



## Escalating Productivity of Work Culture and its Customization through Quality Circles

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### ABSTRACT

*In this competitive globalised era the roles of quality circle act as a management tool to enhance the effectiveness of corporate culture. The concept encourages employees and workers participation as well as motivates and promotes teamwork to contribute towards organizational effectiveness through group processes. Japanese industry implemented*

*Kaoru Ishikawa ideas for quality production in the 1960's. This helped to transform their products from one considered to be poor in quality to one of high quality. This drastic change has been noted in American and European Industries and attempts to emulate their successful techniques have occurred. One of these techniques is the concept of Quality Circles. Now ever days Indian economy is opening up and in a due course of time it will be fully globalised. Survival of most of the Indian companies will depend on the use of latest technology and development of human resource. Since Indians are hard-working, ethical, co-operative and the most important thing is that they are innovative. In this paper an attempt is to be made to develop the utility of Quality Circles for achieving economy growth and certain policy measures have also been suggested for improving the quality circles.*

### KEYWORDS :

#### CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF QUALITY CIRCLE

Dr. K. Ishikawa started Quality Control Circles (known as Quality Circles in India and in many nations) originally for the self and mutual development of the workmen. They are also a very logical outcome of the Japanese drive for training and accomplishment in quality control and quality improvement. From the early 1950's, Japanese learnt from the seed courses of Dr. E. Deming's on statistical methods for quality control and Dr. J. Juran's courses on Quality Management. With zeal for learning and self-sufficiency, they vigorously promoted quality education by local experts across their country. It began with massive education of engineers, and then top and middle managers, supervisory levels.

"A quality circle is a small, voluntary group of employees and their supervisor(s), comprising a team of about 8 to 10 members from the same work area or department" (Russell, 647). Quality circles were first developed in the 1960s by a man named Kaoru Ishikawa in Japan (Russell, 648). The Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (JUSE) were the ones who paid for the research that put the theories about behavior science and quality control together.

"A Quality Circle is volunteer group composed of members who meet to talk about workplace and service improvements and make presentations to their management with their ideas." (Prasad, L.M, 1998).

#### HOW QUALITY CIRCLE WORKS

Under their system of organising work, it became logical to extend training on quality to the Gemba-cho, the 'leading hand' of the workers in a section. Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa and his associates realised the immense potential of front line employees. It is not only the best way to help people to develop their own potential but also from the organisation point of view for contribution through training, development and motivation for quality control and improvement. Generally five to ten volunteers from the same work area make up a pool. The members receive training in problem solving, statistical quality control and group processes. Quality Circle generally recommends solutions for quality and services which may be implemented by the management. Quality Circle is not merely a suggestion system or a quality control group but extends beyond that because its activities are more comprehensive. Furthermore, it is not a taskforce because it can be made a permanent feature of the organization or a department.

#### Its Key Characteristics

- It usually consisting of 5-10 members, from the same segment.
- Membership is on voluntary basis
- Circle members should meet regularly, ideally everyday, in particular place also at a particular time.
- Members select a name for their group in the first meeting and elect a leader to conduct the meetings.
- All the members are trained in problem solving and analysis techniques in order to play their role effectively and efficiently.
- They work on systematically to identify and solve work-related problems for improving the performance of the organization.
- Solutions are implemented promptly once they have been accepted

#### OBJECTIVES OF QUALITY CIRCLES

The concept of quality circles is based on the principles of people coordination and cooperation. One of the main objective of this phenomena is self and mutual development of individuals. No doubt the other forms of participative management do have representative of the management and the trade unions for resolving organizational problems. But their members are sponsored by the management and trade unions respectively and therefore they are not voluntarily selected. Because of the nature of their composition, spontaneity of response for improving the performance of the organization is not always there. In such situations an element of suspicion and mistrust may be found. Most of the participative groups other than the quality circles are constituted officially by the management and they conduct management-directed activities consecutively, directives emanating from their deliberations flow from "top to bottom". On the other hand, in quality circles voluntary formation of groups by employees at grass root level takes place and their recommendations flow from "bottom-upward". Successful operation of quality circles, in practice, is participative management in the real sense, because the employees at the grass root level with the active assistance and cooperation from other levels of management resolve the problems concerning the better performance of the organization. Quality circle programmes are not meant just for solving problems concerning quality alone but other issues affecting quality, productivity, cost reduction, safety, housekeeping etc. are also dealt with. Quality circles focus on quality and the achievement which would mean improvement in productivity, lowering of cost etc.

