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The development of total quality management in Qatar
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The development of total quality management in Qatar

Khalifa N. Al-khalifa and Elaine M. Aspinwall

Introduction

The globalisation of the marketplace and the rapid improvements in information flow capabilities, have increased competition worldwide. In an effort to become efficient, flexible and more competitive in today’s changing business environment, many countries and companies across the world have started to realise the benefits of the quality revolution and in particular of total quality management (TQM). Quality has evolved from inspection, through quality control and quality assurance, to TQM. This has transformed organisations from an inefficient environment with heavy reliance on inspection, an autocratic leadership and hierarchical control, to one employing teamwork, paying attention to customer needs and satisfaction, getting quality right first time and continuously improving processes. The 1990s have seen the quality revolution spreading beyond manufacturing companies to both private and public services and many organisations are forced to change their old strategies and management styles and develop better ways to allocate available resources in order to remain competitive.

TQM is a management philosophy that emphasises both the needs to meet external and internal customers’ needs and expectations and the importance of doing things right first time. Oakland (1995) defined it as:

an approach to improving the competitiveness, effectiveness, and flexibility of a whole organisation. It is essentially a way of planning, organising and understanding each activity, and depends on each individual at each level.

TQM is mainly concerned with continuous performance improvement. To achieve this, people need to know what to do, how to do it, have the right tools to do it, and be able to measure performance and receive feedback on current levels of achievement (Kanji and Asher, 1993). It is a quality/business improvement philosophy involving continuous improvement of processes, products, and services, enhanced productivity, reduced costs, and increased total customer satisfaction. It extends far beyond the philosophy and practices of quality assurance and control. Most organisations employing TQM actively pursue and encourage improvement at all levels.
levels and view change as a natural, continuous part of their activities. TQM is a long-term strategy and is concerned with cultural changes in a business as a whole and with creating missions, visions, and values.

Many companies world-wide, but in particular those in Japan, the USA and Western Europe have implemented TQM as a way of maximising customer satisfaction, gaining better product quality, and obtaining higher productivity through the systematic removal of waste and the reduction of non-productive activities. Many companies in developing countries want to follow suit, but they do not know how to implement TQM, nor which factors/activities are important and in most cases regard it only as quality circle activities (Madu, 1997; Yoo, 1998).

The focus of this study was to analyse and evaluate current practices and knowledge of quality/TQM activities in Qatar, in order to recognise the problems faced and to suggest a way forward. It presents the first part of a questionnaire which was designed to collect opinions on the following areas:

- the awareness and understanding of ISO 9000 and TQM;
- the reasons for their implementation and the progress made to date;
- obstacles encountered in TQM implementation; and
- the knowledge and/or practices of TQM related activities.

Before analysing the survey findings, the paper provides a background of Qatar and describes the methodology used to carry out the study.

Background of Qatar (Department of Economics, 1998; Department of Publication and External Information, 1998)

Qatar is a peninsula along the western coast of the Arabian Gulf. It is one of the smallest Arab states by area. Qatar’s economy is closely linked to its oil and gas resources and it has been an oil exporting country for several decades. It became a liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporting country at the end of 1996 and plans to be one of the major exporters of gas in the twenty-first century as its reserves of gas represent about 7.4 per cent of the world reserve (ranked third worldwide).

Revenue from oil/gas exports is the major national income and is considered to be the state’s main source of foreign currencies, therefore, the petroleum and gas sectors, being the mainstay of the national economy, gain most of the developments, projects, etc. Petrochemicals, iron and steel, chemical fertiliser and cement manufacturers are among the most important industries in the country. However, the economy of Qatar is vulnerable to changes in external factors, in particular the prices of oil/gas. The variations and decline in oil prices since late 1982, and in particular in 1998 and early 1999, has forced the country to reduce government expenditure in all sectors of its industries and to focus on non-oil products to supplement the national income through diversified sources. Therefore, many businesses and services, which had been supported by local government, are now realising the challenges ahead in the next millennium and are starting to look at quality initiatives as a way of improving their products and services.

