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The Application of Pelz Effect to Managing TQM Programmes

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Abstract

This study extends the Pelz Effect (1951) to explain the effects of incongruence between senior managers' orientations and underlying assumptions of TQM on middle managers' own orientations and on TQM itself. Using a multi-case study approach of three organisations from different sectors, the authors conducted 68 semi-structured interviews with managers at both senior and middle levels. The findings largely support the Pelz Effect in that senior management exerts a major influence in establishing the tone and atmosphere of the TQM organisation by their orientations and attitudes towards the underlying principles of it. It has been found that senior managers' reliance on detection, reactive strategies and hard aspects of TQM—as opposed to prevention, proactive strategies and soft people-based issues—resulted in: first, middle managers' compliance with short-term tactical orientations rather than long-term commitment; second, middle managers' increased control over the workforce rather than the work-related processes; third, middle managers' tendency to agree about TQM objectives in a way to prioritise and fulfil their own self-interests rather than TQM intended objectives and organisational interests; and finally and fourth, inability of middle managers to perform efficiently or TQM to be run more effectively. The findings suggest that the nature of middle management's orientation towards TQM and the degree of their supportive behaviour towards first line managers is affected by the senior management's orientation towards TQM and their supportive behaviour towards middle managers. The results reveal that the current practice of TQM can be characterised by inspection and quality control approach, a top-down process based upon a culture of procedure-dominated with a heavy bureaucratic base, and the dominance of senior management's unilateral control. Finally, the theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Key Words: Total Quality Management; Senior and Middle Managers; TQM Failure; pelz Effect

Introduction

Although it is commonly acknowledged that Quality Management (QM) or Total Quality Management (TQM) makes a significant contribution to operating/corporate performance and more importantly to a sustainable competitive advantage of many businesses (Easton and Jarrell, 1998; Hendricks and Singhal, 1997), it is surprising that the factors influencing its failure have not received greater scrutiny in mainstream operations improvement and management research. Previous research have found that up to 60 percent, 80 percent, and even 90 percent of TQM programmes fail to achieve their intended objectives (Soltani et al., 2003, 2006, 2008; Choi and Behling, 1997; Wilkinson et al 1998 , Redman and Grieves, 1999). Despite such a high rate of failure of TQM programmes, current research on operations improvement leaves an important question on the nature of TQM failure unaddressed. For instance, why do quality-focused organisations find it so difficult to establish and maintain a certain level of quality and so often experience quality crisis, thereby TQM failure? Such lack of research has contributed to a limited knowledge of the strategic dynamics of TQM within organisations in terms of its own peculiarities, thereby thwarting understanding of the factors that contribute to its effectiveness (see Ogbonna and Harris, 2005).

An examination of the literature pertinent to TQM suggests that the TQM strategy for achieving its normative outcomes of optimising quality, learning, and cooperation (Sitkin *et al.*, 1994) is rooted in and shaped by four interlocking assumptions: (i) quality, (ii) people, (iii) organisation, and (iv) the role of senior management (Hackman and Wageman, 1995, p. 309). Traditionally, researchers have examined TQM failure at two levels: at the level of person (assumptions ii & iv), and at the level of system (assumptions i & iii). However, in explaining the person or systems-level features and their impact on the effectiveness of TQM programmes, much of the research is limited in scope and with a heavy focus on (to quote Choi and Behling, 1997, p. 38) “identifying practices and circumstances that affected TQM’s chances of success”. Such focus, however, has restricted understanding of the exact nature of both person and system factors that may influence the effectiveness of TQM programmes as well as the

dynamics of these factors over time. While the aforementioned four assumptions – which are grouped into person and system factors – are closely interconnected and regarded as the integral components of TQM, we believe that the role of senior management should not be viewed only as one of several TQM assumptions. While quality, people, and organisation may contribute to the overall effectiveness of a TQM programme, they are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for a successful TQM implementation, simply because they are all direct functions of the quality of the systems that senior managers create. Therefore, it is possible for a TQM programme to fail even if quality, people, and organisation are sufficiently integrated.

Using organisational theories such as the Pelz Effect (1951) and other relevant theories (e.g. Likert's supportive relationships, 1961; Argyris and Schön's theories of action, 1974), we focus on the dynamics of senior management role and support and the way it could facilitate or hinder the process of TQM planning and implementation. In short, we address the nature and extent of senior management's role in establishing and maintaining an organisation-wide TQM programme, its resultant implications for other managerial levels as well as for the effectiveness of TQM itself. On many occasions, middle and supervisory level managers are frustrated with senior managers' orientations towards TQM or their requests for implementation of "yet another new programme" (Kostova, 1999, p. 308). In consequence, they may intentionally or not, decide not to implement TQM practices while reporting otherwise to senior managers; they may implement partial – as opposed to total – quality management; they may adopt those practices which guarantee their own self-interests. In some extreme cases, they might feel so alienated from the senior management team and do not believe in their motives and thus, do not even consider complying with implementation requests (Kostova, 1999, p. 308). As a result, we argue that the nature of senior management's approach towards the underlying assumptions of TQM, as well as senior management's behaviour toward middle managers is a critical influence in the determination of the effectiveness of TQM programmes as well as the middle managers' downward behaviour toward first line managers in relation to the way they implement TQM programmes.

This paper adopts a multiple-case study approach and aims at filling in some of the gaps in the current work on TQM failure through tracing the effects that senior managers' orientations towards TQM might have on middle managers, especially in relation to subsequent reactions of middle managers, and the resultant implications for TQM itself. The present study takes the point offered by Waldman *et al.* (1998, p. 178) that little is known about the nature of effective management as organisations pursue quality improvement initiatives, and Zbaracki's (1998) research on the rhetoric and reality of TQM in that (senior) managers consume a rhetoric of success about TQM, use that rhetoric to develop their TQM programme, and then filter their experiences to present their own rhetoric of success, thereby developing an overly optimistic view of TQM (p. 602). While TQM failure has been extensively researched earlier, this study specifically contributes to the elucidation of middle managers' reactions to any incongruence between senior management's approach to TQM with those underlying assumptions of TQM as well as their own orientations towards TQM.

This paper begins with a review of managing TQM with a particular focus on factors influencing its low effectiveness or failure, followed by an overview of the adopted research method. Then, the research findings are presented and discussed. A final section reassesses the theoretical and practical implications of the research.

Managing TQM: Senior-Middle Management Relationship and its Consequences

Over the last 25 years the term TQM has become indelibly fixed as a means of leveraging competitive advantage (Powell, 1995; Reed *et al.*, 2000). For TQM, there is only one approach for which to aim: being right first time and every time (Deming, 1986; Hill, 2005). This requires proactive rather than reactive thinking about managing quality. In reactive management of TQM, the emphasis is on detection, with the aim of preventing faulty work from being passed on to subsequent processes. The alternative is a proactive management aimed at preventing errors in the first place. TQM requires management by prevention not least because it results in meeting customer requirements more consistently (Oakland, 2003; Besterfield *et al.*, 2003; Dale *et al.*, 2007; Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2005).

Indeed, most of what has been written about TQM is based on a common view of committed and proactive management (by prevention) as the primary driver (Deming, 1986; Juran, 1989; Crosby, 1979).

However, a review of the literature shows us that advocates of TQM have consistently faced a battle in justifying its position (Hackman and Wageman, 1995; Yong and Wilkinson 1999, Redman and Grieves, 1999; Soltani et al., 2008; Sitkin *et al.*, 1994; Casadesus and Karapetrovic, 2005).

