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## The TQM and Business Ethics Relationship: A case study from Greece

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper is an attempt to investigate the Business Ethics link to Quality Management. Business Ethics as management practice is well rooted to many organizations but its contribution to quality management implementation programs and practices is not well documented. The ISO 9001:2015 and the Business Excellence frameworks and Awards provide a basis for the implementation of a TQM philosophy, a “unique” way of improving organizational performance and attaining competitive advantage. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the various issues related to Business Ethics such as corporate citizenship, human rights, environmental protection, consumer protection, occupational health and safety, dishonest business practices (corruption, idleness, and weave problems) and investigate the relationship to Total Quality Management in a MNC operating in Greece. The data gathering was carried out through extensive and in - depth interviews with several multiple informants i.e. the plant manager, the production manager, the personnel manager, using a semi-structured questionnaire with open - ended questions. The main purpose was to collect data and produce basic information, enabling qualitative observations concerning organizations’ Quality and Business Ethics programs and initiatives.*

**Keywords:** Total Quality Management; Business Ethics; Greece; ISO 9001; ISO 26001

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Quality has become the most used word in today’s discourse. It is used in company’s advertisement, annual reports, banners and in the lips of all organization’s stakeholders, in government initiatives and even in personal relationships. Some argue that quality is mostly rhetoric and good stories in order for organizations to promote sales and create a “customer-orientation” profile. In United States and in Europe awards were established to promote awareness and provide a basis and a model for TQM implementation. However, the organizations both in US and in Europe were not so enthusiastic about the awards and the numbers are very small in all categories. On the other hand the certification with the new ISO 9001:2000 series of standards is gaining ground and especially in Asia the increase in certified organizations is beyond expectations.

Business ethics dissert issues such as corporate citizenship, human rights, environmental protection, consumer protection, occupational health and safety, dishonest business practices (corruption, idleness, and weave problems). There is an increasing demand on focusing at the humanistic dimension and social responsibility of business enterprises. Organizations during the 90’s began to invest in formal Business Ethics programs (Weaver, et.al, 1999) especially in the US, by establishing codes of ethics, using telephone lines for reporting ethical concerns and employing ethical officers or creating Corporate Social Responsibility departments. However, according to Donaldson & Dunfee (1994) “the field of Business Ethics has been troubled by a lack of direction ...” and Randal & Gibson (1990) found that research on Business Ethics was methodologically incorrect. It seems that quality can provide a new agenda and a new direction for the design and implementation of Business

Ethics programs and initiatives and create a new language by using a set of frameworks such as Business Excellence models (EFQM, MBNQA) or Quality Management Systems such as ISO 9001 or the ISO 26001 CSR.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Total Quality and ISO 9001

One of the most controversial concepts in the history of management theory is the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM). It is considered as a “social movement” (Hackman and Wageman, 1995), a “comprehensive way to improve total organizational performance and quality” (Hunt, 1993) or a “new paradigm in management” (Spencer, 1994; Grant et al., 1994). Its origins can be traced in the work of the -so called- quality gurus, Deming, Juran, Feigenbaum, Ishikawa and Crosby and on the rise and dominance of the Japanese automobile industry in the world markets. TQM emphasizes self-control, autonomy, and creativity among employees and requires active co-operation rather than mere compliance (Wilkinson, et.al. 1991). Hence it could be argued that it has a significant impact on the culture of the entire organization, calling for change, as it is a global philosophy involving all organization’s members.

ISO 9001 introduction fifteen years ago created a series of controversies and doubts over the role and the significance of ISO 9001 series on improving product and service quality, achieving internal and external customer satisfaction, and improving performance (Tsiotras&Gotzamani, 1996; Dick, 2000; Van der Wiele et al., 2000; Magd & Curry, 2003; Stevenson and Barnes, 2001; Kartha, 2002.) According to Douglas, et.al (2003) “ISO 9001 is a multi-million-pound industry with many individuals and organizations reliant on it for their livelihood, including quality consultants, lead auditors, internal auditors, supplier auditors, quality representatives/managers and software designers/sellers as well as the numerous training companies and certification bodies and their employees”. However, other authors and among them Kartha (2002) argues that the new standards main purpose is to assist organizations to “identify mistakes, streamline their operations, and be able to guarantee a consistent level of quality”.

