

Leadership and employee commitment for quality management – a critical analysis of quality management literature

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Abstract

Originality/Value

Our research provides insights to an important field within quality management – how is the value of management commitment transmitted into methodologies?

Background

Common statements in quality management presentations are:

- Leadership is necessary
- It's important for quality management to have engaged leaders and employees

One way of describing a quality management system is to see it as a combination of values, methodologies and tools. A question to study is which the methodologies and tools are that translate the leadership and employee commitment into action.

The value of: “Committed leadership” is a core value in quality management. Another important value is: “Let everybody be committed”. These values could be seen as the values relating to human behaviour as in contrast to other values focusing on quality technology issues. The value of: “Let everybody be committed” tells us that it is important for employees to feel needed, to be able to take responsibility and to be informed – but how do these methodologies and tools look like?

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to carry out a critical analysis of the methodologies and tools that quality management proposes as support to the values of “Committed leadership” and “Let everybody be committed”.

Methodology/Approach

We have carried out a literature study of books commonly used in university courses in quality management. Focus has been on identifying methodologies that support the values “Committed leadership” and “Let everybody be committed”. We have also looked at other values and supporting methodologies and tools as defined in the “Corner stone model”, Bergman & Klefsjö (2003).

Findings

It seems that quality literature is not very clear on how to engage employees and how to motivate them. Preliminary findings indicate that quality management still is relying heavily on quality methodologies and tools supporting the value of decisions based on facts and the value on continuous improvement. Quality gurus like W.E. Deming and J.Juran have claimed

that only 10-15% of the operational problems can be solved at the operational level with the rest being system and management problems. This could indicate that more focus should be on how employees can affect their work situation rather than teaching them quality tools. Quality methodologies and tools are only of help when management leads in such a way that employees are empowered and encouraged to do the right things willingly. When the literature for quality management is analysed we find that leadership issues are not taken up very much. Not more than about 2 – 5% of the pages in the literature deal with leadership. Also, focus of the parts dedicated to leadership is mostly on check lists for important things to do and to know as a leader – like motivation. But there is very little to read about in what way you can motivate your employees or how you can acquire the required leadership capability.

Limitations

The study is limited to the theories found in the most frequently used quality management literature in Sweden.

Value

The topic takes up important success factors for quality management – how to make practise out of the guiding values of management and employee commitment.

Keywords

Leadership Commitment, Quality Management, Employee Commitment.

Paper type

Research paper

Introduction

Globalisation brings tougher competition and creates increased challenges for change management. Within quality literature there is plenty of advice to help us manage change. In a survey conducted by The Economist Intelligence Unit in 2008, 58% of 600 senior executives in Europe and US respond that less than half of their change initiatives have been successful (Hallencreutz, 2008). A quality strategy must be built on the top management's continuous and consistent commitment to change and quality issues (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). For any company to succeed it needs good leadership. Common statements in quality management presentations are:

- Leadership is necessary
- It's important for quality management to have engaged leaders and employees

A presentation of almost any improvement methodology is accompanied with the statement of the importance of management commitment. In 6Sigma the CEO is defined as the number 1 believer, (Magnusson et al, 2003). How this commitment is to be provided and assured is seldom taken up.

One way of describing a quality management system is to see it as a combination of values, methodologies and tools, (Hellsten & Klefsjö, 2000). The chosen values are supported by methodologies and tools. Bergman & Klefsjö (2003) propose in the "Corner Stone Model" a set of six core values that support Total Quality Management (TQM). One of the core values is leadership – and more specifically leadership commitment. It could be argued that for any improvement, leadership forms the main resource basis on which success of change relies (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). Basic leadership knowledge could be seen to be based on the individual and the individual's behaviour in different group situations. Also, a leader needs to understand how behavioural expectations change in different types of organisational structures, (Müllern & Elofsson, 2006). Leadership is about human relations and thus the value of "Letting everybody be committed" from the corner stone model is also of interest. The four other values of the Corners Stone Model, "Focus on customers", "Focus on processes", "Base decisions on facts" and "Improve continuously" are interpreted as being more related to the use of instrumental methodologies with the human behavioural component being less prominent.

An interesting question to study is which the proposed methodologies and tools are that translate the leadership and employee commitment into action.

