



Quality culture – a contemporary challenge in the approach to management systems in organizations

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The issue of quality culture is a topical one, whilst contemporary socio-economic conditions set new requirements for it, including a systemic approach based on the requirements of management standards, which have prompted us to analyze this approach to the subject.

Design/methodology/approach: The article presents an in-depth analysis of sourced texts compiled with the requirements of ISO 9004.

Findings: The paper specifies the postulates resulting from the analysis of the issue, which, in the opinion of the authors, indicate the most important aspects related to building a quality culture in organizations.

Practical implications: The analysis of the issue presented in the article indicates its topicality and importance in the improvement of each organization, indicating the need to implement the activities described in the article into management practice.

Originality/value: The presented analysis of the issue indicates the most important contemporary problems for the authors related to building a quality culture. The article contains a model of building a quality culture based on activities shaping the awareness of employees in organizations with an implemented management system.

Keywords: Quality culture, System requirements, Organization management

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INDUSTRIAL MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

1. Introduction

The assessment of an organization's quality management represents important and complex issues. These are compounded simultaneously by various entities, both internal as well as external such as cooperative and consumer bodies having modern expectations from the organization's management of quality.

One of the methods used for assessing the quality of an organization's management is through the participation in pro-quality competitions, where they undergo an evaluation: examples include the regional or national quality competitions, where in Poland's case this is the Polish Quality Award established in 1995. The Polish Quality Award competition was established through the development of a model based on assumptions included in the Excellence Model, developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). Nowadays, there are many competitions organized relating to product quality or organizations' quality management, for which the EFQM model is a reference point in developing evaluation criteria. The issue of quality culture is emphasized by the EFQM Excellence Model which strongly advocates attention to aspects related to its creation. Quality culture can be perceived, by increasing employees' commitment to continuous improvement [1].

It should be acknowledged that the innovative involvement of employees determines the potential of creative solutions which have a significant impact on improvement of products, processes, and the organization itself. Organizations, in particular those focused on production, that want to implement innovative activities that bring significant improvement potential, must take measures to increase the awareness of their employees, both in terms of the responsibility of not meeting the requirements, but also the willingness of employees to engage in pro-quality activities [2,3].

The quality culture issue is an element of management within contemporary organizations which corresponds with one of the fundamental principles of management concerning responsibility. For both quality and responsibility require personal commitment. It is impossible to perceive and define criteria for quality and responsibility without relating them to the issues of commitment. The personal commitment of each employee in the field of universally understood quality aspects must correspond to the assumed responsibility for them, which should be reflected in everyday work, both for oneself and for others, as well as with others.

The success of an organization is always the result of the collaboration of its members and the value of its success will

be affected by the level of personal commitment. It is not without significance to define criteria within the scope of entrusted responsibilities, as this is determined by the interdependence in the organizational structure, but it cannot restrict the potential of creative innovation [4].

The issue of responsibility is one of the criteria that constitute the basis for building management effectiveness. Without establishing the scope of responsibility, but above all without understanding and referring it to each employee, particularly managerial staff, it is difficult to achieve management effectiveness and, consequently, increase the effectiveness of management activities (processes). Responsibility is such an important characteristic of leaders.

The expectation directed at management is the issue of leadership [3]. Conscious leadership must be responsible. In the EFQM Excellence Model, one of the most important areas of a company's activity is described as leadership, understood as the way in which the management board and all managers behave and act to inspire and implement changes, in particular changes related to the quality-oriented culture [2].

It is the management staff with the actions they take that is one of the most important foundation stones contributing to the organization's quality culture, which is the essence of this study. One of the definitions states that the quality culture is "a set of values, traditions, procedures and beliefs accepted by the members of the organization, creating an environment conducive to shaping and continuous improvement of quality" [5].

2. Contemporary aspects of a quality culture

Culture in the broadest sense encompasses everything that is the result of collective activity in the behavior and endowment of members of human societies, which in human behavior is learned – as opposed to what is biologically inherited [6].

Culture determines the expressiveness of attitudes and judgments that make up communities, on the one hand determining its distinctiveness and individuality, and on the other hand, the values constituting its being and its identity. The issue of culture is related to identity, because it is the conscious acceptance, participation and creation of culture that is based on the defining identity [7].

