Issues and Concerns in Implementing Quality Circles in Public School Management in Nigeria

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Abstract

Quality improvement in educational institutions in Nigeria and the world at large is a major concern. Countries all over the world are therefore making concerted efforts towards the improvement of educational standards. One of the management techniques applied in most of these countries especially Japan, Britain and America is the Quality Control circles. Its application in Nigeria raises a lot of concerns. These concerns and issues bother on the structure, techniques; methods; and reactions of management of the institutions in implementing the recommendations of quality circles. These and many other issues and concerns form the major crux of this paper. The paper concludes that inspite of these issues and concerns; Quality circle is a technique that will assist in the achievement of educational goals

Keywords: Issues and concerns, Implementing, Public Schools and Management.

1.Introduction

School improvement and quality of education have become issues of serious concern in Nigeria and the world at large. This calls for pragmatic methods in the actualization and achievement of educational goals. In Nigeria, supervision which served as quality control techniques for the improvement of educational goals seem to lose its values. This is due to loss of confidence in the supervisory reports, lack of cooperation between the supervisors and teachers, attitude of government towards the things of education and high cost of maintaining supervisory personnel.

Countries all over the world who are determined to implement and improve the quality of education have embarked on the introduction of more result and practical oriented quality control measures and techniques such as quality control circles.

Nigeria is not left out of this search for quality, hence many institutions in Nigeria have embarked on the implementation of Total Quality Management. Total quality management (TQM) believes in team-based management. One of the management teams employed by corporations wishing to implement Total Quality Management is Quality Circles. Infact, Oakland and Porter (1999:269) rightly observed that "one of the management teams employed by organizations implementing total quality management is quality circles". The choice for this team based management is because of its ability to build employees trust, communication and interdependence.

The building of employee trust, communication and interdependence help the schools to tackle problems which are beyond the capacity of a single administrator through the pooling of expertise and resources. It also exposes the problems to a greater diversity of knowledge, skills and experience and as teachers participate in the solving of these problems, job satisfaction is achieved. It also enables the schools to identify and solve problems which cut across departmental and functional boundaries. Finally, solutions are recommended to the school management for implementation.

2.Conceptual Definition

Quality Circle (QC) refers to a group of employees usually 5-12 who do similar work and voluntarily meet together on a regular basis to identify, analyze and solve work-related problems in their respective work areas through the application of proven techniques in order to maintain quality standards and objectives, as well as sustain mutual upliftment of employees and organizational goals.

Chase (1983) contends that it is "a participative management tool designed to systematically harness the brain-power of employees to solve an organization's problem of productivity and quality'. Therefore, in a school system, a quality circle group involves a group of teachers (usually 5-12) who voluntarily meet to:

(a)   Identity problems relating to educational standards and quality.

(b)   Discuss them,

(c)   Identity and analyze the causes of these problems

(d)   Recommend solutions to school management and

(e)   Subsequently monitor the result.

lmel (I982) rightly concluded that such group provides workers with improved authority. The work of the group is regulated by a facilitator or cross-college coordinator trained in communicating, problem-solving and team-working in conjunction with group of teachers for each circle action.

The findings are reported to the steering groups or management representatives responsible for implementing and maintaining quality functions. This process enables quality circle management technique to achieve the following objectives:

(a)   Enabling the teachers to change the attitude of "1 don't care" to 'I   do care".

(b)   Helping the teacher to achieve self development by bringing out his   hidden potentials.

(c)   Inculcating the spirit of team work in the teachers since the group   achievement   becomes   a collective achievement.

(d)   Improving the organizational culture of educational institutions   through   the   inculcation   of positive work environment, total   involvement of employees at all   levels, provision of motivational   variables and promotion of participative management. However,   Arora   (2008:433)   further remarked that objectives of quality circles   (QCs) include: Ensuring   harmony,   effective   team   work, improvement of quality, increase in problem-solving capacity, prevention   of   problems,   safety awareness, better interactions,   better   job   satisfaction,   willingness   to   volunteer,   better communication, development of better leadership skills, self   development,   increase   in   productivity and increased employee   participation.

