

# The School Unit in Crisis: The Appeal to Total Quality Management (TQM)

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**Abstract**—It is increasingly observed that schools often fail to achieve their goals, with rising rates of students who are uninterested in lessons, do not acquire knowledge, or even drop out of school prematurely. This data underscores the urgent need to find ways to improve the quality of education. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a method that was initially used in businesses but has since found application in educational institutions to enhance teaching and all processes taking place within them.

Specifically, Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management system aimed at maximizing the value of the provided product. This is achieved through customer participation, feedback, as well as the involvement of all employees in the decision-making process. The philosophy of TQM is based on the continuous satisfaction of customer requirements while simultaneously reducing costs (Oikonomou, 2010). The effort to optimize processes and products is a collective one, and customers are considered an extension of the organization. Ideas, suggestions, and knowledge are disseminated horizontally across all departments of the organization to ensure effective communication, collaboration, and alignment around a common vision (Georgada & Xenikou, 2007). These principles can be applied not only in businesses but also in educational organizations, with students assuming the role of customers.

In light of Total Quality Management, this paper will present how the principles and general philosophy of TQM can be applied in a school unit. A case study of a school will be examined, and based on its characteristics, changes will be proposed using TQM principles to achieve improvements in the provided services and processes.

**Keywords**— Education; School Unit; Total Quality Management (TQM); Crisis; Implementation

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Total Quality Management in Education

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a strategic choice made by senior management, aimed at creating an organizational culture that maximizes customer satisfaction (Goetsch & Davis, 2017). In education, the benefits of implementing TQM in schools do not stem

from an increase in workload, but rather from the "elimination of errors that occur in various organizational and individual processes, including teaching and research processes" (Zavlanos, 2003, p. 162). The philosophy of TQM is based on three structural principles: a focus on customer and stakeholder satisfaction, employee involvement and the promotion of teamwork, and a focus on process improvement (Oikonomou, 2010).

More specifically, the first principle is perhaps the core of TQM, as the ultimate goal of all processes is customer satisfaction, which, in this case, refers to the satisfaction of students. Therefore, it is important for the school unit to identify and recognize the needs of students in order to select ways and methods to meet them. In this way, learning outcomes will improve (Mukhopadhyay, 2005). What distinguishes TQM from other strategic approaches is its focus on the satisfaction of all stakeholders, including teachers, the principal, parents, and the school community as a whole. It is essential for educators to recognize the benefits of TQM and believe in the change, so they can work with dedication to improve teaching and the services provided (Kontakos, Papageorgiou, & Kiouisi, 2007).

The concept of participation is of particular importance to the smooth implementation of TQM. All those involved in the teaching process and members of the school community need to be engaged in decision-making to enhance the effectiveness of the approach. Employees, in particular, should actively participate in problem-solving, goal-setting, initiatives, and decisions to prevent failures and mistakes. According to TQM, working groups are formed both within classrooms and among teachers to facilitate communication and collaboration, thereby contributing to the monitoring and control of each activity (Zavlanos, 2003).

Equally important is the focus on processes that must be continuously improved to enhance services and achieve goals (Oikonomou, 2010). The primary purpose of a school unit is to provide education and meet students' needs. However, educators should not focus solely on this but also on all processes that will improve overall collaboration among themselves, the school's administration, and the smooth functioning of the institution.

Finally, all of the above will create the conditions for continuous improvement and learning within the school unit (Zavlanos, 2003). Educators themselves need to

continuously acquire new knowledge and skills to meet the modern needs of students and society. Furthermore, the principal and all those involved in improving education must constantly seek new ways to upgrade teaching and processes to achieve the goals set each time, ultimately aiming for excellence.

## **2. Case Study: Outlining the Image of a School Unit**

Having examined the structural principles of Total Quality Management (TQM), an attempt will be made to outline the image of the school unit under study and analyze the situation that has arisen based on the incident involving a student with problematic behavior. Initially, it becomes clear that none of the principles of TQM are being applied in the school unit under investigation, as there is no specific strategic approach focusing on the student, processes, or the development of team spirit.

The student who is reported to exhibit aggressive behavior has become a source of conflict among the teaching staff, who are unable to reach a mutually acceptable decision to resolve the problem. The teachers appear to be divided into two "camps," with some insisting on changing the student's school environment, while others consider this view to be extreme. Furthermore, the principal has taken the side of one of these informal groups, failing to demonstrate leadership and decisiveness.

