FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

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Abstract

A model for assessing the quality of quality management programs is presented in this paper. The role of Strategic Gaps and Knowledge Gaps in evaluating the quality of quality management programs is discussed in this paper. In addition, the paper presents a method for identification of any possible Strategic Gaps and Knowledge Gaps which may exist in organisational quality management processes. The existence of such gaps may adversely affect the expected outcome from the implemented quality management programs. Furthermore, the paper explores the relationship between the perception of the developers or implementers of quality management programs and other related organizational attributes. Finally, the study seeks to identify other management characteristics associated with success or otherwise of quality management programs in HR departments. In so doing, the importance of addressing issues arising from Strategic Gaps and Knowledge Gaps is addressed.

Introduction:

A number of authors have pointed out to a link between Knowledge Management (KM) and Quality Management (QM). In that regards Stewart and Waddell (2008) reported that the link appears to be far beyond acceptance of KM and QM as an important part of doing

business. This means that quality has once again become a competitive advantage for successful companies.

Other studies by Lee et al. (2001) has proven that integrating the concept of KM and QM together means that the main two functions of KM; namely Knowledge Acquisition and Knowledge Dissemination could ultimately influence the organisational choice of which QMP to used for their products, and or services. This in turn means the knowledge activities which have been regarded as a construct of a series of processes that is crucial for assessment of quality are significantly dependent upon the management of knowledge within an organisation (Srdoc et al. 2005, Soliman, 2000 and Lee and Yang, 2000). Clearly knowledge management processes could provide a structure around QM where knowledge is captured, codified and stored, retrieved and utilised for the benefit of the organisation. This view is supported by the increasing number of managers who are seeking to use the concepts that underpin QM in a manner that will assist them identify the best method of using KM to address causes of failure of QMP. Therefore it is necessary that appropriate strategies for developing and implementing QMP within organisations be adopted. It should be noted that the KM strategy does not necessarily lead to positive impact on KM performance. In other words KM does not dominate QM but it is rather dependent on a number of factors required to deliver quality to customers (Gloet, 2002). Furthermore, because organizations are coming under increased scrutiny to provide better and more effective QMP, KM has presented itself as having the potential to influence and enhance the development and implementation of new approach to the application of the QMP (Soliman and Youssef, 2003).

Accordingly, it is only logical that the quality of Quality Management Programs (QMP) need to be researched and analysed. In doing so, one should consider the properties of products and/or services that the organisation provides, the attributes of organisational processes used for decision making as well as the aims and objectives of the QMP. That is why the relationship

between KM and the success of QMP needs further exploration. Accordingly, the paper seeks to examine: a) the causes of the failure of QMP to deliver the anticipated outcomes and b) how the lack of knowledge about the appropriateness and adequacy of the QMP (if any) may adversely impact on the success of the QMP.

Role of Knowledge Management in Quality Management:

It is important to mention here that Stewart and Waddell (2008) have demonstrated that the components of KM and QM are linked and that the link could add value to organisations. They further added that in recent times KM has played a significant role in what is believed to be *the resurgence of Quality Management*. This resurgence is supported by the growing body of literature which is proposing that quality is making resurgence and that quality that has faded from the literature in the second half of the 1990s and into the early part of the new millennium, is now undergoing a quiet resurgence.

A number of authors described quality as 'excellence, value, conformance to specifications, and meeting or exceeding customers' expectations (Lee et al., 2001). While Berawi (2004) who provided five definitions of quality argues that quality is similar to knowledge, is very difficult to define and that 'QM in business is a system that deals with the procedures of obtaining quality levels that perform intended functions, and to do so within the various human, social, and environmental requirements and constraints'. For example Sinclair and Collins (1994), argued that if organisations are serious about adopting a culture that 'promotes, encourages and maintains total quality', the organisation must first decide whether or not it provides QM and what kind of role QM will play in the organisation. Further Sinclair and Collins argue that, developing a quality culture lies in the use of people, as 'they provide the service, they deal with the problems, they make poor systems work and good systems fail'. This notion lies tightly with Total Quality Management, which 'relies heavily on the knowledge of employees to check and improve quality' (Jabnoun, 2002).