Such disenchantment with TQM's inability to contribute to long-term organisational survival is echoed by Sheppard's (1998) comment that the mantra of 'right first time' seems to have eluded TQM itself. In reaction, a flurry of articles in both academic and professional journals attempted to provide reasons for why, in such an extensive and growing manner, the rate of TQM failure is high, perhaps as high as 90 per cent (Hill and Wilkinson, 1995; Choi and Behling, 1997; Soltani, 2004; Redman and Grieves, 1999). Overall, as Choi and Behling's (1997, p. 38) review of the literature has found, much of the research on the topic has been concerned with 'identifying practices and circumstances that affected TQM's chances of success'. For example, several studies have found difficulties in winning top managements' commitment to have a significant impact on TQM failure (Choi and Behling, 1997; Waldman et al., 1998; Wilkinson et al., 1998; Soltani et al., 2005; Riehl, 1988; Tregoe et al., 1990; Godfrey et al., 1997; Schweizer, 2004; Soltani, 2005; Knights and McCabe, 1999; Wilkinson *et al.*, 1997; Redman and Grieves, 1999). Others identified a lack of integration between quality management and everyday business practices as determinants of TQM failure (Gupatra, 1994; Whiteley, 1991; Chang, 1993). Several other studies suggest that while a lack of senior management commitment is a key to TQM failure, problems of adapting human resource practices to support TQM are also major contributors to TQM's failure (Wilkinson, 1992; Dean and Bowen, 1994; Waldman, 1994; Snape et al., 1995; Walker, 1992; Holpp, 1989). Lastly, the broad and somewhat 'catch all' category of poor implementation has been found to contribute to TQM failure (Numeroff, 1994; Becker, 1993; Taylor, 1997; Doyle, 1992;

Ghobadian and Gallear, 1996; Sitkin et al., 1994; Cole, 1993). While the foregoing analysis highlights a variety of reasons for TQM failure, it does not elucidate the relative impact of each factor on TQM. Thus, what is considered to be a major determinant of TQM failure in one study may not even be considered in another.

While the aforementioned factors could adversely influence TQM effectiveness, quality is viewed as ultimately and inescapably the responsibility of senior management (Juran, 1974; Ishikawa, 1985; Deming, 1986; Hackman and Wageman, 1995; Zbaracki, 1998; Beer, 2003; Soltani, 2005; Soltani *et al.*, 2008). For Feigenbaum (2004), implementing TQM requires hands-on, continuous leadership and that quality today has become the foundation for constant management innovation and leadership” (Feigenbaum, 2007, p. 38). In his seminal book, *Out of the Crisis* (1986, p. 248), Deming declares, “Actually, most of this book is involved with leadership. Nearly every page heretofore and hereafter states a principle of good leadership”. Juran et al. (1995, p. 128) assert that “attaining quality leadership requires that upper managers personally take charge of the quality initiative”. Nor are quality gurus alone in suggesting that basic quality responsibility rests in the hands of company top management (Feigenbaum, 2004). For example, Mauro and Mauro (1999, p. 37) state that “any individual or organization that wishes to take their initial steps on their journey toward quality must begin with a near sighted examination of its organization leadership capability and culture”. Management commitment through the adoption of a highly consistent approach toward TQM practices has been designated as the prime factor or (to quote Kanji, 1998) ‘the fundamental driver’ in making TQM goals come about (see also Kanji, 2001) in other frequently cited texts (e.g. Saraph *et al.*, 1989; Black and Porter, 1996; Garvin, 1988; Dale, 2003; Oakland, 2003). For Besterfield *et al.* (2003, p. 1), “only by changing the actions of management will the culture and actions of an entire organisation be transformed”. The paramount importance of senior management’s orientation for the successful implementation of TQM programmes can also be seen in the attention given to it in many quality awards across the world (see NIST, 2003; EFQM, 2006; Deming Prize, 2004). One explanation for this is that senior managers create the

organisational systems that determine how products and services are designed and produced (Hackman and Wageman, 1995, p. 311). Although the foregoing discussion highlights the need on the part of senior management to learn and practice (to quote Deming, 1986) “the new philosophy” we know little about the reality of the nature of senior management’s orientations to TQM and its implications for middle managers’ own approach to TQM.

There is also little information regarding the nature of middle managers’ reactions and responses to any such incongruity, especially given the role they play in the process of enacting TQM. Although middle managers are regarded as the key players in effective implementation of TQM programmes (Hill, 1991, 1995; Dale and Barlow, 1984; Psychgios et al., 2007; Psychgios and Wilkinson, 2007), we also know that managers at middle and supervisory levels might be seen to be less than fully supportive of the introduction of TQM (Rees, 1995; Marchington et al., 1992; Hill, 1991) as middle and junior managers view TQM, first, as making their jobs more demanding both in terms of the time involved and the need to acquire people management and technical skills (Redman and Greives 1999); second, as resulting in employees questioning their managerial decisions, followed by placing such managers under greater scrutiny from senior managers; third, as reducing their discretion followed by a fear of loss of control due to the empowerment of shop-floor employees (Dopson and Stewart, 1993); and lastly, as resulting in shop-floor employees challenging and questioning their authority. For the sake of parsimony, Wilkinson et al. (1994) summarise the general malaise surrounding the state of middle managers in the context of TQM by arguing that middle and junior managers feel pressure from above and below by its introduction – an indication or symptom of resistance to TQM as the most widely used strategic change programme. These findings, however, do not draw any definite conclusions with regard to how middle managers might get by in such a context.

Using the Pelz Effect (1951), our aim in this paper is to present an alternative and a more specific explanatory account of TQM failure by a more explicit focus on, first, the congruency between senior managers’ orientations and underlying assumptions of TQM, second, whether and how such

(in)congruence moderates middle managers' own orientations towards TQM, and finally and third, the resultant implications for the effectiveness of TQM (see Choi and Behling, 1997; Waldman *et al.*, 1998; Soltani, 2005; Dean and Bowen, 1994; Waldman, 1994; Snape *et al.*, 1995; Staw and Epstein, 2000). Our argument is this: senior management's orientation towards the underlying assumptions of TQM are not only a major factor influencing TQM effectiveness but more importantly moderate and influence the middle management's orientations toward both first line managers and TQM. The Pelz Effect focuses on the leader's upward/hierarchical influence within the organisation. It argues that leader behaviours that facilitate members' goal achievement are highly correlated with favourable attitudes among group members only when the leader also has strong influence within the organisation. This ability of a leader's upward organisational influence to moderate the impact of a leader's downward behaviour has subsequently become known as the Pelz Effect (Jablin, 1980). The Pelz Effect is relevant to our study in that the dynamics of managing TQM practices, the degree of congruence or otherwise between senior management's orientations and TQM underlying assumptions, and the resultant implications for middle managers own orientations and TQM itself have such a structure as Vice President Quality (VPQ) behaviours and orientations towards TQM influence middle managers' TQM intended goal achievement. Given that the senior-middle management relationship has a Pelz Effect structure, in this study it becomes important to specify the dynamics of such a relationship in terms of the nature of senior management's orientations, its resultant implications for middle management's orientations and its consequences for the effectiveness of TQM programmes.

While consistency or congruency between senior management's approach to TQM and the underlying assumptions of TQM would result in positive outcomes and possible supportive behaviour on the part of other managerial levels, the problem arises from incongruence between senior management's approach and the underlying assumptions of TQM. Clearly, incongruence between senior management's orientations and TQM underlying precepts is based on the assumption that senior managers' understating of TQM is different from the core idea of TQM. Assuming this to be the case, senior

managers pursue their own rationale for adoption of TQM, their own way of planning and implementing TQM which is quite different from the reality of TQM. Because senior managers adopt and implement TQM based on their own understanding and specific rationale, this might highly likely diverge from the understanding and orientations of middle managers. However, the question of how such assumed incongruence or goal conflict may be reduced requires further investigation. Thus, the primary research objective of this study was to determine the nature, extent and implications of such a relationship for effective adoption, planning and implementation of TQM programmes. More specifically, we argue that senior management's orientation towards TQM is a critical influence in the determination of the nature of middle management's orientation and consequently the degree of TQM effectiveness.

Our concern in this study also fits the notion of Likert's (1961) supportive relationships. We argue that senior management exerts a major influence in establishing the tone and atmosphere of the TQM organisation by their support and commitment towards the underlying principles of it (Likert, 1961). In a TQM-focused organisation, it is argued that senior management must demonstrate a clear commitment to improvement throughout the organisation by adhering to TQM principles and creating a supportive atmosphere and a cooperative rather than a competitive relationship with middle and first line managers as well as non-managerial employees. Furthermore, middle management's orientation towards TQM and their supportive behaviour towards first line managers can be affected by the senior management's orientation towards TQM and their supportive behaviour towards middle managers. Such combining of upward and downward managerial (top and middle) behaviours provides a crucial, as Likert put it, 'linking pin' between managerial and non-managerial employees and the TQM organisation (Likert, 1961; Anderson et al., 1990, p. 20). Despite the frequent previous calls for exploring the dynamics of managerial relationship and its implications for TQM effectiveness (Wilkinson et al., 1998; Shiba et al., 1993; Dean and Bowen, 1994; Soltani et al., 2008; Choi and Behling, 1997; Waldman et al., 1998; Knights and McCabe, 1998, 1999; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Willmott, 1993; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003), so far little has been done.