Methodology

As a starting point literature used in Quality Management courses in different Universities in Sweden was identified by studying course plans. Courses were identified using the web-site www.studera.nu that presents all available university courses in Sweden. We only looked at basic courses that had the word quality in the course name or that were clearly focused on quality management. Courses with a special focus such as Health, Lean, 6Sigma and statistical courses were excluded. This resulted in 16 course plans from 8 universities that were reviewed. Based on this we chose a few titles for analysis. We did a quick quantitative analysis by counting the pages out of the total that were devoted to leadership issues. Additionally we did a qualitative analysis by looking at the content of the methodologies supporting the core values "Committed leadership" and "Let everybody be committed" in the Corner Stone Model. As a framework for analysis we used the proposal of TQM as a system consisting of values, methodologies and tools, (Hellsten & Klefsjö, 2000). As a comparison to

methodologies for the two studied values we also looked at methodologies for some of the other values in the “Corner stone model”, (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). As a final stage we used knowledge from the pedagogical and behavioural fields as input to proposed improvements in methodologies supporting leadership values. This was done using the content of some chosen leadership courses.

Theory and theory development

Defining leadership

Leadership can be interpreted as influencing people to get things done to a standard and to a quality above their norm - and doing it willingly. Leading others is not simply a matter of style, or following some how-to guides or recipes. Ineffectiveness of leaders seldom results from a lack of know-how or how-to, nor is it typically due to inadequate managerial skills. Leadership is even not about creating a great vision. It is about creating conditions under which all your followers can perform independently and effectively towards a common objective, (Müllern & Elofsson, 2006). Leadership is also a never ending process of self-studies with the purpose to know yourself and your behaviour as individual and in a group better. Understanding group dynamics is essential in order to inspire employees into higher levels of teamwork, (Ibid).

There are several definitions of leadership. Kotter (1996) states that “*leadership is the ability to persuade a group of people to move in a certain direction without coercion*”. Thompson (2008: 290) argues that “*leadership is the ability to influence people to achieve the goals of a team*”. Forsyth (2006:376) in his turn claims that “*leadership is the process by which an individual guides others in their pursuits, often by organizing, directing, coordinating, supporting and motivating their efforts*”. We are looking at leadership for TQM, which could be divided in leadership for continuous improvement and leadership for breakthrough improvement. It is in breakthrough improvement where substantial leadership is needed to enable and assure employee commitment. We therefore focus on looking at leadership for change. Kotter (1996) argues that an examination of success stories reveals two important patterns when talking about Change Management. First, useful change tends to be associated with a multi-step process that creates power and motivation sufficient to overwhelm all the sources of inertia. Second this process is never employed effectively unless it is driven by high-quality leadership, not just excellent management. Thompson (2008) claims that there is a substantial difference between leadership and management – management is a function that must be exercised in any business or team, whereas leadership is a relationship between the leader and the led that can energize a team or an organization. More leadership and less management is needed they say, see Table I and II.

The distinction is absolutely crucial for the purpose of the change process since what this process needs is 70-90 % leadership and only 10-30% management. There is a notable lack of leadership in most companies and some have even created a culture that resists change. This has often been the result of former success possibly in a dominating position. The combination of cultures that resist change and managers who have not been taught how to create change is lethal and the most credible evidence suggests that the rate of change will increase in the future. So, the only rational solution is to learn how to lead change successfully, (Kotter, 1996).

An approach of interest is that used by the management consultancy company Implement Management Partner that identifies two perspectives (management and leadership) to focus on when leading change – the structural perspective and the human perspective, see Figure 1.

The structural perspective contains methodologies of process management, organisational structure and system (management systems, IT systems etc.). The human perspective covers the methodologies of getting the buy-in and commitment of those involved, (Hallencreutz, 2008).

Table I. Management versus Leadership, (Kotter, 1996).