The understanding of identity grew out of sociology, and with time it became popular in social psychology, cultural anthropology, and management sciences (to which the quality issue is currently assigned). Each of the above-mentioned sciences, focuses on different research levels:

psychology deals with individual identity, sociology, and anthropology with collective identities, whilst the science of management tackles organizational identity. Organizational identity provides the answer to question such as "Who are we as an organization?" and "Who would we like to be?" to its members. Assuming that an organization is more than just a set of activities of its individuals, it makes sense to look for organizational social manifestations which include culture, management, strategy or structure and standards which should be defined in every organization. Organizational identity is seen as rooted in local meanings and symbols for that organization. Therefore, organizational culture should be embedded within its internal context – symbolic for the development and maintenance of organizational identity in a good condition [8]. Symbolically, the structure of organizational identity is communicated to its members by the management – this is an important role of the managerial staff, as well their inalienable right, which they do not always use, and often avoid.

Organizational identity is interpreted and approved – adopted by its members based on the organizational culture, experience and social influences derived from external environmental relations as well as internal dependencies and mandatory standards enforced in the organization. There should be an awareness of the differentiated criteria related to the organizational culture, identity, and image indicated and applied in management practice whilst simultaneously maintaining an awareness of their mutual dependence. Organizational culture is a multi-faceted concept, which include values, standards and patterns, as well as symbols that emphasize a sense of community and constitute their representation which is understandable to all members of that community. Organizational culture is to fulfill the basic functions, including [7]:

- ensuring that "we understand each other well",
- standardizing behavior, increasing predictability, and replacing ad hoc controls,
- similarly interpreting and evaluating the surrounding reality and the changes taking place in it,
- as well as making common the aspirations, goals, objectives, hopes and fears of the organization's members.

There should be an awareness particularly by management staff that building an organization's cultural potential is one of the most important conditions for achieving its competitive advantage, which is so important and obvious for production organizations, e.g. in the automotive industry [9].

Within the Total Quality Management philosophy, quality is defined as a cultural phenomenon [10,11].

It should be emphasized that the concepts of quality should be defined precisely through cultural aspects

ensuring that the focus will be on the values stimulating quality assurance, and not on management methods and techniques. The research cited in the article [7] shows that searching for quality culture concepts in the approach to management has been derived from the quality movement in Japan. However, the application of Japanese quality methods in the USA, used only as tools on a formal level, without having been culturally grounded, is frequently the source of failure of many organizations - which is also noticeable in many organizations operating in Europe. This is particularly visible at the intersection of supply chains formed by organizations from Europe and the Far East. It is not without significance that for many years the most used approach to quality within the ISO 9000 series of standards is based on a systems approach [11-13]. Linking the quality culture to a systemic approach is based on 6 fundamental values on which to build a pro-effective quality culture, these are [14]:

- strengthening organizational identity,
- partnership relations within the organizational network,
- open communication based on reliable communiqués,
- open access to information about organizational processes,
- focus on processes – learning, regardless of successes and failures (opportunity and threat).

A quality culture must encompass the organization's values, mission and simply its "way of being" as well undertaking decision-making which include a positive and visible commitment to quality, with an emphasis on continuous improvement [15]. A quality-oriented organizational identity should reflect the existential importance of quality for the continuity of the organization. The characteristics of a creative quality culture are associated with everyone's involvement which today is defined as involving stakeholders in the process of quality assurance or management [10]. Organizational culture influences the quality management system in organizations – a tool as popular as management system implementation in organizations should be considered in this context – although unfortunately, it is not always effectively used by the management [13, 16-18]. A significant number of management system implementations relate to production organizations, where the scope of the management system is associated with the humanization of the production system, but it is not always afforded with the same recognition as in organizations with a service profile. The area's most closely related to a quality culture within a system relate to [13]:

- customer orientation,
- leadership,
- employee involvement,

- group work and coordination,
- responsibility for quality,
- awareness and related responsibility,
- benchmarking,
- and continuous improvement.

The above relates to the quality management functions and requirements defined in quality management standards [19].

Organizational culture of a pro-quality characteristic is called quality culture. This - quality culture – is a relatively new concept in management theory. A Quality culture must be a set of values, traditions, procedures and beliefs approved by the organization's members, creating an environment conducive to shaping and continuously improving quality [19]. Shaping a quality culture in an organization is not an easy process.

It is a cultural reorientation starting from the removal of the effects of errors / nonconformities to an orientation for preventing errors with the conscious involvement of all employees [20].

The above was presented in the proposed model of building a quality culture as an element of a quality management system in an organization – Figure 1 (own study).

