

Quality in the Context of the Mexican Family

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Abstract: The term quality, previously associated only to manufacturing and service activities, is now becoming more relevant in the social sciences. In such a context, quality can be seen as a measure for assessing one's living conditions. The objective of this study is to examine to what degree middle-class Mexican families use the quality principles and philosophies -as they are commonly known in productive systems- while functioning as a social entity. Twenty five randomly selected middle-class families from the Northeastern part of Mexico were surveyed by means of a series of questionnaires designed by ten quality experts. From the collected responses, it is clear that within middle-class Mexican families there is a strong awareness of the benefits that can be obtained from the application of the principles encouraged by a culture of quality.

Key words: Mexican family, context, quality

INTRODUCTION

The term quality, previously associated only to manufacturing and service activities, is now becoming more relevant in the social sciences. In such a context, quality can be seen as a measure for assessing one's living conditions.

It has been shown that a child's early years are essential for his subsequent social well being. Although biological factors define the bounds of his overall development, environmental conditions are the ones that stimulate such a growing-up process. Therefore, an important aspect of being a parent is to influence the child's thoughts and attitudes in such a way that these are accord to social expectations^[1].

A great part of this social adaptation takes place within the family. Hence, if the concept of quality is inculcated into the youngsters' minds during their childhood, it then becomes a way of living rather than just a mere idea. This will lead them to realize the importance of guiding their actions according to principles dictated by a culture of quality.

If a culture of quality surrounds a child learning environment, it will become customary for him to apply its principles throughout each enterprise he undertakes, from elementary school assignments to job and family related endeavors. The first organization known by an individual is the family and, most of the quality principles which are

applicable to organizations can also be successfully practiced in a family that operates as a small organization^[2].

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THE QUALITY CONCEPT

According to Mitre^[3], quality can be defined as satisfying customer needs, in a consistent way, while exceeding his expectations. When pursuing a change towards higher quality standards within an organization, corrective actions should put emphasis on changing the idiosyncrasy of its human members. This leads to a holistic quality model, in which human beings may find objectives, motivators and means for promoting change.

Such a model, which falls along Maslow's hierarchy of needs, can be applied in the family context, since a family might be seen as a small organization where members look to satisfy their own needs. Thus, quality concepts normally handled in production and service settings can be transplanted into the family context where efforts made to satisfy each one of its members' needs are comparable to those performed to fulfill customers' expectations.

Healthy children enjoy growing up, as they obtain new abilities, skills and strengths, they would unknowingly select courses of actions that lead them to develop their potential to the fullest^[4]. In essence, they would pursue a culture of quality. If children are brought up in an environment where quality principles are involved, they will learn, adopt and apply quality standards throughout their entire lives.

In a service or manufacturing organization, the dynamics involved while fulfilling customers' expectations are similar to those involved in any interpersonal relationship. People -being they customers as in the case of a company, or relatives in a family group- demands and related levels of expectations are usually higher than the service or treatment they receive. As their needs increase, they become more critic to the quality of the service offered by the organization or family. When member expectations are not adequately met within a family, interpersonal conflicts are then generated, atrophying the normal functioning of the group.

In Mexico, an awakening in the understanding and application of quality principles started during the late 1980's. Total Quality Management (TQM) and Quality Function Deployment (QFD) techniques, as well as other renown quality philosophies, that lead to international quality certifications such as the ISO 9000 and the QS 9000 became a priority for service and manufacturing organizations across the country. The results attained through the application of these quality strategies were astonishing, taking Mexico's productivity indices to levels never conceived before^[5].

During this study, the role of several well-known quality management tools (Table 1) in the context of the middle-class Mexican family was investigated to assess their effectiveness in establishing a culture of quality within these social groups.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this research, twenty five randomly selected middle-class families from the Northeastern part of Mexico were surveyed by means of a series of questionnaires

Table 1: Quality management techniques considered in the study

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- Total quality management
 - Deming's philosophy
 - Quality control circles
 - Quality evolution
 - Quality strategic planning
 - Cultural reengineering
 - Continuous improvement management (Kaizen)
 - Just in time (Kanban systems)
 - The 9 S's methodology
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designed by ten quality experts. The experts were chosen based on their training as quality management consultants; all of them with a minimum of 10 years of experience in the field.

