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 Drive Out Fear: Deming's TQM Cultural Challenge

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DRIVE OUT FEAR: DEMING REVISITED

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Abstract: *Today management by fear is ubiquitous. Managers do not trust workers and micromanagement is rife. Such behaviours and cultures lead to suboptimal performance. This paper therefore revisits one of the major components of a Total Quality Management (TQM) culture identified by Dr W.E. Deming as the primary duty of every manager – the removal of fear from the workplace. The paper explores, through the extant literature, various aspects of management by fear and its impact on organisations and people. It revisits Deming's contention that when there is a problem 94% of the time it is caused by the system and not people. It explores the requirement that all managers must be able to distinguish between "common" and "special" causes of variation if they are to avoid blaming people for systems errors and hence create a blame culture that perpetuates management by fear. Suggested alternatives to the macho management style based on fear and blame include creating a culture that welcomes mistakes and where fear and blame are replaced by respect and trust.*

Key Words: Deming, Culture, Micromanagement,

1. INTRODUCTION

The success or otherwise of Total Quality Management (TQM) is influenced by the culture of the country in which it is to be operationalised (Kumar, 2006). This national culture and business culture and its values play a significant part in the successful application of TQM (Psychogios, 2010). The sustainability of TQM is also dependent upon how "TQM itself fuses with the quality climate, which is in turn influenced by the national culture setting". TQM has long been shown to consist of two major components: the "hard" or technical component consists of tools, techniques, systems, processes and measures while the "soft" component consists of a philosophy of management, culture, teamwork and education and training.. It has been established that it is the "soft" aspects of TQM that are the hardest to implement successfully. The major components of a TQM culture were identified by Deming (1982) and include, inter alia the promotion of pride in workmanship, teamwork, the instituting of leadership rather than supervision and driving out fear. It is this latter component of a TQM culture that this paper will concentrate on as it is viewed by Deming as the primary duty of every leader to remove fear from the workplace and as key to delivering sustainable TQM and is linked to all other aspects of the TQM culture. Deming (1982) recognised that fear in the workplace adversely impacted on the performance of people or workers. This fear can take many forms; fear of losing one's job, fear of breaking rules or fear of not meeting a production target or delivery deadline.

2. A CULTURE OF FEAR

2.1 Management by Fear

We live in a corporate world where fear and management by fear is ubiquitous (Coyote, 2009). There is a flawed logic that believes that during a recession staff can be motivated to superior performance by threatening them with redundancy. Relying on fear during a recession is a poor choice of motivator and could impact on future performance when times are more prosperous (Deopke, 2010). Staff have long memories and they will treat your customers they way you treat them. The last thing an organisation wants is employee fear transferring to customers. A far better strategy is to keep employees engaged and help them to understand the potential consequences of a recession for the organisation and to inform them of what they can do to help (Deopke, 2010).

A culture based on fear means that senior management will be out of touch with the reality of day-to-day operations. Subordinates will tell them only what they want to hear and that will be only good news. This "good news brigade" filters out any bad news by either withholding it altogether or watering it down. Mistakes are buried and any opportunity to learn from them is buried too.

Putting fear into people at work may increase productivity in the short term but soon that fear will return to frustration and workers will no longer take risks and creativity will be stymied. Customer service will be negatively impacted as workers take their frustrations out on customers (White, 2010). Fear undermines quality and productivity and leads to an

increase in absenteeism and as things get worse management by fear increases. This leads to even lower morale, higher absenteeism and staff turnover and even lower productivity – a vicious downward spiral.

2.2 Competition and Fear

Many managers use competition to instil fear. Competition is about winners and losers. Success cannot exist without failure. Managers deem the anxiety generated by competition between co-workers a good thing as they compete for scarce resources, power and status (Machovec and Smith, 1982). Therefore, management encourage competition between individuals, between groups and departments and between business units. This culture of fear needs to be replaced by one of trust. Trusting others and of course trusting yourself and your own judgement. It is better to trust that judgement than be right every time. We all make mistakes but if you trust yourself then you try to learn from them. Those who don't try to avoid the blame for future errors by following the herd and doing what they do even if what they are doing is wrong. People become risk averse.

2.3 The "us and them" culture

The "us and them" culture that predominates in so many organisations across the world and encourages fear needs to be broken down. Barriers between staff and supervisors also need to be removed for successful joint working relationships to be established. This requires an understanding of people that many managers do not possess. They do not understand what it takes to establish a sense of community in the workplace and real relationships between them as managers and staff as employees (Scholtes, 1999). Workers should not be afraid to express ideas or opinions or to ask questions. An adversarial relationship between management and subordinates is counterproductive.