The new revised standard was launched at the end of 2000 and according to Beckford (2002), is “an attempt to harmonize all the standards and remove the manufacturing bias. Several authors stated that the new ISO9000: 2000 is directed towards performance rather than conformance (Najmi&Kehoe, 2000). Coleman&Douglas (2003) argue that organizations in order to achieve the new ISO 9001:2000 should demonstrate that have quality processes and procedures in place, but they are skeptical about what happens after ISO 9001 certification. Casadesús &Karapetrovic (2005) studying the relationship between the “new” and the “old” ISO found that “the evaluation of the new ISO 9001: 2000 standard is generally positive”. Vouzas&Gotzamani (2005) argue that there is no really negative impact but mention that the perceived benefits are less than the previous standard and that the level of reported benefits of ISO 9001/2/3: 1994 decreases with time, evidenced by two empirical studies conducted in 1998 and 2002.

Overall argue that there is “an erosion of the perceived usefulness of ISO 9001: 2000 in the future, especially in terms of short-term benefits”. Martínez-Lorente & Martínez-Costa (2004) further argue that organizations certified by ISO 9001 “may have gone a part of the way to TQM. However, the authors claim that it is only the “first part of the way, not its end, because there is a large amount of TQM requirements that ISO 9001 does not satisfy”. Research on ISO 9001:2000 all over the world is still going on and the perceived benefits and its integration to other quality initiatives is expected to clear the picture and provide a basis

for further improvement of the standard (Laszo, 2000; McAdam & Jackson, 2002; Najmi & Kehoe 2000.). According to Vouzas & Gotzamani (2005), “careful analysis of the ISO 9001:1994 standards’ requirements compared to the basic principles of TQM and the requirements of the two most representative business excellence awards, the European Quality Award and the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, reveals several main shortages of the ISO 9001:1994 standards.

The authors stated that lack of strategic quality planning, absence of top management commitment; lack of focus on customer satisfaction, lack of systematic training in quality. Furthermore HR competitiveness, benchmarking, and quality cost measurement are absent, as well as issues related to health, safety and the environment in a study in Greek EQA awarded organizations. However, many authors believe that the new revised ISO 9001:2000 series of standards is a significant improvement on the previous version in terms of its conceptual simplification, its process-based vision and its acknowledgement of the importance of customer satisfaction as a key requirement for verifying the effectiveness of the quality system (Conti, 2002). The basic principles on which the new standards’ requirements are based (as found in the ISO 9001:2000 document) are much more TQM oriented.

## 2.2 Quality and Business Ethics

Douglas Montgomery in an editorial in *Quality and Reliability Engineering International Journal* (2003) states that organizations embracing the philosophy of Corporate Social Responsibility can enhance their reputation, and gain greater financial returns. Furthermore, argues that quality has a role to play and that Quality has a very strong ethical foundation and all quality gurus’ (Deming, Juran) incorporated ethical issues in their writings.

A direct relationship between quality and ethics and social responsibility is that of quality systems such as ISO 9001 and ISO 26001. According to McWilliams, et.al (2006) there is a growing interest on CSR and in ISO 26001 and the main motivations are: coercive, altruistic and strategic. As mentioned earlier ISO 9001 is a Quality Management Systems while ISO 26001 is guidance on social responsibility. Both standards have similarities and difference in their scope, principles and content (Castka & Balzarova, 2008). ISO 26001 can not be certified by a third party, and its scope include issues such as social, environmental and legal diversity in the world and look at them in terms of globalization, climate change, organizational governance and sustainable development, etc. (ISO/TMB/WG/SR, 2006). The ISO 2600 consists of four clauses, the SR context, the SR principles, the SR issues and SR guidance, and its main purpose is to build awareness and created an ethical philosophy within the organization (Castka & Balzarova, 2007).