Management versus Leadership	
Management	Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and budgeting • Organising and staffing - creating of structure, delegation of responsibility, providing policies and procedures and creating of systems for monitoring implementation • Controlling and problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing direction - developing a vision of the future • Aligning people - communication in all directions creating teams that understand and accept the vision • Motivating and inspiring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces a degree of predictability and order and has the potential to consistently produce the short-term results expected by various stake-holders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces change, often to a dramatic degree, and has the potential to produce extremely useful change

Table II. Understanding the difference between management and leadership (Thompson, 2008:290)

Management versus Leadership	
Management	Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A function • Planning • Budgeting • Evaluating • Facilitating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relationship • Selecting talent • Motivating • Coaching • Building trust

When things are done in the same way the result will be the same. This simple truth should also apply for leadership competence. This would mean that change of leadership style would be one of the first things to work with in a change project. Additionally changes in the behaviour of all personnel are probably needed, not only as mechanistically learned methodologies, but as a result of understanding one's own role and how work groups function. This means that individuals should go through some behavioural changes based on learning of what is important. These changes should then lead to an understanding and adoption of the Corner Stone values.

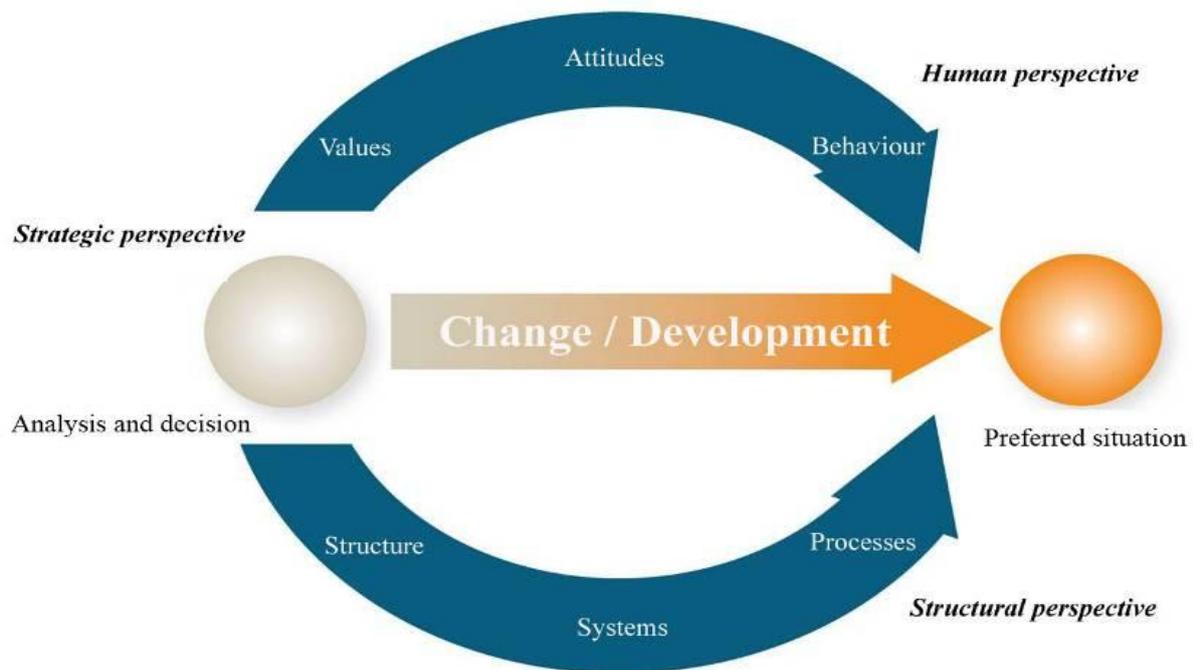


Figure 1. The three perspectives of change, based on Hallencreutz (2008) and Figure adopted from www.implement.se.

The Corner Stone model and the management system for TQM

Bergman & Klefsjö (2003) also argue that a quality strategy must be built on top management's continuous and consistent commitment to change and work with quality issues. Based on top management commitment, successful work with quality improvements can be built. This is the basis to Total Quality Management (TQM). Bergman & Klefsjö (2003) claim that quality work is a continuous process which develops products as well as the personal who are involved in these processes. They see TQM as a concept, where values, methodologies and tools combine to give more customer satisfaction with fewer resources.

“Total Quality Management means a constant endeavour to fulfil, and preferably exceed, customer needs and expectations at the lowest cost, by continuous improvement work, to which all involved are committed, focusing on the processes in the organization.” (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003:34)

This TQM-definition can be expressed using a model consisting of six values, see Figure 2. These six values also form part of a system model, see Figure 3.