Method, Selection of Cases and Interviewees

The present study adopts a qualitative multiple case study design. This is an appropriate research method because it investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context, and significant events or variables cannot be manipulated experimentally. Following Jensen and Rodgers' (2001) typology of case studies, we adopted a set of multiple case studies of multiple research entities for the purpose of cross-unit comparison. The case study design consisted of three cases in three different sectors: an Electronics Company (private sector), a Higher Education Institute (public sector), and a Local Enterprise (third/voluntary sector). The key issue underpinning this study concerns the effects of incongruity of senior and middle managers' orientations on TQM programmes. The diversity of the multiple case design and multiple perspectives adopted in our study in terms of sectors, the hierarchical levels of the participants and their responsibilities, as well as different approaches to managing TQM, offers an in-depth view of the effects of (in)congruity of senior and middle managers' orientations on TQM programmes (Stake, 1995).

To be considered for inclusion in the sample of case studies, an organisation had to conform to three criteria: (1) stability of its managerial positions (both senior and middle level management), (2) long experience with TQM implementation, and (3) existence of a separate quality management department with its own VP. The management tenure criterion was used to reflect the fact that management requires sufficient time to successfully adopt, institutionalise and implement TQM programmes (see Deming, 1986; Garvin, 1988). Deming (1986), for example, stressed a clear relationship between certainty in management position and long-term benefits of TQM. The second criterion was consistent with the notion of TQM as a strategic tool, requiring several years to be successfully implemented (Garvin, 1988). Deming (1986) pointed out that it would take at least seven years to change organisational culture. The third criterion was based on the notion that a VP would act as a means to integrate and assist with the introduction of continuous improvement activities (Crosby, 1979).

The three cases were members of one of the National Partner Organizations (NPOs) of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in the UK. The initial contact for this study was the EFQM regional representative. A joint letter was then prepared and sent to each general manager, explaining the objectives of the research and its potential implications for practising managers, seeking their assistance to encourage their senior and middle managers to take part in the study. Four weeks later, a reminder letter identical to the first was mailed to the managers who had not yet responded. A total of 21 general managers confirmed the interest of their organisations to participate in the study. To represent a diverse cross-section of organisations, these cases were then compared and contrasted in terms of the three aforementioned criteria with the addition of their size, economic sector, nature of operations, content of TQM programmes, focus of TQM, experience with TQM practices, initial and current drives for TQM, rationale for adoption of TQM, means of introducing TQM and more importantly the effectiveness of TQM programmes. Subsequently, three cases in three sectors were chosen for study, representing ‘strategic research sites’ (Merton, 1987) or ‘critical cases’ (Goldthorpe et al., 1968) for our research, not least because of their similarity in many grounds, *inter alia*, similar management tenure, long experience with TQM implementation, long-established quality departments and specifically similar level of TQM effectiveness. Despite the difference in the economic sector of the cases which potentially limited the generalisation of the findings, the three cases were sufficient analogue of each other and shared a number of, as Tripp (1985) put it, “high salient attributes” in particular with regard to the planning, implementing and the degree of effectiveness of their operations improvement programmes. Such recognition of similarities of the cases could in turn facilitate cross-case comparison and therefore “naturalistic generalisation” (Stake, 1978; Tripp, 1985) of the research findings. For this naturalistic generalisation to succeed, as Tripp (1985) has suggested, our design pattern is a Table which is used as our method of documenting the common features across cases – both features common and unique to each case (see Table II). Clearly, the aim here is to investigate similarities between the three different cases – as opposed to generalising to entire populations.

A major feature of the three cases was their growing interest in adoption of quality-related initiatives. The Electronics case was ISO 9000 registered (see Gotzamani and Tsiotras, 2001; and its TQM programmes were primarily geared towards variability reduction through Six Sigma and design of experiments (Taguchi, 1986; Montgomery, 2004) and elimination of high failure rates. Due to its repetitive manufacturing processes and standardised products (i.e. high volume, low variety and low visibility to customers), the company adopted Six-Sigma to reduce process variation through identifying those processes/products which deviated from desirable performance outcomes. In the Education and Enterprise cases, TQM programmes were being mainly geared towards continuous improvement of service quality and customer satisfaction. They had obtained registration for Investors in People (IiP) (i.e. the UK national quality standard which sets a level of good practice for improving an organisation's performance through its people (Collins and Smith, 2004)), and Charter Mark (i.e. a major part of the UK Government's drive to modernise public services that deal directly or indirectly with the public). Charter Mark is unusual amongst quality schemes because organisations are judged on their results (i.e. the service the customer actually receives). The main focus of TQM-related initiatives was on the elimination of wasted resources through close monitoring of the workforce performance, rather than monitoring work processes; their continuous improvement programmes were mainly run by external consultants; that despite the initial senior management commitment to improvement initiatives, their commitment, as the majority of middle managers commented, substantially decreased during the implementation process (Hansson et al., 2003); that despite the popularity of TQM as a responsibility of everyone at every level (Deming, 1986), the TQM practices were labelled by middle managers as top-down programmes (Beer, 2003); and that the three cases adopted the EFQM Business Excellence Model as the holistic framework around which senior management could make decisions on organisational improvement activities and on meeting the needs of all stakeholders (Rusjan, 2005; EFQM, 2004).

Our main method of data collection was the semi-structured interview (Bryman, 1989). To represent a diverse cross-section of informants, the interviewees were selected according to three factors: (i)

department/function: informants were drawn from the departments or functional areas which had been subject to the changes associated with quality improvement efforts; (ii) role in the uptake of TQM programmes: informants included those who had actually been involved in the uptake of TQM initiatives, either as change agents, advisers, facilitators or implementers; and (iii) rank: informants included individuals at senior and middle levels (Waldman et al., 1998, p. 183). Overall, 68 managers at different organisational levels agreed to take part in the study. Table I provides a breakdown of the number of interviewees.

Table I. Descriptive statistics on interviewees

	Electronics	Higher Education	Local Enterprise
Managerial level: Senior (Middle)	8(18)	7(16)	6(13)
Tenure with company	14.10	10.30	9.70
Gender mix: Male (Female)	20(6)	16(7)	11 (8)
Average age (years)	41.40	45.20	43.70
Education: (college) (bachelor) (master):			
Senior management	(0)(4)(4)	(0)(3)(4)	(1)(4)(1)
Middle management	(2)(11)(5)	(0)(9)(7)	(3)(7)(3)

Note: Total number of interviews = 68

Table II. Analogical argumentation of the cases

Economic sector	Electronics	Higher Education	Local Enterprise
	Private	Public	Voluntary
The nature of operations	Providing products and service electronic assembly, transistor, silicon chips, computer accessories, home electric products, electronic maintenance contracts, providing technical advice on damage evaluation to different users.	Career-related training and development programmes. Providing the essential interpersonal and technical/ work-related skills. Partnership with other local schools and higher education institutes. Offering recognised qualifications for specialist career. Providing on-the-job training in a wide range of occupational areas.	Focusing on practical learning. Make people aware of the requirements of the real world business in terms of skills. Focusing on both individual and team learning. Acting as a liaison between young people and local businesses, employers, local politician for further job opportunities
The nature of TQM programme	ISO 9000, six-sigma, EFQM Excellence Model	Continuous improvement of service quality. Investors in people, Charter Mark, EFQM Excellence Model	Continuous improvement of service quality. Investors in people, Charter Mark, EFQM Excellence Model
Focus of TQM	Reducing work process variance Developing working standards and procedures	Elimination of wasted resources Close monitoring of the workforce	Elimination of wasted resources Close monitoring of the workforce
Experience with TQM	Early 1980s (1984-present)	Late 1980s (1988-present)	Early 1990s (1991-present)
Initial drive for TQM	Top management	Top management	Top management
Rationale for adoption of TQM	Fierce competition across the industry Quality as an order winner across industry	Pressure from government (white paper 1997) High rate of public complaints	Pressure from government (as the main source of their funding)
The current drive for TQM	Quality department and external consultants	Quality department and external consultants	Quality department and external consultants
The scope of TQM-related training	Limited to some of middle and first line managers Basic level of TQM training for shop floor (production) employees (half-a day sessions)	Limited to only 10 percent of customer contact employees and their supervisors	Limited to some of the supervisors and a few of customer contact employees
Effectiveness of TQM programmes	No tangible bottom line effect; creating confidence for our customers; encourage our suppliers to focus on quality.	An overall sceptical view to TQM effectiveness; Enhancing our public image; Of more a symbolic value than real.	Very minimal/insignificant cost saving impact; Improving our public image.

