



QUALITY MANAGEMENT AS AN EMERGING APPROACH TOWARDS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT:

Customer satisfaction has emerged as one of the most critical determinants of organizational success in today's competitive business environment. Regardless of industry or sector, businesses that fail to satisfy their customers face significant risks of decline, while those that consistently meet or exceed customer expectations enjoy sustainability and growth. Customers may take different forms—ranging from individual consumers seeking essential products and services to enterprises demanding value-driven solutions.

Quality management is central to customer satisfaction as it directly involves the design, manufacturing, delivery, and continuous improvement of products and services. This study emphasizes the philosophy and principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) as an effective approach to achieve and enhance customer satisfaction. It highlights how organizations that adopt TQM not only offer superior products and services but also establish a system of continuous improvement and innovation. Manufacturing as well as service-oriented firms increasingly use customer satisfaction as a measure of quality and as one of the primary objectives of their quality management frameworks.

Quality management essentially reflects an organizational commitment to meeting and surpassing customer expectations so that customers are not merely satisfied but truly delighted. Understanding customer needs and aligning organizational processes to address them is indispensable for acquiring new clients and retaining existing ones.

KEYWORDS:

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, QUALITY MANAGEMENT, TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM), EMERGING APPROACH.

INTRODUCTION

Customers are the most valuable assets of any organization, and business success largely depends on the number of customers, their frequency of purchase, and the extent of loyalty they exhibit. A satisfied customer base leads to higher repeat purchases, word-of-mouth promotion, and sustainable revenue generation. In contrast, dissatisfied customers may lead to reduced market share and reputational loss.

Customer-centric thinking operates on both strategic and tactical levels. Strategically, organizations need to design long-term processes that consistently deliver value to customers. Tactically, companies must focus on designing products and services that immediately capture customer interest and fulfill their needs. When customers evaluate whether to remain with or leave a business, one-to-one service interactions play a decisive role.

In quality management processes, many organizations categorize customers into different groups to understand their needs better and align processes accordingly. The general principle of customer orientation can be summarized as: "My customer is the person who receives the output of my work, whether internal or external."

The purpose of Total Quality Management (TQM) is to achieve customer satisfaction to a level where expectations are not only met but consistently exceeded,

resulting in customer delight. For this reason, customer satisfaction is the fundamental driving force of most TQM initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of quality management practices can be traced back to the early 20th century. F.W. Taylor, through his Scientific Management principles (1911, 1947), introduced the concept of efficiency and productivity through standardization, task specialization, and organizational control (Kanigel, 2005). Although primarily focused on productivity, Taylor's ideas laid the groundwork for systematic approaches to management and indirectly influenced later quality management principles.

Subsequent thought leaders in quality management contributed more directly to customer satisfaction. Juran (1988, 1989) emphasized the "quality trilogy" of planning, control, and improvement, with customers at the center of all activities. Deming's philosophy similarly stressed continuous improvement, system thinking, and the importance of leadership in quality enhancement.

Feigenbaum (1991) conceptualized quality as an organization's best investment in competitiveness, asserting that customer satisfaction, cost efficiency, and effective human resource utilization all depend on robust

quality systems. Crosby, Ishikawa, and other TQM pioneers highlighted dimensions such as customer satisfaction, leadership commitment, teamwork, training, and cost reduction as cornerstones of TQM (Reed, Lemark & Mero, 2000).

Whiteley & Hessian (1997) stressed the importance of customer-oriented approaches that prioritize listening to customer needs as a continuous process. However, they pointed out that many organizations struggle to interpret and integrate this feedback effectively.

Micklewright and Read-Mauch (2010) highlighted the challenges modern organizations face due to their increasing complexity, which necessitates the implementation of effective TQM systems and reliable measurement techniques.

In summary, literature consistently underscores that customer satisfaction is the ultimate measure of quality and that TQM provides the most structured and holistic framework to achieve it.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

THE STUDY HAS THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

1. To analyze the approaches and principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) as they relate to customer satisfaction.
2. To explore the tools and techniques of TQM that organizations can apply for improving customer satisfaction.
3. To examine customer perceptions towards quality and identify the essential attributes that lead to customer satisfaction.
4. To highlight how quality management systems contribute to both short-term customer needs and long-term business sustainability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study is conceptual and exploratory. The paper is based on secondary data collected from books, journals, research articles, and published case studies on quality management and customer satisfaction. The analysis relies on reviewing and synthesizing these sources to draw conclusions regarding the impact of TQM on customer satisfaction.

