

APPLYING THE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY TO ACHIEVE MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the business of management has become the management of excellence. The failure of the concept of corporate culture to provide a meaningful and practical referent for organisational transformation forces a re-visit to the concept of ideology. A corporate ideology of management excellence, rooted in the ideology of total quality, has enabled many organisations to achieve a substantial degree of management excellence that produces business impact in terms of customers satisfaction, employees satisfaction, suppliers satisfaction and superior financial results. A diffusion process of sense-making guides the total quality ideology to become the definitive corporate culture during the organisational transformation towards excellence.

Keywords: Excellence, Total Quality, Culture, Ideology, Diffusion.

1. THE NEED FOR MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

The 21st century is an ever-smaller world in a constant state of revolutionary flux driven by increasing globalisation and rapid technological innovations. As a result, organisations nowadays operate in highly complex and dynamic environments. Management has to move beyond its focus on a strategy which merely seeks to define a rational product-market position towards a sense of purpose that envelopes its employees' passion and commitment. It must look deep beneath organisations as simple structures and apply a process-based perspective that integrates and links the individual competencies and capabilities that exist within the organisation.

A radical restructuring of current management paradigms is necessary to precede a consequential transformation of the organisation. Various prescriptions in the recent past decade seeking to reengineer, delayer, downsize, rightsize, redesign and

reform the organisation are symptomatic of desperate management attempts to come to terms with the emergent and unforgiving business environment. Business no longer begins and ends with profitability. Likewise, business management ceases to be defined just by market share and sales growth. The business of management has become the management of excellence. While business management would require the alignment of product and services with customers' expectations of quality in the marketplace, management excellence involves the alignment of business strategy, organisation behavior and the global environment.

2. THE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY

The term "ideology" is often scorned or avoided because it is a historically pejorative concept that often overwhelms reason and prudence [1][2][3][4]. Generically, it refers to a coherent body of ideas, a system of thought, or a distinct set of doctrines or belief that form the basis for action in a social system. Its roots in the French Revolution unfortunately contaminate its meaning by references to it as an instrument of control and domination by a ruling class, as well as an externally-imposed sense of "false consciousness" [5][6][7]. That all modes of ideology provide a substantial degree of emotional satisfaction to their believers makes it a valuable concept to aid in the understanding of meaning, motivation and discipline within an organisation.

The concept of ideology contains the notion of "a better world". Every idea in an ideological paradigm is a plan of action to address or change some social or organisational structures or practices, and always proposing a better system for human purposes, in order to achieve the vision of a better, more humane society in a better future. It mobilises emotions, ideas and actions to construct the desired social reality [8]. It is an active concept, and is therefore deserving of respect and application because of its tremendous contributions to our understanding of the social processes underlying

the motivations and discipline of a "excellent" organisations.

The most basic function of ideology is to create some semblance of order in an incomprehensible and often chaotic world. Ideologies make social situations comprehensible and meaningful, often by acting to structure the perceptions of the actors in the social situation. An ideology may be defined as a system of ideas clustered around the principles and concepts espoused by the ideas. These ideas are not static but developmental, and in fact tend to develop and change gradually into a network of ideas (with room for more ideas) that would eventually be recognised as a distinctively unique ideology. An ideological system comprises belief, attitudes and actions that are consciously related to each other. Ideology could also be used to describe the broad philosophical system that forms the mental basis of social life in its group of believers.

Total quality as the ideology of management excellence presents itself as a logically coherent system of symbols, values, beliefs, processes and methods oriented to the customer, with a framework to guide collective action for the successful management of sustainable business excellence. As a managerial ideological system, it defines and describes a business discipline and philosophy built upon a foundational framework of core values and processes, which institutionalise continuous improvements in all areas for the singular purpose of delivering total customer satisfaction. In fact, Adam Smith in his *Wealth Of Nations* already predicted *"the real and effectual discipline which is exercised over a workman is not that of his corporation, but that of his customers"*. The customer is the rightful starting point in the business of management excellence.

The use of total quality as the management excellence ideology also dispels the notion of a basic inherent conflict of interest between management and employees that has manifested in a structured form of antagonism [9]. At the root of this view of organisational conflict is the perspective that the main task of management is to exert control over its employees [10]. Total quality management (TQM) is seen by this perspective to use its managerial techniques as new forms of managerial and political control to obtain employees' consent, by rendering organisations an extension of the marketplace and virtually deifying those at the top of the managerial class [11]. Many accustomed to the empty promises and dashed hopes of the current business management ideology view this construction of consent with understandable suspicions. Voluntary consent is generated by TQM through participation and empowerment. For some, the outcome of TQM is the complete flexibility and absence of opposition to management goals [12]. Others correctly saw TQM as an ideological system that would impact the human subjectivity to define a new social reality beyond class realities and labor conditions by engaging the politics of meaning to reconstruct the meaning of politics in an emerging new world order [6][13].

