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### The Limits of TQM for HE

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#### Introduction: generic elements of TQM

TQM is a 'synthesis of previously well-known management practices and theory aimed at creating a particular organisational culture dedicated to producing high quality products and services' (Warren Piper, 1993, p. 97). It attempts to combine 'tough-minded thinking and tender-hearted feeling' (Lessem, 1991) by bringing together management by objectives, performance indicators, strategic planning, participative management and action learning. TQM assumes that most problems are systemic rather than caused by human error.

There is no single definition or approach to total quality management (TQM). However, there are a number of issues which can be found in most approaches:

- **Constant improvement:** quality improvement is a never-ending goal. There should be constant review of the customers' needs and constant attempts to improve the quality of the product or service.
- **Cultural change:** the implementation of TQM requires cultural change within the organisation. This includes instilling in employees the need for quality in everything they do; moving away from individualism towards mutual trust and interdependence; and developing a free flow of information, appropriate performance indicators and management databases so that decisions can be based on evidence rather than supposition, tradition or prejudice.
- **Customer-driven definitions of quality:** outcomes should reflect customer requirements, needs or preferences. The standards that are set by the company should be dynamic and consistent with ever-changing customer requirements.
- **The 'quality chain':** a product or service involves a process that links together a chain of customers and suppliers. The chain extends outside the organisation in two ways: backwards to the supplier of goods and services that the company purchases; and forwards to the end customer. The chain also operates within the organisation. Each employee or department supplies services or products to other departments and is, in turn, a customer of other internal departments. At each point there is a customer-supplier relationship.
- **Organisation-wide involvement in quality:** every aspect of an organisation and every employee has an important role to play in improving the quality of the product or service.
- **Management commitment:** TQM requires the commitment of the top management and should be management-led. Management is responsible for setting and resourcing quality policy, providing motivation through leadership, and equipping people to achieve quality.
- **Team work:** team work helps to change the culture of the organisation from one of individual competitiveness to one of mutual interdependence and collaboration and helps to

motivate the work force.

- Built-in quality: instead of final-stage quality control, TQM builds in quality at each stage in the process. Each supplier in the quality chain is responsible for the quality of the product or service he or she supplies.
- Statistical techniques: these are used to help improve quality. They can help measure the costs of quality, identify problems and resolve them.
- Organisational structure: the structure of an organisation must be designed to support quality improvement rather than inhibit it. It must allow everyone to have responsibility for quality, ensure barriers to communication are removed, allow those directly involved in a process to identify and implement quality improvement, and provide training for quality.

### TQM Variations

Although there are generic elements that can be identified in most TQM approaches there are also differences in emphasis. Harari (1993) estimates that there are almost a thousand versions of TQM and that it has become a billion-dollar industry in its own right. The key differences between TQM approaches are the relative emphasis given to:

- the use of statistical procedures;
- reflecting customers wants or needs;
- anticipating customer desires;
- and fitness for purpose or consistency.

For example, exponents of TQM influenced by Crosby aim for a fault-free supply or service that conforms to specified standards, the benefits of which offset the costs (Halpin, 1966; Ingle, 1985). 'TQM is concerned chiefly with changing attitudes and skills so that the culture of the organisation becomes one of preventing failure and the norm is operating right first time' (Oakland, 1990, p. 8). For those influenced by Deming the emphasis is on fitting or exceeding customer expectations and using statistics to measure performance in all areas with a view to reducing variability by continuous, incremental improvement (Scherkenbach, 1986; Gitlow and Gitlow, 1987). Juran and his followers emphasise a fitness-for-purpose approach, which sets team goals on a project-by-project basis and warns against: campaigns to do perfect work, 'tool-driven' approaches and assuming that quality is free (Juran and Gryna, 1980). Each 'quality guru' puts a different slant on what is an essentially pragmatic and prescriptive process. TQM has no theoretical or epistemological underpinning — it is pragmatic.

No particular approach to TQM is significantly better than any other in industry according to a review by a non-profit research company called GOAL/TQC who compared six different variants of TQM, all of which worked (Warren Piper, 1993, p. 88).

