

# Total Quality Management

-by Naseer Ahmed

Only five years back Total Quality Management (TQM) was almost an unknown management principle in Bangladesh. But with globalization and increased interaction of our business people with the rest of the world, TQM is entering our business arena though at a creeping pace. Already there is a TQM association in our country and top business leaders are recognizing its growing importance for business success.

In this column, previously, TQM was highlighted at least twice. But because of its new familiarity in this country we think this topic should be discussed more by our concerned people. This is particularly required in order to reap the utmost benefit from this concept of management.

TQM, as the term denotes, is putting due importance of quality on all aspects of an organization. It is believed that there are five pillars on which integrated quality considerations depend. These are product, process, organization, leadership and commitment. In TQM it is believed that product or service is the focal point of organizational purpose and achievement. It becomes clear that quality of product or service is impossible without quality in the process. But quality in the process is impossible without the right organization. Again organization is meaningless without the proper leadership. Strong bottom up commitment is the support pillar for all the rest. All the pillars are interdependent and if one becomes weak all meet the same fact. So, proper emphasis should be placed on each pillar for successful implementation of TQM in an organization.

Based on the five pillars depicted above, TQM is nothing but a relentless improvement process where everyone in an organization should be on a never ending journey towards perfection and achievement. Some business scholars are now saying that TQM concept boils down the following five basic principles:

- Asking customers what they want
- Setting zero defects as company standard
- Completing work in the shortest possible time
- Measuring the system, not personal behavior
- Ensuring an environment where everyone feels like a stake holder

With lots of knowledge base still there is great confusion about what TQM actually is and how to apply it. In the context of TQM several things must be clear. First, who should define quality. It should not be defined by managers or experts. It is always the customers who should have the final say in defining it and what they are willing to pay for it. Second, in TQM there are not only success stories but failures also. This should not discourage the new experimenters. It must be remembered that the faults lie in implementation not in the concept. Third, TQM is a way of doing business. It is a total system of management with a unifying principle. That principle is nothing but absolute dedication to customers. So, ultimately we understand that there is a great emphasis on market orientation in the TQM concept.

Studies in USA and EEC show that less than 50 per cent of companies that have launched their own TQM program have met with success. Commenting on this crude reality one observer rightly says, 'TQM needs TQM.' Total quality essentially involves attention to process, commitment to customers,

involvement of employees and benchmarking of best practices. It is thus hard to believe that you cannot benefit from that.

It must be understood that quality cannot be delegated by top management. TQM may start in the boardroom but it must spread through all levels of people in an organization. Cross functional teams can play a vital role in deciding how and where to start the TQM effort. But responsibility for quality must be shared by everyone on the pay roll – from CEO to floor level workers.

Empirically it has been found that TQM is successful only to the extent that the workforce is trained, educated and then trusted to make informed decisions on how to constantly improve the work process. Along with this the pulse of the customers must be felt wisely. According to Fortune magazine, before launching its quality Campaign in 1991. PepsiCo surveyed 100,000 customers to develop 16 priorities for its new total quality effort.

Finally we must understand that TQM is never a short-term approach – rather a long term one. Again TQM is no panacea – but if thoughtfully applied and adapted it can deliver much success.