In general, there are radical changes taking place in Arab oil producing countries (or Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries which consist of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain), and TQM is considered to be the ideal philosophy to bring about these necessary changes and restructuring. Al-Sulimani and Sharad (1994), Aly (1996) and Zairi (1996) proposed it as a promising model for organisations to address the challenging problems they face. There is also a wider appreciation that implementing TQM programmes could lead to substantial benefits (Zairi, 1996). BS EN ISO 9000 registration (referred to as ISO only from here onwards) is becoming a passport for exporting to the European Union. This has lead some organisations in the Gulf region to seek registration and to begin to assess the level of assurance of their quality systems according to the ISO 9000 standards.

However, Zairi (1996) noted that Arab managers and governments unfortunately believe that ISO 9000 registration will bring miracles with it and can lead to superior competitiveness. He stated that:

- all Arab countries have to deal with these levels of misconception and poor understanding.
ISO 9000 is only a licence to practice and only represents one pillar of the TQM philosophy. It is an essential element but not sufficient on its own (Zairi, 1996).

Despite the number of publications and the amount of research into TQM, little empirical work has been carried out in developing countries. This is particularly true of the Arab world and Qatar specifically. From the researcher’s own experience as well as the limited research and the points raised by Al-Sulimani and Sharad (1994), Youssef and Zairi (1995), Aly (1996) and Zairi (1996), the region (and Qatar in particular) is a long way from maturity in terms of total quality practices and organisational culture and climate that are needed to implement TQM. TQM can not work in an environment in which the systems/practices are hostile to its teaching. It is not enough to describe where Qatar industries should be, but to know where they are before deciding how to move ahead.

Methodology

Since this research represents the first such empirical study on quality and TQM issues in Qatar and because the study was designed to cover as wide a range of the heterogeneous population as possible, a questionnaire was used as the basis for data collection. Issues such as the commitment to and awareness of quality, the understanding of ISO/TQM, reasons for ISO certification if applicable, any quality programmes in place, and emphasis placed on TQM related activities, formed the basis of the questionnaire.

Having designed the survey form, a pilot study was conducted using three companies in Qatar with whom the researcher was familiar. The piloting was carried out using face-to-face interviews with respondents. Based on their responses, certain adjustments were made to the wording of the questionnaire, to improve its clarity. A mailing list of companies was drawn up with the help of the Qatar Commerce Department and using the Qatar Telecommunication Directory. A total of 350 organisations was randomly selected, although the authors ensured that the most well known organisations in the country were included.

The improved questionnaires, together with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey/study, were mailed to about half of the selected organisations. The remainder were delivered manually by the researcher (these were usually given to either general managers, quality (if applicable), human resources or public relations managers), the idea being to maximise the response rate. The distribution took place during October and November of 1998. A total of 162 questionnaires were returned, of which 19 were “spoilt” leaving 143 for the analysis (a response rate of 41 per cent). The high response rate could be attributed to either the level of interest in the subject or the direct and personal/telephone approach used by the researcher. Although this personal approach was time-intensive and costly, and can be impractical in some cases (especially where a large geographical area is to be covered), it proved effective for this study.

Following the data collection the responses were coded to enable them to be computer processed. The software package used for the analysis was SPSS (statistical package for the social sciences) for Windows 8.0.

Survey findings

Background information

The distribution of respondents by industry sector is shown in Figure 1. Of the 143 respondent organisations, 59 were from the service sector, 52 from general manufacturing and 32 from the oil and gas industry. The service sector in this study included the public sector, insurance companies, banks, construction companies, telecommunications, health care, etc. General manufacturing covered companies from textiles, food and drink, steel, cement, clothing, etc. while the oil and gas industry were all those related to oil and gas operations such as exploration, drilling, production,

Figure 1 Distribution of respondents by sector

- Services 42%
- General Manufacturing 36%
- Oil/Gas Industry 22%
LNG’s departments, storage, supporting services, etc. as well as petrochemical/fertiliser industries. This ensured that opinions were sought from a wide range of industries.

