

Role of Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices in the Lean Quality Strategy (LQS) Implementation: A Case Study of Bank

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Abstract

Lean quality strategy (LQS) is a powerful and systematic approach widely recognized for improving the organizational processes and thus, increases organizational effectiveness. The debate has been centered that LQS is a key ingredient in operationalizing the organizational functions. Further, LQS has the ability to truly develop and encourage the high-performance culture necessary to embrace the organizational objectives. Regardless of the potential benefits of LQS organizations remain to overlook to have quality improvement in their functions. Organizations even persistently encountering difficulties to meet with the challenging competencies. One of the highlighted reasons is not incorporating the HR practices to the implementation of LQS. The study, therefore, aims to understand the impact of HR practices on the implementation of LQS. A qualitative method was employed to collect the data by conducting interviews with 12 participants from both functional and HR departments. Research findings indicate that HRM is the main driver behind the objective of LQS implementation to make its possible by entrusting each department to run their tasks in the best possible ways. It has been concluded that LQS is an influential strategy which has the ability to specifying and improving the business performance. LQS is critical to driving the organizational processes important for functional effectiveness. Some recommendations were also presented.

Key Words: HRM, LQS, Organizational Culture, Organizational Effectiveness, Business Performance.

I. Introduction

Strategic formulation and implementation are paramount to the organizational growth and enduring success. Organizations adopt strategies like lean quality strategy aspiring to improve the structural and production factors for enhancing organizational performance ((Moyano-Fuentes & Sacristán-Díaz, 2012). As acknowledged widely, Lean Quality Strategy (LQS) is an approach to reinforce perceived customer value by incorporating unique characteristics in products and services to get rid of all possible wastages (Hines, Holweg, & Rich, 2004). Organizations usually adopt this strategy to improve business performance by minimizing waste processes, reducing costs and timely delivery of products (Radnor, 2010). LQS targets to comprehend the errors and refusals to the minimum and reconstructs the manufacturing process to produce compelling goods and services (Martínez Sánchez & Pérez Pérez, 2001). Moreover, LQS allow organizations to improve the progress of their policies and procedures related to the quality and better productivity of products and services (Rahman, Laosirihongthong, & Sohal, 2010) and thus, ensures a policy of implementing value-adding tasks to the existing processes (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000). Despite the increasing importance of LQS, organizations still encountering multiple challenges such as obstructions, repetition of tasks, overwhelmed work process, and superfluous staff. Further, organizations do not having the expected changes to sustain the quality improvement (Glasgow, Scott-Caziewell, & Kaboli, 2010; Goetsch & Davis, 2014; Smith, Wilkerson, Grzybicki, & Raab, 2012; Scherrer-Rathje et al., 2009; Bacoup, Michel, Habchi, & Pralus, 2018). Sustainable improvement requires organizations to understand the influence of LQS on the organizational processes and procedures (Rahman et al., 2010; Bamber, Stanton, Bartram, & Ballardie, 2014), referring to it as a mechanism. The mechanism can be supported by the incorporation of human resource policies and procedures by virtue of its upfront alignment with the organizational policies and procedures. In accordance with the notion, the literature available is meager which hinders the portrayal of the management's utilization of HRM in lean quality strategic implementation.

Growing trend of comprising the change process to achieve the sustainable quality improvement has led the organizations to initiate the change process with the incorporation of human resource management (Douglas & Judge, 2001; Amin Sadeghi, 2017). Only a few studies have focused on carrying out the change process by employing LQS with the incorporation of HRM. Lean strategy implementation initiates

at the HR since human resource management entails capacity to train employees about the LQS implementation, educate them about the LQS process, and evaluate the performance for successful adoption of LQS. According to the (Erin Frackleton et al., nd; Amin Sadeghi, 2017), human resource management is critical for strategy implementation in organizations as it bridges the firm's core values and employee performance. Human resource management is essential to trigger the successful strategic implementation through employees. Thus, the purpose of this study is to get focus on strategic implementation suggesting a lean quality strategy with the incorporation of HRM.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Lean Quality Strategy

The lean quality strategy was first given a prominent status in the 1990's in the automobile industry. Since then, this strategy has been implemented in a number of industries. Organizations increasingly attracted to adopt the lean processes in order to enhance business efficiency. The use of lean principles, tools, and techniques have been accustomed in industries like health care, information technology, construction, and banking, etc. since the 1990's. (Poppendieck, 2011) has stated that LQS refers to the continuous improvement in business processes such as eliminating waste by reducing the procrastination, redundancies, and improving human productivity efficiently and effectively. The primary focus of lean strategy implementation is to achieve each milestone in an equitable manner while optimizing raw material and human capital employment ((Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Ali, 2016). Hines et al., (2004) has stated that lean is a major factor contributing to the value formation that leads to decreasing the cost, eliminating errors, and promoting the overall organizational functions.