The research particularly emphasizes customer classification, needs assessment, and perception analysis to illustrate how businesses can align quality management practices with customer satisfaction outcomes.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

UNDERSTANDING THE CUSTOMER

A customer is the focal point of any business system. As Mahatma Gandhi rightly stated:

“A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him... He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to serve him.”

Customers may be internal (within the organization, such as employees or departments) or external (individuals or businesses purchasing products/services). This study primarily emphasizes external customers who make purchase decisions based on value, quality, price, delivery, and service reliability.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction refers to the degree to which a product or service meets or exceeds customer expectations. It involves a comparison between what customers expect prior to purchase and the actual performance delivered. Customer satisfaction is multi-dimensional and influenced by factors such as product quality, price, service responsiveness, brand reputation, delivery performance, and complaint-handling mechanisms.

It is important to note that high satisfaction does not always guarantee customer loyalty. Organizations must therefore continuously analyze customer perceptions and implement proactive strategies to maintain satisfaction levels.

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM)

TQM is a holistic management approach focused on long-term success through customer satisfaction. The American Society for Quality (ASQ) defines a Quality Management System as “the organizational structure, processes, procedures, and resources needed to implement, maintain and improve quality.”

KEY ELEMENTS OF TQM INCLUDE:

1. Strong management commitment and leadership.
2. A relentless focus on customer satisfaction.
3. Full involvement of employees at all levels.
4. Continuous improvement in processes and systems.
5. Treating suppliers as strategic partners.
6. Establishing performance measures for accountability.

TQM philosophy promotes a culture where all members of an organization collectively strive to improve processes, products, and services while aligning with customer needs.

Customer Perception and Essential Attributes

Customers evaluate quality based on several attributes, including:

1. Product performance, features, and warranty.
2. Brand image and reputation.
3. Packaging and presentation.
4. Delivery commitments.
5. Responsiveness in addressing complaints.
6. Communication and accessibility.

TQM recognizes that customer expectations evolve over time. Thus, continuous improvement and adaptability are

essential to sustaining satisfaction and loyalty.

Approaches to Implementing TQM for Customer Satisfaction

The following steps represent a structured approach to establishing a TQM system:

1. Clarify Vision, Mission, and Values – Align employees with organizational strategy.
2. Identify Critical Success Factors (CSFs) – Define measurable performance areas (e.g., customer satisfaction, financial performance, process efficiency).
3. Develop Measures and Metrics – Track progress through surveys and data-driven indicators.
4. Identify Key Customer Groups – Recognize both external and internal customers.
5. Solicit Customer Feedback – Collect input regularly through surveys and focus groups.
6. Develop Customized Survey Tools – Tailor instruments to customer groups.
7. Establish Baseline Data – Benchmark current performance and set improvement goals.
8. Develop Improvement Plans – Translate feedback into SMART goals.
9. Resurvey and Monitor Progress – Reassess after implementation to ensure improvement.
10. Pursue Quality Awards and Certifications – Recognize excellence and benchmark against international standards such as ISO 9000, the Deming Prize, Malcolm Baldrige Award, and Golden Peacock Award.

CONCLUSION

Total Quality Management (TQM) represents a modern management philosophy that emphasizes continuous improvement and customer focus as the cornerstones of organizational success. Unlike traditional management approaches that prioritize short-term efficiency, TQM integrates strategic planning, employee involvement, supplier partnerships, and customer orientation to achieve long-term excellence.

By emphasizing customer satisfaction as the central measure of quality, organizations adopting TQM benefit from increased competitiveness, stronger customer loyalty, and enhanced brand value. Tools such as customer surveys, complaint-handling systems, performance measurement, and quality certifications further reinforce these efforts.

Ultimately, TQM's emerging role in commerce and industry is to not merely satisfy customers but to delight them—by consistently exceeding expectations, creating value, and ensuring sustainable business growth.

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