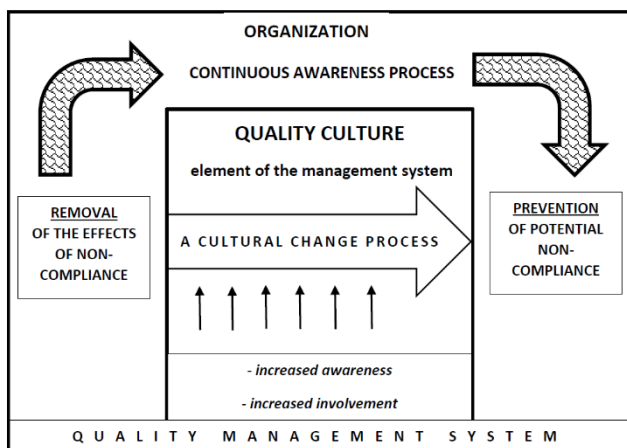


Fig. 1. Effect of changes in employee awareness in an organization with an implemented quality management system – on Quality culture – own study

A quality management system, developed within an organization founded on a particular level of practices and principles of behavior, is primarily to be helpful, but its effectiveness is based on awareness – which is a continuous process, both for operational employees and managerial staff [21]. Shaping a quality culture also requires changing the management model from a traditional, highly hierarchical,

and functional approach to an approach that takes into account the active attitude and responsibility of employees for the organization's management process [22].

3. Quality culture and quality management system

In management practice the quality culture issue concerns determining the direction of future activities that should be undertaken by the organization in this area with particular emphasis to undertake activities that will be of value both for organizations in which employees perform their tasks, but also personal passions, as well as those which are of value to the universally understood general public [23].

Quality culture is not only important for the activities of individual organizations, but also relates its practical importance in corporate activities, as well as more broadly in the sense of shaping the quality culture of societies, which is so deeply rooted, for example, in far east culture.

It is important that by shaping the attitudes of employees inside the organization, the attitudes of societies are shaped indirectly, as the adopted attitude should emanate in social groups in which employees operate outside the organization [20].

Efficient and effective quality management in an organization should be targeted to create a certain type of organizational culture that is determined in literature as a quality culture. It results directly from the adopted pro-quality approach, which is to shape organizations to operate more effectively in a free market economy.

The issue of a quality culture is a kind of cognitive dilemma, of particular significance in creating a contemporary perception and understanding of quality.

European culture circles have adopted and applied the quality paradigm, without fully understanding and accepting the building foundations of the quality culture identity in the form that is known, nurtured and developed in the far eastern culture but which gave the far east countries an economic advantage.

Developing and shaping a pro-quality understanding on an European scale is strongly rooted in formalized quality management systems. It is worth noting that they are also evolving, as exemplified by the ISO 9000 series of standards which since their first edition have had two significant amendments in 2000 and 2015 [23].

Organizations are the fundamental entities of economic life. It is impossible to understand the context of the organization, i.e., those issues that are important for the purpose and strategic direction of its activities, without

analyzing the issues related to the values and culture that create the organization. The 2015 requirements of the ISO 9001 standard also emphasize that this is one of the elements that shape the ability to use the quality management system in achieving the organization's intended goals (clause 4 of ISO 9001) [24].

The issues related to culture have been repeatedly highlighted in the ISO 9004 standard: "Quality management; Organization quality; Guidelines for achieving lasting success" from 2018 [24]. It was rightly noticed and emphasized that the factors influencing the success of an organization constantly appear, evolve, increase, or decrease over the years, and adapting to these changes is important for the organization's achievement of lasting success, including environmental and cultural factors.

In terms of the organization's identity, it is emphasized (scope clause 6.1) that it depends on the characteristics of the organization and is based on its mission, vision, values and culture. Mission, vision, values, and culture are interdependent, and the relationship between them should be recognized as dynamic.

It is important that the organizational culture is in line with the mission and vision and the values of the organization. This should include understanding its existing, defined, adopted culture and assess the need to change the culture as it is also subject to the dynamics of change [24].

The top management of the organization should not only review the mission, vision, and values but also cultural issues. The requirements contained in the ISO 9004:2018 standard postulate that it should be implemented at planned intervals, as well as in those particularly important moments of the organization's activity, when the context of the organization changes. Top management reviews should consider the external and internal context of the organization that may affect the organization's ability to achieve lasting success, those relating to aspects of cultural identity.