“Total Quality Management can be seen as a management system made up of values, methodologies and tools. The objective of the system is to create increased external and internal customer satisfaction with less resource consumption. The methodologies and tools in Figure 3 are only examples, not a complete list. Also, as time passes they tend to change” (Hellsten & Klefsjö, 2000).

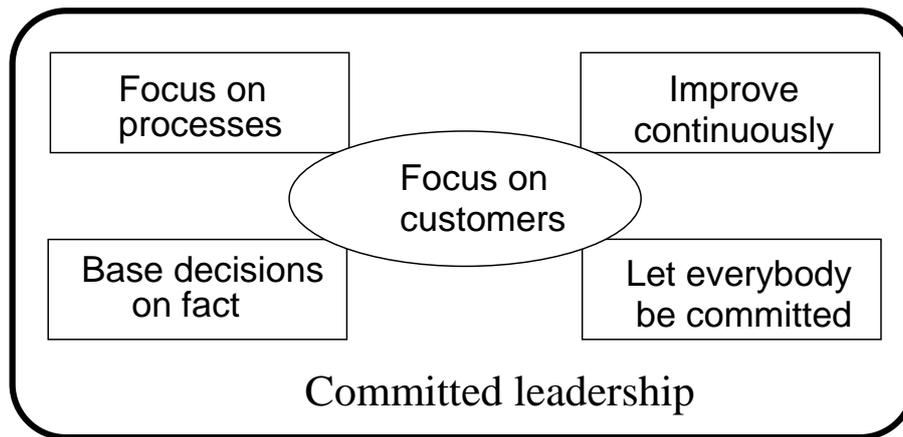


Figure 2. The Corner Stone Model, which defines the core values of TQM (Bergman & Klefsjö 2003:36).

The Corner Stone model in Figure 2 defines the core values of TQM in Figure 3. These are then in Figure 3 linked to supporting methodologies and tools in a quality management system. For example the value of Focus on processes is supported by the methodology of Process Management, which relies on tools such as Process Maps.

Aim: Increase external and internal customer satisfaction with a reduced amount of resources

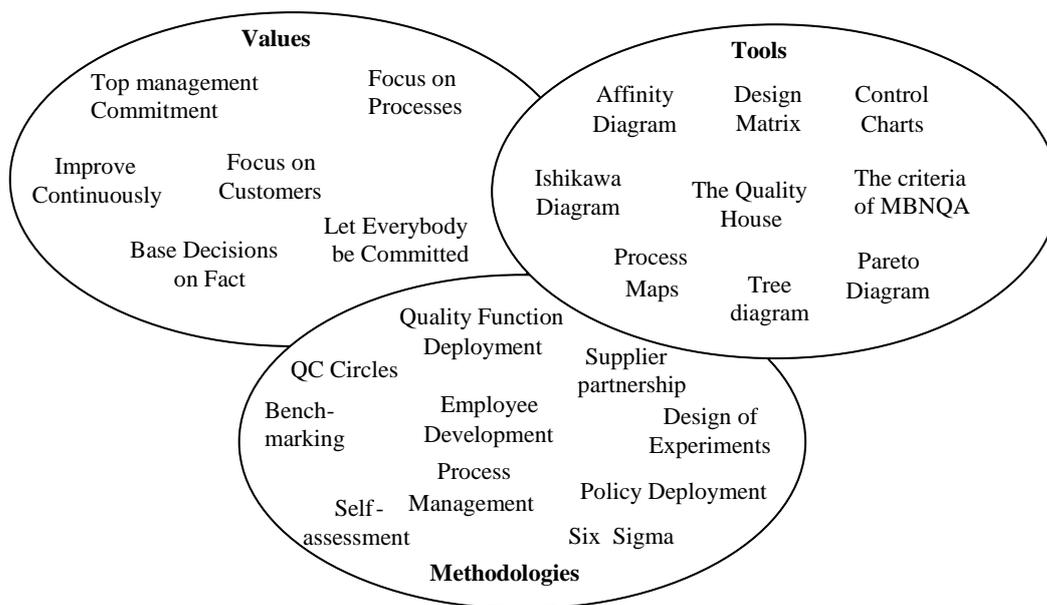


Figure 3. TQM as a management system, Bergman & Klefsjö (2003:400) based on Hellsten & Klefsjö (2000).