For the purpose of this study, companies with less than 100 employees were classified as “small”, those with 100 to 500 as “medium” and those with more than 500 as “large”. The profile of the respondent companies in terms of these definitions were 57.3 per cent large (it should be noted that a lot of companies in Qatar employ low class workers from Asian countries, because of their low wage demands, which results in many companies having more than 500 employees), 18.2 per cent small and 24.5 per cent medium sized. In total, 38.5 per cent of the respondent companies were of a partnership/joint venture type indicating links not only nationally but also internationally with European, US, and other Arab enterprises. Government-owned companies comprised 26.5 per cent of the respondents and privately- or foreign-owned 31.5 per cent.

The questionnaires were distributed to different levels of employee to ensure that a range of opinions was gathered. The majority of the respondents (52.4 per cent) were middle management – quality managers, human resource managers, etc. – who, according to Madu et al. (1996), are a good source of information relating to quality practice inside any company because they are:

1. the executors of top management decisions;
2. positioned to interact with both top management and floor level and are able to understand the performance of their companies as well as the reactions of floor level employees in relation to quality practices;
3. able to understand quality related problems that may affect the company; and
4. in possession of the right information to respond to quality related questionnaires.

A total of 19.6 per cent of the respondents were from top management (general managers, assistant general managers, etc.), the same percentage held a supervisory position (quality and technical officer, etc.) and the remainder were classified as “other”.

**Importance, awareness, understanding and application of ISO/TQM**

The extent to which concern for quality/TQM was considered an essential factor for the success of any quality initiative, in particular by top management, was investigated. The respondents were asked to rank their perception of the degree of concern for, and/or commitment to, the need for quality by each of top management, middle management and employees. A five-point likert scale was used, with “1” indicating “strongly disagree” and “5” indicating “strongly agree”. The respondents believed that all three levels in their companies were concerned about quality. Top management, the most important category, received the highest ranking with a mean value of 4.2 followed by middle management with 3.92 and employees with 3.48.

Since this was the first study to investigate the extent to which quality is practiced in Qatar, it was important to assess the level of awareness and understanding of both the ISO 9000 standard and TQM. The results from the survey showed a relatively high level of awareness of the ISO standard and a moderate one for TQM. However, there was a lack of understanding of their purpose particularly with regard to TQM as can be seen in Table I.

In terms of awareness, 80.4 per cent of the respondent companies stated that they were involved and/or familiar with the ISO 9000 standard while the result for TQM was 66.4 per cent. A cross-tabulation was constructed, classifying the respondent companies into their respective industry type, size, ownership and managerial positions, in order to determine whether the level of awareness differed within each category. As a result, it was further established that:

1. With respect to ISO 9000, more of the respondents from the oil/gas industries and the general manufacturing companies demonstrated a high degree of awareness than those in the service sector. The same was true of the large respondent companies and the medium sized ones compared to the small ones. Those that were a joint venture or a partnership again revealed a high level of awareness, while, companies with government and local ownership were lower.
In terms of TQM awareness, 81 per cent of the oil/gas respondent organisations showed a high level of awareness, while the percentages in the other sectors were appreciably smaller. Only 38.5 per cent of the small companies showed a high level of awareness compared to 74.4 per cent of the large and 68.6 per cent of the medium sized ones. Private companies exhibited a very low awareness of the subject as well as companies with government and joint ownership.

The participants were further asked to select a statement (or provide their own) which they thought best described the purpose of ISO 9000 and/or TQM. There is a danger that when a new management approach receives a lot of attention and publicity by government institutions, consultants, etc., the “leaders” in many companies become familiar with the buzzwords and assume they know what it is all about, often basing their views on very limited, perhaps even superficial information. Thereafter they can become blase about the subject without really ever knowing about or overcoming their lack of knowledge (Taylor and Adair, 1993a).

The respondents’ indication of their understanding of ISO 9000 certification varied. Less than half of the respondents indicated that it was to establish either a consistent documentation method or a formal quality system. The most common “wrong” answer was that having ISO 9000 certification meant high-grade products and services. Some answers ranged from continuous improvement through problem solving and teamwork (14 per cent) to making the customer the focus of all business processes (4.9 per cent). This shows the level of misunderstanding regarding certification amongst companies in Qatar.