In terms of building a quality culture, top management should:

- promote the adoption of mission, vision, values and culture, which should be defined in a concise and easy-to-understand way, so that it is one of the elements in achieving the set goals, because the cultural aspect can significantly affect and shape the level of employee involvement in pro-quality activities,
- create an internal environment in which employees are involved in achieving the goals of the organization, the manifestation of creating such an environment is widely described in the subject literature, the so-called "Quality circles" operating in organizations in Japan,
- encourage and support managers at the appropriate levels of the organization to promote and maintain specific

goals and develop directions set by the top management, e.g. by taking actions based on specific and adopted cultural frameworks and values.

The requirements of ISO 9004:2018 (clause 7) also indicate that for sustained success the top management should demonstrate leadership and commitment to the organization by taking actions such as [24]:

- establishing aspects related to the identity of the organization,
- promoting a culture of trust and integrity,
- establishing and maintaining the rules of teamwork,
- providing employees with the necessary resources, training and authorization to act responsibly,
- promoting shared values, integrity and ethical behavior so that they are they are maintained at all levels of the organization, strengthening on an individual and collective basis the values that characterize the organization,
- communicating the successes achieved, respectively: externally and internally,
- establishing effective communication with employees in the organization, including discussing issues that have a general impact on the organization's activities,
- supporting the development of leadership at all levels of the organization.

In terms of the ISO 9004:2018 (clause 11) requirements, it was proposed that the organization should ensure that improvements were introduced within the organizational culture by [24]:

- enabling employees to participate and contribute to the successful achievement of improvement initiatives – remembering that the greatest improvement potential is represented by employees,
- providing resources necessary to achieve improvement (without the support of resources it may turn out that most improvement initiatives will remain only at this "paper" planning stage and in time, when the number of such initiatives ends the enthusiasm and willingness of employees will fade extinguishing their undertaking),
- establishing improvement recognition systems – which is not only a form of reward but also a recognition of improvement initiatives undertaken by employees,
- establishing recognition systems in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the improvement process – remembering to enhance the improvement process itself, and not only verifying the effects of the improvement processes in which the reported improvement initiatives were implemented as at some point it may turn out that the process used in the organization according to a given formula has run out, has become less effective, or ineffective,

- involving the management in improvement activities – which is most frequently forgotten by the top management, this important issue cannot be ignored, because it is the top management that must carefully shape the improvement processes, treating them as an internal imperative for the development of the organization. The dynamics of improvement in organizations are directly related to the quality culture and the involvement of employees.

This standard defining a quality culture is a valuable element that not only supports, but actually conditions the correlation between the issues of commitment and quality. The adoption of the quality paradigm as the foundation of the improvement process (self-improvement, organizational improvement) must be based on the understanding of its value and the willingness/need to get involved in this process [4].

The framework created by a quality culture makes up its conceptual understanding, both subjective and objective, and when adopted by the organization and its members, constitute the foundation of conscious involvement in the improvement process [24].

The ISO 9004:2018 standard also proposes a method of organizational self-assessment to determine its level of maturity. One of the assessment elements proposed in this standard is the evaluation in terms of mission, vision and culture (clause 6 of the standard).

The lowest level of this assessment concerns organizations in which the processes of defining their identity along with the establishment of a mission, vision, values and culture are carried out in an informal or ad hoc manner. Organizations should aim at a level where they clearly define the understanding of the organization's current culture along with the process of considering the need to change that culture, and actions in this regard will be implemented and maintained.

And furthermore, regarding (clause 7 of the standard) key processes, which organizations should define in terms of their identity include aspects of culture, trust, integrity, teamwork, necessary resources, training, and authority, in order to ensure that behavioral attributes are defined, as well supporting the development of leadership. This action should also be determined through processes aimed at maintaining culture and promoting conscious responsibility.

It is also necessary to refer to the aspects of the organization's self-assessment (point 10 of the ISO 9004:2018 standard), in which organizations should analyze the elements of the widely understood management system based on the relationship between the elements and their impact on the mission, vision, values and that which is important from the analysis of all viewpoints – the culture of the organization [24].

4. Challenges for building a quality culture

Quality culture cannot be the only issue, even when its content subject is of an in-depth theoretical and methodological consideration, but must refer to the aspects of its valuable implementation in organizations.

In terms of systems – due to the interest of many organizations, (including those implementing and maintaining quality management systems) are based on the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard. Issues which should be noted were those highlighted in the 2015 revision of ISO 9001 and the following criteria established for them which relate to the aforementioned issues of involvement and awareness of employees and managers.