## Application of TQM to education and training

TQM has been tried out in higher education institutions in Britain, Australia and the USA in recent years mainly as a result of increasing financial pressures and the need to 'behave like commercial enterprises in a fiercely competitive market' (Williams, 1993, p. 229). However, there has been little serious implementation of TQM in higher education and what has been tried has met with 'patchy success to date' (Yorke, 1993, p. 3).

In the USA, only a handful of institutions are seriously committed to TQM despite being encouraged by funding bodies to adopt quality improvement procedures so as to become more effective and efficient (Muffo, 1992). Marchese (1991b) identified twenty-four institutions that have adopted TQM institution-wide, of which only five have any significant experience. Given that there are 3,614 colleges in the USA this is not a significant number.

In the wake of increasing pressures on efficiency there is a recent expansion in interest in TQM (Chaffee and Sherr, 1992; Seymour, 1992). Marchese (1992b) refers to an 'explosion of interest' in TQM amongst members of the American Association for Higher Education. A similar thing happened in Britain but the interest did not develop into implementation in higher education. TQM, as it is currently being implemented in the United States is all about being more productive and containing costs than improving the learning experience and attainment of students. Myrna Whittington at the University of Pennsylvania, for example, noted that the decision to turn to TQM was that 'we have to do more with less' and that 'our people had to be more productive' in the face of 'escalating costs, unhappy customers, sloppy services'. As TQM had worked for Motorola and Kodak it 'looked like a candidate for managing our affairs better' (Marchese, 1992a).

In Britain, it appears that only a handful of universities have attempted to implement TQM across the institution. In Australia, any initial steps at implementation are mainly restricted to Training and Further Education (TAFE) colleges. Similarly, in New Zealand, encouraged by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), TQM is currently fashionable in the non-university sector of post-16 education (NZQA, 1992, 1994). In Japan, in contrast to the situation in industry, TQM is a 'non-starter' in institutions of higher education (Harvey, 1993a; Warren Piper, 1993).

In higher education, TQM tends to be most frequently implemented initially on a small scale rather than changing the entire organisation. This may be because it is seen as having limited applicability and is directed to areas that seem most suited to it. For example, in the United States the implementation of TQM has mainly been confined to administrative and service functions or to specific projects. Axland (1990) reports that half a sample of 78 American universities are using TQM principles to run their administrations, although in twelve cases this was confined to a particular area of administration. There was greater reluctance among universities concerned to apply TQM principles to their academic programmes.

In Australia, no higher education institution 'appears to be applying TQM across the board' (NBEET HEC, 1992b, p. 70). However, some are applying it to specific areas. The University of New South Wales, for example, has implemented TQM in its buildings and facilities areas and both the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and the University of Queensland have both instigated TQM projects in the area of student registration and induction. Where TQM has been applied in universities it has most often been to administrative and service departments as the likelihood of success is higher there. (Warren Piper, 1993, p. 98)

## Institution-wide or small-scale implementation

The literature on TQM implementation in higher education, particularly from the US, strongly advises starting with projects that are of manageable size, have campus-wide visibility and impact, and promise savings. This is at variance with the total approach in industry.

However, it may be that institution managers, rather than go for a 'process that's fixable, important to customers and that can save you money' (Coate, 1990), adopt a partial approach out of caution. Often, managers are hesitant about TQM and want to pilot it in one small area before extending the process (Marchese, 1991b). At Crawley College, for example, the School of Engineering was given permission to go ahead with a pilot for a quality system as a forerunner to the implementation of a College-wide quality system (Turner, 1993).

In some cases the incremental approach occurs because a small group want to demonstrate, by results, how TQM can work and thus hope to convert the rest of the institution — the 'infection model' (Seymour and Collet, 1991). At the Universities of Bradford (Porter and Oakland, 1992) and Northumbria (Prabhu and Lee, 1992) implementation began in the Business School where staff were familiar with the concept of TQM. There is, however, little evidence to suggest that these small-scale, limited introductions lead to full-scale implementation.

