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Improving Corporate Quality Management Using Internal Surveys

Cornelia Denisa IVAN[1]*, Georgiana Daniela BĂDICU[2]

Abstract

In an era of speed and turbulence, greatly important for any organization is the management of the emergencies that have occurred as challenges of the large scale change, by the implementation of new development strategies, by quality increase through the implementation of a total quality management system, by re-organization for the reduction of the non-quality costs etc. In a continuously changing business environment, organizations are nowadays facing numerous challenges, which it must identify and exploit, in order to create real value for the organization. The organizational change process is highlighted by the connection that must be established as a mutual interaction, between the organizational context and the change steering action. Therefore, the manager's actions taken in the purpose of change are structured by the organizational context. Within this context, the aim of this paper is to identify the actual situation of the enterprises in Dambovita County, Romania, regarding the perception of the employees and of the managers on quality, quality improvement, measuring work quality, involvement in quality improvement, and the evaluation of the work satisfaction degree in order to increase quality and implicitly performances. The importance of the present study is given by its interdisciplinary approach, which reunites domains such as: change management, total quality management, marketing researches and economic-financial analysis.

Keywords: *Employees' perception; enterprise; performance optimization; quality analysis; resistance to change; total quality management.*

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1. Introduction

Quality, namely the quality of the processes and of the results, is a very important competitive factor, which the firms do their best to obtain [1]. In order to create and transmit quality, we need an efficient management [2]. The approach of quality management in the enterprise is particularly complex, including a series of processes and key success factors, and the greatest influence goes to its employees [3]. Without a special attention paid to the personnel, the enterprise cannot be able to successfully implement an efficient quality management system [4].

The two terms, i.e. quality management and change, are inseparable [2]: the company cannot obtain a high quality except by improving the negative aspects of the company and adapting to the new tendencies of the environment [5].

Putting into practice a major change requires from the organization's employees to acquire new skills [6], adding new competences and abilities to the already accumulated portfolio. The organizational management has to know how to take advantage of this major change to develop new strategic management skills with its employees [7]. At the same time, the employees' commitment to the new work configuration created by change allows them to increase their credibility in their teams and in the eyes of the management [8].

2. Problem Statement

Quality management is an evolving concept which, in certain authors' opinion [5], represents a "set of methods and practices aiming to mobilize all the actors in the enterprise to sustainably meet the clients' needs and expectations at the best prices".

The importance of quality assurance in a company can be highlighted through the negative effects generated by "non-quality", namely [9]: cost increase, loss of the market(non-quality redirects the company's clients towards other suppliers), impossibility to penetrate certain markets, risk increase – i.e. non-quality triggers the responsibility of the tenderer, who may be sued by the client.

Some authors draw the attention on the need to assure, on the enterprise level, the harmony between the employees' qualification [10] and the complexity of the tasks [1] or responsibilities they need to accomplish [4]. The corporate personnel policy ought to be oriented so that the

company personnel should be neither under-qualified, nor overqualified in relation to the complexity of the responsibilities [11].

The agreement index ($\overline{K_c}$), determined as a ratio between the complexity index of the tasks / responsibilities ($\overline{K_l}$) and the average qualification index of the manpower ($\overline{K}$), can be used to characterize the modality to use the qualified personnel on the level of an enterprise.

$$\overline{K_c} = \frac{\overline{K_l}}{\overline{K}}$$

To determine the qualification level of the personnel employed in an enterprise, one can use the average qualification index ($\overline{K}$), determined on the basis of the following relation:

$$\overline{K} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \left(N_{si} \times k_i \right)}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} N_{si}}$$

where: N_s is the number of employees on groups of positions / qualification, k – category of position, n – number of categories of positions.

To determine the average complexity level of the tasks or responsibilities on the level of an enterprise, the tasks complexity index is used ($\overline{K_l}$), based on the following relation:

$$\overline{K_l} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \left(N_{hi} \times t_i \right)}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} N_{hi}}$$

where: $\mathbf{N_h}$ is the number of hours in a norm per category of position,**t** – category to which the tasks belong and **n** – number of categories to which the tasks may belong.