As Table I indicates, 32 per cent of the interviewees were senior managers (n=21), the remaining 68 per cent were middle managers (n = 47). While senior managers provided a perspective on long-term continuous improvement strategies (Beer, 2003; Dale and Cooper, 1994), middle managers provided evidence on actual transmittal and implementation of senior management policies and priorities to shopfloor employees (Golhar et al., 1997; Lowe, 1992). All interviews lasted around one and a half hours and were supplemented by examination of documentary sources and internal reports with respect to continuous improvement policies and involvement of senior and middle management. The interview questions were designed to probe interviewees: (i) on their orientations, understanding and perceptions of TQM; (ii) to understand different experiences with TQM in terms of hierarchical levels; (iii) on the commitment and support of management to such initiatives; (iv) on the effects of incongruency between orientations of senior and middle managers on TQM; and (v) on the nature of middle managers' reactions/responses to any incongruency.

To determine the extent and nature of senior and middle management's understanding of and orientations towards TQM, and whether TQM effectiveness was a function of the congruence between senior management orientations and TQM assumptions, within-case and between-case analyses were undertaken respectively. To this end, Yin's (2003) pattern-matching was used to examine the congruence effects between the underlying assumptions of TQM (i.e. predicted pattern of variables) and the actual managers' orientations in each case. To analyse the collected data and sift through the large volumes of interviewees' responses, Miles and Huberman's (1994) four stages of qualitative methodology were used: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. With regard to data reduction, a data accounting sheet was prepared whereby a tally was maintained of the number of times a particular variable was mentioned in each interview. To display data in various organised forms, the text was coded according to the variables (and terms representative of those variables) specified in the predicted pattern of variables, and subsequently the

averages of responses were calculated as ‘total responses/number of interviews’. This, in turn, helped control for the varying number of interviews per case study.

Finally, in the conclusion drawing/verification stage the focus was on the pursuit of objectivity through enhancing the level of reliability and validity of the results. To this end, Miles and Huberman’s (1994) and Yin’s (2003) recommendations were taken into account as follows: (i) the frequency of counts of responses across interviewees were compared to ensure the representativeness of the evidence; (ii) the frequency of interviewees’ statements was tabulated to ensure ascribing more weight to the relevant evidence and less or no weight to rival explanations; and (iii) inter-rater reliability for each of the cases was calculated (ranged between 53% and 84%) as a percentage of agreements divided by total counts. After the reliabilities were measured, three of the research team reviewed again the interviewees’ responses and associated coded text, and negotiated agreement on all concept counts. The reliability of the coding was finally established with the average inter-rater reliability equalling 99%. Table II provides a summary of these counts and their associated categories which includes references to (i) senior and middle managers’ orientations towards TQM; (ii) the impact of senior managers’ orientations on middle managers; (iii) middle managers’ reactions to any incongruence; and (iv) the implications of the existing incongruence for non-managerial employees.

Table III. Text Analysis Frequencies (average reference to the main themes of the interview data)

		Senior Management				Middle Management			
		Positive		Negative		Positive		Negative	
Variable/category		Total	Average*	Total	Average	Total	Average*	Total	Average
Electronics (26 interviews: 8 senior and 18 middle managers)									
	Prevention	12	1.50	0	0	43	2.38	0	0
	Detection	37	4.63	11	1.38	89	4.94	83	4.61
	Proactive	11	1.38	0	0	41	2.28	0	0
	Reactive	33	4.20	9	1.13	91	5.10	54	3.0
	Buffering the workforce	9	1.13	2	0.25	14	0.77	49	2.72
	Self-protection	37	4.63	0	0	93	5.17	0	0
	Process control	7	0.86	0	0	17	0.94	0	0
	Workforce control	44	5.50	7	0.88	101	5.61	2	0.11
Local Enterprise (19 interviews: 6 senior and 13 middle managers)									
	Prevention	7	1.17	0	0	23	1.77	0	0
	Detection	39	6.50	11	1.83	88	6.77	41	3.15
	Proactive	8	1.33	2	0.33	8	0.62	2	0.15
	Reactive	31	5.17	3	0.50	73	5.61	32	2.46
	Buffering the workforce	5	0.83	1	0.16	10	0.77	46	2.88
	Self-protection	23	3.83	0	0	55	4.23	0	0
	Process control	5	0.83	0	0	14	1.10	0	0
	Workforce control	44	7.33	1	0.33	97	7.46	0	0
Higher Education (23 interviews: 7 senior and 16 middle managers)									
	Prevention	6	0.86	0	0	21	1.31	0	0
	Detection	42	6.00	14	2	102	6.38	49	3.10
	Proactive	7	1.00	2	0.29	10	0.63	2	0.13
	Reactive	37	5.29	1	0.14	91	5.68	34	2.13
	Buffering the workforce	4	0.57	1	0.14	8	0.50	47	2.93
	Self-protection	31	4.43	0	0	75	4.69	0	0
	Process control	5	0.71	0	0	15	0.94	0	0
	Workforce control	46	6.57	1	0.14	112	7.00	0	0

*Average references to each variable = total number of interviewees' responses / total number of interviews in each case.

The analysis of senior management's orientations towards TQM (Table II) revealed that there was an extremely low reference to 'management by prevention' (1.50, 1.17, 0.86 average references), 'proactive approach to managing quality' (1.38, 1.33, 1.00 average references), 'buffering the workforce' (1.13, 0.83, 0.57 average references), and 'work process control' (0.86, 0.83, 0.71) across the three cases, and that these were highest in Electronics and lowest in the public sector case. However, as seen in Table II, across middle management level, the average references to these variables were seen to be slightly higher than across senior management.

Incongruence/inconsistency, prevention and detection, proactive and reactive, monitoring and increased control, and managerial conflicts are defined as follows. On the one hand, defect prevention—as opposed to defect detection—constitutes an integral part of TQM philosophy. The terms 'incongruency' or 'inconsistency' concern, first, the incongruence between management's orientation and underlying assumptions of TQM, and second, the incongruence between senior and middle managers in their managerial perspectives towards TQM programmes. While prevention means identifying and stopping quality-related problems at the source through greater emphasis on product or service design, detection requires inspection after the product is manufactured with the consequence of rework and waste. In contrast to a reactive approach to managing quality in which the aim is to minimise the costs of poor quality, proactive thinking helps identify what could result in poor quality, with the consequence of preventive actions and backup plans (Hill, 2005, p. 394). On the other hand, embarking on TQM as a strategic decision requires senior executives and non-managerial employees' commitment, confidence, conviction and involvement (Dale and Cooper, 1994, p. 20). In the context of TQM, commitment is defined as the willingness of both management and employees to pursue excellence not because of fear of a consequence, but out of belief in the philosophy of TQM. In the presence of compliance, however, employees do what is required or expected, but no more. Where employees do enough of what they are asked to do, it is mainly because they want to avoid jeopardising their positions.

The notion of control is regarded as a means of providing information or feedback aimed at both monitoring a process and at eliminating causes of unsatisfactory performance. For quality management specialists (Godfrey et al., 1997, p. 561; Dale and Oakland, 1994), the concept of control refers to monitoring the work process. Finally, conflict is a multidimensional concept which can be defined as any difference in senior and middle managers' viewpoints or opinions about planning and implementation of TQM programmes. This definition conforms to Imazi and Ohbuchi's (2002) vertical conflict that occurs in groups of different hierarchical levels, and to Pinkley's (1990) task conflict (as opposed to relationship/emotional conflict: a perception of interpersonal incompatibility) in which conflict is viewed as a perception of disagreement among group members or individuals about the content of their decisions. Conflicts that occur in relation to the distribution of resources, about procedures or guidelines, and about the interpretation of facts are examples of task conflict (Jehn, 1995; Priem and Price, 1991; Medina et al., 2002). The future examination of management's orientations (i.e. prevention and detection, proactive and reactive) towards TQM and the consequences (commitment and compliance; self-protection and buffering the workforce; process control and workforce control) across senior and middle management are outlined below.