A careful examination of these objectives indicate that a quality control technique of this nature when applied in any educational system will yield a positive result since the teachers will voluntarily and genuinely be involved in the work process. This assertion is valid because workers become frustrated in some way, by the work environment, which prevents the workers from doing job as well as they should be done. Quality circles enable the teacher to identify the problems hindering his progress, analyse them, proffer solutions and present to management for implementation. When these recommendations are accepted and implemented by the management, the teacher feels more committed towards its implementations because the ideas and recommendations belong to him and its failure will challenge his personality and integrity.

These benefits explain why Holley and Jennings (1983) asserted that despite lack of general acceptability and application of quality circles by organizations and educational institutions, a good number of American and Japanese schools are applying the technique to reduce the cost of education, improve morale and increase productivity.

3.Concerns in the implementation of QCs in schools:

Nwogu (2005:67) stated that "group dynamics is a very complicated process and working together in group for a common purpose is a challenging task". In his opinion, differences in opinion, personality clashes, controversy during meetings if not properly managed can lead to the disintegration of circle groups. This makes the existence a defined structure, method, approach and procedure for solution implementation. Implementation of quality circles in the management of secondary schools in Nigeria is not yet well rooted. This is true because Nwogu (2005:6) observed that "although many institutions are applying total quality management (TQM), it appears they fail to incorporate management teams such as quality circle, which is a component of TQM".

These, therefore, have negative implications on the implementation of quality circles in Nigerian secondary schools. The position of this paper therefore is that even when quality management technique is applied in some schools, the implementation is inadequate in terms of structure, methods and techniques of problem-solving, approaches and reaction of school management towards recommended solutions.

4.Quality Circle Structure: Quality circles have appropriate structure for effective and efficient performance. These structures may be altered from organization to organization depending on the nature of the organization. In spite of these differences, Chase (1983), Dessler (1984) and Arora (2008) confirm that every Quality Circle must have the following structure:

(a) Top management

(b Steering committee

(c) A co-coordinator

(dl A facilitator

(e) A circle leader

(f) Circle members

The top management refers to the Chief Executives at the highest level of the education whose support helps or disrupts the circle programmes. In a school situation, it includes the principal, vice principals and Zonal Directors, where necessary.

The steering committee refers to the Senior Executives who are representatives of the management. Their functions include orientation of circle programmes, identification of objectives, provision of resources, authorization of actions, etc. Its meetings are held once a month.

The co-ordinators are senior administrative staff who supervise the work of facilitators and other leaders. This is necessary because a school may have several quality circle groups as there are several faculties, departments and sections. Facilitators are the senior supervisors. Their responsibility includes publicity of the concept, enlisting of members, providing training for leaders and members. The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) Study circle hand book (1999) states that the work of the facilitators include presenting problems to members, directing the working of the group, guiding discussions in the group, coordinating the activities of the group, summarizing contributions of members and ensuring active participation of all members. This calls for innovation and human relation potentials on the part of the facilitators.

The leaders are the immediate supervisors or foremen of a quality circle group. They must be properly trained in leadership activities because they bear the direct responsibility of the group.

Finally, the members of the QC group are those who voluntarily participate in quality circle activities. They belong to the Theory Y group of workers as identified by McGregor's Theory X and Y. In spite of these well established structures, Nwogu (2005) in his study on the 'Application of Quality Circle Management Technique in the Administration of secondary schools in Rivers State' established that there are significant differences in the structure of Quality Circles in private and public secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings revealed the existence of a steering committee, coordinator, facilitator, leader and members in private schools while the public schools had coordinators, leaders and circle members. These differences are at variance with the structures established by Sharp and Smith (1999), Chase (1983), Arora (2008) and Talib and Ali (2002). There should be uniform structures for all Quality Circles for effective functioning of QCs.

Another issue of concern in the implementation of QCs is methods. The methods applied by QC groups during problem solving include identification of problems, prioritization of the problems, selection and analysis of the problem, generation of solutions. After the generation of several solutions through brainstorming and other techniques, the most appropriate solution is selected. This is followed by the preparation of an action plan for solution implementation.