The current literature discusses the core purpose of this strategy which is to find ways of increasing customer responsiveness by reducing human efforts and inappropriate procedures (Jayaram, Vickery, & Droge, 2008). The lean quality strategy does not only contribute toward achieving the improved business performance, but it also devotes to the industrial existence of the business. Moreover, Suarez-Barraza & Ramis-Pujol (2010) suggests that tolerance towards uncertainty; risk-taking, functional information and internal locus of control are few human resource management characteristics, essential for successful strategy implementation (Paranitharan, Begam, Abuthakeer, & Subha, 2011).

2.2 Incorporating Lean Strategy with Human resource management

So far, we have discussed the significance of lean quality strategy for organizations and successful strategic implementation. (TickFei Chay, YuChun Xu, Ashutosh Tiwari, & FooSoon Chay (2015) have explored the fact that successful transformation toward a lean process requires a considerable amount of contribution to human resource management. This transformation must be initiated by optimizing the recruitment process (Hrebiniak, 2006). In this perspective, Deflorin & Scherrer-Rathje (2012) suggested that transformation through LQS requires people in organizations to attain more accuracy and effectiveness in their performance. Furthermore, LQS can implement more effectively with the coordination of human resources to critically evaluate the lasting impact of employees in the short term or long term goals achievement. Forrester (1995) has stressed to align the policies, procedures, and philosophies of HR with LQS to overcome the impediment faced by the organizations in successful implementation. Organizations adjusted these two elements have experienced that it assists in managing workforce vulnerability (Alagaraja & Egan, 2013). Whereas workforce vulnerabilities are suggested as change resistance, lack of relevant job skills and team spirit, ineffective decision making and employee turnover. Thus, the LQS approach targets the organizational culture to generate favorable outcomes by implementing the lean strategy that must be aligned with human resource strategy to perform as a dynamic partner in fostering organizational functions (Kehoe & Collins, 2017).

A scholar Motwani (2003) has stated that organizations can also examine lean quality strategy through focusing on manufacturing processes as they support organizations in the global business expansion, inventory management, delivery time, labor, quality, and production-related factors. This phenomenon will not only feed the organizations with increasing profit but will also help in achieving customer satisfaction and a successful

image in the market. Research suggests that LQS approach has been implemented in several aspects of businesses, but its importance is not justified mainly with the collaboration of HRM which works as the spinal cord in the organizations (Marianne Khlal et al., 2014). Thus, Spencer Onuh (2010) proposes that improvement in human resource management has aided organizations in a proactive manner to enhance organizational growth. Successful organizations devise techniques and procedures to achieve their financial and explicit goals as well. LQS can enhance the (Valentina Gecevska, 2012) reappearance of R&D investment and deliver cost-effective growth, particularly in manufacturing companies. Moreover, organizations can implement LQS in resolving managerial issues by administering transformation processes.

Although current reviews demonstrated several shreds of evidence of employing lean strategies such as organization productivity, operational performance, product management, and quality improvement, they didn't highlight the HRM role which may streamline the significant contribution in the lean quality strategy implementation. Further, they didn't explicitly mention how LQS facilitate organizations with a desirable culture. In reality of the contemporary corporate world, research has surged to accommodate change and pursue best human resource management practices for enhancing organizational competitive advantage. The purpose of this research is to shed light on lean quality strategy with the incorporation of human resource management to enhance the business competency level.

2.3 Research Questions

The fundamental drive of the current study is to assess the lean quality strategy with the incorporation of HRM with the following research questions.