Even though the KM field has made considerable advances, it is only in recent times that the lack of knowledge about programs such as QMP has been linked to the failures of the QMP and that the failures of the QMP have been shown to be due to lack of knowledge about the development and or implementation of QMP strategies. This view is consistent with that of Mangelsdorf (1999) who has shown that KM began to gain relative importance to QM in a number of ways such as collecting data and information to gain possible insights into the way in which organisations could improve their offerings of goods and services to customers. Furthermore, during the 1990s, KM was seen as a critical part of service provision (Gloet and Berrell, 2003 and Soliman and Youssef, 2003). That is the importance of KM and its role in QM is seen as the vehicle for organisational effectiveness and competitiveness which has quickly become focused on using KM models in order to develop strategies that an organisation can adopt to improve its competitive advantage and knowledge management' (Rowley, 1999 and Hlupic et al., 2002). Some of these strategies are related to developing and implementing QMP.

The growing momentum towards improving the quality measurement and reporting, has forced organisations to improve their record documentation and administrative data coding accuracy. In doing so, organisations need to identify and address any defect that may be found in QMPs. This is necessary to avoid any adverse impact on the delivery of the quality (Rangachari, 2008). In other words, one needs to scan the various decision making processes in order to identify and then remove or reduce any *Strategic Gaps* that may exist. Equally correct, any defect in QMP may be attributed to lack of the necessary and may be appropriate knowledge about the processes and properties of products and/or services that the organisation provides and the aims and objectives of the quality management programs. These defects may be referred to as *Knowledge Gaps.*

Origins of *Strategic Gaps and Knowledge Gaps:*

Strategic Gaps and *Knowledge Gaps* were first identified in 2000 in the landmark article (Soliman, F. and Spooner, K., 2000, "Strategies for implementing knowledge management: Role of human resources management. Journal of Knowledge Management, 4(4), 337–345"). It is important to mention here that that high profile article has attracted a considerable international attention to the degree that the Journal of Knowledge Management has rated the article as the second most downloaded article in the year 2006. The article was downloaded 2,491 times in the year 2006 alone. Further, it should be noted that the article has demonstrated that a strategic failure may be due to the existence of any or both types of defects or gaps; namely *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps.*

However, it is still unclear *why some quality management programs have failed and some have succussed*? Various authors have pointed out that the reason could be due to the existence some discrepancies between the *Ideal* QMP and *Actual* QMP (Benson et. al, 1991). It should be noted that Benson's work has not linked the failure of QMP to the existence of any possible discrepancies between *Ideal* QMP and *Actual* QMP. On the other hand Soliman and Spooner (2000) have pointed out that discrepancies could be due to the existence of two types of gaps namely *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps*. They have also demonstrated that there is a relationship between the two types of gaps. However Soliman and Spooner work did not identify *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps* as possible reasons for the failure of QMPs. Therefore, it is believed that discrepancies, if they exist, between the expected outcome of the *Ideal* QMP and the outcome of the *Actual* QMP identified could be explained as due to the existence of *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps* in developing and or implementing QMP.

Framework for evaluating the quality of quality management programs:

A theoretical framework has been developed to determine any possible link between quality thinking, implementation and assessment. Furthermore, the research aims are to fill a void in

quality management theory by identifying and bridging *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps*.

It is not surprising that further research in QM could expose the existence of *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps*. Furthermore, the apparent difference between quality process in theory and quality process in application may be due to the presence of *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps*. Accordingly, this research is an attempt to identify and analyse stakeholders' perceptions and organizational approach in respect to quality thinking, implementation, and assessment and in turn to investigate any differences that may lead to lack of performance. That is why a framework has been developed to assess organizational approach and stakeholders' perspective in respect to quality thinking, implementation and assessment. The proposed framework is presented in Figure 1 below.

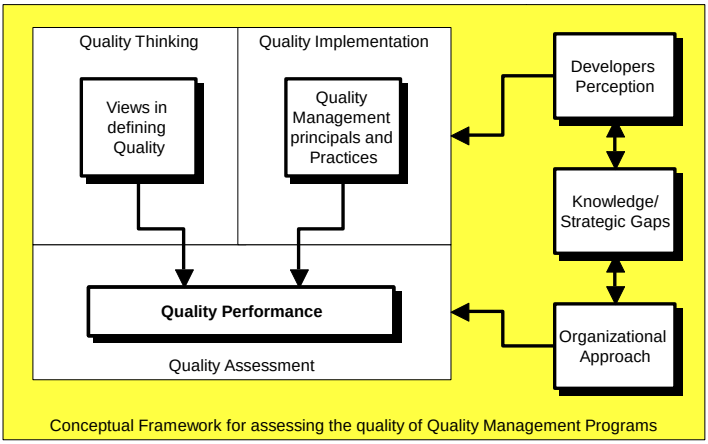

Figure 1: A framework for assessing the quality of quality management programs based on identification of possible knowledge/strategic gaps.