Awareness of TQM is only a beginning; the key to progress should be an understanding of its philosophy and processes. As highlighted by Oakland (1995) and Taylor (1996) a correct understanding of TQM is vital to ensure its proper implementation. The study sought to probe this understanding. Only nine of the 95 respondents who had an awareness of TQM described its purpose as “making the customer the focus of all business processes”. This was probably the most relevant of the answers (Taylor and Adair, 1993a). A total of 48 (33.6 per cent) defined it as “continuous improvement through problem solving and teamwork”. This description when compared to the former, lacks the customer dimension as well as implying that the teams are the main source of improvement which may not be true (Taylor and Adair, 1993a). The remainder of the respondents offered answers ranging from a documentation method or formal system (19) to a means of guaranteeing high-grade products and services (12). Although 66.4 per cent of the respondents indicated an awareness of the subject, only 40 per cent seemed to understand it. In terms of the

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**Table I The awareness and understanding of ISO and TQM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>ISO 9000</th>
<th></th>
<th>TQM</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, just familiar/involved</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>66.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No/do not know</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Understanding/purpose of the two subjects**

1. To establish a consistent documentation method
   - ISO 9000: 32 (22.4%), TQM: 8 (5.6%)
2. A new name for not-so-new management practices
   - ISO 9000: 2 (1.4%), TQM: 5 (3.5%)
3. Continuous improvement through problem solving and teamwork
   - ISO 9000: 20 (14.0%), TQM: 48 (33.6%)
4. To establish a quality/formal system
   - ISO 9000: 28 (19.6%), TQM: 11 (7.7%)
5. Making the customer the focus of all business processes
   - ISO 9000: 7 (4.9%), TQM: 9 (6.3%)
6. A means of guaranteeing high grade products and services
   - ISO 9000: 26 (18.1%), TQM: 12 (8.4%)
7. Not known
   - ISO 9000: 28 (19.6%), TQM: 48 (33.6%)
8. Other
   - ISO 9000: 2 (1.3%), TQM: 1 (0.7%)

**Total**

- ISO 9000: 143 (100%)
- TQM: 143 (100%)

Source: *Adapted from Taylor and Adair (1993a)*

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(2) In terms of TQM awareness, 81 per cent of the oil/gas respondent organisations showed a high level of awareness, while the percentages in the other sectors were appreciably smaller. Only 38.5 per cent of the small companies showed a high level of awareness compared to 74.4 per cent of the large and 68.6 per cent of the medium sized ones. Private companies exhibited a very low awareness of the subject as well as companies with government and joint ownership.
industrial sector, the understanding of TQM was highest in the oil companies followed by services and lastly manufacturing. Small and medium companies were not quite as conversant with the philosophy as larger ones.

Some studies have indicated that ISO 9000 registration is a useful step towards implementing TQM (Meegan and Taylor, 1997; Quazi and Padibjo, 1998; Tsiotras and Gotzamani, 1996). It was found however that only 17 of the companies who responded to the survey were ISO certified, ten of which were from manufacturing, five from services, and two from the oil sector. It should be noted that some of these companies are subsidiaries of foreign organisations (not local organisations) who are ISO certified. With regard to declared intentions for the future, 55 or 38.5 per cent of the companies were planning to seek ISO 9000 certification in the future. About the same percentage (37 per cent or 53) stated that they had no interest in the quality management system while 12.6 per cent (18) of the participants — most of whom were from the service sector — thought the standard not applicable to their particular business area.

Those firms that had achieved ISO certification, or were considering it, were asked to state their reasons for taking this route. Slightly more than half of them confirmed that their reason was to establish a quality/formal system inside their organisations. Almost equal to this was to stay in business/competition/trade and for marketing/public relations/advertising benefits. Other cited reasons were to heighten/increase awareness of quality (44.4 per cent), to satisfy customer demand (37.5 per cent), to improve organisation efficiency/reduce wastage (34.7 per cent) and to make the customer the focus of all business processes (18.1 per cent).