TQM is a leadership-driven management ideology that reconstitutes the limits of human freedom through their mediation of human subjectivity. The total quality environment is a subjectively constructed reality and a product

of total quality disciplinary mechanisms, techniques of surveillance and power-knowledge strategies [14]. The new social reality of TQM, with its action framework focused on the customer, is also accompanied by an entirely new management lexicon that promotes a new "vocabulary of motive" [15] to legitimize the transformation of the organisation and to translate the total quality ideology into material practices.

The concept of ideology in management is not new. Dunlop [16] conceived of ideology as the set of values and beliefs that form the operating principles of a workplace industrial relations system comprising the employers, employees and the state as "actors", and who interact within a contextual environment of market conditions and budget constraints, state of technological development, and the power distribution balance in the larger society. This is similar to Mintzberg's reference to ideology as a force in organisation that "pulls members together".

However, Dunlop's assumption of a homogeneous value system for all three "actors" is unrealistic and illusory given the pluralistic nature of society and organisations. His assertion that the goal of organisations is the maintenance of stability and regularity in industry is therefore naïve since the "actors" do not necessarily act from the same basic ideological assumptions and values. In the absence of a fourth "actor" entity who is unrelated to Dunlop's three "actors", but whose desires and expectations must be adequately addressed and met to assure the organisation's continual survival as a viable business entity, it is unlikely that the three "actors" could ever obtain any final and consensual resolution to organisational conflicts engendered.

Total quality introduces the "customer" as the "fourth" actor entity in the business environment. The total quality ideology emphasises a complete and total commitment to this "customer" and to a disciplined approach that drives continuous improvements to every process using quantifiable, fact-driven problem-solving and decision-making techniques by teams of people who have been empowered to do so [17][18].

The total quality ideology does not consider the arena of labour relations as a battleground for pursuing personal, sectarian or vested interests. Management excellence in the workplace is bound together by horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation, not by vertical relations of authority and dependency defined by conventional management practices. Common purpose, trust, tolerance and the social structures for value creation provide the means through which every person along the supply chain interact with one another, and is reinforced in their total quality beliefs by the positive nature of these interaction. The deeper the internalisation of the total quality ideology, the greater the commitment to both internal and external customers, and the greater is the levels of trust and cooperation in the delivery process of customer satisfaction within a consciously urgent time-frame.

3. ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE - A CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT

The concept of culture is central in any investigations into human organisations. Scholars have not yet reached a consensus as to what the concept of culture really mean. Definitions of "culture" in the literature ranged from the simplistic "...the way we do things around here" [19][20] to the profound "...the set of habitual and traditional ways of thinking, feeling and reacting that are characteristic of the ways a particular (organisation) meets its problems at a particular point in time" [21][22]. These are in addition to about 164 other different definitions discovered in 1952 by Kroeber and Kluckhohn [23][24]. Some writers see "organisational culture" as just a polemical concept since it has no clear definition [25]. This is further understandable since the concept of culture has its roots in anthropology, where even anthropologists have not agreed to a common acceptable definition for it.

Culture would generally refer to a system of attitudes, values and knowledge that is widely shared, consciously and unconsciously, within a society and propagated through learning from generation to generation. There is some degree of convergence of the view that culture refers to "a set of shared values and beliefs" and acting the "normative glue" that holds an organisation or society together [26][27][28][29][30].

Many definitions agree that culture comprises some interrelated psychological qualities indicating group agreement, implicitly or explicitly, on how problems are identified, solved and decisions made. Ordinarily, these psychological tendencies translate into "the way things are done around here" or "what people believe does or does not work in their workplace". They eventually become taken for granted and move beyond awareness. Schien [31] defined culture as a pattern of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic taken-for-granted fashion, an organisation's view of itself and its environment. These assumptions are invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Schein further contends that these "solutions eventually come to be assumptions about the nature of reality, time, truth, space, human nature, human activity, and human relationships..." (p.19).

It is the fusion of beliefs, values, norms and behaviors that provide the character of organisational culture. The degree of cohesiveness of organisational culture is the extent to which its members have internalised the beliefs, attitudes and values within the organisation, as manifested in their individual and collective behaviors. It is thus important to understand that culture is what the organisation "is", and not something that the organisation "has". The implications of such a perspective are that organisations would behave and act as a consequence of how it interprets its world. It is this enactment and interpretation process that constitutes the essential dynamics of organisational culture. As Shweder [31] so succinctly pointed out, the differences in organisational cultures would support the presupposition that its respective members are in fact living in different worlds.

The organisation should not be conceived of as the carrier of a single, unique, and monolithic culture. Organisational members also bring into the organisation the various sets of assumptions that they acquire outside the organisation. And these could interfere with their development of a shared set of assumptions within the organisational setting. Organisations thus contain many different cultures rather than a single, pervasive culture.