The surveyed group consisted of families with incomes ranging from \$20,000 to \$75,000 a year. The families were composed by both parents, having at least one of them a college education, with one to three small children (between 1 and 12 years of age).

The developed survey consists of four questionnaires. They were carefully designed to accomplish the following four objectives:

- Verify at what degree the surveyed families utilized the quality management tools previously cited.
- Corroborate if parents posses the values that are typical in quality entities according to the Total Quality Criteria used by the Macolm Baldrige National Quality Prize^[6].
- Assess whether or not the studied families follow principles of cleanliness, orderliness, promptness, self-improvement and responsibility as dictated by the 9 S's Methodology^[7].
- Observe if families conduct activities that lead to continuous improvement in their daily actions.

The questionnaires, that covered 85 items, were administrated to the family members via interviews of approximately 2 h of duration each. Their responses were statistically analyzed and major insights regarding the knowingly or unknowingly application of quality principles within the families were inferred.

RESULTS

After the surveying process was completed and collected responses analyzed, it was found that 32% of the families were aware of the importance of the use of quality oriented policies such as Strategic Planning. Twenty seven percent of the couples interviewed had frequently utilized most of the quality tools knowingly. The remaining 73% had unknowingly applied at least one of the principles involved in renown quality management philosophies (i.e. Just In Time, Cause and Effect Analysis, Pareto Analysis, Strategic Planning, Quality Circles, Kaizen Events and Kanban Systems) when interacting with each other and with their children.

Only 9% of the families considered that following quality principles commonly used in manufacturing and service organizations would not improve their family life,

Quality principles according to the 9 S's activities	Never (%)	Some times (%)	Always(%)
Most frequently used objects are easily identifiable	51	44	5
House objects have a fixed storage place	10	9	81
Items are usually put away after used	18	39	43
Non-used items are periodically disposed	10	46	44
Family members are involved in house keeping activities	14	63	23
Parents supervise their children's chores	0	46	54
Family members treat each other with respect	14	0	86
Annual physical checkups are observed	23	46	31
Annual dental checkups are observed	18	28	54
Family members work out on a regular basis	15	31	54
Relevant household activities are not procrastinated	19	24	57
Activities that involve all family members are pursued	5	32	63

Fig. 1: Collected responses on the 9 S's activities

Planning and continuous improvement principles	Never (%)	Some times (%)	Always(%)
Activities are prioritized within the family	0	24	76
Household tasks are examined to assess their importance	10	28	62
Family members question whether chores are performed on a priority basis	15	23	62
Activities leading to an improved family life are performed	32	14	54
The performance of tasks around the house can be improved	0	28	72
Family activities are scheduled on a regular basis	18	41	41
Objectives are pursued through a well-defined strategy	5	36	59
Parents promote a culture of quality within the family	0	14	86

Fig. 2: Collected responses on planning and continuous improvement principles

while the other 91% believed that quality management techniques could greatly benefit their actions, specifically in time management, teaching strategies and house keeping activities.

Eighty two percent of the interviewed families believed that quality practices could be a part of family life through education in quality concepts. Most parents agreed that it is their behavior as quality individuals what influences the most their children's feelings towards respect, honesty, sincerity, love and freedom principles.

Sixty four percent of the surveyed individuals considered that parents are the only ones responsible for promoting a culture of quality within the family, while 18% believed that teachers, public Figures such as lawmakers and politicians and relatives should also be involved in such an endeavor.

When inquired about possessing values typically related to those of quality entities according to the Total Quality Criteria used by the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Prize, 82% of the surveyed parents thought about themselves as role models with solid beliefs in effective leadership, successful planning and continuous improvement.

Finally, Fig. 1 and 2 summarize the responses obtained when family members were asked whether or not the principles of cleanliness, orderliness, promptness, self-improvement and responsibility were followed during their daily activities.

CONCLUSION

From the results of this study, it is clear that within middle-class Mexican families there is a strong awareness of the benefits that can be obtained from the application of the principles encouraged by a culture of quality. Such benefits can be described in terms of physical health, orderliness, cleanliness, mutual esteem, work planning and self-improvement among other quality values.

Most family members believe that this culture of quality can be learned and adopted by means of quality doctrine instruction, as well as through the example set by parents. With regard to continuous self-improvement within the family, most of the studied families prioritize their actions, constantly searching for improvement through well-defined strategies.

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