2.4 Blame Culture

Fear predominates in a blame culture - companies need to move away from this to a more open culture where people are encouraged to learn from their mistakes and identify how to improve so that such mistakes do not happen again. Failures can reveal, inter alia:

- What doesn't work;

- Expose weaknesses that need addressing (Ramsey, 2010)

Peters and Waterman (1982) argued that tolerance for failure is a specific component of an excellent company culture. Peters and Austin (1984) further argued that making mistakes that try to improve the system should be celebrated and advocates organisations instituting an award of "Mistake of the Month" so that information on problems can be shared. He believes that this sends a powerful message to people working in the organisation – it is alright to make a mistake. In such a culture people won't hide their mistakes and organisations and individuals learn. However, a word of caution, he advocates that the CEO or equivalent should be the first winner of such an award.

2.5 Human Error

The extant literature reports two approaches to human error (Chavan, 2011):

- The systems approach – which considers humans to be fallible and errors occur even in the best organisations;

- The person approach – which blames individuals for errors;

With regards to the person approach Deming (1982) was one of the first to recognise the flawed thinking behind holding workers accountable for what they do. Managers mistakenly focus on performance statistics and "counsel" those that are considered "underachievers". Deming (1982) recognised that most problems and most opportunities for improvement were associated with systems.

Indeed proponents of this systems approach put the percentage of problems caused by systems as high as 94% with other causes at 6% (Deming, 1982). We know of course that these systems causes he termed "Common causes" whilst the other causes he termed "Special causes". The common causes were the responsibility of management and only they could remove or improve them. That being so it would seem absolutely ludicrous to blame workers for these systems variations as that would only lead to demoralised workforce. Managers need to focus improvement initiatives on the 94% of common causes i.e. the system if they want to see significant performance improvements (Seddon and O'Donovan, 2010).

It is astounding that today that we have managers who cannot distinguish between common causes and special causes of variation. This leads to all sorts of erroneous assumptions and decisions. Managers take action when they should do nothing or do nothing when they should take action. Myron Tribus (1993) rightly describes variability as a "virus" and the inability of managers to distinguish between common and special causes of variation leads to what he calls "mis-diagnosis".

In the UK, where the Government is obsessed with League Tables of performance this virus of variability may be prevalent. There are league tables for many public sector organisations' performance and they are now an integral part of the UK National Health Service (NHS). But league tables must be viewed with caution. The ranking of, for example, hospitals and surgeons gives the impression that the reported differences in league table positions require some action to be taken against hospital management

or individual surgeons – in other words the differences are due to some special causes. However the differences may simply be due to common cause variation, i.e. the differences are intrinsic to the system itself and not individuals (Mohammed at al, 2000).

2.6 Micromanagement Culture

All of the above creates a culture that actively works against TQM. Managers don't trust workers to do a good job therefore they micro manage them. Micromanagers don't delegate and become irritated if their subordinates make a decision without consulting them. One of the drivers behind such behaviour is so allow such a manager to take the credit for any successes but also to shift the blame for any failures. They rarely develop people but exploit them (White, 2010). In some cases micromanagement is used as a tactic to get rid of unwanted employees. The manager sets standards that cannot be achieved and then uses this non-achievement as grounds for dismissal. Alternatively, these high standards can be used to create a stressful work environment in which unwanted employees no longer wish to participate. Excessive stress creation can lead to cases of constructive dismissal being brought against organisations by the effected employees. When it comes to recruitment micromanagers rarely hire people with experience and talent as they may eventually challenge them. They hire drones (White, 2010). A downward spiral begins; good workers leave and more drones are recruited, skills decrease, morale decreases and productivity falls. The constant recruitment and training of staff is a drain on an organisation's resources – a cost of poor quality.

People micromanage people because they are "control freaks" (Muturi, 2011) that are hooked on controlling others (White, 2010). Command and Control macho managers increase fear. It can manifest itself as blatant bullying by a supervisor of a worker or dictatorial management behaviours or constantly threatening people with job loss if they don't perform as demanded. Micromanagement could also spring from a complete lack of trust. When a manager cannot trust people to do a good job in their absence then they have to micromanage (Muturi, 2011).

Micromanagement makes staff resentful. They may lose interest in their work and in their job. They lose their motivation and initiative and their productivity decreases (Presutti, 2006). A micromanager frustrates and demoralises her staff and seriously damages the productivity of the organisation (White, 2010). Some staff may get angry and lose respect for managers over what they rightly perceive as mistrusting, stressful, adversarial relationships and they may begin to look around for other job opportunities with other companies. Excessive staff turnover is a symptom of an unhappy workforce. Employees who once engaged in mutually respectful communications with their managers will now hide mistakes because of a fear of being reprimanded. Individual lapses may become contagious and spread to become a general breakdown in team spirit and cooperation. Communications will stop because employees think they will not be treated fairly. This means managers stop access to good ideas.