Based on TQM principles, it is evident that there is no focus on the customer-student in this specific school unit. No efforts seem to have been made to identify and recognize the needs of the "aggressive" student, which might have contributed to finding effective interventions. Instead, the teachers are focusing on the problematic behavior and the impact it has on the student's classmates. Additionally, there is a lack of team spirit among the teaching staff, which would have allowed them to discuss the issue, set common goals, and make decisions collaboratively. Each teacher expresses their opinion individually, without a unified approach.

Finally, there is no strategy, planning, or predefined procedures that could have prevented mistakes and facilitated problem-solving. The situation involving the student has affected all processes and the relationships among staff members, hindering their effectiveness and ultimately making it more difficult to manage the issue smoothly and effectively.

## **3. The Causes Leading to the Emergence and Inability to Manage the Situation**

In the case study, the attitude of the student's mother is highlighted, as she claims that her son has been subjected to some form of verbal abuse by the teachers. Such behaviors are unacceptable in any case and reflect the entire school unit's ineffectiveness in addressing issues. The school has not established a collaborative relationship with the parents of its students, which complicates communication and often

leads to misinterpretation of behaviors and attitudes. The involvement of parents could be achieved through various activities or meetings where topics or goals related to the school's operation and the improvement of learning outcomes are discussed. In this way, conditions for fostering a productive dialogue regarding the student's problematic behavior could be created. This approach would enable the expression of ideas and proposals, allowing the issue to be addressed holistically and in a timely manner.

The above is a crucial aspect of the school unit's culture, which, as it appears, does not encourage the development of interpersonal relationships and cooperation with parents and guardians (Koutouzis & Pavlakis, 2018). Additionally, within the organization, there is no team spirit or atmosphere of discussion that would facilitate the expression of ideas and proposals for the effective and immediate management of the problem caused by the student (Kirkigianni, 2003). This lack of teamwork is further exacerbated by the absence of feedback between teachers and between teachers and students. The student's aggressive behavior could stem from various factors, one of which could be learning difficulties. Through feedback, there would be an opportunity to identify good practices and recognize mistakes (Zavlanos, 2003). Furthermore, it would create an appropriate environment for students to express concerns and thoughts, helping teachers to recognize their needs.

Finally, it is observed that the principal lacks leadership skills, there is no vision that would unite the staff, and she is not capable of motivating them in a specific direction. Consequently, in this case, the consequences of the situation that has arisen are magnified, taking on additional dimensions and reducing the chances of a smooth resolution of the issue.

## **4. Selection of TQM Principles for Implementation in the School Unit**

The concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) encompasses a set of principles aimed at finding ways, ideas, and strategies to transform products and services to meet customer needs. From this perspective, it is both a process and an outcome. In the school unit under study, it is necessary to adopt the philosophy and all principles of TQM to improve not only the organization's processes and culture but also the quality of education. However, based on the case study, it is considered that incorporating changes through the application of two specific principles could immediately bring about significant positive results.

First, a fundamental principle that should be implemented immediately in the school unit is a focus on the customer-student. As previously analyzed, it appears that the educators do not take into account the needs of all students, as they focus primarily on those who experienced the aggressive behavior rather than on the student exhibiting it. Engaging in discussions with the student in question and their mother could shed light on aspects that may not have

been previously considered and could contribute to the formulation of proposals to improve the situation. Focusing on the customer-student extends beyond the participants in the teaching process and, in this case, the student displaying aggressive behavior, to include external customers (students, parents, local community, other schools, government) and internal customers (teachers, administrative staff) (Sfakianaki, 2015). Therefore, it is important to recognize the needs and motivations of all stakeholders in the school unit to make correct decisions or avoid mistakes.

Another principle proposed for implementation in the school unit under study is participation and teamwork. The lack of participation in processes or decision-making often leads to conflicts, as seen in this particular case (Karagianni & Roussakis, 2016) (Mitsara & Iordanidis, 2015). There is a divergence of opinions and an inability to collaborate because no working groups have been formed, and there are no regular meetings to discuss and resolve issues. As a result, there is no common vision or specific strategic plan that would help prevent tensions and disputes (Sfakianaki, 2015).

