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Abstract: Hard economic times have caused industries of all kinds to pay more and more attention to quality. This has become a major problem if a company wants to remain competitive. Quality circles and teams have provided the most common way to physically implement quality. They give the workers an opportunity to use their knowledge and skills to deal with the problems they face everyday. In this paper, the author studied several aspects of quality implementation through quality circles and teams namely the feasibility of the projects, the motivation brought by quality, the benefits it will bring to the company, and the evolution from quality circles to quality teams.

**Involving Your Company in a Quality Program
Through Quality Circles & Quality Teams**

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INVOLVING YOUR COMPANY IN A QUALITY
PROGRAM THROUGH QUALITY CIRCLES
AND QUALITY TEAMS

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1. FEASIBILITY

Before starting to build a quality circle, a company should first begin with the feasibility of the project as well as the readiness of the employees. The statement, "if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there," illustrates the fact that if the organization is not ready, starting a quality circle may have long-term negative effects .

According to Gryna(e,g,[10]), a company can study the feasibility by posing several questions concerning the support they will get. Some of these questions include support from:

- Upper management,
- Production supervisors,
- Labors unions.

For those companies who implemented a quality program, their questions concerned:

- The amount of funds needed.
- Objectives.
- Expectations.
- Benefits of a consultant.

Berger says (e.,g.,[2]) that for a quality team to be successful, the management must also be willing to assess potential effects of quality circles on organizational roles, structure and technology.

The following are the critical factors needed in evaluating feasibility.

1.1. Definition of objectives

The problem is to convince people that clarity of objectives is needed before deciding to go ahead with a project. The question is whether the objectives of quality circle will be primarily personal and team development (in which the intent is to provide a mean to workers to improve themselves as individuals and as contributors to the company) or tangible results (in which the aim is to solve problem of the work place that are of personal concern to the worker or the company.) An effective quality circle activity will speak to both of these objectives, but deciding on the primary emphasis is necessary for evaluation of the pilot circles' results.

The reaction of workers provides a warning of the necessity of having objectives clearly defined.

1.2. Management support

Organizations that have become comfortable with participative management should have an easy time implementing quality circle. They are regarded as one of several mutually supportive approaches used to communicate with workers and expand their scope of participation.

Gryna (e.,g.,[10]) believes that workers do not always expect management to act on all problems identified by workers. The workers understand that a large backlog of problem can't be solved overnight and that priorities must be set. Nevertheless, workers do expect that management will show evidence of good intentions by taking at least gradual action on long-standing causes of quality and productivity problems, such as obsolete equipment, unrealistic specifications, and lack of preventive maintenance, etc.

1.3. Support of production supervision

Most production supervisors are initially skeptical about circles. However they are supportive as well. Unfortunately, upper management often assumes that the yes means the supervisors agree with the concept and understand their own roles in the circles. This is not always the case. Some supervisors see a conflict between the boss role and workers participating in circles, as a solution to the problems.

Most of this reluctance is a result of a misunderstanding of the quality circle concept. High priority should be placed on completely explaining to production supervisors the meaning of circles and the specific role they are expected to play. For the feasibility study, the question is whether middle line management is ready to have workers share decision-making.

2. MOTIVATION

2.1. Quality brings motivation

Given that many of today's job in the office and the factory are enormously routine and boring, they may also be devoid of the characteristics that motivate. Dewar (e.g.,[13]) shows how the involvement in quality could make a real difference for an employee. He referred to Herzberg's motivators which are:

- Interesting and challenging work
- Opportunity to perform meaningful work
- Recognition
- Responsibility.

Participating in a quality circle definitely provides vital motivations. As a result, "Members assume responsibility to identify and analyze problems in their work areas. This opportunity to do interesting and meaningful work provides a new and exciting challenge. The management presentation is a dramatic form of recognition for the circle members."(Dewar)

Even if the meeting about quality only last a few hours every week, circle members talk about circle activities during breaks and lunch times. So rather than one very separated meeting every week, it becomes very special and permeates the other hours of work.

2.2. Job enrichment

The redesign of jobs is often limited by machine and other factors. According to Baird (e.g.,[12]), the quality circle may not be able to alter the entire job, but the effect of involving a few hours each week can dramatically influence the entire work. It may help the employee to reach the next level of

Maslow's theory. Even if the job itself is not very different, the employee will pay more attention to it, as a result quality circle may open new horizons about the importance of the quality of a product.

2.3. Participation in quality circles

According to Ingle (e.g.,[14]), participation is the key to a successful quality program. Without effective participation from various levels, this program cannot achieve a high degree of success. Motivation and participation go hand in hand. Motivational workers and managers can accomplish wonders with quality program.

The best example of this is in Japan. People are convinced when they see the benefits of the program and how it can grow in any society. However, in order to maintain the continuity, it is essential to get effective participation from various groups such as:

- Top and middle management.
- Foremen.
- Circle leaders and members.

According to Nemoto (e.g.,[13]),each of these groups has different roles to play with quality circle:

The top and middle management should support the program and participate actively. They should also help to establish policies and promote quality in various areas in the company. In addition, the company must also provide training sessions for middle management who must act in the capacity of advisers to quality circles.