Micromanagement demoralizes workers and leads to significant declines in productivity and performance in the long run (Dowden, 2012)

2.7 Avoidance Strategies

So how can organisations avoid micromanagement and the creation of a climate of fear?

Firstly, managers need to remove the stigma associated with making mistakes. But this is by no means easy. In the UK, among the medical profession there are cultural and legal barriers to the disclosure of errors (Helmfeich, 2000).This is because mistakes may lead to legal action by patients or their families or lead to dismissal by employers. However Chavan (2011) reports on the adoption of a "no blame" culture in hospitals in New South Wales Australia. In line with Juran's (2004) theory of human infallibility as applied to inspection activities those hospital managers have recognised the "inevitability of errors" and realised that it is far better to have errors reported, recorded ad analysed so that they can learn from them and hopefully reduce them. If mistakes are covered up then over time they will be repeated (Gray and Williams, 2011).

Secondly organisations must substitute micromanagement with Leadership (Deming, 1982) and restore pride in workmanship (Deming, 1982); Command and Control is failing a new approach to management needs to be adopted (Seddon, 2003). This new approach is a systems approach. The need for such an approach has been advocated for the past 30 years because enlightened management have realised that their people work in a system. It is the job of management to work on the system to improve it continuously with their help (Tribus, 1993).

Thirdly, organisational structures need to be flattened (again) and unnecessary layers of management removed;

Fourthly, organisations need to allow mistakes.

All of this is possible. As Deming said the present style of management is a modern invention, invented by us and as such it can be re-invented. This reinvention involved understanding and managing our organisations as systems. The purpose of management is to strive to continually improve the system.

2.8 Serbian Culture

So what about Serbia's Culture? Hofstede (1980) identified four dimensions that differentiate countries' cultures:

1. Power distance (large versus small) – concerns social inequality and how power is distributed. A large score in this dimension means that individuals accept the inequality of power in their society while a small score means the opposite is true (Hofstede, 2001; Lagrossen (2002) Lukashenko, 2009).

2. Individualism versus Collectivism – concerns the relationship between the individual and the group. Is it a society where individuals are expected to look after themselves or are individuals integrated into strong groups that will look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 2001; Lagrossen (2002) Lukashenko, 2009).

3. Masculinity versus Femininity – concerns gender and their distinct roles. People in masculine societies place more emphasis on masculine traits such as achievement and material success whereas feminine societies determine achievement in terms of close human relationships and quality of life (Hofstede, 2001; Lagrossen (2002) Lukashenko, 2009).

4. Uncertainty avoidance (strong versus weak)- is defined by Hofstede (1991) as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty and unknown initiatives". High uncertainty avoidance cultures maintain strict codes of belief and behavior, establish formal rules and are intolerant of deviant ideas and actions (Hofstede, 2001; Lagrossen (2002) Lukashenko, 2009).

Later, a fifth dimension of differences among national cultures was identified – Long Term orientation versus short-term orientation. This concerns the extent to which society exhibits a "future oriented perspective rather than a conventional, historic or short-term point of view" (Lukashenko, 2009).

There have been a number of studies that examined the influence of national culture on TQM implementation through Hofstede's five dimension. Tata and Prasad (1998) found that power distance and uncertainty avoidance seemed to be the most relevant dimensions connecting TQM and national culture

In Europe, research (Lagrosen, 2002) has shown that it is power distance (high or low hierarchy) and uncertainty avoidance that affect the approach taken to implement TQM. The favoured mix being low uncertainty avoidance and low power distance. Add to this that TQM encourages team work (collectivism) rather than focussing on the individual and you are able to identify the cultural requirements of TQM as a collectivistic culture that encourages a participative management style that empowers employees (Kumar and Sankaran, 2007).   Lagrosen (2003) later confirmed that Hofstede's dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and individual-collectivism influenced the implementation of TQM in European countries.

Research on Serbia's national culture suggests that it is characterized by high power distance, collectivism, femininity and high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980, Milikic, 2008). In other words this is not the ideal culture for TQM to flourish.

A study by psychogios (2010) into the application of TQM in South Eastern Countries including Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia found

3. CONCLUSIONS

A concluding section is required. Although a conclusion may review the main points of the paper, do not replicate the abstract as the conclusion. A conclusion might elaborate on the importance of the work or suggest applications and extensions.

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