In the corporate practice, the following situations may occur:

- $K_c < 1$ reflects the fact that the enterprise has overqualified personnel (from the perspective of the technical level of the tasks to be carried out). Such a situation may have non-favorable economic consequences, materialized, most often than not, in: lack of motivation for the personnel, with direct implications on the work quality; increased expenses associated to salaries, with direct negative implications on the results and performances on the company level.

- $K_c > 1$ reflects the fact that the enterprise uses underqualified personnel (from the perspective of the technical level of the works that need to be carried out). This situation is also a non-favorable one from the economic perspective, with negative consequences on the personnel and on their results and on the corporate performances. The low quality of the products or works realized attracts, undoubtedly, other negative effects, such as: the clients' disappointment and the loss of clients; sales decrease and implicitly diminution of the company's results and profitability; degradation of the company's image on the market.
- $K_c = 1$ reflects the assurance of an optimal agreement between the personnel's qualification and the complexity degree of the works.

It results, thus, that only the equality between the complexity index of tasks/responsibilities ($\overline{K}_l$) and the average qualification index of the manpower ($\overline{K}$) is the prerequisite of an adequate use of the human potential, in relation to the complexity degree of the activities specific of the company.

Optimizing the job tasks requires the change of the managers' management style, i.e. they need to be aware and able to delegate authority [1]. A performance over the one expected from the employees could result out of the combination of the employees' ability of improving a job and the managers' capacity of delegating [6].

The corporate management needs to apply some collective and individual rewards [7], according to the new change-generated demands, needs to create opportunities of sharing experience within the teams [6] in order to stimulate the group dynamics in favor of the change by means of total quality.

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

The study of the opinion of the enterprises' employees relied on the following hypotheses:

H1. *The employees consider that they can contribute significantly to the quality improvement process.*

H2. *Most of the employees have not received training in the quality domain.*

4. Research Methods

In our study, we aimed to identify the actual situation of the employees' perception on quality management in the enterprises where they

work. Considering the importance given to quality, both from the clients' perspective, to benefit of the best products and services, and from the enterprises' perspective, to attract clients and obtain competitive advantage, we considered it opportune to study the employees' and the firm leadership's perceptions [12] on the activities whose aim is quality management improvement. In this context, we made an internal survey, based on a questionnaire, filled in by 478 respondents from 61 enterprises, covering a series of activity domains, such as: production, services, trade, public services. This questionnaire includes 23 questions, out of which: 5 open questions, 17 closed questions and one mixed question, and was taken over from and adapted after the work of Philippe Détrie [9].

To complete the field research, we have proceeded to the collection of information necessary to the analysis of the harmony between personnel qualification and responsibilities complexity on the corporate level. This information concerns, on the one hand, the distribution of the employees on groups of professions or on qualification levels, and on the other hand, the distribution of responsibilities on difficulty groups.

Initially, we established a representative sample of enterprises, yet, because of the refusal of some managers to participate in the survey, the sample was modified, the result being a sample that cannot be considered representative. Out of the employees, a number of 5-10 people, chosen non-randomly, took part in the research, depending on their availability to answer the questions and on the size of the enterprise.

The questionnaire was applied during the period 15 October -15 December 2017, using the method of the face-to-face interview, the operators being students of Valahia University of Targoviste, from the specialties Marketing and Business Administration, coordinated by the authors.

The objectives of the research concerned the following aspects:

- the employees' perception on the importance of quality in the firm and on the qualitative improvement initiatives;
- individual quality evaluation;
- involvement in quality improvement activities;
- degree of knowledge and identification of some important factors with a strong impact on quality improvement;
- identification of the training level in the quality improvement domain.