All the components are according to the authors to be seen as examples. This means that especially methodologies and tools can be added. However it can be assumed that the authors have introduced the most current methodologies in the example. In Figure 3 only the methodology of Employee Development seems directly to related to the value of Let Everybody be Committed. Among the quality tools there is nothing which specifically would relate to Employee Development. Also, Employee Development is not a well defined

methodology, but more of a generic area. There does not appear to be any methodology directly linked to Top Management Commitment/Committed Leadership. Possibly working with Self-assessment could partly qualify. Working with criteria from Business Excellence Models is supposed to be based on identified core values. Criteria related to Leadership provide some insights to what is expected of good leadership. It could be argued that the value of Committed Leadership only is to be seen as a clear commitment for all the other TQM-values, (Isaksson & Wiklund, 2001). However, even this should be possible to present in the form of a methodology.

Perspectives of change

Change could be divided in two steps, creating interest for change and improving processes, (Isaksson, 2006). These two steps could be seen as both sequential and parallel. Kotter (1996) speaks about the importance of early gains to demonstrate as good examples. When improvement is started stage-wise with a pilot project the success of this will hopefully fuel further improvement. This means that one part of the organisation has already the interest and is working with process improvement where as other parts are still contemplating the necessity of change. The perspectives from Figure 1 could be elaborated further, see Figure 4.

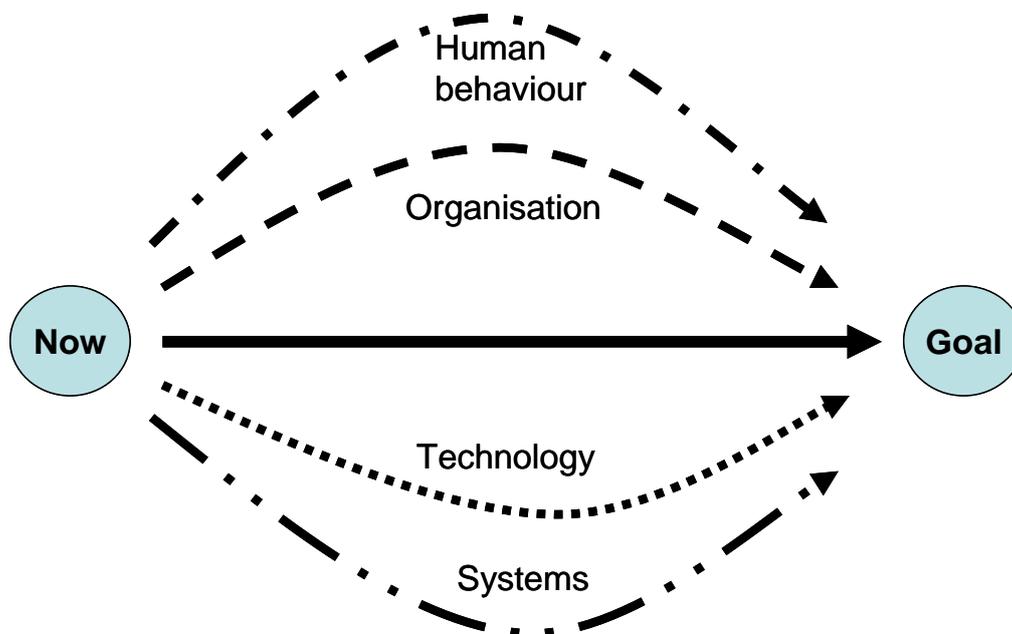


Figure 4. Proposed perspectives of change based on the Implement model and preliminary work by Isaksson & Taylor (2009).

The structural perspective could be divided into issues of how the work is organised, which could include such things as process orientation and the chosen management mode as for example Management By Order or Management By Policies. Systems are closely related to the chosen form of organisation but are different in the sense that they provide the overview of all elements of the organisation as a system. For many organisations, but especially goods manufacturing ones, technological change is of importance. Often changed technology requires change in the other perspectives like when automation reduces workforce in number but simultaneously requires a higher competence from those who remain. With fewer but more competent employees the organisational structure probably needs to be changed. The hardest perspective to concretize is the human behaviour perspective, which could explain why clear methodologies for this seem to be missing.

