

# The Role of Top Management Leadership in Adopting TQM Values: Using Kurt Lewin's Change Approach to Create and Sustain TQM

## Le rôle du leadership de la direction dans l'adoption des valeurs de la gestion totale de la qualité: utiliser l'approche de changement de Kurt Lewin pour créer et maintenir la gestion de la qualité totale

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at exploring how Top Management Leadership (TML) can act in order to adopt the appropriate values for Total Quality management (TQM) in the organizations. Kurt Lewin's change approach was proposed for TML as a useful process to evaluate, change and sustain the necessary values for TQM. Each stage of Lewin's model requires TML to provide necessary tools and methods in order to keep the operation of adopting TQM values on the right track.

**Keywords:** Top Management Leadership (TML); TQM values; Lewin's change approach; unfreezing; making changes; refreezing.

**Jel Classification Codes :** M1; M12; M14.

**ملخص:**

هدفت هذه الورقة البحثية إلى استكشاف كيفية عمل القيادة في الإدارة العليا على تبني القيم المناسبة لإدارة الجودة الشاملة (TQM) في المؤسسات. حيث اقترحت الورقة مقاربة التغيير الخاصة بـ Kurt Lewin كعملية فعالة تستخدم للتقييم، التغيير والحفاظ على القيم الضرورية لإدارة الجودة الشاملة، حيث تتطلب كل مرحلة من نموذج Lewin للتغيير توفير الأساليب والأدوات اللازمة من أجل الحفاظ على عملية تبني قيم إدارة الجودة الشاملة على المسار الصحيح.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** القيادة في الإدارة العليا، قيم إدارة الجودة الشاملة، مقاربة Lewin للتغيير، إذابة الجليد، إحداث التغييرات، إعادة الجليد.

**تصنيفات Jel:** M1، M12، M14.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

TQM has always been related to culture because it is considered as “a way of life” and many TQM gurus confirm that. (*Juran & Godfrey, 1999*) stated that “it took many organizations years to understand that a successful total quality system required a special culture within the organization to sustain continuous improvements”. (*Kanji & Yui, 1997*) confirm the importance of culture for TQM; according to them, “Total Quality Management (TQM) is the culture of an organization committed to customer satisfaction through continuous improvement”. (*Oakland, 2003*) considers culture as an essential pillar in his TQM model and says: “culture plays an enormous role in whether organizations were successful or not with their TQM approaches”.

Creating and sustaining TQM culture can be started by adopting the appropriate quality values, which represent the intellectual aspect of culture. In fact, focusing on planting values in the first place is a good start to adopt any kind of organizational culture, as it is for TQM culture.

(*Schein, 2010*) believes that any attempt to change the thinking system is originally derived from Kurt Lewin. The German-American psychologist developed an approach through which thinking systems can be changed in a planned way. His approach goes through three main stages: unfreezing, changing then refreezing the concerned elements of thinking systems or values.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore how TML can create and sustain TQM values with the use of Lewin's change approach. The paper reveals many quality and culture initiatives can be done by TML in each stage of Lewin's change approach in order to create and sustain TQM values.

## I. Literature Review

### 1. Total Quality Management (TQM) and Quality Culture

Total Quality Management (TQM) is one of the topics that continuously consider organizations. It is related to how to achieve quality not only in products and services, but also in all the functions and activities carried out in the administrative departments and across organizational levels (*Saadi, 2017*).

TQM has many definitions; according to (*Dahlgaard et al. 2007*) TQM is a vision which the organization can only achieve through long-term planning, by drawing up and implementing annual quality plans which gradually lead the organization towards the fulfilment of the vision. (*Kanji & Asher 1996*) see TQM as a continuous process of improvement for all employees and the whole organization. Another definition is that TQM is a holistic concept that considers the improvement in all organizational activities and processes through joint collaborative efforts of all functions and members of an organization that the totality in TQM can be achieved (*Madu, 1998*).

As for quality culture, TQM has always been related to the organization's way of life, and this made TQM highly related the organization's culture. Juran & Godfrey (1999) define quality culture as "a product of behaviors, skills, tools, and methods as they are applied to the work". (*Ehlers 2013*) defines it as "the creation of a high level of internal institutional quality assessment mechanisms and the ongoing implementation of the results. Quality Culture can be seen as the ability of the institution, program, etc., to develop quality assurance implicitly in the day-to-day work of the institution and marks a move away from periodic assessment to ingrained quality assurance". Moreover, "Quality culture is the pattern—the emotional scenery—of human habits, beliefs, and behavior concerning quality. Designing and maintaining jobs to meet the criteria of self-control are essential prerequisites to achieving a positive quality culture" (*Juran and Godfrey, 1999*).