Rayner and Porter (1991), Taylor and Adair (1993b) and Lee (1998) looked at the reasons why organisations in West Yorkshire, Northern Ireland and Hong Kong, respectively, sought ISO 9000 certification. Their conclusions were broadly customer pressure, to gain market advantage, improve efficiency and to improve product quality, which are somewhat similar to this study (although the emphasis or order varies), there was little reference, however, to establishing a formal system which was the response from the majority in this study.

The participants were asked if they had implemented any form of quality improvement programme. It is interesting to note that a high percentage of respondents stated that they had. The validity of this was to be assessed in the next section. A total of 58.7 per cent of the respondent companies had implemented quality improvement programmes either in every department/unit (25.2 per cent) or in a few (33.5 per cent) while the remainder had not implemented any form of quality improvement initiative.

Those firms that had not implemented a quality programme were asked why not. The most common reason cited was "no customer pressure to initiate" (27, split almost exactly between manufacturing and service) (see Table II). This could be attributed to the fact that many of the companies may be part of a larger conglomerate or be heavily involved with government bodies and so do not feel that they need such a programme. Lack of both information/education/training and top management support were also reported as some of the main reasons. None of the six who expressed no interest were from the manufacturing sector.

Based on their knowledge of TQM, the participating companies were asked to state the main obstacles they faced in implementing quality programmes. Of the 95 respondents who were aware of TQM, 65 confirmed that the major difficulty was the bureaucratic culture that was prevalent in their companies. This was particularly true in the case of the service and government owned organisations. A similar number of respondents cited culture change as a major problem. Other reasons given included the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number of responses a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No pressure to initiate</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information/education/training</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of top management support</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of human resources</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of financial resources</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not needed/interested</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a Each participant was allowed to choose/tick more than one answer
rigid hierarchical and authoritative structure that exists in Qatar, top management commitment and support, employee resistance to change, current negative work climate and middle management resistance to change. Other factors like lack of knowledge and skills of top management, limited resources to implement change, wrong people in the wrong positions and promotions based on nationality (particularly in the case of Qatari citizens) rather than on qualifications, and difficulties associated with empowerment at lower employee levels were added.

The degree to which TQM related activities take place or are practised in the companies in Qatar

It is not always easy to identify which company is a TQ/TQM company and which is not. As highlighted by van der Wiele and Brown (1998), some companies may call themselves TQM organisations but they are only trying to create an image and are using it for marketing and public relations. Other companies do not describe themselves as TQM but have implemented many of the principles using their own terminology. In order to support the previous section and to assess the real quality progress/development or practices amongst Qatari companies, the respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point scale, the level of emphasis their companies attached to TQM related activities. A rating of “1” would indicate no development of the activities concerned while that of “5” would indicate that there was a very high emphasis. A “0” was added to the range to indicate if either the activities were felt to be not applicable to their respective companies or they were unsure, since it was thought that many of the participants would be ignorant of these quality related activities.

The prescribed TQM related activities were based on the TQM principles discussed in the literature and in particular the publications by Saraph et al. (1989), Kanji and Asher (1993), Kanji (1996) and van der Wiele and Brown (1998). Employee absenteeism and financial measures like reducing costs and gaining market share/profits were added. The reason for this was to assess the degree of emphasis placed on them, compared to the TQM-related activities. The list comprising 22 factors can be seen in Table III.

Many of the respondents indicated that they were not aware of several of the factors or that they considered them inapplicable to their particular industry. The seven tools of quality and SPC were the least known. Other activities that were not popular were business process reengineering, benchmarking, quality cost systems and supplier feedback systems. This highlighted a low level of understanding of the advanced techniques, which are usually associated with leaders in the quality field (e.g. benchmarking and BPR).

On the basis of the mean ratings, the respondents’ answers were classified into three categories. The first were those with a relatively high mean score, i.e. in excess of 3.6. Only three of the 22 factors belonged to this level, i.e. focus on the customer needs, gaining market share/profits and reducing cost, of which only the first is a TQM activity. There was a great deal of emphasis placed on financial issues.