The whole college 'cascade approach' (Seymour and Collet, 1991), based on centrally planned introduction, which has the full support of the senior management, is rare. Among those documented are Aston (Clayton, 1992), South Bank (Geddes, 1992), Oregon State (Coate, 1990, 1993) Pennsylvania (Marchese, 1992a) and Fox Valley Technical College (Spanbauer, 1987).

Even where there is a total commitment to TQM, implementation in universities is not as institution-wide as it might appear. At South Bank, for example, the emphasis has initially been on the internal customer-supplier chain and the main effort has been in the development of customer-service agreements (South Bank University, 1992). At Aston, the effective introduction has been mainly in non-academic areas. The development of quality circles is an important feature of staff development for TQM and it is indicative that they have been set up to address such things as maintenance, cleaning, health and safety, communications, security, catering, finance, personnel, reprography and student care (Ager, Barnes, and Slee, 1992). Introduction of TQM in Australia and New Zealand tend also to be heavily linked to administrative functions (Jackson, 1994; Garlick, 1994)

It is not surprising that TQM implementation has been so limited and tentative. There are significant problems with introducing TQM to education, both practical and theoretical. Many of the difficulties with the application of TQM to higher education are 'generic' problems of TQM.

### 'Generic' problems of TQM

Despite the enthusiasm for TQM in industry, success in applying TQM is less widespread than advocates suggest. Those companies that have been successful through using TQM are widely publicised. Little or no publicity is attached to the thousands of companies who used TQM but still failed, or who abandoned TQM because it was not having any positive impact. Surveys of TQM users show widespread dissatisfaction, with a 'success rate of less than 30%'. Harari (1993, p. 33), for example reported that only 20–30% of TQM organisations claim to have achieved 'significant or even tangible improvement in quality, productivity, competitiveness or financial returns'. Similarly, Myers and Ashkenas (1993,) found that two-thirds of firms surveyed felt their TQM programmes were failing to have any impact.

TQM has not been transplanted easily to the service sector. For example, an extensive action-research study of implementation of TQM in the British National Health Service showed that of 38 sites undertaking quality initiatives, only 2 successfully implemented TQM. In conclusion the research indicated that an 'orthodox' TQM approach would be unsuitable and that a 'mixed model should be implemented.... It would allow for the particular strengths and complexities in the National Health Service which depends upon the integration of many forms of professional expertise' (Joss, Kogan and Henkel, 1994).

There are two kinds of problem identified by critics of TQM. First, criticisms that suggest the whole approach is fundamentally flawed. Second, criticisms that relate to the 'internal' failings of TQM. Much of this latter criticism relates to the different emphases that different approaches place on elements of TQM. The 'fundamental' criticisms include the following.

- TQM is not customer-driven. There is no evidence, for the vast majority of TQM organisations, that individual customers specify in advance what is required. Even where specifications 'originate' with an 'ideal type' customer via market research the product will be 'mediated by cost, available technology, time, marketing (such as advertising) and so on' (Harvey and Green, 1993, p. 17). Priorities are not set on the basis of customer requirements, indeed, they are often not set at all (Goodman, Bargatze and Grimm, 1994).
- TQM focuses people's attention on internal processes rather than external results.
- TQM is intrinsically bureaucratic and leads to additional burdensome procedures (Hill, 1993). It tends to add new layers of organisational management rather than effect radical organisational reform. Similarly, it fails to demand new arrangements with outside organisations and changes in management compensation (Harari, 1993).
- TQM focuses on minimum standards rather than striving for high standards of excellence.
- TQM may shift the emphasis away from quality control but instead it delegates quality to specialists and experts. The notion that everyone is responsible for quality in a TQM system is a sham.

As we have seen, TQM is varied and not all commentators would necessarily agree that the above are generic problems that are fundamental to any TQM approach. It may be argued that, at root, all these are practical problems of implementation and that, in principal, TQM is customer driven, results do matter, it is not necessarily bureaucratic, it can strive to high standards and everyone is given responsibility for quality.

Frequently cited 'internal' problems with TQM include the following.