Weick [32] proposes a model of organizations as "loosely coupled" systems in which individual members have great latitude in interpreting and implementing actions. Organisations evolve as they make sense of themselves and their environment. As a social organism, the organizational survival instinct seeks to reduce uncertainty through information flows, and the organization is enacted through the interpreted meaning of individual actions.

4. CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY

When left alone, culture should naturally evolve towards greater congruency and consensus in a steady fashion. This is only possible when situations encountered by organisations are not radically different from the past, and when the environment is changing in an orderly and understandable fashion. That is, when the future is viewed as an extension of the past. The "culture" of an organisation, as a "loosely-coupled" system, cannot deal effectively with the radical change needed when the organisation finds itself in an environment with a dynamic, chaotic character as in the new management realities.

The new realities of management excellence threaten organisations as they systematically dissolve hitherto accepted motivations and purpose, when they are not amenable to the usual interpretations, when the usual means to adapt and dealing with change usually backfire and are often rendered ineffectual.

Table (1) illustrates the key differences between culture and ideology.

Table (1)
Key differences between Culture and Ideology

Dimension	Culture	Ideology
Nature	Shared Values and Beliefs	Values and Beliefs
Formation	Historical	Vision
Orientation	Status Quo	A Better Future
Preference	Adjust, Adapt	Create, Engage
Environmental View	Orderly	Chaotic
Action	Passive	Active
Change	Gradual	Radical

It is fatal to regard culture and ideology as synonymous or merely mirror images of the same phenomenon. It matters that they are fundamentally and conceptually different, and a careful understanding of their differences is critical to the

determination of an organisation's success and survival, or failure and oblivion.

5. CREATING A CULTURE OF MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

Organizations do not function as mechanistic cybernetic systems. The normative structures are often loosely connected to actual behavior at both the individual and collective levels. The organization is, in effect, a coalition of groups and interests, with each attempting to obtain something from the collectivity by interacting with others, and each with its own preferences and objectives. The resulting culture, as the constructed organizational reality, is dependent on the degree to which a group of people share many beliefs, values, and assumptions that encourage them to make mutually-reinforcing interpretations of their own acts and the acts of others [33]. The loose coupling nature of organisation as seen by Weick [34] is a key ingredient in enhancing the quality of adaptability in the organisational culture.

Adaptability presumes learning. In this respect, culture refers to what is learnt. Therefore, if culture is learned, its ultimate locus must be in individuals rather than in groups. A satisfactory cultural theory must therefore explain the sense in which one can speak of culture as being shared or as the collective property of a group of individuals, and it would have to identify and describe the processes by which "sharing" emerges [35].

Another important concept in this way of understanding culture is the idea of "social construction." That is, there is no absolute version of the world - rather one makes interpretations according to his perception systems. This operates at both an individual and collective level. The meanings that we attach to our interpretations are our "social constructions." The concept of social construction leads to the notion of organisations being essentially socially constructed realities that rest as much in the hearts and minds of their members as they do in concrete symbols, artifacts and sets of rules and relationships. Shared meaning, shared understanding and shared sense making are all different ways of describing cultural formation. Culture therefore refers to the process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects or situations in distinctive ways [36]. Weick [37] called the meaning-sharing development process as "sense-making", which he defined as a process of clarifying and appreciating the potential of relationships, an evaluation of the external environment. According to him, these processes of sense-making are essentially learning processes.

Sense-making is an overall "meaning giving" activity which is grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive, social, ongoing, focused in relation to extracted cues and driven by plausibility, not by accuracy. This activity consists of the processes of enactment, selection and retention, which are located on the aggregation level of the organization, not of the individual. In the end, sense-making in organizations creates a structure of shared meanings and understandings based on which concerted action can take place. A network of shared meanings and interpretations provides the social order,

the temporal continuity, and contextual clarity for members to coordinate and relate their actions.

Weick [32] used the concept of enactment to describe the way an organisation as a social organism adapts and adjusts to its environment by acting upon it to change it. Enactment involves defining the beginning of information management, followed by selection which is narrowing down the equivocality, and then deciding what to deal with and what to leave along, ignore, or disregard. And finally, retention refers to the decision as to what information, and its meaning, members will retain.

Sense-making is an organisational learning process. It advocates a more radical approach that considered individual learning as occurring when people give a different response to the same stimulus, but that organizational learning occurs only when groups of people give the same response to different stimuli. Organisations are patterns of means-ends relations deliberately designed to make the same routine response to different stimuli, a pattern that is antithetical to learning in the traditional individual-focused sense. Management excellence involves cultural changes aimed at organisational learning in order to obtain a widespread enduring change.