The second level were those with means between 3.1 and 3.6 which reveals a relatively low practice level. They included management commitment to a quality programme, employee absenteeism, process management/improvement, focus on continuous improvement (never-ending improvement), quality management-related training is given to management, quality auditing, focusing on each person satisfying their internal customer and emphasis on prevention rather than correction. Some of these results were consistent with the findings in the previous sections. For example, management participates and assumes responsibility for quality had a mean ranking of 3.56 which was consistent with the perception of concern for quality shown by top and middle management.

The remaining 11 factors belonged to the third level because least emphasis was placed on them. The measurement and feedback activities were, in fact, reported to be the least practised with an average of 2.56 for employee feedback system (the worst of all activities) and 2.61 for supplier feedback system. It is, however, interesting to note that there was perceived to be a high emphasis on the customer needs issue (a mean of 4.07), many companies did not have, or placed a low emphasis on, the establishment of a customer needs identification/feedback system (2.75). Similar low mean rankings were also apparent
with regard to the quality tools and techniques. For example, the seven tools of quality control received an average ranking of 2.82, the use of SPC to control variability and improve processes 2.73, quality costs system 2.83, conducting benchmarking against best practice 2.82, business process reengineering initiative 2.62 and self assessment 2.90.

The quality auditing factor was deemed relatively high compared to the other quality tools, this may be due to the fact that most of the companies in Qatar placed a great deal of emphasis on issues such as reducing costs and the ISO process. BPR, on the other hand, was very poorly perceived, probably because it is generally applied in cases where processes require dramatic improvements as part of an advanced TQM programme, which was not evident in this study.

### Conclusions

The analysis of this part of the questionnaire has raised some important and interesting issues. It has also reinforced the arguments presented by the authors about the need for studies related to TQM application in Qatar and the need to develop and help build a quality infrastructure in the country. While it is encouraging to know that ISO certification/TQM are experiencing reasonable levels of awareness in Qatar, the level of understanding is in fact very low, particularly with reference to the latter. There is a large gap between the

### Table III Descriptive statistics of perception of current practice of TQM related activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasis inside organisations of the following activities</th>
<th>Number of responses scoring &quot;0&quot;</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factors/principles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Focus on the needs of customers (customer satisfaction)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reducing costs*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Management participates and assumes responsibility in the quality improvement process</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Focus on continuous improvement (never-ending improvement)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Quality management-related training is given to management</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Quality management-related training is given to employees</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Involvement of everyone within the company in quality improvement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Emphasis on prevention rather than correction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Employee absenteeism*</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Gaining market share/profits*</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Each person satisfying their internal customer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Process management/improvement (all work is a process)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tools and techniques</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Using the seven tools quality control</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The use of SPC (statistical process control) to control variability and improve processes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Quality costs system (track rework, waste, rejects)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Quality auditing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Conducting benchmarking against best practice</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Business process reengineering initiative</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Self assessment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measurement and feedback</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Employee feedback system (by questionnaire, teams, etc.)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Development of customer needs identification/feedback system (survey, complaints, etc.)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Supplier feedback system (auditing, training, visits, etc.)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
* a = not included in the final analysis

**Scale:** 0 = unsure/not applicable; 1 = no emphasis at all; 2 = little emphasis; 3 = some emphasis; 4 = high emphasis; 5 = very high emphasis
number of respondents who are aware of TQM and those who correctly understand what it is. Wong (1998) has highlighted that many of the TQM programmes implemented in developing countries fail, due to a lack of real understanding of the principles. These levels of misunderstanding are obviously a cause for concern and clearly identify the need for an effective country initiative, in particular through more education and training, seminars, etc. to develop a quality and TQM mind-set within the workforce and in particular the leadership. Only then will companies/people be inspired and directed towards the acquisition and spread of knowledge of TQM.