Analysis of the Research Findings

The quest for quality initiatives

When we asked, 'what are TQM initiatives for?' it was clear that while there were various TQM initiatives, those adopted initiatives were not necessarily very widespread or embedded. It was the case that the dominant approach to managing TQM initiatives had been conventional inspection and detection system. For example, comments such as: 'We *should* do things right the first time', 'When something goes wrong we *should* try to understand the cause(s) of problems', 'We *should* focus on identifying the high cost drivers in each process' and 'Our quality efforts *should* focus on avoiding rework and waste' were indicative of senior management's approach to quality across the three cases. Thus, while it appeared TQM initiatives were firmly on senior management agendas in the three cases, and a range of

initiatives were being taken, middle managers felt that their TQM programmes were vulnerable to their senior management's conventional inspection and detection mindset. The following quotations echo the views of many middle managers across the three cases in highlighting a substantial divergence of TQM practices from what the organizations' own systems were set up to do, thereby failure of TQM to have a tangible impact on the overall organisational performance:

Although high quality raw material is an important ingredient for high quality products, there has not been an effective management of purchasing activities in place...In terms of outsourcing and supplier selection, lower cost has always played a key part in such decisions...What I mean is that we have started our quality journey with quality as responsibility of everyone both internal and external to our organisation. But we have soon replaced it with cost-cutting measures...Of course we cannot expect to see any benefit in it [TQM]. [Middle Manager – Electronic]

The initial focus of our continuous improvement practices was on customer service. We [middle managers] then expected to observe a sea-change in the way customer service and relations were managed and complaints were handled. Although there has been some minimal improvement mainly in terms of quick response to customer complaints, the old customer service regulations and detailed guidelines have remained unchanged and prevented us from resolving the problems. After many years, there exists a very tiring and disappointing procedure for customer complaint. No one cares to complain. They simply shift to other service providers and this in turn has left us with no benefit in quality programmes [Middle Manager – Higher Education]

There has been some improvement in terms of better responsiveness to our customers. But this does not mean that we resolve their problems or handle their queries fairly. We do not have a set of standardised customer service guidelines. In case of a customer complaint, each of us has their own judgement. Some of us take the customer side and others take our company side. It is interesting to know that we rarely say that customer is right. We have to save our resources from any customer complaint. Otherwise, we [lower level managers, shopfloor & front office] will be held responsible for any loss. So what do you expect of TQM to bring us. [Middle Manager – Local Enterprise]

These findings have close affinity with Kerr's (1975) classic article entitled "On the folly of rewarding A while hoping for B", in that managers can expect employees to rationally do the things that are rewarded rather than the things they say employees should do. As the evidence showed, the folly across the three cases seemed when senior managers were the initial drive for TQM, yet middle level managers were obliged to comply with senior managers' short-sighted approach and focus on inspection rather than prevention irrespective of the quality implications.

In the Electronics case, two contentious issues were identified. First, middle managers reported that they implemented TQM programmes under a very tight budgetary control. As a result, middle managers tended to focus on detection of quality problems, rather than adopting a strategic overview of quality and focusing on prevention. For example, a middle manager stated that his unit set a goal to maximise customer satisfaction through quick responses to customer complaints. To this end, continuous improvement initiatives were geared towards avoiding mistakes and reducing the product defects and variation inherent in work processes. While the application of TQM initiatives can be a lever to higher performance improvement, such a quick-fix approach to handling customer complaints was seen to be the daily routine of their operations with no long-term improvement. In one middle manager's words:

Although our quality improvement efforts seem to be institutionalised, we have not made a reasonable achievement with regard to both diminishing the defects rates and decreasing customer complaints. In fact, the costs associated with finding and inspecting quality problems have always been very high.

Another middle manager commented:

We have been implementing a range of quality management initiatives to continuously reduce variability in all organisational processes and improve overall organisational performance. However, these initiatives are mainly concerned with inspection after the product is manufactured.

In short, the uptake of TQM initiatives was seen to concentrate on detection of defects and did not do enough to overcome the legacy of finding and fixing mistakes associated with traditional quality management. In the Local Enterprise and Higher Education cases, there were again marked disparities

between senior and middle managers' orientations towards TQM. Despite senior management enthusiasm for TQM initiatives, there were far fewer references to it by middle managers. Comments such as 'We wait to see the frequency of customer complaints' and, 'If we do not hear from our customers, this implies that we provide error-free service' were indicative of their approach to managing quality. Such late detection of mistakes can be seen as a detection/inspection approach. Furthermore, such an approach to handling customer complaints neither indicates an intention to move towards 'customer-driven quality' (i.e. the customer determines what to design and deliver) nor changes the status quo. This approach, in turn, coincided with a lack of reference to TQM effectiveness.

Why did management advocate a focus on inspection? Senior management emphasis on end-product inspection had been triggered by a concern over their own performance in the eye of their board of directors. As a result, their decisions were concerned with the short-term direction of the TQM initiatives and a reactive approach to handling quality-related problems. Clearly, these decisions had implications for the middle managers. Middle managers' decisions in the three cases were characterised by the need to follow senior management and to integrate senior management final-product inspection approach in activities that were concerned with TQM. Indeed, the need for consistency with the senior management approach to TQM became critical for middle managers in order both to meet the short-term senior management requirements and to safeguard their own managerial positions. The quest for TQM initiatives therefore became an operational and short-term responsibility for both senior and middle managers and the requirement was for middle managers to be reactive to TQM-related activities. In addition, the most important consideration by the middle managers was to ensure that they were not criticised for being unaligned with the approach of senior management to TQM. The existence of such a culture of blame did not allow or motivate middle managers to identify and report major quality-related problems to their senior managers. This is similar to Choi and Behling's (1997, p. 41) 'tactical orientation' of senior management in which the use of inspection to manage quality is not clearly related to a larger vision of future growth or excellence.

As the above evidence shows, the actual conduct of TQM was determined by the senior management's orientations towards TQM and by the middle managers interpretation of their demands. While such orientations towards TQM were peculiarly susceptible to end-product inspection, the managerial approaches of the three cases involved establishing a good relationship with customers through inspection and a quick fix approach to handling their complaints. There was disagreement/conflict between senior and middle managers' orientations towards TQM, and as a result in the three cases the potential for task conflict between hierarchical levels was apparent.

The cause of conflict

To further investigate, we then examined the nature of disagreement and conflict between senior and middle managers with regard to managing TQM. Conflict is a multidimensional concept (Amason, 1996; Cosier and Schwenck, 1990) which can be categorised into task-focused and relationship-focused (Pinkley, 1990; Jehn, 1997). Both types of conflict occur in groups of different hierarchical levels (vertical conflict) or between individuals at the same levels (horizontal conflict). Analysing the interviewees' responses in each case, some common themes emerged. First, differences in orientation towards TQM objectives and how they should be achieved were seen to be the main sources of conflict by the middle and senior managers at different hierarchical levels.

A couple of months after adopting TQM practices, we faced a kind of budget deficit. Of course this was a coincidence. I mean there was no link between the senior management's willingness to adopt TQM and our weak financial status. We were told that the primary focus of TQM was on improving customer service. We [Middle Managers] knew that this would be a good start for our programmes and had no doubt that the programmes would eventually secure a kind of cost-effective operations...But in reality, we were forced to cut costs in any possible way in the name of TQM to avoid further budget deficit. So they said something and at the same time we were told to do something else. Of course this system does not work. [Middle Manager – Electronics]

We are not involved in its [TQM] planning. We simply implement it in a way to conform to our top management's requirements. Although such senior management's version of TQM could work for a while, but it has been obvious for most of the middle and supervisory level managers that we do something absolutely different from what we understand of TQM. I am not saying that TQM is not an effective management philosophy. But, relating the improvements made to TQM is wrong. We simply make our employees work harder and harder as we have to. If we fail to do so, we do face disciplinary actions. We [middle managers] believe that any improvement is due to our hard working and close monitoring of our workforce than any managerial initiatives. [Middle Manager – Higher Education]

Like many other organisations, our senior management are held accountable for their decisions with regard to various organisational activities. But when it comes to TQM or other managerial practices, we have a different story. Because they want to make something out of it [TQM] at any cost. They plan it and we implement it. And at the end of the day we are held both responsible and accountable for any relevant inefficiency. In any situation we do our best to make sure that the programmes achieve the planned objectives. But there is a clear gap between the programme [TQM] objective and the senior management intended objectives of the programme. When improvement is made they [the senior management] link it with TQM. But this is far from reality. [Middle Manager – Local Enterprise]

Second, while the three cases experienced vertical task conflict, there was little evidence of any conflict between managers at either senior or middle levels in the three cases (i.e. no horizontal conflict).