In the realization of our research in the field, we were faced with a series of limitations, such as:

- the research was realized only on the level of Dambovita County, given the lack of time and resources needed for a complete study;

- lack of availability of some employees who could not join the research;
- the respondents were not familiar with the participation to interviews;
- the questioning of the employees could not be in-depth because of their work programme;
- the employees considered that it took quite a long time to answer the questions (30 minutes);
- not all the respondents were willing to answer the open questions.

5. Findings

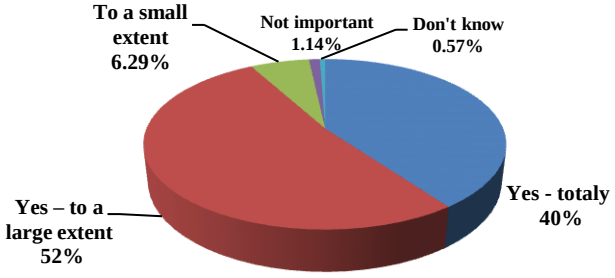
The analysis and the interpretation of the main results of our study are presented below.

The personnel interviewed considers that for the present enterprises, in general, quality improvement is a fundamental (35%), very important (40%) and important (20%) stake, the rest considering this stake as secondary, which demonstrates the fact that the employees are aware of the importance that the management should give to quality in order to improve the performance of their activity.

Regarding the enterprise where they work, most of the personnel interviewed (the employees) consider that the quality improvement process represents a very important stake (50.29%), 23% consider this stake to be fundamental, and 22% important.

The opinion of the employees regarding the importance the firm leadership gives to quality, in general, highlighted the following answers (fig.1).

Fig. 1. Importance of quality, in general, for the leadership of the enterprise

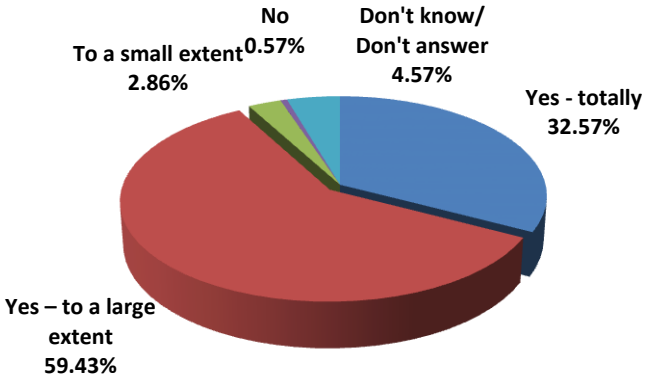


The management of the enterprise is perceived as giving importance to quality to a great extent (52%), and a significant ratio of the employees (namely 40%) consider that the management gives total importance to

quality. There, are, however, also employees who consider that the leadership of the enterprise gives little importance to quality (6.29%) or no importance at all (1.14%).

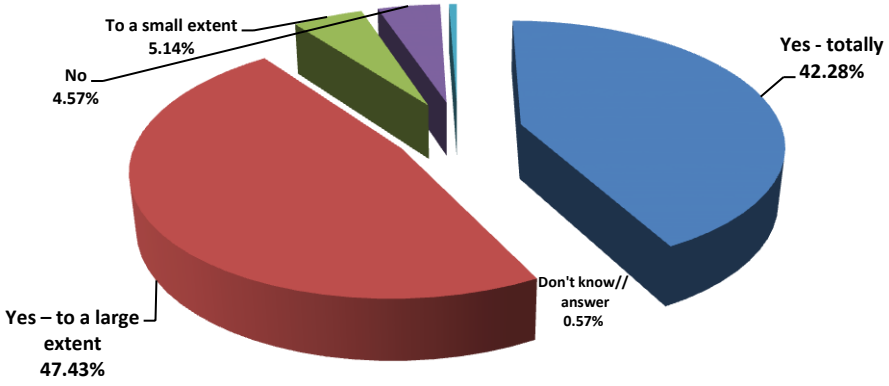
Quality improvement is a mobilizing objective for the leadership of the enterprise, to a great extent (according to almost 60% of the employees), while 32.57% consider this objective as totally mobilizing for the organization (fig.2).