(*Juran & Godfrey 1999*) argue that creating quality culture involves five key elements, so the organization should:

- a. Create and maintain an awareness of quality;
- b. Provide evidence of management leadership on quality;
- c. Provide for self-development and empowerment;
- d. Provide participation as a means of inspiring action;
- e. Provide recognition and rewards.

Creating quality culture can start with planting "quality values" in all employees and inside the whole organization. Organizational values represent the mental aspect of culture; they refer to all beliefs, ideas and models of thoughts that employees possess towards their workplaces and the organization as a whole.

So, if the organization seeks to apply TQM, it must adopt the TQM culture (i.e. quality culture) which require the TQM values to be created and sustained in the first place. And this is discussed later in this paper.

## 2. Top Management Leadership (TML)

Top management leadership (TML) is one of the essential pillars of TQM and has a crucial role in TQM implementation (*A.Mustafa and Bon, 2012*). It is the degree of which top management sets up QM objectives and strategies, provides and allocates necessary resources, contributes in quality improvement efforts, and assesses QM implementation and performance (*A.Mustafa and Bon, 2012*). Moreover, "leadership is a prerequisite for putting TQM principles and core concepts into practice" (*Kanji, 2002*).

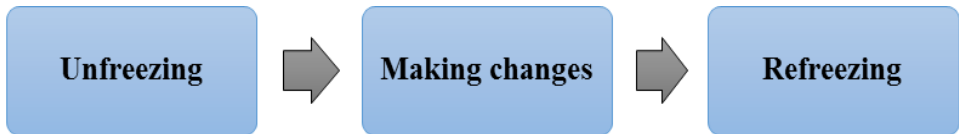
Kanji (2001) makes it clear that "top management is actively involved in creating a Total Quality Culture (TQC) and has a vision". This means that TML's role is prerequisite in every initiative towards adopting TQM values. For that, TML should possess the following characteristics (*Ulle and Kumar, 2014*):

- a. **Values:** Integrity, Trust and Culture. They demonstrate commitment to quality;
- b. **Vision:** Strategic Focus. They establish organizational systems and approaches to support quality effort;
- c. **Inspiration:** Charisma, Communications Skills, Role Model, Motivational and Mentor. They encourage and recognize team effort. They also train and coach, rather than supervise and direct;
- d. **Innovative:** Change Agent. They continually improve communications and learn from problems;
- e. **Systems View:** Interactive. They emphasize prevention and improvement rather than cure and maintenance;
- f. **Empowering:** Focus on Employees. They empower, rather than control;
- g. **Customer Focus:** Society. They give attention to internal and external customers' needs;
- h. **Business and Quality Knowledge:** They encourage collaboration rather than competition.

### 3. Lewin's change process approach

Kurt Lawin developed an approach for the planned change. He argues that successful change in the organization should come out from three main steps. This change approach is illustrated in figure1. below.

**Fig.1. Lewin's change process model**



**Source:** Designed by the authors.

- **Step 1: Unfreezing:** In this step, the organization will make disequilibrium in the subject that is needed to be changed. This means that employees start to doubt about the validity of their thoughts, behaviors, the work methods and everything that the organization wants to change, so that they are destabilized (unfrozen) before they can be discarded (unlearned) (Burnes, 2004). If the organization succeeded in unfreezing the old (existing) items, the new (desired) ones can then be easily adopted;
- **Step 2: Moving (Making changes):** (Gallos & Schein, 2006) stated that unfreezing is not an end in itself; it “. . . creates motivation to learn but does not necessarily control or predict the direction”. So, in this stage, the organization works on adopting the new aspects of the change subject. “The change agents” must be aware of the importance and sensitivity of this stage because they are prone to an activity trap (Schermerhorn et al., 2010); if they bypass the unfreezing stage or they do not know what replaces what, the whole change process would be led to failure.
- **Step 3: Refreezing:** (Schein, 2009) calls this stage “seeking a new equilibrium”; it is about internalizing the new concepts of the subject under the change process, so the new behavior occurs automatically. The change agents work on maintaining the new concepts and making them a part of the normal organizational routine.

## II. Initiatives of top management leadership (TML) to adopt TQM values

(*Juran & Godfrey, 1999*) argue that building a strong quality culture requires two steps: (1) collecting information to determine the present quality culture and (2) taking the steps necessary to change the culture. These two steps can be carried out with the use of Lewin's change process model. Therefore, this section spots light on the initiatives that TML can make in order to create and sustain TQM values as illustrated in figure 1. Above.

### Stage 1: Unfreezing

This stage implies on the good preparation for the change process. TML should spread a sense of "the need for change" in the organizational climate, i.e. review the organizational values that must be changed and find out how to promote them or even replace them by other values that are suitable for TQM.