The authors of the study indicate that a quality culture should be based on an implemented quality management system within an organization. This is not only due to the quality management system applicable scope and criteria, but refers to the very foundations of quality management systems based on a TQM philosophy. Naturally, this is not a condition for developing a quality culture but should significantly facilitate its adoption within an organization.

The authors have presented a model shown in Figure 1 to demonstrate that building a quality culture should be founded on a framework that is a basis for the quality management system implemented in the organization. If the quality management system maintained in the organization is used effectively and accepted by its employees, it should constitute a framework for developing internal rules and mechanisms which will shape the quality culture by using its elements as was indicated in the developed model. The QMS criteria that correspond to a conceptual and practical scope of developing a quality culture (characterized in chapter 3 of this study) maybe represented by elements of the quality management system constituting a component of the proposed model.

The authors envisage shaping quality culture in two aspects that are addressed in many available quality management systems publications: shaping employee pro-quality awareness and increasing their involvement in pro-quality activities.

It should also be emphasized that building a quality culture is a continuous process.

A systemic approach to quality requires the use of preventive and corrective action mechanisms already developed in the organization. For example, this may apply to the use of data and information related to corrective actions resulting from nonconformance in implemented processes. Through the continuous process employee awareness, the cultural process of change will be initiated and maintained – as indicated in the developed model.

Without taking real action in this aspect, it is impossible to build a valuable quality culture at the organizational level [20]. In connection with the above, it is postulated that:

- Top management undertake analysis and implementation of activities so that the quality management systems being used as management tool for the organizations they lead are based on specific foundations of building and developing a quality culture. Without a practical approach to this issue, it should be noted that the maintenance and development of the quality management system will be impoverished to a large extent.
- Another challenge concerning the building of a quality culture in its global and social sense, which should be emphasized is the importance of all competitions concerning quality aspects, both local and global. This is one the pillars for building pro-quality awareness amongst citizens, and is complementary to publishing activities in this area as well as all the scientific activities carried out in numerous academic centers, by many wonderful and dedicated scientists, as well as the managerial staff of countless organizations, including those that participate in a large number of pro-quality competitions and implement pro-quality activities – co-creating a pro-quality movement both in many countries and globally across the world.
- The context of quality culture is an extremely important and topical issue in terms of organizational management, not only for contemporary, but also for future societies. Based on societies' century-old achievements characteristic of many regions of the world, resulting from long years of entrenched adopted attitudes, standards, and philosophies, it is necessary to jointly unite on the way to excellence to create a common quality culture – of global importance.

To emphasize the importance of a quality culture, it is worth noting that the ISO 9004 standard published in 2018 emphasizes in the proposed self-assessment and criteria general model related to the organization's maturity levels, the aspect of "learning" (creating internal processes in the organization related to it) which is one of the inalienable factors that will effectively allow for risk-taking and learning from mistakes within an organizational culture. [24].

The authors conclude that the practical aspects of building quality cultures in organizations should include taking actions such as:

- a) shaping pro-quality awareness by reminding and consolidating the need to care for the company's quality image through employee participation in such actions, as for example, the appropriate communication of information, including the use of educational posters or boards presenting qualitative indicators as well as training in shaping attitudes pro-quality;
- b) employee involvement in pro-quality activities by undertaking: motivating activities in the organization aimed at increasing the potential of employee involvement in improvement activities. These can be implemented by programs such as suggestion systems, KAIZEN programs or the Six Sigma methodology, as well as training in the development of pro-quality attitudes with particular focus on the value of group work, as well as group consolidation and integration of implemented activities, including inter-departmental aspect or multi-levels within an organizational structure. It should be concluded that building a quality culture in an organization should allow for the following effects:
 - increasing the dynamics of implemented pro-quality activities,
 - increasing the scope of reported and implemented pro-quality activities in a wider context than previously, including larger areas and parts of processes.
 - a significantly reducing the number of activities related to removing the effects of non-compliance in order to increase the number of activities in proactively shaping the quality level.
 - increasing the efficiency of implemented processes through conscious employee participation in shaping the quality of implemented processes,
 - increasing the process quality level carried out in all areas of the conducted activity.

Quality can be bought, but in order to be proud of our Organization's quality and achieve economic success, it is necessary to shape it ourselves by constantly undertaking improvement activities based on principles and the developed quality culture.

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