- Organisations fail to achieve the required level of communication for effective TQM implementation because there is rarely a shared vision and middle managers, in an attempt to retain power, act as a communication block (Stevenson and Donnelly, 1994).
- TQM inhibits innovation and undermines entrepreneurship by standardising and routinising internal processes, leading to a formulaic approach, which is sterile and mechanistic

(Harari, 1993).

- TQM fails because it lacks rigorous measurement of results (Goodman, Bargatze and Grimm, 1994).
- TQM is viewed by new users as a 'quick fix' to help them overcome their problems. The TQM literature clearly indicates that implementation is not a rapid process, that it involves a change of culture and that the impact is long-term. However, this is often overlooked by enthusiastic vendors of TQM programmes desperate to sell their wares and by purchasers, desperate for results, who think they can effect rapid implementation.
- Participation in decision making at all levels rarely takes place. Those with power wish to retain it and much decision making is merely rubber-stamping decisions of top managers (Stevenson and Donnelly, 1994).
- Too many versions of TQM fail to focus on outcomes, preferring, instead, rather more vague notions such as 'continual improvement', 'management by objectives', 'performance appraisal' or 'zero defects' (Smith, 1994).

These failings are less vehemently defended by TQM advocates as they accept that there will always be initial problems of implementation until organisational culture is changed and that some approaches to TQM have different priorities to others.

#### Problems of implementing TQM in HE

Many of the problems of implementing TQM in higher education include problems of identification of customers and products, specifying a customer-driven 'definition' of quality, and introducing a managed 'quality culture' based on an industrial model.

#### Customers and product — the educational experience

Commentators on TQM suggest that any or all of the following may be seen as the product of higher education: education, knowledge, research (applied and other), scholarship, arts and culture, criticism of society and students. Thus, the customers (or clients) include: students, academic disciplines, employers, funders, parents, government and society. Students are both product and customer, which undermines the model. Similarly, if 'critique of society' is a product the supplier-customer model breaks down because staff and students combined are suppliers of critique to society or government who are often unwilling customers and who rarely seek the product (Warren-Piper, 1993).

The plurality of the university's customer means that sometimes the products or goals of the university are in conflict. Thus universities have a role in moderating competing needs and expectations and in taking responsibility for final judgements (NBEET HEC, 1992b). This leads to another problem for TQM as prioritising competing needs normally requires market values in order to make a decision. 'These complexities, which do not occur in manufacturing, and which are only faintly reflected in service industries, make the application of TQM to the university enterprise a complex one' (Warren Piper, 1993, p. 99).

It is therefore not surprising that TQM in higher education has been focused on academic

support services, given the relative ease with which their customers can be identified. Similarly, the institutions at the forefront of developments of TQM in higher education in the USA are the prominent research universities and the local community colleges. This may be because these institutions find it easier to articulate their mission in clear and unambiguous terms and hence it is easier to identify product and customer (Marchese, 1991b). For example, the apparent success at Fox Valley Technical College may be due to it having a specific vocational focus on business quality.

#### Identifying student requirements

From the TQM perspective, the needs of customers must come first and should determine the quality standards the institution must satisfy. TQM derives from manufacturing where the product is usually identifiable and customer requirements in relation to the product can be established, at least within some broad parameters.

There are more difficulties in applying TQM in service industries, not least because the product and the consequent needs of customers are less readily identified (Roberts, 1990; Newby, 1992). Buyers of manufactured products are disengaged from the organisation producing the product. In the service sector, the customer is less clearly separated from the product, which leads to problems in defining the product and in understanding customers' needs. (Warren Piper, 1993, p. 98).

Attempts to define customer needs in the service sector have focused on distinguishing the service process in which the 'customer' is involved and the service outcome. The emphasis has been not so much on fulfilling stated customer needs but attempting to measure satisfaction (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990). Satisfaction approaches might help to identify a narrow range of 'customer' priorities and satisfactions (Bell and Shieff, 1990; Ramaseshan and Pitt, 1990) but this does not help to reconcile vague expectations with professional expertise.