## EFFECTS OF QUALITY CIRCLE

Quality circle is basically a structured approach to group problem-solving. Quality circles provide unique opportunity for industry to tap the creative intelligence of the employees. The effective working of quality circles has a significant effect on the quality of work life, resulting in increased productivity. People getting together, working together and arriving at a consensus on important issues provide opportunities for meaningful growth of organizations by way of tangible and intangible benefits. Quality circles give the grass root level employees an opportunity to learn and apply scientifically new techniques in solving day to day problems. It enables sharpening the analytical skills and creative abilities of people. It recognizes that every human being is potentially resourceful and, given a conducive atmosphere and opportunity, people not only want to work well but also like to seek challenges and responsibility. The concept is based on the dignity of the human being. Participative problem solving in the form of quality circles involves delegation of power to lower levels. Ouchi argues that "in Japan it was this sharing of power with lower level employees which marked employees innovation and motivation". Small group interaction is dynamic in nature and involves lot of feedback. The social relations within the small group in the form of quality circles influence the kind of communication that takes place and in turn, the nature of communication will influence social relations. In today's business, it is quality that provides the decisive competitive edge. But this has to be the quality as perceived by the customers. Quality is not the outcome of an isolated activity performed in one corner of a department. It is to be considered as organization-wide passion and goal, and should involve all concerned employees of the organization. Organization-wide quality enhancement efforts can show better results in terms of improved product performance. This is where quality circles can play an important role because it provides opportunities for participation and involvement and a sense of achievement and recognition on the part of employees at different levels.

A major boost in quality and productivity may be achieved when there is total involvement of people from the grass root level to top, in the functional areas of business. This can be possible by motivating and tapping the creative abilities of everyone in the organization. Quality Circle concept offers new vistas in this direction for people's meaningful participation with total commitment at grass root level. Quality circle brings problem solving grass root level.

## PITFALLS OF QUALITY CIRCLES

Most of the problems are caused mainly due to poor and inefficient management. An analysis of quality problems reveals that majority of problems are attributable because of management failure, some of them are as under

- Lack of sufficient top management support to Quality Circle activities among management personnel
- Lack of work interest or incompetency of leaders/facilitator
- Fear and misunderstanding among executives
- Non-implementation & Delay of Circle recommendations
- Non-application of simple techniques for problem solving
- Participation can not succeed in an unresponsive and unprepared cultural setting
- Circles running out of problems
- Inadequate visibility of management support
- Too much or too little benefits and facilitation
- Language barrier in communication
- Communication gap between Circles and group leader
- Change of management
- Confusing Quality Circle for another technique

In Quality Circles, there is opportunity for challenges in work are needed, through the autonomous participation of people within the framework of the organizational goal.

## MEASURES TO INITIATIVE SOUND POLICIES THROUGH QUALITY CIRCLES

There is some confusion about the quality circles movement that may cause failure of the management structure. These confusions mainly arise due to lack of proper understanding of quality circles as management concept, absence of meaningful participative culture, lack of commitment, mutual understanding and trust and conducive organizational climate. The policy initiatives suggested below can go a long

way in strengthening the quality circle movement in any organization and can be used as effective tool for motivation and people understanding.

i) Every individual is unique and distinctly resourceful. Given a conducive work environment and opportunity for growth human being not only wants to work but also seeks challenges. Quality circles work on the basic theme of people building through learning new techniques and sharpening analytical skills and creative abilities. This people building effort should aim at long term gains for the organization. Looking for quick results would mean creating obstacles for the employees in the short run and defeating the organizational goals in the long term.