When I decided to adopt and apply TQM as our major driver for enhancing organisational performance, I held a meeting with my senior management team...I had no problem with getting their support for my decision. But I recall that one of my senior colleagues then discussed this with two of our middle managers in a rather informal way. Surprisingly, he was challenged and faced a lot of questions in terms of whether our [senior management] proposed TQM programme could achieve our intended objectives. It seemed to me that we were talking about two different issues or even spoke different languages. [Senior Manager - Electronics]

I cannot recall a single occasion that we went against any top management decisions on adopting any modern management practices. We always welcome such decisions as they enhance our credibility in the eyes of the public. [Senior Manager – Higher Education]

In addition to these common themes, some other issues were apparent when comparing the three cases. In the Electronics case, senior management's orientations towards TQM were seen to be at odds with the promotion of continuous improvement philosophy and hence their involvement in TQM did not foster an organisation-wide quality culture. Senior managers urged attention to achieving short-term objectives of TQM. Comments such as 'I was expecting lower costs, higher sales and increased market share' and 'TQM is primarily associated with enhancing product quality' were quite common in their responses. Despite the problematic nature of the short-term approach to TQM, senior management found it easier to manage TQM initiatives only for compliance purposes and in response to the board's expectations.

I want to see quick and tangible return on the investment made in continuous improvement initiatives. This is partly because this measure is used by the board as the main criterion in assessing my performance. [Senior Manager – Electronics]

They [TQM initiatives] are very common across the industry. Despite having standardised working practices and procedures, I felt that we needed to adopt them as a means of improving the bottom line and customer service. I should also mention that we are now very proactive in adopting new improvement initiatives as they help to enhance our image in the eyes of the stakeholders. [Senior Manager – Electronics]

In the Higher Education and Local Enterprise cases, senior managers talked in very similar terms about their approach towards TQM programmes. Comments such as 'Too many issues to deal with every day', 'Quality is not easy to achieve and requires our daily monitoring', and 'Every day new problems arise and it does not seem to stop', were indicative of their approach to managing TQM programmes. Indeed, the main focus of senior management was on resolving daily customer complaints, rather than achieving strategic and long-term organisational objectives through meeting customer requirements.

In our field [higher education] we deal with many customers on a daily basis. They are so diverse. While some of them stay with use for a couple of years, others might have simply a short query to see whether we can fulfil their demands. Most of them will never get back to us. So we focus on accommodating such needs and wants of our diverse customers which are of very short-term nature. It is important to be as quick as possible in handling such queries. [Senior Manager – Higher Education]

One quote from a middle manager at Electronics case illustrates a common theme across the three cases:

When a problem occurs, there is no opportunity for us to share our ideas with senior management. That is, we have to wait to see our senior management's reaction and follow his way of dealing with it. To be frank, their approach is neither quality-oriented nor is consistent with our views. [Middle Manager – Electronics]

In the Higher Education and Local Enterprise cases senior managers were seen to be passive rather than 'actively involved in creating a total quality culture' (Kanji, 2007 p.1). In a similar manner to that of the Electronics case, their TQM initiatives were directed primarily at the short-term senior management requirement for quick returns. In consequence, middle managers spoke of a lack of visible engagement of senior management. For middle managers, senior management involvement appeared to take place only when the impact of their disengagement would be likely to damage their status. This, in turn, had resulted in a considerable disquiet about the effectiveness of TQM programmes. While middle managers lent senior management considerable support in various stages of TQM implementation, they had no voice in proactively shaping, managing and implementing TQM programmes:

I believe that senior management self-interest in the adoption of TQM has undermined its promises in practice. They simply fancy slogans like TQM, Six-sigma or Balanced Scorecard etc...In reality they have no sufficient knowledge of its basic principles. So what do you expect us [middle managers] to do with it in such top-down context? Of course we try to follow a quality approach but this is very limited. [Middle Manager – Higher Education]

What we implement as 'TQM' is very different from its rhetoric. There is empowerment but it is still the senior management who dictate everything. We therefore cannot make the necessary organizational

changes. We are all in favour of TQM principles. But we have no sufficient authority to apply them as it should be...What I mean is that our senior management expect quick results. But we know that we need to be patient with practices like TQM to grow up as part of organisational culture. [Middle Manager – Electronics]

What we [middle managers] do is to match our management styles and approaches to senior management tactical thinking and short term view to TQM. [Middle Manager – Local Enterprise]

Prior to taking up my current position, I worked as head of quality control and quality coordinator in several other companies. Based on my prior experience with and knowledge of TQM, I can say that I am doing something different from those principles underlying TQM. I am a true believer in its [TQM] underlying assumptions. However, I have no other options but to meet my senior management's demands through other non-quality related mechanisms such as setting short-term goals, the use of monetary rewards, and carrot and stick approach. [Middle Manager – Electronics]

Given the many commonalities in the interviewees' responses at each of the management levels across the three cases, it can be argued that, first, TQM initiatives were not being evenly pursued by the senior management of the cases; second, the core ideas of TQM were neglected by the senior management and instead were replaced by their own short-lived intended objectives; third, the middle managers appeared unable to keep a balance between the two competing demands of senior managers and TQM, and instead, though unwillingly, they had to abandon TQM in the interest of the senior management own version of TQM, and finally and fourth, the overall picture was seen to be muddled by the top-down, procedure-dominated, and consultant-led application of TQM (see Knights and McCabe, 1998, 1999; Hales, 2006; Storey, 1992).

Resolution of conflicts

Senior and middle managers were asked to explain how they handled disagreement or conflict with regard to managing TQM initiatives. Specifically, we asked what coping mechanisms senior and middle managers adopted to counteract any existing task conflict. In the Electronics case, senior managers mentioned that the existing conflicts were handled by adopting a narrow view to managing quality.

While an operations view reflects the production orientation of the quality ‘gurus’ and extends the power of TQM in an organisation, it emphasises the importance of tactical and short-term solutions to operations improvement (Pegels, 1993; Black, 1993; Wilkinson et al., 1998). By implication, the evidence suggests that the hard statistical approach is probably the most popular path for improving operations for senior managers. In all three cases, there was also a strong emphasis on the importance of TQM techniques and tools as control mechanisms to achieve long-term objectives of TQM. This was particularly apparent in the following statements:

We provide tools and techniques to our employees to achieve the planned goals of quality initiatives. This approach provides us a clear quantifiable measure of their performance over short-term time intervals. It helps us to know who performs better or who does not fulfil our expectations. [Senior Manager – Electronic Case]

Embarking on soft quality factors such as teamwork, devolved responsibility, worker empowerment towards generating commitment to TQM has often necessitated a challenge to us [senior management] followed by conflicting interests and therefore organisational resistance. [Senior Manager – Local Enterprise]

We [senior management team] are interested in objective measures. We want hard evidence and fact-based data to show that the investment made would pay back with a reasonable return. We want to make sure that the resources spent would bring about a kind of cost-effective operations. Clearly, TQM tools can partly fulfil our needs. [Senior Manager – Local Enterprise]

All middle managers mentioned that their senior management’s tendency to delegate authority to middle and lower level managers and to engage shop-floor employees had lessened over time. In consequence, it is not surprising that a lack of awareness of the vital role of soft TQM factors (i.e. people-based issues) and a cost-benefit equation to its application—perhaps combined with using tools and techniques to get the job done at a lower cost—have adversely affected the middle managers’ view of TQM and its substantive associated outcomes.