#### Customer or participant?

Talk of customers, of satisfying needs, of getting things right first time, and of educational products are far removed from the idea of students as participants in a process of learning. Despite attempts to adapt TQM to take account of students as participants in a process of self-development, the genesis and focus of TQM fundamentally inhibits its suitability to a participatory model.

TQM is about organisational procedures designed to ensure that customer requirements are fulfilled. It is about producing an end-product consistently, or in constantly improving processes so that requirements are met as nearly as possible and efficiently and effectively as possible. At the heart of TQM is a concept of customer receiving a product.

In short, TQM does not address transformation. Higher education is fundamentally about transforming students through empowering them by enhancing their knowledge and skills. TQM is essentially reductionist—'production or service possibilities are analysed by stages' (Warren Piper, 1993, p. 97)—it does not see the student learning experience as part of a holistic process. The disregard for the transformative notion of education and replacement with a customer-perspective, dressed up in managerialist language (Carothers, 1992), leads many academics to regard quality systems as faddish and not worthy of being seriously engaged. In essence, TQM is about providing a product to satisfy the end-customer it is not about transforming a participant.

### Uniformity or variation?

Much of the quality assurance process in industry, and to some extent the service sector, is concerned with a consistent product or outcome. For example, Crosby's model emphasises uniformity of 'product', delivered without defects. This emphasis on consistency might be all right for mass produced components or consumer products but it entirely disregards the exploratory nature of learning. A consistency approach is, therefore, hardly commensurate with higher learning (Holloway, 1993; Baldwin, 1994; Harvey, 1994b, Woodhouse, 1994).

### Teaching and learning

With a few exceptions (Müller and Funnell, 1991, 1992, 1993; Walley, 1992; Hansen, 1993) discussions of the implementation of TQM in higher education are extremely reticent to discuss, let alone provide evidence of, the potential impact on the quality of the teaching and learning process. This, in part, reflects the deliberate distancing of the teaching and learning from TQM in some institutions.

Holloway (1993, p. 12–13) reports that at the Open University, in Britain, some academic staff involved in TQM implementation, believed 'that there is something essential about "teaching quality" which should remain outside the remit of TQM. A similar limit to the domain of TQM is reported in other HEIs in the UK and abroad, and has a parallel in medical practice'. The practice of 'starting with the 'soft targets' of support services and to ease off when the examination of internal customer-supplier chains reaches academic staff, appears to be a common experience in the UK, USA and New Zealand'.

### Costs and time

There is little hard evidence about the costs of implementing TQM. However, Oregon State University estimates that at least 20% of the time of people involved in projects being assisted by TQM processes is given over to the implementation of TQM itself (Coate, 1990). In health contexts it has been suggested that the financial costs of TQM implementation are quite high, for example, Brooks (1992) estimated a cost of £500,000 over three years for a hospital with 2000 staff.

Seymour (1991) suggests that, although it is too early to tell, there is a cost-benefit trade-off at the project-level where the implementation has met with more success than when implemented institution-wide. This raises questions, though, of how, for example, is the 'price of non-conformance', such as a cancelled lecture, determined? Is it possible to quantify 'good quality tuition' in financial terms?

For staff, the real obstacle, even if they are inclined towards TQM, is one of time. The pressure on staff from increased student numbers and a declining unit of resource is leading towards a culture of 'getting by', let alone embracing irrelevant activities that eat in to their time (Yorke, 1993, p. 6). Quality systems are seen as increasing work loads and administrative burdens on teachers who are already expected to do more.

Furthermore, the benefits of TQM are not immediately apparent, there is a long time-lag of between three and ten years between initiation and expected benefits from full implementation (Coate, 1990; Schofield et al., 1991; Clayton, 1992).

### Staff resistance

Scepticism and cynicism flourish amongst academics who tend to be more conservative than

radical in their view of the higher education process. This cynicism is accentuated by a distaste for the evangelicalism associated with TQM (Baldwin, 1994).