3. MEASURING THE BENEFITS OF A QUALITY CIRCLE

Quality circles bring long-term benefits to the whole company: for the organization itself, for the workers, and for the management.

3.1. Benefits to the organization

The organization that implements a Quality Circle program intends to gain numerous benefits to its production workers, non-production workers, and managers. According to Mohr (e.g., [1]), it also benefits in terms of its structure and culture.

First, quality circles are an opportunity to improve communication within and between the various organizational levels. It also provides a greater flexibility in the organizational structure due to a more egalitarian and cooperative atmosphere.

Quality circles reduce conflict, through interactive teamwork, which lessens conflict and friction. A more human and stimulating work environment is developed due to the development of greater relationships.

The work force is better utilized because the employees feel more commitment to the organization which enables them to identify with goals and products. As a result, there is less turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness. This improves the level of awareness among employees.

Circles' solutions to problems and members' commitment to these values permit savings in money and time.

3.2. Benefits to the worker

One of the benefits a worker gets from a quality circle stands in his work content. According to Ingle (e.,g.,[4]), the quality circle add new challenge and new learning experiences to employees' work. The meeting provides variety and opportunity for achievement and recognition, which suit the goals and needs of today's sophisticated worker. Tasks are seen as less fragmented and more significant. Also, the worker's new awareness of their task and the viewpoints of others help them to perform their jobs more effectively. Their ability within the circle to choose their own problems to evaluate and solve, rather than being directed by management, empowers workers and gives them a sense of control over their professional lives.

The workers will learn professional and social skills during the meeting, which they will then use on the job. Through the quality circle process they gain openness and flexibility in their interactions with their colleagues, as well as a capacity to perform cooperative work in a supportive atmosphere. Participation in the management presentation enables them to become more adept at speaking in public and communicating with authority figures as well their peers.

The quality circle will also develop confidence for the worker. Discoveries they will make through the program will lead workers to a new awareness of their talents and their potential. This will encourage them to strengthen their own aptitudes and develop new ones. As a result, they move from regarding work as a chore to perceiving it as an opportunity for self-actualization.

Participating in the problem solving session gives the workers greater insight into the difficulties and constraints faced by supervisors and managers and a more realistic understanding of the manager's role. As a result, their appreciation of the company philosophy and goals increases.

3.3 Benefits to the management.

Most of the benefits the management will get from the quality program relate to the obvious advantages of working with more mature, creative, motivated and satisfied employees. When employees are given the opportunity and tools to increase their own control over their work environment, they become more competent and self directed, so that managers need to spend less time on supervision. Workers are more conscious of quality and productivity, so their goals are no longer the concern and responsibility of management alone. Management is seen by employee as a tool for growth rather than a controlling and inhibiting factor. As a result the relationship between these two roles becomes more cooperative.

Managers are enthusiastic about quality circle activities. They didn't worry about the immediate costs of implementation. According to Ishikawa (e.,g.,[7]), investment in quality circle education and activities has a return of 50 (or even more) fold.

Managers also can gain from involvement in the quality circle process in the same way workers can. They too can increase their problem-solving skills through the quality circle training, furthermore their knowledge of the whole organization improves as they are exposed to a variety of workers' viewpoints.

4. QUALITY TEAMS VERSUS QUALITY CIRCLES.

The quality circle concept has expanded since its creation. Although they both have the same goal :improving quality, they differ from one another in that the quality circle philosophy is that "quality should be everybody's business" (Townsend,e.,g.,[5]).

4.1. Making everybody aware of the quality issue.

Many reasons support everybody 's involvement in quality program.

First, involving everybody in a quality program obviously removes the volunteering aspect. What is done in place of motivating people to volunteer, is to review the benefits of being volunteered.

Getting everyone involved is another way to make sure to get a commitment to adequate funding, this of course is one of the foundations of success.

Lack of knowledge of operations is less of a potential problem with quality teams. In the majority of cases, the decisions are implemented in the department in which the team works. The team, therefore, is the expert on what to change.

Training is as important to quality teams as it is to quality circles. But by restricting the training to team leaders, trust in those team leaders is exhibited.

4.2. Self-policing teams

Top-down commitment is also necessary to overcome the natural resistance of middle managers. This is sometimes a real problem. There is less opportunity for middle managers to block initiative and change with the quality team approach than there is with quality circles. Presentation cease to be a problem, since there are none. Poor suggestions still arise, but they tend to be an insignificant percentage of the total number of ideas. Quality teams are self-policing.

4.3. Sharing ideas.

Ideas that involve more than one team do not meet with the same degree of resistance since everyone is on a team. Since any team may also need help implementing an idea at some point, mutual cooperation is in everyone's best interest. By establishing the philosophy of sharing ideas, most resistance to implementation is eliminated. Since quality team members works together, everyone becomes aware of the ability of their fellow workers, as a result, mutual respect grows. There are no member-nonmember conflicts.

CONCLUSION

Although quality circles help improve quality, productivity and communication in an organization, it should not be regarded as a solution to all problems. Yet, it helps to get people together and create better harmony. People get to know each other better and teamwork is built within the organization. Moreover, implementing quality standards makes employees more aware of the outside market , the competition, and what is needed to remain competitive.

Quality should be implemented at all levels of the hierarchy, from the top to the bottom , quality should be everybody's concern.

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