

Implementing total quality management in a virtual organisation: thoughts and lessons from an interventionist approach

Wellington Norberto Carneiro and Octavio Ribeiro de Mendonça Neto

*Center for Applied Social Sciences, Mackenzie Presbyterian University,
São Paulo, Brazil*

Paulo Afonso

Centro ALGORITMI, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

Jose Carlos Tiomatsu Oyadomari

*Center for Applied Social Sciences, Mackenzie Presbyterian University,
São Paulo, Brazil and*

Institute of Research and Education, INSPER, São Paulo, Brazil, and

Ronaldo Gomes Dultra-de-Lima

*Center for Applied Social Sciences, Mackenzie Presbyterian University,
São Paulo, Brazil and*

*Department of Production Engineering, University Center FEI,
São Bernardo do Campo, Brazil*

Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to understand the challenges and key takeaways of implementing total quality management (TQM) in a virtual organisation.

Design/methodology/approach – An interventionist research (IVR) methodology combined with a qualitative critical event analysis was used to evaluate the challenges and concerns faced during the company's adoption of TQM and understand the roles of the key players involved.

Findings – Standard process tools such as desktop procedures (DTP), focused teams, and service-level agreements (SLAs) were fundamental to implementing TQM in the company. These processes require the right leaders, but external agents may also be influential, acting as accelerators of change in adopting and using management practices in small companies. Indeed, the researcher acted as a problem solver, bringing innovative solutions to the firm using a hands-on iterative approach.

Practical implications – This research underscores the importance of critical success factors (CSF), such as employee engagement, training, and project management tools. These factors are not just important but crucial for the success of TQM in organisations seeking to adopt the industry's best practices.

Originality/value – This study, conducted as a virtual IVR for TQM implementation, provides novel insights for practitioners and academics. It elucidates the pivotal role of some quality management tools in the journey towards TQM and the role of both internal and external critical players in the process, particularly in small virtual organisations based on innovative business models.

Keywords Total quality management, Small and medium-sized enterprises, Virtual organisations, Remote work, Interventionist research approach

Paper type Research paper



The authors acknowledge the critical comments from the anonymous reviewers that were more than helpful in publishing this paper.

Funding: This research was partially supported by Mackpesquisa — A Mackenzie Presbyterian University research fund.