In the early days of quality movement, authors such as Deming (1986), Crosby (1979) and Peters (1988) stated that quality has a high ethical content. Vinten (1998) states that “TQM is built on a foundation of ethics, integrity and trust. It fosters openness, fairness and sincerity and allows involvement by everyone”. Vinten (1998) also believes that “Crisis ethical management comes expensive. The extent of ethical audit depends upon the organisation’s attitude to business ethics and society, as well as to its more immediate stakeholders. Ethical considerations are the only really guaranteed way to ensure this is by the adoption of total quality procedures. There is hardly any management philosophy that is as much adopted by companies as quality management”.

According to Svensson & Wood (2005) the core values of quality management should be build upon ethical fundamentals and quality tools and techniques should consider these fundamentals. Quality is about making things right, responsibility for quality lies to all, customer satisfaction is the main drive for success, and profound knowledge is the new name for quality. The main argument is that doing good and doing well is the key to excellence.

Organizations can not just invest and focus only on technical-oriented approaches and techniques but rather gave to enhance and utilize their people and contribute to the community. According to Steiner & Steiner (1995) quality, productivity and ethics go hand in hand. Issues such as corporate image, better environment, avoidance of stricter government regulations and the preventions of social problems than their cure are the main elements or aspects of the above relationship. In a study conducted in European organizations, Steiner & Steiner (1995) found that very few organizations of the sample had an ethical culture, and statement or codes of ethics and there was no difference between service and industrial organizations. According to their study results, ethical dimensions should be incorporated to quality management process. Fisscher & Nijhof (2005) tried to investigate the implications of Business Ethics for Quality management. The authors argue that quality cannot be managed successfully without an explicit focus on moral values and on the opposite ethical behaviour in a business environment assumes full quality control in order to answer moral questions.

Another aspect of the quality and ethics relationship was examined by Gonzales & Guillen (2002), the ethical dimension of Leadership in Quality. One of the main quality principles is that quality requires top management commitment and that leadership is one of the critical success factors in quality management implementation. The authors state that “the ethical dimension of leadership refers to the right decisions and actions combined with good intentions, and accompanied by moral correctness of behaviours”. They suggest that organizations should start building moral trust in their manager’s behaviour, by providing them training in ethical issues, give them the opportunity to write ethical statement and create an ethical culture in their function. Svensson & Wood (2005) however found that there are different expectations and perception between managers and employees concerning corporate ethical issues in TQM. Finally, in all the so-called Business Excellence models (EFQM model and the Malcolm Baldrige Award) there is a focus on ethical issues and specifically on Corporate Social Responsibility. Impact on society, satisfaction of clients and satisfaction of employees are important elements of the widely adapted EFQM model and the Malcolm Baldrige Award. In this way, quality management leads automatically to moral deliberations and responsibilities towards the different parties in and around an organization (Steiner and Steiner, 1995; Fisscher and Nijhof, 2005).

### **2.3. Summary of Literature Review**

From the analysis of the above literature, the relationship between TQM and Business Ethics is an important area of study, as both fields emphasize the significance of responsibility and ethical practices in organizational management. Here are some more contemporary abstracts and citations that explore this relationship.

#### **2.3.1. *The Role of Business Ethics in TQM***

A study titled "The Mediating Role of Business Ethics in the Relationship between Total Quality Management and Sustainable Performance" examines how business ethics can mediate the relationship between TQM practices and sustainable performance in organizations. The findings suggest that ethical practices enhance the effectiveness of TQM initiatives, leading to improved sustainability outcomes in various sectors, including hospitality and manufacturing (Hashmi, 2020).

### **2.3.2. Integrating Ethics into Quality Management**

Another article discusses the integration of business ethics into TQM frameworks. It emphasizes that ethical considerations are crucial for the successful implementation of TQM, as they foster a culture of trust and accountability within organizations. The study argues that organizations that prioritize ethical behavior are more likely to achieve their quality management goals (Muhammad, et.al, 2024).