1. What is the role of HRM in the implementation of LQS?
2. How LQS promotes organizational culture?

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study analyzed the role of HRM in lean quality strategy implementation in a single case enduring lean quality strategy. HR is not available only for the intervention of support, efforts but also been deployed in lasting change and organization optimum performance. Qualitative case study method was employed to ensure the subject of the study. A case study is a popular approach of qualitative research and becomes an emerging tool to describe a "rich, detailed story" answering the "how" and "why" forms of research questions on contemporary situations or events. Becker (1970) explains that case study refers to a detailed analysis of an individual case supposing that "one can properly acquire knowledge of the phenomenon from the intensive exploration of a single case" (p. 75). Therefore, researchers espoused the case study method to develop the micro-level perspective of HRM in a single case undergoing lean quality strategy. Use of qualitative approach in a single case has disclosed several categories, subcategories, considerations, activities, and results in relation to the research questions. The research questions have been answered by using a qualitative approach through in-person interviews, focus group, field observation, and related articles. Interviews arose with senior/executives from both functional and HR departments of a selected bank. Interview tenure was observed 45 minutes to 1 hour for each sitting. Moreover, the grounded approach was employed as an analytical tool to develop a theory that helped in the evolution of research outcomes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1988).

3.2 Qualitative Method

The use of a qualitative method yields more descriptive, inductive, and interpretive meaning to the study. The effectiveness of qualitative research is its power to furnish a documentary explanation of how the organization is encountering various issues. It delivers about the human being consequences regarding their performance, ideas, feelings, and their interactions (Epstein, 1988). The goal here to use qualitative research is to truly recognize the collective organization understandings to explore the LQS imperatives with the

collaboration of HRM. The elasticity of being considered qualitative research is making a deep understanding regarding the specific role of HRM in LQS implementation. The use of qualitative research has exhibited various themes, considerations, engagements, and values in relation to the research questions. Qualitative research helped to understand how respondents deduce meaning from their environment and how their meaning impacts their actions to shape the LQS culture throughout the organization.

3.3 Case Study Design

According to (Whyte, 1958; Dalton, 1959) case study does not only create the capability for expanding on procedures under exploration but also define the formation of concepts and their attributed implications and associated activities inside the organizational framework. The use of case study design helped to get a deeper understanding and rich, detailed story about the subject of the study. Case study permits to ask the nature of the research problems and research questions by looking into multifaceted social units comprising of numerous variables of possible significance in realizing the phenomenon (Yin, 1994). The case study allows the researcher to search organization for complicated interference, relations, or societies. It assures that the theme of the study is well explored and the facts of the case have been revealed (Pamela Baxter and Susan Jack, 2008).

3.4 Select a Case and Fixes Data Collection and Analysis

The organization that was looking for a change in order to uphold its objectives of achieving highest efficiency and effectiveness at lowest possible cost with the contribution of HRM that could leverage and enrich the continuous quality improvement to attain its optimum goals. The participating organization was a bank. Samples of 12 elements were targeted to collect the data including 9 from the functional department and 3 from the HR department. To select and finalize the participants; one condition has been set out by the researcher that participants must involve in lean quality strategy either directly or indirectly.

3.5 Data Evaluation and Analysis of data

Data analyses process has been accomplished by commonly used qualitative research method. In this regard, the researchers found various major themes and ideas in the amount of data collected from the interviews. After completing the interviews, the data were analyzed for general trends, attitudes, and themes, then the results from each participant were compared, and the common themes were extracted. Interviews transcribed were reported by the researchers in the style of case study approach to data analysis. In the view of (Anonymous, 1997) "Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships" (para.2). After collection and analyzed the data, researchers kept on coming back over and over to the data for the purpose of further clarification and fulfill the requirement of necessary implications of the study (Moustakas, 1990). Data were coded through Excel to provide the means and general description of the study. Moreover, trustworthiness was demonstrated by presenting four features such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility adds following features; triangulation of data (in-person interviews, focus the discussion, related articles), sustained participation, persistent observation (one hour interview, follow up emails to assure the accuracy of data). Researchers used purposive sampling to approach the seniors/executives from the functional department and HRM department to enhance the perspective and differing data to assure the transferability of findings in the other context of the study. Elaborated written notes and field observation increased the dependability of the study. Researchers also employed the triangulation of data by focusing (in-person interviews, group discussion, field observation, and related articles). Findings of the study were sent to the interviewees to confirm and verify the data. Grounded theory has been applied to classify and shape the categories through the constant comparative method. Researchers analyzed the data to formulate the perceptions by constantly comparing the events, improving these perceptions, describes their attributes/dimensions, discover their connection to one another, and incorporate them into a consistent, informative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The total of 12 participants and observations permitted for exploiting the strength and differing of data, which increased the exchangeability of findings to the additional framework. Moreover elaborated interviews, written notes and related articles heightened the reliability of the study.

