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Research Paper on Quality Circle - A Way To Improve Quality

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Abstract

On the face of it, it makes sense, If you want to involve your employees more in decision making and shift the organization toward a more participative culture, starting suggestion groups called quality circles seems to be a risk-free way to begin. Having studied many quality circles in different organizations, the authors of this article conclude that quality circles have their distinct advantages but that they have inherent in their design numbers of factors that often lead them to self-destruct. Quality circles are also said to be a poor forerunner for more participative approaches to management. Changing a quality circle into an institutionalized participative structure involves making many changes in important features of the organization that do not naturally flow from the implementation of a circle program. The authors describe the stages that quality circles go through, discuss the various threats they must survive, and then outline the most effective uses that managers can make of them.

Introduction



Concept of Quality Circles (QC):

The concept of quality control originated in the U.S. and was taken to Japan by W. Edwards Deming who marked the beginning of revolution in quality control. As quality control awareness increased in Japan, the Japanese companies used statistical quality control to motivate their workers to produce high-quality products.

One of the mechanisms used by these companies to improve the quality not only of their products but also the personnel was quality circles which is in practice even today.

Quality circle is a group of labour and management who belong to a single department, do same or similar work, meet periodically to discuss and analyse manufacturing problems (for about an hour per week in paid time) and find solutions to quality problems.

Rather than developing technical staff that works with management and workers, quality circles train the workers who identify and solve the problems they face during the production process. Quality circle is “an approach to improving quality and reducing the cost of producing a product or service by the voluntary efforts of small groups of workers, who are generally led by a first-line supervisor”.

However, the supervisor does not issue orders. The circle members analyse their problems,



gather relevant information, find solutions and implement them. The QC members do not receive monetary rewards for presenting solutions to management but receive recognition for their services to the organisation.

The quality circle is one of the most widespread practical ways for higher recovery of human resources and this is due to the remarkable results obtained through group work. Creating quality circles shall be made for the improvement of activity, in general, and capacity production, in particular.

This paper highlights the importance of establishing the quality circle in a production firm in order to resolve some of the issues in terms of the quality of the technological process. The approach and analysis of the problems by means of the quality circle have led to an optimization of the financial and human effort involved.

The Quality Circle Phenomenon

The QC programs that managers have implemented in the United States follow a similar pattern. (See the accompanying insert for a description of what we mean by “quality circle.”) Not all programs are the same, however. Usually organizations fine-tune the quality circle approach to suit their needs. The number of circles, the amount of training, the size of groups, and whether the supervisor serves as the facilitator vary among companies. Nevertheless, what goes on across organizations is similar enough to allow us to speak with some confidence about how management usually operates quality circles.

It is interesting to contrast quality circles in the United States with those in Japan and with the suggestion groups that companies with Scanlon and other gain-sharing plans have used for several decades. Although American and Japanese QC programs are very similar, several important differences exist. Programs in Japan give greater emphasis to statistical quality control; employees often meet on their own time rather than on company time; and finally, in Japan all company employees usually receive a financial bonus for the performance of the organization.

The problem-solving groups that work in conjunction with the Scanlon Plan differ in some important ways from the typical quality circle. The groups often have the authority to make and implement decisions that affect their work area only. Indeed, they generally have a small budget they can draw on. Most Scanlon Plan organizations have a hierarchy of committees, so that lower-level groups pass on to higher-level groups whatever problems can't be solved at that level. Although the more mature quality circle programs sometimes also have higher-level groups, higher-level QC groups generally legitimate and approve suggestions rather than solve problems. Overall, Scanlon Plan groups seem to have more power than quality



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circles and, like Japanese quality circles, are found in companies that give bonuses based on organization performance.

Quality circle programs in the United States create a parallel organizational structure; that is, they operate independently and in ways different from the existing organization. They emphasize different group processes, assign new roles to people, and take people out of their normal day-to-day work activities. To accomplish anything, the circles have to report their results back to the existing organization, which is the object of change as well as the controller of the resources necessary to effect it.

Conclusion: The use of quality circles has increased in European countries with a shift in focus from continuous medical education to quality improvement. Well-trained facilitators are important, as is the use of varying didactic methods and quality improvement tools. Qualitative inquiry is necessary to examine why QCs thrive or fail in different countries and systems.

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