Organisation, technology and even systems can be readily modelled and at least on the surface changed. But, if the human behaviour does not change accordingly then the other changes will not result in realisation of the full change potential. Management and leadership are required for changes in all perspectives, but it could be argued that leadership is essential especially in the change of human behaviour.

Leader and management qualities

Two main classes of leader and manager qualities are identified as basic prerequisites and as desirable competencies. The first one is the quality of a leader who makes things happen by leading people to do what is required. The other one is more related to managerial capabilities of understanding organisational, technical and system requirements needed for change and who can make the change happen. Many change initiatives require decisiveness and not everybody can be convinced, which means that change often has to happen against the will of some of the employees. The more favourable basic prerequisites a leader has, the greater the potential to develop the desirable competencies and vice versa. Also, the larger the gap from the desired capability is in the organisation the more of change is needed, either by training or by changing key persons.

There are three basic types of leadership styles: developmental leadership, conventional leadership and non leadership where a leader should aim to be as often as possible in the field of developmental leadership, (Larsson & Kallenberg, 2006). A developmental leader is characterised by being inspirational and providing motivation in order to promote participation and creativity. He/she also should show personal consideration by giving support but also by providing constructive criticism, if it is for the good of the organisation and or the person. A developmental leader is also a role model by doing what is asked from others, (ibid).

Research findings

Chosen Quality Management books and leadership content

In 100% of the studied course plans the book "Quality from Customer Needs to Customer Satisfaction" by Bergman & Klefsjö was used. Additionally we chose the books "Continuous improvement (Ständiga förbättringar – in Swedish) by Lars Sörqvist from 2004 and "Quality Control with Total Quality (Kvalitetsstyrning med total kvalitet – in Swedish) by Lennart Sandholm from 2001 as complements. These are written by Swedish authors and are presumably used as reference literature in Sweden, see Table III. We also looked at the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) and studied the Leadership criteria.

Table III. Leadership content results from the review of the three quality books.

Author	Total nr of pages	Leadership	Percentage on leadership
Bergman & Klefsjö	612	22	4
Sörqvist	572	29	5
Sandholm	329	5	2

When the chosen literature for quality management is analysed we find that only a small fraction (2-5%) of these books deal with leadership.

The content of the part dedicated to leadership consists mainly of check lists describing how good leadership should be. The titles take up important things to do and to know as a leader – like motivation. But there is very little to read about in what way you can motivate your

employees. The leadership criteria in the MBNQA also describe a list of items and behaviour which should be there. The interpretation is that both quality literature and the studied Business Excellence Model present objectives for how leadership should be without describing how to get there.

When looking at other TQM core values as for example customer focus and decisions based on facts there are several chapters in Bergman & Klefsjö describing different supporting methodologies and tools.

Proposal for leadership and employee related methodologies

The change process of human behaviour in Figure 4 could well be the most complicated, but also one of the most important parts of change. The crucial issue is to create understanding of how humans as managers and employees are affected by change. On paper a reorganisation is easy to carry out, but what happens with the individuals assigned to new groups and with new work tasks? How can this change behaviour be controlled in such a way that individual and organisational capabilities are utilised in the best way.

Wheelan (2005) claims that groups go through different stages, which depend on how mature the group is and how much the group members know about their own behaviour and about group dynamics generally. A group irrespectively of the member composition often shows the same behaviour when starting to get to know each other and when starting to solve problems together. There are typical behaviours that individuals in a group do, but also specific group behaviour that can indicate to a leader in which stage a group is. As a leader you can both hurry up the process and you can also slow it down, depending of what you give the group in form of tasks, goals, help and time to build the team. The more leaders know about themselves, the easier it will be to manage groups and accept their differences. Even experienced leaders need to reflect on their leadership and their behaviour, (Müllern & Elofsson, 2006).

Gotland University has some experience in carrying out leadership courses where the importance of individual behaviour and group dynamics are emphasised. Ljungblom & Isaksson (2008) studied the courses: “Individual and group based leadership” and “Leadership and Organisation” with the purpose of looking at effectiveness and if theories and methodologies were put into use by the students. These courses cover basic organizational theory and group dynamics. The typical student at these courses is a person with a degree working in some organisation, often in a managerial position. Course assessments have indicated appreciation and a high level of student satisfaction. The relevance of the course content has also been explored by asking questions relating to personal learning. Results from assessment of the two courses have been summarised, (ibid):

- Have you learnt more about yourself? – yes 89.2%
- Have you learnt to co-operate better with others? – yes 68.8%
- Have you become more secure in your working role? – yes 73.4%

In Figure 5 a summary of what students have learnt. Results indicate a certain level of change, at least based on their own assessment of themselves.