To buffer themselves from senior managers' criticisms, middle managers continued to pursue the TQM objectives as they had been planned from the top. This was mainly because middle managers were directly exposed to the pressures of their senior managers. An important corollary of middle managers' orientations towards TQM programmes is that they wanted to ensure full compliance with their senior management. Such approach to quality improvement programmes by middle managers, however, had its own unique characteristics. First, there was either no role for middle managers; or at best a limited one where middle managers were allowed to manage the TQM programmes but only on senior management's terms. Second, to comply with the senior management's terms, it appeared that in the three cases middle managers had to rely heavily on controlling the workforce rather than work-related processes, as demonstrated in the following comments:

I have to continuously monitor my staff to ensure that they pursue the set of TQM-related policies determined by senior management. [Middle Manager – Higher Education]

Senior managers are too likely to criticise us for any poor performance...We have therefore no choice but to exercise control over the workforce in the name of work process control. [Middle Manager – Electronics Case]

TQM techniques buffer us from unpleasant and sometimes unfair senior management criticisms. We therefore need to make sure that they are being used appropriately by our workforce. Indeed, what we have is a kind of workforce control rather than work process control. [Middle Manager – Local Enterprise]

We all wish to apply and follow TQM assumptions as it should be. We have the knowledge and experience. We always put into place the necessary resources to make it work. But the reality is what the senior management want. To operationalise the senior management's version of TQM, we have to ignore its basic promises. We talk about empowerment during briefing sessions, but exert tighter control mechanisms during the implementation. That's not what we want. That's what we have to. [Middle Manager – Electronic]

As a result, in the three cases, the need to consider people-based approaches to quality improvement was less apparent by middle managers. Whereas TQM emphasises process control, middle managers were seen to exert more control over the workforce rather than the work processes. However, workforce control is inconsistent with the existing theory, which suggests that an appropriate persistence to support and motivate employees from the top is required to sustain quality improvement efforts over time (Waldman et al., 1998; Bennis, 1999). The evidence from the cases highlighted two other related concerns. First, there were few indications of continual commitment from senior management to support quality initiatives and motivate employees:

Despite the initial surge of interest of our senior management in quality improvement initiatives, there has not been a visible engagement and involvement on their part (Middle Manager – Higher Education).

In fact we do our job as it has been prescribed by the external consultants, followed by short-term senior management scrutiny. [Middle manager – Local Enterprise]

I can say for certain that instability in our senior management support of quality-related programmes and the workforce not only has been a major barrier to their successful implementation but also has resulted in middle managers to feel anxious and pressured. [Middle Manager – Electronics]

Second, the source of variability in senior management support and commitment appeared to be a matter of mindset concerning what was required of them and how to provide tangible and short-term results to the board. In the Electronics case, senior managers talked about the conditions of instability and heightened international competition; in the Local Enterprise and Higher Education cases discussion of attracting funds from government to secure long-term survival (Cunningham, 1999), and resolving the problems of low effectiveness were seen as the key contextual drivers .

Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

The purpose of this paper was to clarify and analyse the effects of incongruence between senior managers' orientations and underlying assumptions of TQM on middle managers' own orientations and on TQM itself. The three cases provided particularly strong examples of how senior managers could

adopt and implement TQM based on their style rather than in a manner consistent with TQM philosophy. The findings provide support for the argument that TQM programmes that are not managed and implemented congruent with the underlying assumptions of TQM are less effective than TQM programmes in which the fit is more well achieved (see Knights and McCabe, 1997; Sila and Ebrahimpour, 2005; Rungtusanatham *et al.*, 2003; Mehra *et al.*, 2001).

Analysing figures shown in Table III ('Text Analysis Frequencies), some conclusions can be reached about a clear gap and division between two different types of managerial orientations. We label the first one as '*drivers*' and the second one as '*obstructions*' (see Lewin, 1951). *Drivers* are those which are central to an effective quality improvement programme (i.e. prevention, proactive management, buffering the workforce, process control). As discussed earlier, across middle management level, the respondents from the three cases mentioned these factors positively (e.g. 2.38, 2.28, 0.77, 0.94 for the Electronics case) and that the average references to these variables (except buffering the workforce) across middle management level were higher than senior management level (e.g. 2.38 and 1.50; 2.28 and 1.38, 0.77 and 1.13; 0.94 and 0.86 for the Electronics case). *Obstructions*, on the other hand, are those issues which impede transition to a stable total quality environment (i.e. detection, compliance, self-protection, workforce control). Interestingly and in contrast to the average references to drivers across senior and middle management levels, the average references to these variables were also higher by middle management across the three cases. However, all the three cases had negative responses to these factors, and this was also higher across middle management level. While senior and middle managers from the three cases mentioned these factors positively (e.g. '4.63 and 4.94', '4.20 and 5.10', '4.63 and 5.17', '5.50 and 5.61' for the Electronics case), there was an extremely high negative mention of these factors across middle management level (e.g. '4.61, 3.0'; '3.15, 2.46' and '3.10, 2.13' in the Electronics, Local Enterprise and Higher Education cases, respectively). For example, while middle managers across the three cases mentioned that 'management by detection' and a 'reactive approach' to managing quality-related problems were integral parts of their managerial perspectives to TQM, they

acknowledged the incongruence between these practices with the assumptions of quality management. In one middle manager's words, "I do not feel comfortable and satisfied with the way I manage the TQM programmes. Although I am willing to effectively manage the programmes I am unable to do more or go beyond this". In a similar vein, other middle managers stated that: "It is the senior manager approach that reinforces our perspective to managing TQM. That is, we need to behave in a way that is consistent with senior management's way of doing things rather than TQM principles". These findings have close affinity with Zbaracki's (1998) study of TQM in that the symbolic value of TQM supplants its technical value and that senior managers use the rhetorical TQM to gain legitimacy without affecting activities at the technical core of the organisation and that institutional forces/managerial self-interests can distort the technical reality of TQM (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Powell and Di Maggio, 1991). Likewise, in line with Kerr's (1975) classic paper, such rhetorical presence of TQM encourages behaviour contrary to the TQM intended objectives. As the evidence showed, the three cases were not immune to the follies of senior managers' rhetorical TQM.

Our study finds that the degree of incongruence between senior and middle managers' orientations towards TQM can have serious effect on its success. While middle managers' (and other non-managerial employees') work effectiveness is viewed as a direct function of the quality of the systems that senior managers create (Juran, 1974; Ishikawa, 1985; Deming, 1986; Hackman and Wageman, 1995, p. 311), senior management's orientations towards TQM was seen to have a serious effect on or even be antithetical to the underlying assumptions of TQM. It can also be suggested that congruence between senior and middle managers' orientations towards TQM can be regarded as a useful litmus test of the authenticity of the adoption of TQM initiatives. Altogether, our findings lead to a number of contributions and implications for both theory and practice.

In respect to theory, an important contribution of the paper is derived from the examination of TQM failure through the lens of organisational theories –i.e. Pelz Effect (Pelz, 1952). While previous research attributed TQM failure to factors such as a lack of integration between quality management and

everyday business practices (see Chang, 1993), difficulty in winning managerial commitment (Wilkinson *et al.*, 1992; Choi and Behling, 1997; Soltani, 2005), problems of adapting HR practices to support TQM (Delbridge, 1995; Soltani *et al.*, 2006), the effects of recession and restructuring (Redman *et al.*, 1996; Jones, 1997), and the poor implementation—to name but a few (see for further details, Redman and Grievies, 1999; Soltani *et al.*, 2008), the key theoretical contribution of this study stems from the finding that TQM initiatives are vulnerable to the incongruence of senior management's orientations with TQM underlying assumptions and with middle management own orientations towards TQM. As the results show, despite the well-established TQM systems of the three cases which could be regarded as examples of best practice in their own sectors, their TQM systems appeared to be fundamentally flawed. Such findings support Argyris and Schön's (1974) theories of action –i.e. theory in use and espoused theory – in that both senior and middle managers had their own mental maps with regard to how to manage the TQM interventions. As we observed, the self-interests of senior management (and of middle management as a function of senior management's orientations) guided their approach towards TQM rather than the TQM theories. While the effectiveness of TQM programmes could only result from developing congruence between the managers' stated orientations – i.e. their espoused theory – towards TQM and their associated observable behaviours –i.e. their theory in use – there was a clear gap between the orientations that governed managers' actions and managers' actual behaviours, thereby failing to lead to desired TQM outcomes (Argyris and Schön, 1981). While based on the Argyris and Schön's (1974) theories of action, the theory that actually governs managers' actions might or might not be compatible with their espoused theories, and that individual managers might or might not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories (Argyris and Schön, 1981, p.7), we found that both managerial levels were aware of the fact that their orientations towards TQM did not move the firm to a substantially higher level of performance. Rather, their orientations towards TQM seemed to be motivated purely by their self-interest which indeed outweighed their organisational self-interests.

