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Need to make quality circle a permanent feature of the organization

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Abstract

Now-a-days, the practice of inspection and rejection has been replaced by defect prevention in order to maintain quality. Quality Circle generally recommends solutions for quality and productivity problems which may be implemented by management. Thus, QC is not merely a suggestion system or quality control group but extends beyond that because its activities are more comprehensive. Further, it is not a task force because it can be made a permanent feature of the organisation.

Keywords: Indian organizations, job satisfaction, organizational effectiveness, quality circle, quality control

Introduction

The concept of quality circle (QC) has entered Indian organizations only very recently but the concept is catching the attention of many organisations. Many companies have tried out quality circles. Some have succeeded, others have had to abort half way and some others have just introduced it and are in the experimenting stage. The concept of QC has emerged from quality control. Comprehensive quality control is the effort of an organization to develop, design, manufacture, inspect, market, and service products that will satisfy the customers at the time of purchase and give them satisfaction for a long time after purchase. In Western countries, this was attempted to achieve through quality control department though the result was not satisfactory to the maximum possible extent. As against this, Japanese system of management integrated quality control with manufacturing department which gave rise to the idea of quality control circle or simply quality circle (QC).

Quality circle is a group of employees that meets regularly to solve problems affecting its work area. This group carries on continuously as part of organisation-wide control activities, self-development and mutual development, and control and improvement within the workplace utilizing quality control techniques with all the members participating. Generally, six to twelve volunteers from the same work area make up the circle. The members received training in problem solving, statistical quality control, and group processes. QC generally recommends solutions for quality and productivity problems which may be implemented by management. Thus, QC is not merely a suggestion system or quality control group but extends beyond that because its activities are more comprehensive. Further, it is not a task force because it can be made a permanent feature of the organisation.

Objectives of Quality Circle

Today's concept of quality is "fitness for use" and the methodology adopted is defect prevention rather than inspection and rejection. Hence, the attitudes of the people

towards work affect the quality of end products. One of the important tools for bringing about attitudinal change is QC- an approach which brings about participation as well as teamwork. The basic philosophy and methodology of QC provides opportunity and forum to realize and satisfy people's needs at the workplace. Thus, it motivates people to contribute towards organisational effectiveness through group processes. It may be mentioned that the scope of QC is not limited to manufacturing organizations only but is extended to other organizations like banking, insurance, finance, etc., also. The basic idea behind QC is as follows:

1. Contributions to the improvement and development of the organization;
2. Respect humanity and build a happy workplace worthwhile to work; and
3. Display human capabilities fully and eventually draw out infinite possibilities.

Thus, QC ensures harmony in the organisation, effective teamwork, problem-solving capacity, self-discipline, better interpersonal and group relations, better communication, participation, job satisfaction, and finally productivity and consequently organizational effectiveness.

Developing a Quality Circle

Usually, a QC system in an organisation is developed by going through the following phases:

1. **Start-up Phase:** QC requires an attempt just like an organizational change programme. An organizational change programme can be made successful when people are convinced about the utility of the change. Therefore, the first thing that should be done in developing QC is to publicize the concept of QC in the organization. People should understand the implications of QC. This is necessary because participation in QC is voluntary. Initial training to some personnel should be provided to operate QC system in the organization.
2. **Constitution of QC:** QCs may be constituted at different

workplaces in the organisation. Members of a QC are from the same work area or doing similar type of work. They are drawn voluntarily. Once a QC is formed, they remain as permanent members of the circle unless they leave the work area.

Besides QCs at various workplaces, there may be steering committee, facilitator, and coordinator. Steering committee is an apex body at the highest level of the unit/division which oversees the functioning of QCs in the unit/division and serves as advisory body. Facilitator is usually a manager of the shop/department/section and is responsible for guiding and directing the activities of the QC in his area, enthuses other executives to get involved in supporting QC activities. The basic responsibility of coordinator is to coordinate the activities of QCs on behalf of the management and to carry out such activities as would make the operation of QCs smooth, effective, and self-sustained.