Findings

The results and findings revealed that the implementation of Lean Quality Strategy with the contribution of HRM imparts valuable outcomes which are intrinsically connected to the organizational values and culture. The results show that LQS has enough capacity to improve the business processes with the incorporation of HRM. For instance, HR professionals are inclined to provide training programs, a clearly defined description of the specific task, and reliable techniques to evaluate the employee performance to enhance the HR development programs. Such programs intensively assist the organizations to execute the lean strategy successfully. Moreover, LQS implementation involves optimizing tasks by minimizing staff requirements and cost within the least possible time frame with minimized redundancies. By merging various operational units, lean processes are ensured while workforce existing tasks reassigned. Furthermore, LQS expressed an effective culture through creating an awareness of processes, flow of work within hierarchy while removing wastes and enhanced customer value. Research findings also state that HR is a supporting business activity to achieve the overall organizational goals and being devised as an optimum human capital model which is cost effective and in line with the business dynamics and requirements. HRM has played a significant role in setting the overall budget being the custodian of workforce planning and resourcing. It has also developed an execution plan for all HR interventions to support lean quality strategy implementation.

IV. Discussion

This paper has discovered several perspectives regarding Lean Quality Strategy Implementation with the collaboration of HRM. Result findings show that Lean Quality strategy is best addressed through the removal of repetitive & unnecessary tasks which contribute to decreasing the overhead of the business. The extent of HRM contribution to lean quality implementation is not only limited to reduce waste and superfluous staff, but it protracts to build satisfactory and efficient merger of human exertions, timely delivery of products and superior product creation in the most effective ways (Ifechukwude K. Dibia and Spencer Onuh, 2010; Alagaraja, 2010). The involvement of HRM in lean strategy implementation typically holds identifying the repetition in workflow and mitigating unnecessary tasks in the business operations. Monica W. Tracy and Jamie Flinch Baugh (2006) exhibited that the HRM took an active part in LQS implementation to lead the organization in achieving optimum performance. In the process of avoiding repetitive tasks, HR must lay off unnecessary staff which can be a difficult task in its entirety. Organizations may have to face resistance in the process of lay off unnecessary staff, but the HR managers and labor unions can play a crucial part in this regard. HR acts as a support function and helps in achieving the organization's objectives related to departmental changes, staff recruitment/transfers, training, cost budgeting, employee appraisals and so forth. Dr. Zoe Radnor et al. (2006) described the full implementation of lean and prevailing management control style with the support of lean ideologies and extensive use of various lean gears. In this perspective, various means have been attained regarding lean implementation with the help of major flow of HRM and derived several valuable outputs such as improved workers empowerment, streamlined optimum efficiencies, reduced cost, and enhanced flow of works.

Result findings also show that the lean strategy successfully shapes the organizational culture. HR acts as an intermediary between the organization and the staff for dealing with issues pertaining to reorganization. In the opinion of Wisconsin manufacturer, (nd) organization needs constant enhancement and effective alteration to form a sound culture; it requires tactics that involve the whole organization depending on the challenges including organizational strategies, new tackles, and practices, the degree of discipline, norms, and values. Thus, culture improvement through lean strategy is central and can be addressed by problem-solving methods usually employed by people in organizations. The lean strategy has particular qualities that determine the conduct of employees to share their thoughts and to look for excellence in products, services, and processes. Trent D. Szabo (2014) stated that to streamline an acceptable lean culture; the organization must distinctly eloquent the management attitude, the anticipated performance, formulated structure, and plans to endure the organization in changing its culture to be one that is associated with the logical beliefs of lean management.

Lean yields functional and cultural transformation that is highly contributive in the minimization of waste and eradication of redundancies. The lean approach emphasizes frequently cultivating production efficiency and systematic employee engagement for the persistent improvement of culture organization. Lean acts as a driver for culture change, the significant development in productivity, and environmental improvement; it may influence to reap environmental benefits as well (Goel & v Singh, 2018). Lean is a core idea to maximize organization growth with both tangible and intangible aspects. It creates opportunities to sustain a continuous focus on company objectives with high quality and low cost. Research findings also foregrounded four themes, focusing on four different aspects regarding lean strategy implementation.

Theme 1: Contribution of HR in lean quality strategy implementation

HR has contributed to the strategic implementation as a business partner to all the departments. This act has implied focused attention by the HR to all departments. The stimulus of HRM is most essential in the evolution and reconstitution of employee's day-to-day duties. To disseminate the concept of lean, HR department has followed several prospects of Lean strategy to improve its own functions and procedures. Lean produced values for the clients, internal stakeholders, outsiders, and other users by executing business operations smoothly to lead the culture effectively. Lean entails a bottom-up approach to the engagement of all employees to contribute to the organization growth.