Often, in practice resistance is underestimated and necessary groundwork has not always been done to gain assent and sustained support from staff (Yorke, 1993). Nor can this cynicism be ignored because there will be tension between TQM practitioners and non-practitioners in the same institution. In addition, extensive cynicism will make it difficult to achieve a 'critical mass' to support the institutionalisation of TQM and get beneath surface-level applications (Seymour, 1991). It also reduces the potential for developing teamwork, consensus-building and conflict resolution, all of which are vital elements of TQM implementation and difficult enough to achieve in an academic environment at the best of times. Staff resistance to TQM is significant and takes a number of forms, including:

- suspicion of management motives: many staff are resistant because they see TQM as another ploy that increases managerial control and undermines academic autonomy. However, in ironic contrast to employee resistance, a lack of wholehearted support often reflects the concern of managers that TQM would lead to a loss of managerial control (Seymour, 1991; Harvey, 1993b).
- resentment: there is resentment at the inference that the failings of the institution, brought about by inadequate or inappropriate allocation of resources, are being blamed on staff. Teaching staff at Crawley College, for example, 'were very sensitive about any implications that they were not giving a quality service already' (Turner, 1993, p. 20) a point echoed by library staff at the University of Western Sydney (Stevenson and Donnelly, 1994)
- failure of trust: for many academics, the introduction of any quality system implies a criticism of the quality of their work hitherto and a lack of trust in the work force. These concerns are not allayed by the emphasis placed, by many versions of TQM, on the need to place trust in the workers to fulfil their responsibilities.

#### Team working

TQM places considerable emphasis on working in teams. In many respects this is an alien process for many academics who are not only used to working alone but who are valued by their institutions for their individual contribution. Team working, traditionally, has been a restricted activity for academics, limited to some larger research projects, to course-scheme design for externally accredited courses (such as by awarding, professional or regulatory bodies) and team-teaching. For most academics, individual teaching and scholarship are the norm. It is not surprising that, in higher education settings, TQM is introduced into areas where team-working already exists and where the team has a fairly straightforward task. However, some reports suggest that TQM, in such circumstances can do more harm than good by threatening the existing team-working processes.

For example, the University of Western Sydney introduced a pilot TQM into the Collection Services Department of its Library with a view to examining the processing and turnaround time for book purchasing. Senior managers were aware of the resentment and scepticism that TQM could generate but, even forewarned, were unable to allay the problems caused by the external facilitator (Stevenson and Donnelly, 1994). The introduction of TQM in this case almost destroyed a process that was already underway and it was only with the ejection of the TQM

facilitator from the group that the team was able to return to an effective way of working. A similar situation was reported at Oregon State University Library where staff were resentful of TQM because they already used participative problem-solving (Butcher, 1993). Again, in this case, the TQM trainer nearly caused disaster.

#### Increased bureaucracy and burden of work

Quality management is sometimes seen, justifiably, as resulting in increased layers of management, not flatter organisational structures. At Crawley College, for example, the pilot introduction of TQM did not proceed smoothly as there was considerable resistance to what amounted to the introduction of an additional layer of middle managers, who among other things, 'have responsibility for driving the quality initiative in their area' (Turner, 1993, p. 29).

TQM, it is claimed, ought to work better in semi-autonomous situations because it is based on mobilising organisational culture rather than a reliance on bureaucratic procedures (Drucker, 1991; Tannock, 1991a). However, TQM leads to major gains in effectiveness and cost savings when 'cross-cutting functions' are addressed, for example, enrolments management, where central administrative processing is linked to academic decision-making about student admissions. However, cross-functional change tends to be difficult in a collegiate ethos of semi-autonomous units.

Implementing TQM is also seen to involve an intolerable and unnecessary burden of work with no discernible pay-off in the academic context.

#### Measurement and statistical procedures

A major area of resistance is the measurement of quality. Given the diversity of customers and products there is little agreement about suitable quantitative benchmarks. Some staff are suspicious of statistical focus of TQM, 'since they feel it will tend to introduce an inappropriate levelling of healthy diversity' (Warren Piper, 1993, p. 91). This reflects the protracted debate about the appropriateness and nature of performance indicators in higher education.

