

Applying Total Quality Management to the Educational Process*

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Total Quality Management (TQM) is recognized as an important management philosophy and is widely used in US industry. It has been used very successfully in the development and acquisition of systems such as satellites and aircraft in preparing efficient performance reports. Over the last few years, TQM has been applied in the education industry. Most of the applications have been in the administrative side of the institutions, but some schools have applied TQM to curriculum development. The Air Force Academy has been a leader in this application of TQM. In this paper, the principles of TQM are described with an emphasis on the importance of identifying the customer and analyzing the process. The 14 Points of Dr. W. Edwards Deming, which form a framework for the implementation of the TQM, are individually applied to the academic environment based on the experience gained at the Air Force Academy.

INTRODUCTION

TOTAL Quality Management (TQM) was first espoused by Dr. W. Edwards Deming in the late 1950's. His ideas were not accepted by US industry but were heartily endorsed by Japan in their recovery from World War II. Largely as a result of the implementation of TQM, 'Made in Japan' has changed from a derogatory term to high praise [1].

In the 1980's, US industry began to see the value of a TQM approach. Such companies as Motorola and Federal Express have turned failing companies into world leaders. Motorola now does a good deal of business selling to Japan [1]. Universities, however, have been slower to see the value of using TQM in their business, although several schools are now using TQM to improve the administration of the university. In 1990, Oregon State University endorsed TQM as its management philosophy and has experienced outstanding success in improving the operations of the university. For example, using TQM they reduced the average duration of remodeling projects by 23% [2]. In 1988, the Air Force Academy began an attempt at applying TQM to curriculum development and, in 1990, offered a course that was designed and conducted using the principles of TQM.

The course that we chose as the target of our TQM efforts was Energy Systems, a first course in thermodynamics. This course is a core course and is therefore taken by almost all of the cadets at the Academy. Cadets from every major discipline take the course as a graduation requirement, so it differs from traditional thermodynamics courses in

that the classes have a large portion of students who are not engineers. Thermodynamics is a difficult subject for technically inclined students and is even more so for students whose interests lie in the humanities or social science. We chose Energy Systems as our target for TQM implementation for two reasons. First, Energy Systems was not a very popular course among the cadets, not unlike thermodynamics courses anywhere else in the country. We felt that if we could improve this course in the eyes of the students, we will have made a significant step. Second, the people charged with running this course, the authors, had been strong advocates of implementing TQM at the Academy from the very beginning.

Several papers have been published which describe just what we did to implement TQM in our course [3-5]. In those papers, we reported impressive improvements in many areas of the course. The students liked the course much more than before and felt they learned more as well. Quantitative measures of student performance increased significantly as well. The purpose of this paper, however, is not to rehash the details of one specific implementation. Rather, it is to make some observations and recommendations based on that experience that can be applied to any university situation. For readers that are interested in the details of our particular implementation, we refer them to the other papers or suggest that they contact the authors directly.

TQM PRINCIPLES

The one factor that is the most influential in the success or failure of a TQM implementation effort

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Applying Total Quality Management To The Educational Process

RJ Alexander



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