IS TQM AND QUALITY EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK, A FAD?

Over the last few decades, TQM has gained substantial institutional value and has become the accepted way of performing and managing activities in organisations. Underpinning the principles of TQM philosophy, various quality awards / business excellence models have been established. A large number of studies exist which confirm the positive correlation of TQM with organisational excellence. The frameworks for TQM requirements are commonly known as Business Excellence Models (quality excellence framework) such as the EFQM Excellence Model or standards such as ISO 9000 Quality Management System. Such standards or awards have addressed TQM from four dimensions: (1) core values, (2) business excellence models/frameworks, (3) tools and techniques, and (4) implementation and cultural integration. There is an agreement among scholars of TQM and excellence models, that all of the excellence models emphasize on continual improvement in order to improve or enhance the quality of processes, corresponding outcomes and overall organisational performance to attain excellence.

Interestingly, there has been a difference of opinion among various researchers regarding the successes and failures of TQM in different organisational context. Many studies confirm that in cases where TQM / quality awards fail, it is most often not because of the insufficient Requirements, and/or Models of TQM but because these models or frameworks were not effectively implemented. Improper implementation or prematurely abandoning the TQM program were the main reasons for failure of TQM and related quality excellence program. One of the drawbacks and difficulties of TQM that researchers have highlighted is that the implementation of TQM differs from one company to another. Therefore companies develop TQM models suiting their own particular needs and thus the same model may not be suitable to the other organisations. The implementation of any TQM framework not only depends upon the framework being applied but also on other factors that exist in organisations. It is a common problem of identifying and setting the organisational factors which contribute to the success and failure of TQM framework such as the excellence model. Furthermore, the implementation of TQM requires different approaches from one organisation to another due to varied working environments and culture. Moreover, benefits of TQM are not immediately realised and require time to materialise. Hence, the initiative is perceived as too time consuming for eventual return.

On the other hand, there has been a growing and continuous interest in establishing and adopting national quality awards. Over the last two decades, excellence models have been spread as a way of increasing competitiveness and reducing costs by helping to incorporate and assess the Total Quality Management (TQM) principles and practices within the organisations. In one of the recent studies, it has been revealed that at present 100 business excellence models / national quality awards are being used in 82 countries. This gradual increase in establishing business excellence models / national quality awards highlights that the TQM philosophy through quality excellence frameworks is still receiving considerable attention worldwide. A study carried out by Mann (2011) for analysing the impact of business excellence and quality awards has highlighted that companies which reported about business excellence had a major impact on their competitiveness and performance. Another empirical research conducted by Ali and Ali (2014) on EFQM excellence model implementation have concluded that implementation of the EFQM excellence model has improved overall company's performance including key results, customer results, people results and society results.
To conclude, various researches on the positive impact of quality excellence frameworks and the growth in the number of quality awards worldwide provide evidence that TQM is still a valid management approach. Many organisations realised it as their competitive edge in terms of customer satisfaction and in gaining greater market share.

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