ii) It is a myth to consider quality circle a short lived phenomenon. Quality circles are not short lived once they are formed; they may exist for a long. To make the quality circles a self-sustained and on going scheme it is necessary that the policy makers are not misled by these misconceptions. To give right direction to quality circles movement it is essential that any misconception that may be lurking in any one's mind should be dispelled in the initial stage itself.

iii) Quality circles being the bottom-up approach should voluntarily be for the grass root level employees. Quality circles in true sense must result in bringing down the problem solving to the grass root level. The process of quality circles should provide people with an opportunity to work together with shared values and develop individually through mutual group interactions. The effectiveness of the scheme of quality circles in operation should be reflected in terms of opportunities to employees to identify, analyze and recommend solutions to their work related problem together with opportunities to implement these recommendations. Such opportunities to employees will not only help in identifying work related problems but also infuse a sense of achievement and satisfaction in them.

iv) Presentation of the quality circle concept to top and senior management executives is fundamental to the success of any quality circle movement. Proper understanding, firm conviction and faith in the philosophy should be the most important pre-requisites. Introduction of quality circles should not be rushed through without adequate preparation. After full exposure of the concept, the management should be allowed to go ahead for launching the quality circles movement at all levels in the organization. Positive attitudes and mutual trust are the important pre-requisites for the quality circles. The management should think of launching the quality circle only when it is convinced of its efficacy and successful operation.

v) Periodic training should be an integral part of quality circle movement. Whatever may be the modus operandi for the training of members of the quality circles care should be taken to see that it is relevant and comprehensive enough covering all important aspects of quality circles when the members are properly trained only then they can effectively contribute to circle activities.

vi) The actual business of quality circle is transacted at the regular meetings that are convened for discussing work related problems, analyzing them and finding their solutions call for prior planning for tie meetings. Before convening the quality circle meetings each member must be communicated with the purpose, scope and objectives of the meeting. At the end of the meeting the things resolved must be summed up in black and white in precise manner along with the details of the persons who are assigned the responsibilities for the implementation and execution of such resolutions. A task force committee may be formed for each quality circle for follow up actions and to inform the members the extent of progress achieved in the implementation of the decisions taken in the previous meeting and to seek necessary suggestions if any, of the members.

vii) Generation of ideas in a group situation may be based on brainstorming. Brainstorming is indeed more effective technique to generate ideas. The technique of brainstorming is used to identify problems, locate factors which help prevent potential problems, and find solutions to problem. Since brainstorming is meant to develop the creative abilities of the group the members must be informed of the Specific terms of reference prior to meeting to enable them to develop, their ideas in advance and to find possible solutions to problems.

During the brainstorming sessions, there should be no rigidity regarding the matters to be discussed and also free flow of ideas should take place. The ideas proposed by the members during brainstorming sessions may be stored for future reference.

viii) Despite the reported positive effects of the scheme of quality circles on the productivity and profitability no legislative support is available for implementing this scheme of participative management. It is, therefore, essential that suitable legislation should be enacted for introducing quality circles as a major technique of participative management in Indian industries but with the precondition that the basic theme of voluntariness of quality Circles is kept intact.

ix) To use quality circles as a motivator, a climate of autonomy, independence, growth and development and self-discipline should be maintained. Such a climate helps in satisfying human needs including safety, social, self-esteem and self-actualization.

## CONCLUSION

Although corporate values shared by all employees are of paramount importance for those who take strategic decisions. Managers are responsible for making strategic decisions and hence to create a balanced synthesis between ancient Indian wisdom and modern knowledge, an emphasis on Vedic value, therefore, is of special significance for professionals. However, to achieve synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern knowledge, it is desirable to utilize the energy, creativity and innovative skills of the employees of a corporation at the grass root level. The scientific utilization of creativity and innovative skills of grass root level personnel will enhance the excellence and global competitiveness of the Indian corporate sector. Therefore, the quality circle being a voluntary and "bottom-up" style of decision-making on issues including productivity, cost reduction, quality, safety, house-keeping etc. can go a long way in building people and achieving productivity and work culture.

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