Fig. 2. Perception of quality as mobilizing objective for the leadership of the enterprise



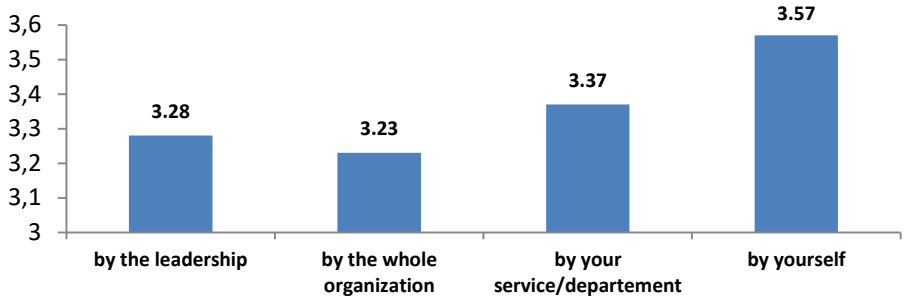
For the employees, quality improvement is an objective totally mobilizing 42.28% of them, and constituting an incentive to a large extent for 47.43% of the interviewees (fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Perception of quality as mobilizing objective for the personnel of the enterprise



The employees' opinion on the quality of the work undertaken in the enterprise generated the following answers (fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Evaluation of the quality of the work realized



The quality of the work undertaken is perceived differently for the leadership of the enterprise, the whole organization, the department and the employee himself. Thus, the employees consider the quality of the work realized by the whole organization as quite good (obtaining a score of 3.23 on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 represents the very poor quality and 4 the very good one). The interviewees have a slightly better opinion on the quality of the work realized by the leadership of the organization (the score obtained being of 3.28), an even better opinion on the quality of the work realized in the workshop/department they are part of (3.37) and a still even better opinion on the quality of their own work (3.57).

The employees were asked if, in the organizational structure of their work, they can reconcile the demands specific of their function with those of the Quality Improvement Process, and they consider that largely they can (49.14%), or that they can, yet with difficulty, while 40% consider that they manage to completely reconcile these essential aspects.

Regarding the reconciliation of quality and quantity, the interviewees consider that the two can be reconciled, yet with difficulty (46.29%), whereas 31.42% consider that they can be totally reconciled. A quite significant ratio of the respondents consider that quality and quantity cannot be reconciled (15.43%), while about 7% did not know what to answer.

The personnel of the enterprise perceive the commitment of their department leadership to the quality policy as strong (54.86%), but also intermittent (24%) and very strong (18.28%). The score obtained is relatively low (2.89 on a scale from 1 to 4), highlighting the fact that the personnel of the enterprise considers the involvement of the leadership in the quality policy as being modest. The employees do not always consider themselves responsible for the quality improvement process, this indicator obtaining a score of 2.90.

Regarding the measurement of work quality, 45% consider that they can measure it quantitatively and objectively, whereas 48% measure it only

intuitively. A ratio of 7% of the employees cannot or do not know how to measure the quality of their work.

The employees interviewed consider that the most important factor contributing to quality improvement is the awareness of the clients' demands (score 3.43) and the awareness of their satisfaction degree (3.37). At the same time, the employees consider that a better communication both within the company and in the department they are part of (3.09) represents another important factor in quality improvement. Almost similarly important were considered the following quality improvement factors: better work conditions (3.03), a professional training improvement (3.02) and better informatics or administrative support (3.01). According to the decreasing order of their importance, the other factors contributing to quality improvement are: a better adapted organization (2.99), better instruments and materials (2.93), an improvement of the employees' training in the domain of quality (2.89), participation in quality-related work teams (2.88), knowing the cost of non-conformities (2.85), drawing clearer instructions (2.75), assistance from the superior hierarchic level (2.66) and assistance from the Quality Improvement Group (2.62).