The selected solution is then recommended to the school management whose responsibility it is to implement the solution. These methods are well articulated and applied by the schools that implement Quality Circles. In order to achieve success during the implementation of these methods, the Quality Circle (QC) group adopts various approaches such as trial and error, hill climbing, breaking problems into sub units,

contradiction of problems, flashback and comparing of information obtained. These cannot be achieved without the application of techniques such as brainstorming, voting to achieve consensus, cause-and-effect analysis, collection of data etc.

At the end, there is an evaluation of the recommended solutions. Based on the results of the evaluation, the entire problem can be adjusted, resolved or revisited. Quality circle groups do not implement solutions. The solutions are recommended to management for implementation. Therefore, management reaction is another issue of concern in the implementation of quality circles. Arora (2008:442) contends that Quality Circle Management technique believes in the principle of voluntary use of human mind for best results and that a man who does the job understands the problems of the job more than any other person.

Based on this principle it is expected that management should:

(a) Recognize and reward the workers' efforts

(b) Offer monetized incentives

(c) Provide training for both members and QC trainers

(d) Accept and implement recommendations.

Unfortunately, one of the problems or concerns in the implementation of QCs in public secondary schools is lack of management support. Research results from Tang and Edie (1992) on the attributions of Quality Circle failure reveal that "the most important thought by respondents to contribute to Quality Circle failure was lack of management support followed by lack of quality circle members." In another related study Tang and Edie (1992) found out that management initiated QCs solved their problems significantly faster and solved more problems than did self-initiated QCs. Self-initiated QCs had low level of upper management support.

Nwogu (2005) also found out that public and private schools management reacted negatively to recommendations from QC groups. Specifically the study established that:

(a) Management did not accept most of the recommendations

(b) Management fears that solutions and recommendations are against them

(c) Management fears that QC groups may usurp their powers

(d) Employee unions are against some of the recommendations

(e) Management fears that circle groups may become too popular

(f) Management does not motivate Quality Circle groups.

These issues and concerns on the reactions of management are serious threats to the actualization of quality circles in public schools.

These negative tendencies are counter-productive because Lillrank (1988:16) affirmed that "The Quality Circle Control (QCC) activity should be a part of company-wide QC activities. The activity must be coordinated other quality improvement goals and activities and enjoy support and recognition from the management".

The teacher who is a member of a quality circle group becomes frustrated when the recommendations are not implemented. Nigerian managers are noted for indifference towards the things which yield no direct monetary value to them. Definitely some of the recommendations of the QC groups may be against some of this mismanagement syndrome. These issues and concerns must be positively addressed before QCs can be effectively implemented. Teachers are human beings and would be interested in the quality of their products. But negative reactions from the government and management will affect their morale and hence inhibit productivity.

5. Implications for School Management

Supervision of instruction has been one of the oldest forms of achieving quality in education delivery. Unfortunately, most teachers have become dissatisfied with supervisory activities since most of the supervisory reports have not made the desired impact on quality education visa-a-vise the professional improvement of the teacher.

Therefore, the implementation of Quality Circle Management – a quality control technique which involves the group of teachers evaluating themselves, identifying problems, proffering solutions and making recommendations to management will help in the improvement of quality education in Nigeria. As the teachers recommendations are being implemented by management, the teachers have a sense of belonging, feel motivated and satisfied that their decisions are recognized by the management. This naturally makes the teachers to be more dedicated, goal oriented and committed.

6. Conclusion:

Quality Circle management technique is a form of participative management, a human resource development solving technique. It helps to prove that man will naturally exercise self-direction and self-control in any service to which he is committed. Therefore, teachers not only accept responsibility but seek it.

Although, QC is not generally practiced its results in the achievement of quality education in Nigeria is obvious inspite of lack of uniformity in structure and management support. Educational organizations that are desirous of quality results should resort to the Quality Circle management option since it builds trust, motivation job satisfaction, positive work environment and promotes the culture of participative management.

7.Recommendations:

Based on the foregoing issues and concerns, the following recommendations are summarily made:

(1)   Quality Circle groups should obtain approval and support of   management before establishment.

(2)   Training should be provided for all category of members-management, facilitators, steering groups and members.

(3)   The structure of quality circles should be harmonized

(4)   The methods applied during problem-solving should be maintained

(5)   Managements should motivate Quality Circle groups

(6)   Recommendations of Quality Circle groups should be implemented.

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