Creating a sense of "the need for change" means showing how the actual espoused values are no longer valid to adopt TQM in the organization for many reasons, such as the several changes in the external environment, a decreased performance, some problems in quality, or finding other organizations with espoused values suitable for TQM, etc. (*Schermerhorn Jr, Hunt and Osborn, 2002*). These reasons cause the organization to fall in a situation of disequilibrium then create the need for change. (*Juran & Godfrey, 1999*) stress on this point; TML must create and disseminate information on current status of quality, and the message must go to upper management, middle and lower management, and all other personnel.

In addition, the unfreezing stage refers to finding the appropriate alternative values that the organization is willing to adopt for TQM. That means that top management leaders have evaluated the current values, found them inappropriate for total quality culture and found the right alternatives. (*Dahlgaard, Kristensen and Kanji, 2007*) also argue that the need for changing organizational values can raise because of some problems in quality.

Since the unfreezing stage involves evaluating the current espoused values, Schein put a practical model to carry out this operation. According to him, "The essence of the assessment process is to bring together one or more representative

groups in the organization, provide them a model of how to think about organizational culture and subcultures, and then ask them to identify the main artifacts, the espoused values, and the shared tacit assumptions, ..."(*Schein, 2010*).

Schein (2010) also divided the evaluation process into several practical steps and explained how to do each one of them. These steps are:

- a. Obtaining leadership commitment;
- b. Selecting groups for self-assessment;
- c. Selecting an appropriate setting for the group self-assessment;
- d. Explaining the purpose of the group meeting;
- e. A short lecture on how to think about culture;
- f. Eliciting descriptions of the artifacts;
- g. Identifying espoused values;
- h. Identifying shared underlying assumptions;
- i. Identifying cultural aids and hindrances;
- j. Decisions on next steps.

For the unfreezing stage of organizational values, what matters in those steps is the seventh one (identifying espoused values). Schein says that this step goes through asking: "why do we do what we do?" because the answer represents values that employees adopt in the organization and base their behaviors on to get their duties done. Employees could adopt values such as: "we care about solving problems rather than formal authority", "we believe that freedom of communication is effective to get the job done", "we do not believe that leaders should get more rights than the rest of employees", "teamwork instead of individual work" and "we should be helpful to each other" and many ideas that must meet consensus by employees so that they can be considered as "espoused values".

After finding the espoused values, top management leaders decide whether those values are suitable for TQM or not. They can use their experiences to do that through the so-called "benchmarking"; they examine the espoused values in other organizations adopting TQM and try to set those values in their organization. They also can work on applying one of the well-known TQM

models, such as Malcolm Baldrige model, the European foundation of quality management "EFQM" model and the Deming's prize model, etc.

So, if top management leaders assessed the need for change, they will execute the unfreezing stage. Employees must be informed about this process, leaders should convince them that the current values do not support TQM, and strategies and objectives towards TQM require a different model of thinking. This can reduce the employees' resistance to change and go further in the change process.

### **Stage 2: Making changes**

This step starts from the last step of the examination of organizational culture proposed by Schein (decisions on next steps). After preparing the "unfreezing phase" very well, top management leaders continue to replace the old or unnecessary values with other new suitable ones for TQM.

This phase requires high skills from "the change agents" represented by the leaders and every person responsible for the changing process. This phase also depends on the employee organizational learning in order to adopt new ideas and values.

In addition, Schein calls the changing phase "learning new concepts and new meanings for old concepts", it can be achieved through the benchmarking or the trial-and-error learning until the changing operation comes to the right model of thinking and acting (*Schein, 2010*).

As for the TQM values that leaders should embed in the changing process, Woods (1996) argues that there are six organizational values that every organization should espouse to adopt TQM, these values are mentioned as follows.

**Value 1. We're all in this together: company, suppliers, customers:** It is also called "everybody is concerned by quality", this means that organization's success is highly related with cooperation among all employees put together to achieve the organizational objectives. So, this value focus on: making employees aware of how belongingness is important for the organization, teamwork instead of individual work and, the importance of creating employees loyalty.



**Value 2. No subordinates or superiors allowed:** It means that leaders should stay close to employees with positive social relations. They can be cooperative-style leaders to empower employees and give them the opportunity to give opinions and make decisions, and all of that can diminish the mentality of supervisor-subordinate relations. Woods (1996) argues that supervisor-subordinate relations are not what matters, but it is the spirit of cooperation to achieve the organizational objectives.