The research problem:

The apparent growing interest in both QM and KM has led to the formulation of the research problem on the basis of the comprehensive framework for assessing the quality of quality management programs as shown in Figure 1 above.

The anticipated research outcome could provide firms with a more invaluable detailed approach on how to improve product quality performance by bridging gaps between theory and practice. In other words there is a need to provide substantive insights into the relationship between *knowledge gaps*, *strategic gaps* and organizational factors associated with deployment of QMP. Further, the study provides insights into a number of organisational characteristics essential for the success of QMP in HR departments.

The research then looks into the different levels of quality in HR and empirically investigates and analyses quality definitions, quality management principles and practices, and quality assessment techniques into these different levels of quality from the organizational and developers perspectives and thus investigates the existence of any *knowledge gaps* and *strategic gaps* that may exist.

Accordingly, the research problem can be summarised as "How can firms bridge *knowledge gaps* and *strategic gaps* in the development and implementation of QMP in order to improve these firms quality performance?" The research problem could further be stated as:

1. How to identify the types of *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps* that could be factors for the success of developing quality management programs in HRD.
2. Identification (if any) of those critical *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps* that are critical to the success of developing quality management programs in HRD.

3. Identification (if any) of the impact of the various types of *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps* on the performance of quality management programs in HRD.

The above research problem has led to the formulation of the conceptual research model described which is shown in Figure 2 below.

Research hypotheses:

The above research problem has lead to the formulation of the following eight hypotheses that has been developed to address the research problem.

1- It is hypothesized that there is a positive relation between organizational performance and the organization's knowledge of QMP.
2- It is hypothesized that there a positive relation between organizational performance and the organizations' approach in implementation of QMP.
3- It is hypothesized that there is positive relation between organizational knowledge of QMP and these organization's implementation approach of quality.
4- It is hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the existence of *knowledge gaps* and quality performance.
5- It is hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the existence of *Strategic Gaps* and quality performance.
6- It is hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the existence of *Strategic Gaps* and Implementation of QMP Strategy.
7- It is hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the existence of *Strategic Gaps* and Development of QMP Strategy and quality performance.
8- It is hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps* and implementation strategies.

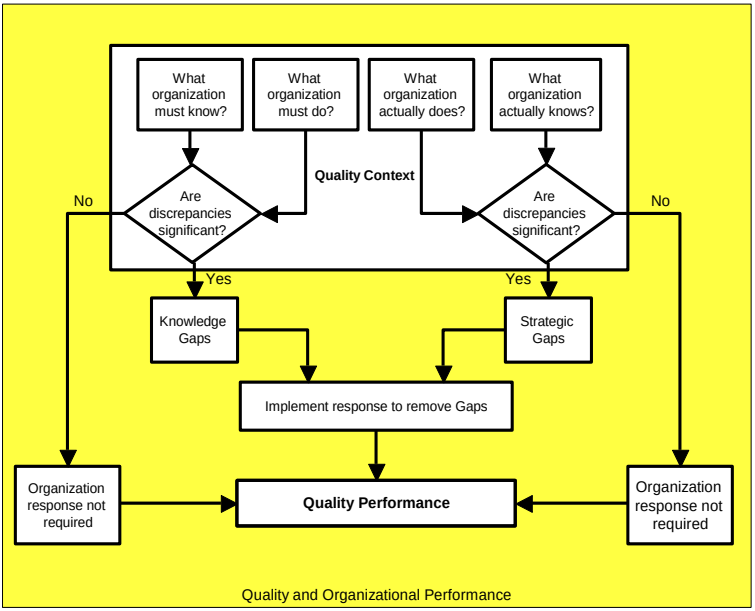

Figure 2: Conceptual model of identification of Knowledge and Strategic gaps.