1. **Initial Problem Solving:** Once people in the circle are trained and officially sanctioned, they turn to problem solving. This involves three stages: data collection, data analysis, and problem solving. Data collection is carried on through various ways like past records, contacting employees, and self-suggestions. Data analysis tries to establish the basic reasons for a particular problem or problems on hand. Problem solving at the initial stage involves participation of various members of the QC on regular basis. Methods used for solving the problems may be brainstorming. Various suggestions put forward by members are analysed subsequently and final decisions are taken through consensus.
2. **Presentation and Approval of Suggestions:** When the QC members get ready to show their solution of a problem, they present it before the management. Presentation of the project report, or group assignments in project presentation. Presentation to management helps to improve the communication between management and workers, demonstrates management's involvement and interest to QC members, and fosters good working relationship among all the people. It also offers opportunity to recognize the QC Members efforts.
3. **Implementation:** The final phase is implementation of suggestions. For this purpose, relevant groups may be assigned activities depending on the nature of suggestions. If the suggestion involves only one workplace without affecting others, the implementation can be undertaken directly at that workplace. However, if it involves others also, it may be assigned to a group.

Once this process is over, QC may be organized for other departments. Thus, through this process, entire organization can have QCs.

Pitfalls in QC and Their Remedies

No doubt, QC concept has many positive points but it has failed miserably in many organization and they had to abandon the scheme midway. In fact, many problems come up in the way and unless sufficient safeguards are taken against these, QC's efforts are unlikely to succeed, Following are

some major problems of QC operation and their suggested remedies:

- The first basic problem in QC is the absence of right type of attitudes both among managers as well as among workers. Managers, particularly at middle level, may feel that QCs dilute their authority and importance; QCs make superiors to find faults with executives for not finding solutions to the problems earlier; QCs are meaningless. Similarly, workers may feel that QCs are meant to improve organizational efficiency without really benefiting them; QCs may dilute their power and opportunities for bargaining. This problem can be solved by giving appropriate counselling to managers the problems with new concepts come because of misunderstanding of the concepts. QC is no exception to that.
- There is problem of organizing QCs in Indian context because of low profile of workers in the form of their low-level education and lack of leadership abilities. This may affect the operation of QCs successfully. This problem can be overcome by proper training to workers and also the leaders of QCs.
- Delay in implementation of suggestions given by QCs may affect the operation of QCs. Management can take effective steps to implement the suggestions at earliest opportunity. In case, where suggestions cannot be implemented at all or can be postponed for the time being, it must be communicated with convincing reasons to the members of the QC.
- Non-members of QCs may sometimes pose problems to the operation and functioning of QC. This problem can be solved by making them to witness the QC activities like presentation of solutions to management. This way, they can be enthused to join either a particular QC or volunteer them to start new ones at their workplace.
- There may be some operational problems like members not being permitted to hold meetings during office time, irregularity of meetings, facilitator not attending meetings even for brief period, etc. Such problems can be overcome by providing adequate support from the top management to facilitate operation of QCs, creation of QCs throughout the organization, denoting a day and time on which meetings are held every week. Similarly, regular meetings of steering committees and coordination committees should also be held.

Thus, it can be seen that there are many problems in QCs but most of these problems can be overcome with the active support of top management and by creating a suitable work environment in the organization where management and worker cooperate with each other. After all, both these groups are going to get benefits of QCs in the long run.

Conclusion

The concept of QC has emerged from quality control. Quality circle is a group of employees that meets regularly to solve problems affecting its work area. This group carries on continuously as part of organisation-wide control activities, self-development and mutual development, and control and

improvement within the workplace utilizing quality control techniques with all the members participating. One of the important tools for bringing about attitudinal change is QC- an approach which brings about participation as well as teamwork. Thus, QC ensures harmony in the organisation, effective teamwork, problem-solving capacity, self-discipline, better interpersonal and group relations, better communication, participation, job satisfaction, and finally productivity and consequently organizational effectiveness. QC requires an attempt just like an organizational change programme. QCs may be constituted at different workplaces in the organisation. Besides QCs at various workplaces, there may be steering committee, facilitator, and coordinator. Once people in the circle are trained and officially sanctioned, they turn to problem solving.

However, it has been seen that there are several problems in QCs but most of these problems can be overcome with the active support of top management and by creating a suitable work environment in the organization where management and workers cooperate with each other.

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