Thus, the emphasis placed on statistical procedures by some approaches to TQM acts as much as a major demotivator for some staff as 'managerialist jargon' (QUT, 1990). For others, however, the statistics are opposed on the ground that they are inadequate or irrelevant to the quality monitoring or improvement processes. For example, the first attempt to introduce TQM in the Science Faculty at Queensland University of Technology overemphasised statistics. The attempt was abandoned as heads and deans who were the subject of the attempted TQM-implementation were insulted by the disregard for their own level of expertise in statistics. They regarded statistics as irrelevant to their quality concerns — they could critique statistical approaches from a position of considerable knowledge of the limitations of such techniques.

#### Repackaging

There is a tendency among TQM enthusiasts to repackage a range of research and management procedures as their own, and to 'ascribe all improvements, however initiated, to TQM' (Woodhouse, 1994).

For example, there are a growing number of commentators offering advice when introducing TQM into a service environment (Saraph et al., 1989; Holmes, 1991; Schofield et al., 1991; Binney, 1992; Coulson-Thomas, 1992; Zairi, 1992; Garvin, 1983; Kalunzny et al., 1993).

Important features of successful implementation of TQM in the service sector that emerge from

these include: a passion about quality; a belief in people and their potential; flat organisational structures; commitment of leaders and key stakeholders; simple informal communication systems; genuine commitment to listen to employees and respond rapidly to their comments; minimising perceived threats to power bases; and so on.

The question arises as to whether this list of 'critical success factors' are unique to TQM. 'They may be just as relevant to strategic planning, organisational development or human resource management' (Holloway, 1993, p. 9).

Similarly, market research tools such as customer-satisfaction surveys are being claimed as TQM approaches (Cliff, 1994). Indeed, a whole range of basic social research techniques are repackaged as TQM techniques. Juran (1988, p. 210), for example, suggests that TQM involves 'planned, systematic collection of data on multiple process variables and the associated product results. The data are then systematically analysed to establish the relationships'. This is nothing more than multivariate analysis: for 'process variables' read 'independent variable' and for 'product results' read 'dependent variable'.

Similarly, in an education setting, Jackson (1994) repackages simple social research when claiming that monitoring the teaching of quantitative subjects in non-quantitative degrees at La Trobe University involves using 'TQM techniques':

The technique involves development of a longitudinal database, where data is collected over time, to gain a greater understanding of the process, which is the subject, and the relationship between its inputs and its outputs. With a better understanding of the process and identification of problems within it, it will be possible to take actions to improve the process and hence, hopefully, the outcomes.... Taking the introductory statistics subject as the process to which students are subjected and viewing the students as both inputs and outputs, the longitudinal database is used to collect data upon process variables (student characteristics) and product results (performance in subject). (Jackson, 1994, pp. 89–91)

Closer analysis shows that this is nothing more than standard longitudinal action research, based on multivariate analysis.

However, the repackaging suggests three respects in which TQM differs from most social research. First, TQM is much more clearly reductionist. Although some forms of positivist social research use reductionist, system models to identify key factors in a process, this is rarely as clear cut as the system-analysis model underpinning much of TQM.

Second, TQM makes clearer links between research and action than much conventional social research, which tends to be hesitant about the politics of informing policy or specifying action. However, critical research has never had a problem in identifying the political implications of its work (Lynd, 1939; Mills, 1959; Habermas, 1970; Harvey, 1990). Similarly, social policy research, action research and evaluation research all have clear agendas that link research findings to recommendations for action (Ben-Tovim, Gabriel, Law and Stredder, 1986).

Third, TQM makes much of the transformation of data into actionable information. This is a difference of focus. Social research transforms data into evidence in developing a deeper theoretical understanding of an issue. TQM is more restrictive in its focus and requires only that data is processed into management information. This reflects the managerialist concerns of TQM rather than a deeper understanding of social processes. However, one should avoid assuming that the production of management information is itself a 'TQM technique'.