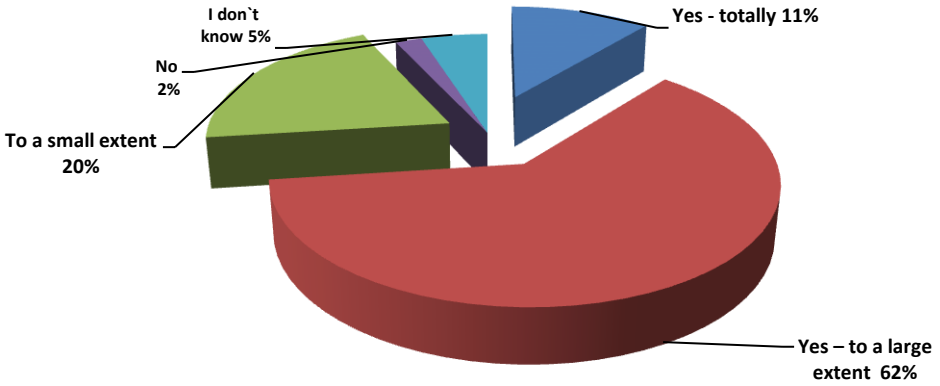
Regarding the factors that could help the employees most concerning the quality improvement in their work, the first place is held by the awareness of the clients' demands, followed by the awareness of the costs of non-conformities and the participation in quality-related work teams. Very helpful are also the awareness of the clients' satisfaction degree, an improvement of the professional training, better instruments, etc.

Regarding the participation of the employees in training programs in the domain of quality, unfortunately, most of the employees (57.14%) did not participate in such programs.

Out of the training programs that 42.86% of the employees joined, we can enumerate: quality management courses, ISO 9001, professional and specialization courses, market analysis, programs meant to inform on the quality and the norms that need to be respected, quality improvement programs, personnel training, IT courses, client counseling, etc.

Out of the people who participated in training courses in the domain of quality management, 62% largely changed their attitude to quality, 11% totally changed their attitude, and 20% to a small extent (fig. 5.).

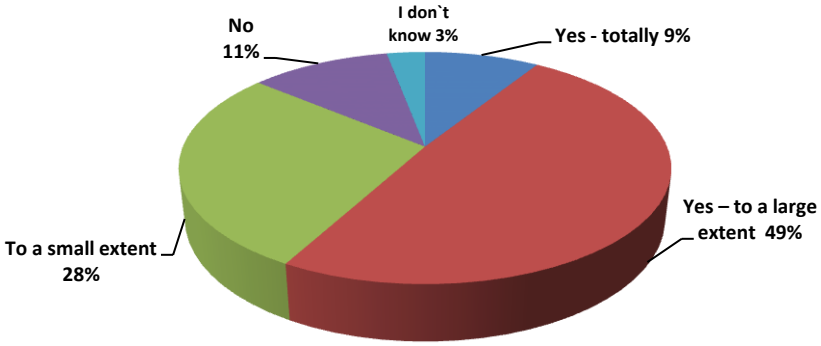
Fig. 5. Modification of the employees' attitude to quality following their training



At the same time, 2% have not changed their attitude, whereas 5% cannot tell if their attitude has changed.

The respondents who did not take part in training courses in the domain of quality were asked if they feel involved in the Quality Improvement Process in the organization they belong to (fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Involvement of the employees who did not participate in training to the Quality Improvement Process



Thus, 49% affirmed that they feel involved to a large extent, while 9% of them feel totally involved. In exchange, 28% feel involved to a small extent, 11% do not feel involved (at all), whereas 3% did not know what to answer.