6. MAKING CULTURAL SENSE OF THE IDEOLOGY OF MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE - A DIFFUSION MODEL

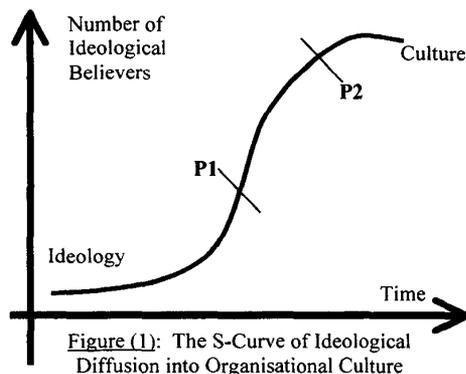
Rogers [38] defines diffusion as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas. Communication is a process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding" (p5-6). The total quality ideology as the framework for management excellence would qualify as an innovation according to Rogers' definition. An innovation is defined as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption". While not all changes require something new [39], the innovation needs only be perceived as new for the adopters, despite the fact that it may already be in use elsewhere.

Experience from many earlier innovations shows that the spread of a new method, idea or concept in a market can be characterized by the S-curve (sigmoid curve) discovered by Bass [40]. The S-curve is now commonly used to describe the diffusion of new ideas and technological innovations. Innovations diffuse in a nonlinear pattern because as the number of its adopters grows, so does the infrastructure that allows exponentially (P1) for more users as well as to facilitate a wider variety of its use. At some stage, the adoption process reaches its limits of exponential growth and begins to experience diminishing marginal returns (at point P2 at the top hump of the "S").

The S-curve waxes and wanes in accordance with the dynamics arising from the interaction of technologies, processes and people. It reflects the underlying paradigmatic shifts engendered, consistent with Kuhn [41], in organisational members. A paradigm may be defined as a fundamental set of beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors and technologies

"adopted" by a group of people that allow them collectively to share similar worldview (a common sense) and engaged in commonly shared practices.

Figure (1) shows a S-curve depicting the evolution of an ideology into the culture of the organization.



The S-curve in effect shows sense-making in action, the result of "meaning giving" activities of identity construction, retrospective, enactive, social, ongoing in the various processes of enactment, selection and retention located on the level of the organization. Nearing the top of the S-curve, a structure of shared meanings and understandings would have been created. The socially constructed network of shared meanings and interpretations provides the social order, the temporal continuity, and contextual clarity for members to coordinate and relate their actions, until the next sense-making occasion.

Ideological sense-making makes it possible to escape from the forces of the current conventional business management paradigm and effect a paradigm shift towards management excellence by embracing the total quality ideology. In other words, the birth of the management excellence paradigm is accompanied by a whole new set of values, attitudes, beliefs, rules, regulations and behaviors. This paradigm shift fundamentally alters the original way of thinking, and has a similar effect in magnitude to Kuhn's scientific revolution.

At any one time, however, there are many S-curves within the organisations, indicating the presence of many supposedly competing cultures and ideologies. The total quality ideology would have to traverse, negotiate and adapt with these other

cultural and ideological elements so as to emerge as the "definitive" paradigm (a concept preferred over the "dominant" paradigm concept) of the new commonsense.

7. CONCLUSION

Enduring change does not happen because of the ready availability of new ideas, methods or tools. Change is instituted from a realisation and consciousness of what are there and that which are not working. The reluctance and avoidance in using the term "ideology" in TQM intervention is proving costly to both consultants and organisations. In the 21st century, management excellence means projecting visionary leadership and instil confidence and a sense of direction out of the chaos created to bring about a new social order and equilibrium within the organisation [42]. The thrust of change efforts is to evolve a corporate culture of excellence where there is a prevalent sense of continuous learning and improvements, and where change has become a way of life. Such a corporate culture begins life as the total quality ideology.

The attraction by current management to the plethora of new management fads and ideas demonstrates a hunger for permanent solutions to deal with the management realities today. It is clear that that current management rooted in obsolete, historical ideological assumptions are not producing tangible benefits for them any more. The Baldrige and European Quality Award winners are living proof that their conversion and baptism to the total quality ideology also made good business sense by obtaining enviable financial returns [43], even though these were not their only excellent results.

Management is at best a situational art with an uncertain science. The new global realities of the 21st century expose the vulnerability in current managers in their belief in accepted practices and principles. It would take tremendous courage to embrace the total quality ideology so as to venture into the unknown with a sense of certainty, to create new and sustainable competitive advantages. With its focus anchored firmly on the customer, the total quality ideology as the ideology of management excellence can draw under its ideological umbrella a variety of new methods eg re-engineering, quality function deployment, systems thinking, learning, creative visualisation...etc without fear of drifting away on passing management fads. The challenge of management excellence is to deconstruct the ideology of the current business management culture to enable the diffusion of the total quality ideology to become its definitive corporate culture.

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