### **2.3.3. Quality Management and Corporate Social Responsibility**

A research paper titled "Total Quality Management and Corporate Social Responsibility: A Framework for Sustainable Development" explores the intersection of TQM and corporate social responsibility (CSR). It highlights that both TQM and CSR share common goals related to ethical practices and stakeholder engagement, suggesting that integrating these approaches can lead to enhanced organizational performance and ethical standards (Samah et.al, 2023)

These studies collectively indicate that the integration of business ethics into TQM practices is essential for fostering sustainable performance and achieving organizational excellence.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this paper, the author suggest that in order to have a reliable and objective depiction of the Business Ethics on quality improvement frameworks, a thorough examination and analysis should include all the various approaches and perceptions recorded in literature -some of them based on empirical data and some deriving from rhetoric and “good-stories” or “how things ought to be” perspective. The paper examines one industrial organization, a multinational company in the drinks and beverages sector that operates in Greece over 45 years and has a long tradition of corporate social responsibility. The company was among the first organizations in Greece that received the ISO 9001 in the 90’s and implementing a series of standards (ISO 9001, ISO 22000, ISO 18001 and ISO 14001) with a strong commitment to quality.

The data gathering was carried out through extensive and in - depth interviews asking several multiple informants i.e. the plant manager, the production manager, the personnel manager, using a semi-structured questionnaire with open - ended questions in one of the three plants operating in Greece. The main purpose was to collect data and produce basic information, enabling qualitative observations concerning organizations’ Quality and Ethical efforts. The questionnaire was developed based on state-of-the art literature review and consisted of three parts. The first part was questions about the profile of the organization (legal status, number of employees, etc), the second part was about the organizations Business Ethics efforts (policy, programs, initiatives, etc) and the third about the link between quality improvement efforts and Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility. This paper is based on a pilot study of larger scale research aiming at exploring both qualitative and quantitative the link between Business Ethic and Quality. The data analysis provides some ground for generalizations, even though subjective judgments were also made from the analysis of the case.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. The Company Profile

Company is A is one of the largest organizations in Greece in the Drink and Beverage sector, and the leader in the alcoholic beverages. In the past ten years the company invested almost 300 million Euros in infrastructure and its plants considered the most modern in Europe. The company is a major sponsor of athletic and social events and promotes safe alcohol drinking among young drinkers. The company's advertisement logo is "enjoy responsibly" and in its webpage there are pages dedicate to safe drinking. All company's plants have environmental standards concerning energy consumption (electricity, gas), pollution (water, air, noise) and money spent on introducing environmental friendly production technologies. The company awarded in 1987 with the best award for environmental consciousness and in 1998 with the Corporate Social Responsibility Award. The plant in which the study took place has 300 full time employees and 100 seasonal personnel in approximately 20 specializations. The plant gone through restructuring and infrastructure modifications in the past ten years. From 1996 to 2000 there was a multi-skilling program aiming at enhancing the skills and abilities of the personnel with in majority were coming from the nearby rural community.

### 4.2. Business Ethics

The organization's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) issues are in the hands of the Communications Affairs department in the central offices in Athens. The department is new and before that CSR and Business Ethics were handled by the financial department. The main philosophy of CSR in the organizations is that Ethics is everybody's job and all employees from top to bottom are responsible. Furthermore, the company must prove that through everyday practices and culture. Every year the company organizes a CSR conference aiming at building awareness and communicating best practices to all stakeholders.

Employees and management are aware of the importance and value of Business Ethics through the company newsletter and of events taking place inside the organization. The main programs and initiatives introduced and implemented related to the Business Ethics are : promoting employee participation (many work groups operating at the plant both, functional and cross functional) written commitment of all work groups within the plant on quality and safety, full implementation of ISO 18000, continuous training and coaching, strict numerical goals regarding energy consumption, pollution, recycling, internal and external benchmarking on quality and CSR issues, support of local community, formation of voluntary groups for environmental purposes (cleaning beaches, planting trees on burned forests, etc), schools and university students visits, etc.