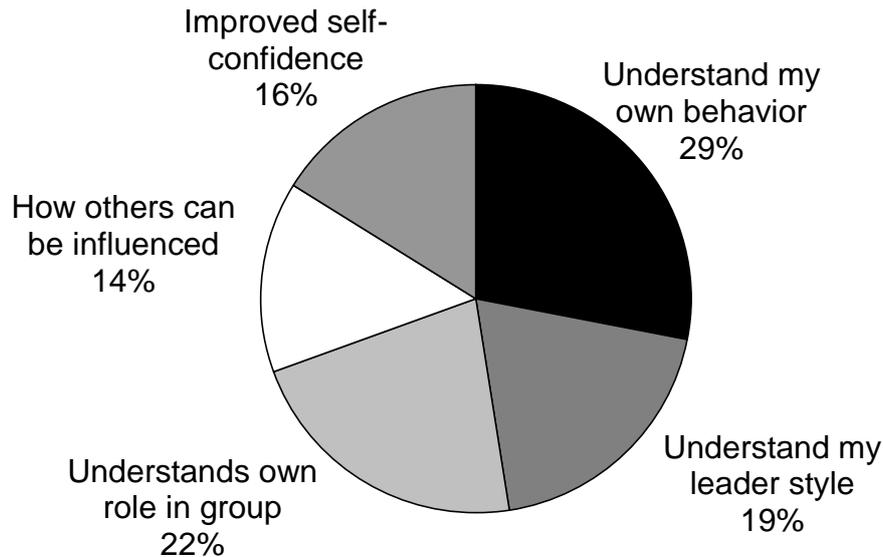


Figure 5. Student learning about themselves, (Ljungblom & Isaksson, 2008).

These courses seem to contain at least some of the elements of a methodology for changing human behaviour.

Maybe the most important part in changing behaviour is understanding yourself. This applies both for managers and employees. The starting point is the individual who should be willing to reflect and put into question his or her own behaviour. Methodologies used for this work are such as Strength Development Inventory (SDI), Learning Styles and Myers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI).

Another part is to reflect on how you behave in a group. How can you affect a group and how are you affected by a group. Methodologies used are based on different group dynamic theories, Team Skills and experience based learning. A prerequisite for success is that ongoing work like meetings can be stopped and used to highlight the dynamics taking place.

Finally it is important for the manager to develop leadership that can be adapted to groups with different stages of maturity and needs.

The result of our analysis is still only an embryo of a methodology for behavioural change and needs further development.

Conclusion

It seems that the Swedish quality literature is not very clear on how to engage employees and how to motivate them. Findings indicate that quality management still is relying heavily on quality methodologies and tools supporting the values of customer focus, decisions based on facts and continuous improvement. Bergman & Klefsjö (2003) use Deming's 14 points as an example for leadership methodologies. It is questionable if this is an example of how to deal with the change of human behaviour. Deming's 14 points describe primarily areas of importance without telling how to carry out change related to behaviour. Quality gurus like Deming and Juran state that only 10-15% of the operational problems can be solved at the operational level with the rest being system and management problems. However, based on our assessment, the quality methodologies described, mostly seem to deal with the 10-15% of problems that are related to the operational level. Kotter (1996) says that *"In a typical large*

change programme, it is not a matter of sending out the new organisation chart or the new budget or the new strategy with a few projects. It is about changing people's behaviour, often a lot of people and this is not trivial". This could indicate that more focus should be on how employees can affect their work situation and how managers need to change to make it possible before focusing too much on teaching quality technology. Quality methodologies and tools are only of help when management leads in such a way that employees are enabled and encouraged to do the right things willingly. This means that at least as much focus should be put on the change of human behaviour as described in Figure 4 as is put on the other perspectives of organisation, technology and systems.

There is no reason to believe that quality education internationally would differ too much from the situation found in Sweden even if more research is needed to confirm this.

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