**Value 3. Open, honest communication is vital:** Woods (1996) stresses the need for open and honest communication to yield true information. He says that the best way to adopt values of open, honest communication is to use the principle of "tell the truth". Senge (1990) also recommends to "tell the truth" because it means that all of the employees and the organization are committed to clearly facilitating the flow of information. Woods (1996) adds that developing employees' listening skill can be useful to adopt such organizational values.

**Value 4. Everyone has access to all the information they need:** It is related to value 3 (Open, honest communication is vital), Woods (1996) argues that spirit of cooperation mentioned in value 2 requires values of access to the information in the organization. He also argues that providing with information can be useful in the organization's effectiveness, especially when leaders empower employees and make them contribute in decision-making process. So, all of that raise the need for access to all the information that every employee needs.

In addition, access to information can help strengthen other values for employees, such as trust in the others, belongingness and loyalty.

**Value 5. Focus on processes:** Since TQM is a system of operations and processes, it is necessary to have values of "focus on processes". This value means possessing the intrinsic values related to work and how to think about duties and goals.

The focus on processes helps employees be aware about the importance of the teamwork and cooperation, as well as the importance of the necessary methods and tools to achieve the objectives.

Woods (1996) argues that values of “focus on processes” are useful for continuous improvement; they go with using the appropriate tools for applying TQM and measuring performance. These values are consistent with one of the Deming’s fourteen points for TQM, which, precisely, is point no. 5: “Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service, to improve quality and productivity, and thus constantly decrease costs” (Micklewright, 2010).

So, when employees understand their duties and related organizational processes and can measure their performance, they will reduce quality deviations and get closer and closer to work perfection, and this is the essence of espousing the value of “focus on processes”.

**Value 6. There are no successes or failures, just learning experiences:** This value is very important; employees are empowered and encouraged to make initiatives and apply their own ideas in their workplaces. In turn, this value consists with point no. 8 of Deming’s fourteen points for TQM “Drive out fear so that everyone may work effectively for the company”.

This value also comes in the context of the organizational learning, employees have the chance to learn with the use of the so-called “trial-error learning”, this method is useful for employees to be more effective, and necessary for the culture of continuous improvement.

Those values, and many others, must first be espoused by TML themselves; they should be the source of culture in the organization. Then, they turn to employees to train them on how to get those values and maintain and develop them.

### **Stage 3: Refreezing**

This final stage means that leaders have finished making changes and made sure that all the new values and concepts were adopted by employees. The “refreezing” stage includes all efforts to restore stability in the internal climate according to the new espoused values, and sustain those efforts by encouraging employees to adopt the new values, as well as emphasizing their importance and merits for TQM compared to the old values, and refining and developing them over time.

Moreover, there are many initiatives that TML can perform to ensure effectiveness of the new values refreezing. One of them is enabling the organizational learning; (*Schein, 2010*) states that "culture change is always transformative change that requires a period of unlearning that is psychologically painful". So, TML should give a period of time for employees to understand and learn the new espoused quality values.

Another initiative is training for quality culture; this can be carried out through quality values, empowered employees, customer focus, collaboration, commitment and creativity (*Juran and Godfrey, 1999*). Socialization is also a useful method for employees, especially the new ones, to learn the espoused quality values from TML. Socialization is the process through which employees become familiar with the organization and learn the norms, values, and role behaviors which are expected from them in particular positions (*Farazmand, 2002*).

In addition, the cultural change process may need a specific type of leadership called "cultural leadership". Cultural leaders are highly aware of the importance of adopting new values instead of the existing ones and integrating them with the organizational culture, and the same thing is for adopting TQM in the organization. (*Daft, 2015*) states that one of the cultural leader's duties is to make sure to deliver a message to all employees that culture is vital for the organization and they must hold it in their thinking and actions. That can be achieved through rituals and ceremonies, symbols and a special organizational language.

## **Conclusion**

This paper discussed how TML create and sustain the appropriate organizational for TQM. TML can carry out that with the use of Kurt Lewin's change approach in order to address the unneeded values (unfreezing), work on replace them with the compatible values with TQM (changing), then strive to maintain and sustain them for the right adoption of TQM in the organization (refreezing).

After bringing about the change process, TML should continue building TQM culture; "A quality culture is a product of behaviors, skills, tools, and methods as they are applied to the work" (Juran and Godfrey, 1999). So, TML should work on the artifacts represented in TQM managerial methods, models and processes, and make them compatible with the new espoused values. TML should also manage organizational behavior to ensure sustainability of the right TQM culture.

Another important thing is that TML must not stop at merely providing with the necessary quality values; they also have to use them effectively in accordance with organizational dynamics required to develop the TQM strategies. Otherwise, the quality values will remain no more than just slogans (Sinclair and Collins, 1994).

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