It was found that many companies place a high emphasis on certification as more than half of the respondents indicated that they were either planning to achieve ISO 9000 or had already achieved it. The most common reasons for the interest were a desire to establish a quality system and to use it as a marketing tool. Surprisingly, the desire to satisfy customer need was ranked as the fifth reason behind increasing quality awareness, whereas in the West, customer pressure has been perceived by many companies as the main reason for gaining certification. It seems that ISO 9000 certification is seen by many companies in Qatar as a quality model. This finding is consistent with the work reported by Zairi (1996) who stated that many Middle Eastern countries put more emphasis on ISO certification. Apparently the local firms, seeing the popularity of ISO certification among foreign firms operating in Qatar, and realising the need to survive in today’s highly competitive market are considering the requirement of ISO 9000 for international trade, particularly with the EU. These findings are probably attributed to the fact that the quality movement in the Middle East and particularly in Qatar has a relatively short history, unlike the USA, Japan and Europe where the concept of TQM has developed widely and is now being applied extensively. However, companies in Qatar should not jump on the bandwagon without adequately examining the potential problems, issues and real meaning involved in the implementation of these quality initiatives.

The general way to move forward in terms of quality practices is to create a driving force, which is usually associated with pressure from customers or an initiative from the owner or manager. The customer probably has the strongest influence especially if the survival of the company is at stake. However, the main reason given by companies in Qatar for the lack of quality initiatives was that there was no pressure to implement them. So, it seems that the impact of the customer is not that strong. However, it is more likely that some customers, probably outside the country and in particular Europe, might force certain companies to go for ISO certification, and only a few of these will be converted into quality believers and will progress to TQM, as many of them reported that the reasons for their certification were for trade and public relations purposes.

Alongside no pressure to initiate as reasons for not implementing quality programmes, was lack of information/education/training. This finding is again due to the lack of studies in, and knowledge of, TQM in the country. It appears that the major problem is not financial but is related to both the “know-how” of TQM implementation and to convincing the owner (in this case more probably government institutes) and/or top management of the benefits surrounding the TQM philosophy. They also need to understand that ISO 9000 certification is only the beginning of a continuous improvement process rather than the end and could be a useful stepping stone for TQM.

To date, the use and knowledge of TQM-related activities discussed/assessed in this study have been found to be very limited. The use of quality tools and techniques as well as the establishment of systems to measure customer (internal and external) needs and satisfaction were not widely practiced. A possible reason for this is the lack of personnel (including top management) with the necessary knowledge and expertise in the TQM philosophy and the activities and/or tools associated with it, as suggested by the low awareness of TQM among participating companies. Another possible reason is the focus on ISO certification and to a lesser extent customer demand/pressure (both anticipated and actual), which has been perceived as the driving force behind TQM implementation. Although not far ahead, in those companies reported to have some form of quality improvement programme and/or are already involved in quality system
standards, the level of awareness and practices of quality issues was rated more highly. This shows that the experience of working in a quality-oriented environment is persuasive.

Quality is fast becoming one of the competitive issues of the last few decades and definitely will be in the twenty-first century. The pressure on companies to improve has become intense, especially those in developing countries. All companies whether large or small are equally affected. In Qatar, the dramatic reduction in oil prices and the fact that they are expected to remain low in the next century, means that there is now a shift towards better quality management practices. The implementation of quality programmes is gaining acceptance either as a way of maintaining a competitive edge, of simply surviving in a fiercely competitive market or to increase performance, and productivity. From this perspective as well as the immediate need to improve products and/or services and reduce costs (reduced budgets in the government and oil sectors also have direct effects in other sectors around the country), the results of the survey are timely, in terms of any pro-active action needed to be taken by the companies operating in Qatar in the form of quality practices.

The growing importance of quality and TQM has spread to many enterprises outside the developed countries, especially in the South East Asian region and some of the South American countries. However, it is still lacking in the Arab world and in particular in Qatar. As an important region, Qatar urgently needs to enhance the quality of its goods and services if it wants to be a main player in the world markets. The priority is to create awareness and to promote the importance of quality measures/activities and TQM. It is appropriate, therefore, to study TQM application and transferability for the benefits of the economy in Qatar, where the need is even greater due to a lack of total quality management information and understanding in the country.

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Commentary

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