The claim that all improvements in education are due to TQM extends to a range of standard

practices as diverse as periodic review of courses, monitoring of student assessment turnaround, team development of new courses, devising student coursework assessment criteria, end-of-session summary feedback procedures, as well a host of other teaching and learning 'innovations' and staff development processes (Bolton, 1994)

Repackaging an old product does not make it a new product. However, as in the case of TQM, it can be marketed as something new. It might be argued that TQM is predatory and nothing more than an assemblage of good management practices, statistical procedures and common-sense underpinned by a simplistic philosophy designed to spread the responsibility for quality outcomes (Holloway, 1993, p. 2).

Repackaging is an attempt to give TQM a legitimacy and it has facilitated the resale of old ideas. The more it attempts to infiltrate realms it was not designed for the more the predatory and eclectic nature of TQM is revealed. In higher education, TQM has nothing new to offer other than reminding us of established procedures and responsibilities.

## Conclusion

It appears that there is a lot of effort, energy and resources expended on inaugurating TQM and related systems but little evidence that have any major impact across the higher education system nor that they deliver any improvement at the staff-student interface. There are innumerable bullet-point papers that list things to do when setting up TQM systems but very few that critically evaluate the potential, let alone actual, impact of such systems in higher education. There is not much to suggest that TQM is other than yet another passing fad:

We have experienced a string of fads proclaiming the same institutional success including Statistical Process Control, Long-Range Planning, Strategic Planning, Management by Objectives, Zero-Based Budgeting, O & M (organisation and Methods) Theory 'Z', Theory 'K', Job Enrichment, the energetic Management-by-Walking-About, the Management Audit, Value-Added Planning, Work-Place Reform and the various other theories through which scholars and practitioners have earned their fame, their theses, their MBAs and their consultancy fees. (Hinchcliffe, 1994, pp. 161-2)

There is no overwhelming evidence that, in the higher education context, TQM does you good. This does not mean that those institutions who have embraced TQM are wrong. Some institutions have doubtless benefited from the adoption of TQM. Most, it appears, are sceptical. TQM is certainly not an option an institution should take just because it may have been of some use somewhere else. It is essential to evaluate the potential benefits carefully and estimate costs of all kinds before embarking on what might be an unnecessary voyage. Indeed, what may accrue to higher education from TQM might be much more readily and effectively gained by encouraging the new collegialism.

There is no compelling evidence that TQM will become a major aspect of quality monitoring and development in higher education. Indeed, interest in its potential is already beginning to wane, judging by contributions to major national and international conferences, seminars and colloquia. Two years ago parallel sessions on TQM in education used to attract far more than the average number of respondents. For example, at the QHE 24-Hour seminar in January 1993 the TQM-related session was by far the most popular. Anecdotal evidence suggests that TQM-related sessions are now seen as somewhat passé. Indicative of this is the cancellation of

the first national conference on TQM in higher education due to have taken place in Britain in early 1995.

Part of the reason for declining interest appears to be that the debate about TQM in education has not progressed. TQM gurus are saying the same things and not relating sufficiently closely to the educational context. TQM sessions are characterised by continuing sterile discussions about clients, customers and products as well as constantly reiterated fears about TQM as a managerialist tool. Disaffection is creeping in rapidly because of the evident failure of TQM to have anything meaningful or useful to contribute to the staff-student learning interface. The contribution tends to be in terms of specifying service standards, such as turnaround time for student work, which are now covered by institutional student charters.

At root, TQM is fixated on a product or service supplied to a customer (or client). Higher education is a participative process. There is no simple, discernible end-product of higher education, it is an ongoing transformative process that continues to make an impact long after any formal programme of study has been completed. In essence, TQM addresses a partial 'pragmatic' notion of quality that is of marginal use in the context of higher learning and knowledge development.

Effort might be more profitably directed to encouraging the development of open, self-reflective collegialism rather than the importation of expensive, bureaucratic, unwieldy, alienating managerialist approaches from industry. In essence, TQM misses the mark, having little to offer in relation to the teaching and learning interface, not least because neither can accommodate the notion of the active participant in learning.

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