Theme 2: Cross-Functional Performance

Cross-functional performance is essential for the improvement of organization capability to meet customer requirements and the tenure of work to respond to business motives. Cross-functional performance has viewed as a massive enhancement in employee overall job gratification, heightened bank productivity, and performance. Cross-functional performance has the capacity to expand the direction and consolidation, extend the organizational borders, and lessen the obstructions in innovative product growth.

Theme 3: Employee Perception Regarding Lean

The research has observed the transformation on behalf of employees pertaining to work and organization commitments, sense of accountability, and employee willingness to adopt a lean strategy. Lean is dealt as a managerial and administrative approach which oversees accountability of workers in establishing and sustaining a continuous stream of effort.

Theme 4: Recognition of Success

Lean grows into a sustainable strategy for achieving clear and distinct objectives. It leads employees to feel a sense of recognition, motivation, accountability, and achievement. Accepting lean values has effectively transformed organization functions including quality process, customer value chain, cross-functional performance, operational costs, resulting in overall improvement. Lean has provided a long-run, progressive, and exclusive environment for the betterment of organization success.

5.1 Limitations

Two limitations were also highlighted while assessment of the study; one limitation was concerned with the small number of sample size, as the researchers couldn't able to approach a large number of sample size due to limited number of companies employing lean quality strategy as well as enduring complications in attainability of required data from those companies. This may narrow the rate of perceptions of respondents and subsequently, may reduce the generalizability of results.

The second limitation pertained to the scope of the study limited within the context of the single case as well as being restricted to focus only on seniors' executives. Other stakeholder's perception would also have been valuable to get an insight into the study.

5.2 Conclusion

Strategy formulation and implementation can shape the growth of an organization and its culture. The result shows that lean strategy implementation with the incorporation of HRM has presented significant evidence of successful transformation in an organization functions, procedures, and culture. Lean is an influential strategy which has the ability to improve business performance by cutting cost, removing

redundancies, optimizing employee productivity and enhancing their willingness to carry out the successful change. Results also show that the foundation of lean strategy depends upon comprehensive rules, which are essential to deal with the dynamic nature of the business. The principles and tools of lean provide expeditious results coupled with extensive, uninterrupted, and well-informed human resource management. Lean intervenes as an effective system for the existing workforce to ensure better performance. The collaboration of human resource management and LQS is significant to assure constant improvement throughout the organization.

V. Recommendations

This study evidenced that, to pursue continuous improvement and streamline sustained lean management; the bank must assure the suitable culture to support the lean strategy implementation extensively. To do so the HR team of a bank must distinctly formulate the organization management, the anticipated performances, and skills to foster the lean transformation further to be one of the successful organizations in the banking industry. There are three recommendations are proposed to provide the clear roadmap regarding successfully lean transformation to the bank, which is given below;

6.1 Describing the View Points

Bank leaders must explicitly outline and articulate its management viewpoints and the preferred lean actions and skills for its management and staff. Also, the proposed viewpoints should integrate with the other stakeholders both internal and external to enlarge the culture of lean management.

6.2 Springing up Lean Management Circle

The bank lean criteria solely depend upon seniors, even though this notion is considered to be excellent in order to develop the centralize management culture as well as can helps top management for making secret decisions and improve leadership style, but it may create a lapse and massive gap between the perception of top management to lower management; also it could be a cause of disaggregation and weak coordination amongst seniors, middle managers, subordinates and other peers. To overcome these hurdles and fill the gaps throughout management, a bank must develop valuable training programs, the expected lean management performance, and accomplishments for all bank employees who still unaware and uninvolved with the concept of lean strategy implementation to assure and to spring up the lean culture at all level of the organization.

6.3 Rehabilitation of Performance Management System

The bank must rehabilitate its performance management system for all level of organization. For the senior executive level, this would entail the appraising of surviving performance management system to utilize the desired performance and skills into the procedure explicitly. For lower level management the process must be completely rearranged to assure that bank seniors are furnishing continuing response promoting the wanted skills and performance, though at the same time getting down unwanted performance. In addition, other stakeholder's performance appraisal process should be updated according to the establishment of the new appraisal system.

By carrying out these recommendations, it is conceived that the bank would place the strategic groundwork required to transform its culture to successful lean management. By having so, a bank would develop an environment that endeavors to progress the lean management ceaselessly.

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