The quality of the information that the employees receive in the enterprise they belong to was evaluated on a scale from -2 to +2 (-2 representing the opinion of the employee that he is badly informed, -1 poorly informed, 0 neither informed – nor uninformed, +1 informed, and +2 very well informed). The average scores obtained highlight the fact that

the employees do not consider themselves very well informed regarding certain essential aspects of the organization, namely:

- the policy of the firm, its projects (1.07);
- the organization of the firm, its structures, its methods (1);
- the financial results of the firm (0.94);
- the remuneration system, social advantages: leaves, retirements (0.88);
- market, competition, commercial results (0.76);
- possibility of training, promotion (0.74);
- technical information useful to their activities (0.69);
- training, promotion moves (0.64);
- what the people in charge think about every person's work (0.41).

A high-quality management cannot exist without a high satisfaction level of the employees. In this sense, the satisfaction of the employees was evaluated on a scale from -2 to +2 (where -2 represents very dissatisfied, -1 dissatisfied, 0 neither satisfied – nor dissatisfied, +1 satisfied and +2 very satisfied). The results obtained highlight a quite poor level of satisfaction among the employees: information of the employees (0.68), work conditions (0.70), work environment (0.61), social advantages (0.46), salary level (0.35), professional training (0.73), work program (0.73), work place safety (0.47).

The employees are relatively content with their work program, their professional training in different domains, as the enterprise cares about the training of its employees, with the work conditions and the environment at the work place, yet also with the information level. A lower level of satisfaction is affirmed by the employees regarding the social which and salary level.

Regarding the analysis of the agreement degree between personnel qualification and responsibilities complexity, the conclusions are as follows:

- in 48 % of the enterprises included in the present study, $K_c < 1$, which reflects the fact that a part of the personnel is overqualified by comparison with the technical difficulty/level of the works to be carried out;

- in 31 % of the companies included in the present study, $K_c > 1$, which reflects the fact that these enterprises use insufficiently qualified personnel by comparison with the difficulty/technical level of the works to be carried out;

- in 21 % of the enterprises included in the present study, $K_c = 1$.

Thus, we can notice the low ratio of enterprises ensuring a suitable personnel policy from the perspective of the optimal agreement between personnel qualification and the complexity of their responsibilities. An

improvement of the personnel policy is recommended on the level of 79 % of the enterprises, regarding the employees' recruitment or improvement.

6. Conclusions

As it has been highlighted from the beginning, the aim of our research was the identification of the actual situation of the enterprises in Dambovita County, Romania, regarding the employees' and the managers' perception on quality.

We appreciate that the aim proposed for this first stage has been reached, and the hypotheses established have been checked, which means that the hypothesis 1, according to which the employees are confident that they can contribute to the quality improvement process is valid, and also hypothesis 2, namely that the majority (confirmedly 57.14% of the respondents) are not trained in the domain of quality.

The present research has allowed the extraction of some important information from the employees' and managers' opinions concerning the quality improvement within their organizations, namely:

- the personnel are aware of the importance of the quality for the company;
- the interviewed employees have a high opinion both about the quality of the work carried out by the company's management, and about the quality of the work carried out by themselves;
- the personnel's opinion is that the managers are involved in the company's quality policy;
- the employees do not always consider that they are directly involved and responsible for the quality improvement process within their company;
- client satisfaction is an important factor for the employees in the quality improvement, and so are the awareness of their expectations and a better communication within the organization, as well.
- a weakness of the analyzed enterprises refers to the fact that most employees have not participated in the training program for quality improvement. Of those who have attended the courses, a significant part has changed, in a positive direction, their attitude towards quality.
- employees consider that they should be better informed on the company's strategies, promotion policy, environment conditions and training possibilities.

- a particular attention must be paid to the employees' satisfaction to assure the best quality management possible. The results obtained highlight an average level of satisfaction of the employees.

The managers should pay more attention to the involvement of the employees in the quality management improvement.

The responsibilities set by the company's managers for the employees must be adapted as well as possible to their qualifications, so that the employees should be as motivated as possible, and the company should obtain the best results possible. As we have shown in the present paper, it is ideal that this correlation coefficient should have values close to 1.

It is important that managers should give more importance to the employees' satisfaction in order to increase performance. We have recommended them to accomplish some studies regarding the satisfaction of their employees.

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