However, there are no formal ethical codes that take the form of work practices and responsibilities among employees and managers in the plant. The reason is that people are within the organizations many years and there is no need for written statements and formal ethical policies in the plant according to top management. There are no training programs focused on CSR and Business Ethics on the plant and there are no disciplinary actions in cases of ethical malpractices. The training manager mentioned that the climate is that of a "public organization" meaning that employees enjoy work stability and security and formalities and rules are being incorporated through informal communication.

Over the years the organization and the plant in particular had no incidents of unethical behaviour from managers or employees. The plant manager in cooperation with the management team and the union have day to day communication and the goal is to prevent any actions causing problems (proactive philosophy) inside the plant or affecting customers or the local community. In cases of customer complaints about the product – retailer or final

customer- (not proper filling of the bottles, foreign particles inside the bottle, etc) the organization policy is to provide information to the customers and give them the opportunity to visit the plant and the facilities and to get familiar with the production and the quality assurance system.

Today, the organization is trying to be as effective as possible, introducing new technology, utilizing people and techniques and cutting costs. All these are done in accordance with the organizations Corporate Social Responsibility policy and with the change of philosophy. Being effective and financially health depends on ethics and ethics can push organization forward.

### **4.3. Business Ethic and Quality**

Quality was always a major concern of the organization since its establishment. The company's products are worldwide known for its supreme quality. The plant is certified with the ISO 9001 since 1994 and as mentioned earlier had two other certifications (ISO 14000 and ISO 18000). The main drive for quality improvement in the plant is the quality improvement teams. The teams were formed with the consensus with the union. Their main goal of the teams is to ensure that quality procedures are understood and implemented without problems. There are a series of financial and non financial incentives in order to promote quality and productivity. Employees get a productivity bonus based on the annual performance appraisal system and there are awards for the best team in the plant. Training is considered an investment because give the opportunity to employees to learn more and become less vulnerable to changes in technology and in systems implementation. The multi-skilling program enhanced employees' capabilities and protects them from being obsolete. This was considered as an ethical-based program from the top management and the employees.

There is a very strong connection between quality and ethics in the plant according to all informants. The plant organization is focused on satisfying customer needs and protecting the public from excessive alcohol drinking. There are annual customer satisfaction surveys and on the spot audits (from the sales department) to the consumer points (supermarkets, café, bars, clubs, etc). The goal is to have zero complaints, zero defects and zero accidents. The company used various quality management techniques and tools such as benchmarking, business process re-engineering, etc in order to monitor and control all quality issues related to ethical problems. Best practices among the company's worldwide plants are articulated and top management people have the opportunity to visit other plants around the world and learn new methods and practices.

The organization is not in the process of applying for the European Quality Award according to the plant manager. Top management is aware that EQA is providing a model for self-assessment and that in the model there is a CSR part. The training manger at the plant said that EQA is the next step and a major challenge for the organizations and for the plant itself. However, believes that many things need to be done before the organization give the green light for the award process such as formal written CSR policy in each plant, appointment of a CSR officer and a long term training program on ethical issues for all personnel.

Finally, ISO 26001 CSR is more than welcomed and the managerial team of the plant believes that is a matter of time to be introduced and implemented.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Business Ethics is a necessity and a major challenge for all organizations around the world. It provides a set of guidelines and a new culture for the future. Quality Management is customer consciousness -both the internal and the external – and its philosophy is a creating a culture in which production is causing no pollution, excessive use of energy and resources, and human traumas. Quality is a mean to prevent ethical problems and change the way organizations think about the product or service and their stakeholders. In quality, financial profit is replaced by value for the people inside and outside the organization. Providing a safe workplace for the employees, keeping the production under environmental standards and creating an ethical new image for the product and the services are the main issues in the ethics-quality relationship. The organization studied is in the process of changing its practices and re-evaluate its policy on ethics. Greece is a country with a long tradition on ethics, from Socrates, Plato and the Greek philosophers, to the new reality.

This paper is a first step of a major research on the Business Ethic and Quality. The research is under way and the authors make the final alterations in the quantitative questionnaire aiming at Greek organizations involved already with CSR and are members of the Greek Network for Corporate Social Responsibility.

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Ethical approval is not applicable to the current study, as the data collected are unanimous and the analysis is based on the summary statistical data only.