Linked to these findings is the contribution derived from the nature of middle managers' resistance to TQM. TQM is viewed as an organisation-wide strategic change programme not least because all organisational functions need to be integrated in a model underpinned by a systems approach because the cultural factors of organisation play a significant role in its success (see Prajogo and McDermot, 2005; Becker, 1993; Larsson et al., 1996; Powel, 1995). As most strategic change programmes (TQM included) aim to improve organisational performance, one of the consistent findings in quality management research is that it has faced substantial middle and supervisory level management resistance. While the resistance to strategic change programmes stem from a variety of person and system-level sources, research on operations improvement initiatives such as TQM often attributes resistance to cultural clashes (see Larsson et al., 1996; Buono and Bowditch, 1989). In contrast to TQM theory and existing empirical evidence, which suggest that TQM changes the role of middle managers from holders of expert power to facilitators and that removal of expert power is perceived as a significant threat by many middle managers, our results suggested that middle managers counteracted and resisted such associated threats by adopting three different coping strategies: (i) agreeing about TQM objectives in a way to prioritise and fulfil their own self-interests, (ii) exercising greater power and control over the first line managers and non-managerial employees, and (iii) compliance with senior management's way of managing TQM. As noted by Wilkinson *et al.* (1997: 512), "instead of resisting the introduction of TQM, middle managers prefer to go along with it by emphasising the hard controlling aspects of TQM as a way of maintaining the existing power relationship" – as opposed to softer behavioural and cultural aspects of TQM. In contrast to the notion of organisational strategising (Whittington, 2001) of initiatives such as TQM (Garvin, 1988), in that both the micro-level processes and practices as well as organizational members need to work together to construct and enact the organisation-wide long-term TQM objectives, middle managers appeared to have little input into decision making. In consequence, while they had the desire to grasp the value of TQM, they were also

suspicious of the true senior management's intention of TQM adoption (see Balogun and Johnson, 2004, p. 504; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003).

To overcome their suspicious mindset of senior management's true rationale for TQM and to minimise any potential conflict with senior managers while also implementing their requirements, middle managers pursued one central feature of the rational-bureaucratic type of organisation, namely, greater control over the workforce (Weber, 1947; Stoner et al., 1996; Baxter and Hirschhauser, 2004). Additionally, our findings have close affinity with Adler's (1999: 45) argument about the impediments to the enabling-related programmes (such as TQM): 'a shift from the coercive approach to the enabling one requires managers to give up unilateral control and the material and psychological rewards that go with it'.

Previous research on organisational conflicts has identified task-focused conflict as a productive form because it can improve decision-making outcomes and group productivity. It does so by increasing decision quality through incorporating Devil's Advocacy roles and constructive criticism (Cosier, 1977; Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1997). It appears, however, that the incongruence between senior and middle managers towards TQM (i.e. task conflict) has not helped the managers to perform better or TQM to be more effective. An important corollary of this finding is that non-managerial employees are regarded as the main source of variation in organisational performance, rather than systems-level features as emphasised by TQM (Soltani et al., 2004).

In the three cases, middle management compliance (i.e. focusing on what they are required or expected to do) with senior management was seen to be an attractive option to protect their position. Such mismatch between senior and middle managers' orientations followed by middle managers' compliance in turn had implications for the effectiveness of TQM programmes. As Young has argued, adopting change initiatives "does not necessarily indicate an intention to change the status quo. It can be seen, rather, as a declaration or symbolic ratification of current practice, an affirmation that customary behaviour conforms to the canons of acceptability" (1987, p. 98). For example, in the three cases

extensive external support was sought in designing and implementing their TQM initiatives. In Higher Education and Local enterprise cases, the service provision was either statutory or the service provider seemed to have a monopoly on their provision (Donnelly and Dalrymple, 1996). Such consultant-oriented TQM programmes can be ‘pale or highly distorted versions of what TQM gurus had laid out’ (Hackman and Wageman, 1995, p. 338), and raises concerns about the organisation’s rationale for pursuing TQM and whether an adequate understanding of TQM exists. In the light of the current study, it is argued that while the three cases adopted a range of TQM initiatives towards continuous improvement and the highest quality of output, their TQM programmes were more (to echo Hackman and Wageman, 1995: 336) “window-dressing than real, as in a programme that exhorts people to alter their behaviour but that requires managers to do little other than issue the exhortation”. In this case, as Hackman and Wageman asserted, “implementation is easy, but the old organisational structures and systems remain untouched and continue to generate the same behavioural dynamics as before”. Indeed, across the three cases, TQM was seen to be implemented without threatening top-down managerial control of the organisation and that employees had to adhere closely to the work procedures and standards that were developed by senior management.

In contrast to previous quantitative-dominated research on TQM, our study contributes methodologically through adopting a qualitative approach. We adopted a set of multiple case studies of different multiple entities for the purpose of cross-unit comparison. The three cases chosen for inclusion in this study were at the leading edge in that they had long experience of TQM; they were at the forefront in pursuing other quality-driven initiatives; they were recipient of several national quality awards such ISO 9000 series, Investors in People, and Charter Mark; and they had well-established working standards and procedures in place with effective control mechanisms. Similar to previous qualitative research (e.g. Waldman *et al.* 1998), to close the gap between the quantitative and qualitative research, the interview data was analysed using Miles and Huberman (1994) four stages of data analysis. This approach, as Bryman (1989) and Waldman *et al.* (1998, p. 185) have pointed out, is an example of how qualitative research

can include some degree of quantification, and thus, offers support for the view that the difference between qualitative and quantitative research may not always be so distinct. This in turn has improved validity and reliability of the research findings and the potential to generalise findings to other similar contexts. While the cases were different in terms of economic sectors, we concentrated on naturalistic generalisation –i.e. the process of “recognizing the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context and by sensing the natural co-variations of happenings” (Stake, 1978). In line with Tripp’s (1985) classification of similarity statements –i.e. literal, metaphorical and analogy – we focused on literal similarity in that the “high-salient attributes” which were common among the three cases were identified (Table II documents the comparable features/the high-salient attributes of the cases).

In short, consistent with previous research (e.g. Legge, 1995; McCabe and Wilkinson, 1998; Wilkinson, and Willmott, 1995; Rees, 2001) central messages of this study can be summarised as follows:

- Despite TQM being around for many years, and despite the case study organizations being at the leading edge, in practice TQM is still driven by an inspection and quality control approach, rather than ‘right first time’;
- TQM is still a top-down process based on a culture of procedure-dominated with a heavy bureaucratic base;
- Senior managers focus on control, especially of the work force, rather than long-term, continuous improvement;
- Organizations are still hierarchical, as opposed to the image of post-bureaucracy; and
- TQM in practice is still a long way from the rhetoric of the textbooks.

It is therefore not surprising to argue that there is no evidence that TQM principles have become any more embedded than they were when TQM was new, and that this result is convincing not least because the three chosen organizations really were leading edge cases that should exemplify current best practice. Implicit in the above discussion are several points which deserve further attention in future research.

- *Mutual interests*: when the degree of senior management understanding of TQM is low, middle managers' tendency to match their needs and self-interests with the needs of senior managers or to cooperate and coordinate their efforts to fulfil their senior managers' requirements is likely to be higher. Therefore middle managers' compliance to senior management requirements—as opposed to commitment to TQM—should be further developed.
- *Senior management and TQM effectiveness*: effectiveness of TQM as a function of senior management's understanding of TQM; and the resulting congruence between senior and middle managers' orientations towards TQM that follows.
- *Middle managers' role in TQM*: the impact of middle managers' role on TQM effectiveness is indirect through senior management's orientations towards TQM. The question could be further explored: when there is congruence between senior and middle managers' orientations toward TQM (i.e. middle managers follow senior managers' orientations towards TQM), whether the introduction of TQM would not expose middle managers to undue risk.
- *Implications of incongruence for middle managers*: whether the incongruence between senior management's orientations and TQM's underlying assumptions could convey a substantive message to middle managers, namely, that low effectiveness of TQM should be attributed to non-managerial employees.
- *Extending the study*: in the current research the views of senior and middle managers were sought. Clearly, first-line managers and shopfloor employees (absent from our study) are not unimportant and taking them into consideration would be especially critical in understanding the overall impact of senior management's orientations towards TQM. Furthermore, in the current study, a multi-case study approach was adopted. Despite the strengths of this method in particular with regard to the ability to examine a topic in great depth, to allow thorough examination of numerous factors and nuances, and to provide a richness of description and first-hand observation of phenomenon in a natural setting – to name but a few – it is not with its

limitations. For example, its inability or limitation to generalise results from a few organisations to a broader population and more importantly a good chance of bias on the part of the researcher(s) in terms of interpretation can be substantially mitigated with the use of this technique (see Ying, 1989; Eisenhardt, 1989). To develop an accurate account of the research phenomena, the use of mixed methodology or multiple perspectives offered by multiple empirical methods should serve as a basis for future research (see Boyer and Swink, 2008).

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