The Gap Matrixes:

QMP are a usually formalised to increase quality and as such the formalised structure of QMP helps ensure that every individual within an organisation understands what is required to meet pre-determined quality standards. This formalisation can be viewed in terms of a close link between KM and QM. This link has a common organisational cause which is "creating a competitive advantage through the application of processes that help organisations get closer to the customer, in a way that allows them to better understand their customers' needs and wants". This link is best descried by the interaction between the two gap matrixes; namely

Strategic Gaps Matrix and *Knowledge Gaps* Matrix which is shown in Figure 3 below.

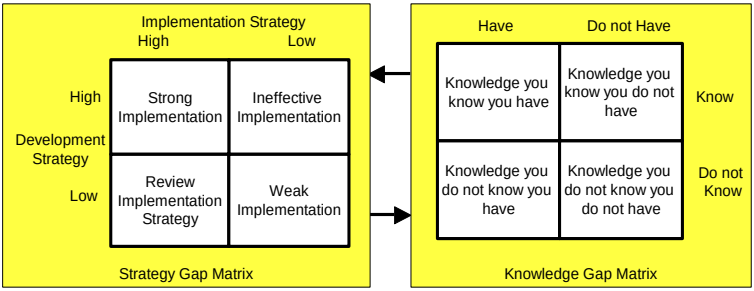

Figure 3: Interaction between the two types of Gap Matrixes:

Conclusions:

It is clear from the above study that both Knowledge Management (KM) and Quality Management (QM) could jointly contribute to the improvement of quality of QMP.

The research has demonstrated that a link between QM and KM could lead to identification of defects in developing and implementing strategies for QMP. This link could further be used to identify any possible defects in QMP. Those defects may be due to existence of *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps.*

If organisations ignore the *Strategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps*, their ability to deliver quality could be undermined. On the other hand, those organisations that are aware and responsive to removing and or reducing S*trategic Gaps* and *Knowledge Gaps* would be in a better position to deliver quality and hence gain relative competitive advantages.

This paper has identified a series of critical issues that must be carefully considered to ensure successful implementation of QMP. However, most of these factors are not related to technology and

almost entirely to the people and business processes, and they are highly interdependent.

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ADVANCING THE QUALITY OF HRM AND HRD IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

PREFACE

As the globalisation of markets continues at a rapid pace, the challenges for HR managers and those teaching HR increase. Human Resource Management practices vary between countries, sector, size and ownership of organizations. As a result it is important to acknowledge that what are largely considered to be 'Western' style HRM practices may not be relevant in other cultures. Despite this, some lessons may be learned from organizational experiences that can be transferred across countries and cultures through globalisation.

Globalisation is used to define a combination of factors - a single market place with growing free trade among nations; the increasing flow and sharing of information; and connections and opportunities for organisations and people to interact around the world without being constrained by national boundaries. To date globalisation has been a prime force for spreading knowledge through technology. Knowledge about production methods, management techniques, export markets, and economic policies is available at very low cost, and this knowledge represents a valuable resource for both developed and developing countries. It has been suggested that the HRD profession must include not only economic development and workplace learning, but it must also be committed to the political, social, environmental, cultural, and spiritual development of people around the world, particularly, as global success depends on utilizing the resources and diverse talents and capabilities of the broadest possible spectrum of humanity.

This conference draws from the research and experiences of participants to provide lessons and examples regarding how some organizations and individuals are attempting to utilise HRM strategies in order to promote agility and excellence and, in some cases, globalise business through such diverse topics as:

- HRD and HRM policy
- Organisational culture and power
- ER processes: collective and individual
- Community resource development
- HRM outcomes: empowerment, job satisfaction and productivity
- Workplace learning
- Values, politics, power, ethics and HRD
- Employment relations at public policy level
- HR and corporate sustainability
- Leadership and other areas.

The papers presented in these Proceedings have all been subject to peer referee by two reviewers with comments offered to authors.

The conference organisers would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the College of Management at Mahidol University for generously hosting this 17th Annual Conference of IERA. We also wish to express our thanks to the University of Technology, Sydney for its financial and administrative support of the conference. Special thanks to Virginia Furse, who worked tirelessly to produce these Proceedings and other materials critical to the success of the conference

The Conference Organisers are sure this 17th IERA Conference will be a rich and rewarding learning experience for everyone involved. We look forward to welcoming you to Bangkok.

IERA 2009 Conference Committee
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TABLE OF CONTENTS