#### **5.Actions by the Teachers' Association and the Principal to Support the Philosophy of TQM in the School**

According to Zavlanos, for the smooth implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in a school unit, it is initially necessary for the teachers and the principal to attend TQM training courses to understand its philosophy and principles and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for its integration (Zavlanos, 2003). Subsequently, it is important for all teaching staff to accept the change and consent to the application of TQM in the school unit. It is crucial for them to be participants in the decision-making process, as this will lead to their commitment to implementing the program (Motwani & Kumar, 1997). Finally, the school unit must abandon traditional approaches and ineffective tactics previously used and adopt horizontal organization and participatory decision-making methods (Zavlanos, 2003). To integrate these changes, Deming's PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) is recommended. According to this model, specific improvement changes are planned, tested for implementation, and then assessed for performance and effectiveness. Based on feedback, it is decided whether these changes should be adopted or not (Sfakianaki, 2015).

This process should also be followed in this specific case; however, special emphasis should be placed on the actions taken by the Teachers' Association and the school principal to make TQM philosophy operational.

Regarding the Teachers' Association, it is expected to develop an approach to schedule regular meetings aimed at discussing problems encountered in classrooms. These could include issues such as lesson organization, tools to improve teaching, student behavior, and so on. Through this process, ideas and proposals for lesson improvement will be formulated,

while teachers will also receive feedback through the exchange of experiences and ideas, and the implementation of changes that will contribute to their personal and professional growth.

From her side, the principal needs to take several actions, as she plays the role of coordinator for all processes (Giangou & Theofilidis, 2008). It is expected that she will organize meetings with all teachers to discuss issues concerning the school community. Additionally, she should create opportunities for cooperation and communication with parents through activities, regular meetings, and other initiatives, in order to more easily identify the needs of the students.

It is especially important for the principal to develop a plan that includes the strategic goals of the school and to encourage teachers to set corresponding goals for themselves (Balbastre-Benavent & Canet-Giner, 2011). Moreover, she should schedule teacher training sessions on the principles of TQM to foster and adopt a shared vision. Finally, she should introduce self-assessment methods, encouraging continuous improvement for both teachers and the educational process. In this way, there will be ongoing support and supervision for everyone involved (Argyropoulou, 2018).

#### **6.Developments Signaling the Implementation of TQM in the School Unit**

As previously highlighted, implementing changes in a school unit is not enough; feedback, monitoring, and evaluation of results are also necessary to determine whether the initial goals have been achieved. Therefore, this school unit will adopt the proposed changes and subsequently collect data to assess the effectiveness of these changes. In many cases, such data are not quantitative but emerge from observed developments.

Regarding the school unit under study, an informal evaluation will take place, with teachers observing the behavior of the "aggressive" student and their interactions with classmates and teachers. This requires that the student's needs have been identified through the intervention activities carried out and that an improvement plan has been developed, involving student workgroups aimed at fostering interpersonal and collaborative skills, as well as promoting a better understanding of one another.

In addition, the extent to which teachers actively participate in decision-making will be evaluated, as well as whether conflicts have become more manageable and are resolved promptly, and whether problems are discussed and addressed. The effectiveness of parental involvement in school initiatives, activities, and meetings will also be observed. If parents are supportive, this indicates that they endorse the school unit's approaches and are willing to contribute to their implementation.

Through the above developments, the effectiveness of the principal's leadership and her



ability to guide teachers and coordinate processes will also become evident. If these developments occur, it means that the school unit is moving towards an improved version of the school, characterized by enhanced educational work and the quality of services provided.

### Conclusions

Through the presentation and analysis of the principles and philosophy underlying Total Quality Management (TQM), the benefits it offers have become clear, not only for businesses but also for school units. The examination of the case study demonstrated that a problem can serve as a catalyst for the adoption of changes within an organization, as its dysfunction is often the result of multiple factors.

The proposed changes in this particular case focus on the student and all those involved in the educational process, emphasizing participation that extends beyond decision-making to encompass all processes within the school unit. The principal's role is pivotal in the introduction and adoption of TQM, as she is the one who will inspire the staff and unite them around a shared vision for change.

In turn, the principal should create opportunities for collaboration and communication with both staff and parents, as well as improve the procedures followed through better coordination and organization. Strategic planning, along with continuous feedback, will enable the enhancement of educational work and the overall improvement of the school unit.

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