

Strategic Leveraging Total Quality and CRM Initiatives: Case Study of Service-Orientated Firms

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While establishing and managing effective quality and customer-centric processes are typically discussed in the manufacturing sector, they can be a large part of the success of firms in the service sector as well. Managing quality processes can be challenging for smaller firms due to the need to rapidly adjust to fluctuations in the market, and also because the products and services created are typically customized, making standardization difficult. A combination of personal interviews of upper to middle management, as well as comments from convenient samples of employees, were used to gather perceptions of the accuracy of the various firms' perceived quality reputation and associated customer-support systems that help their drive for improved for profitability and/or community acceptability. This article also examines the quality control and customer relations measures currently in place for three service-orientated firms with significant stakes in their marketing strategies towards customer retention and satisfaction. Recommendations are presented for each of these firms.

KEYWORDS *case study, customer behavior, customer relationship management, operations management, quality assurance, service marketing, strategy*

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INTRODUCTION

Total Quality Management (TQM) as Operational Strategy

TQM is an operational strategy, which emphasizes the importance of constantly improving quality from supplier to customer. This commitment to quality must be embraced by every employee in the organization for the strategy to become successful. The decision by an organization to focus on TQM affects each of Deming's 14 decisions (Browning & Heath, 2009; Heizer & Render, 2008) made by operations managers, primarily due to the fact that much of operational decisions deal with providing customer satisfaction and quality. An effective TQM strategy must implement continuous improvement, employee empowerment, benchmarking, and just-in-time (JIT; Sprovieri, 2008). Continuous improvement is a never-ending process of all employees by which all process and procedures are analyzed and improved (Hendricks & Singhal, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Hu, Wang, Fetch, & Bidanda, 2008). Perfection is the ultimate goal, which can never be achieved due to the nature of continuous improvement and every moving target in a highly competitive environment.

Employee empowerment requires employees to become a part of TQM. The employees have an avenue to state their opinions, ideas, and thoughts during every step of TQM. Employee empowerment will allow for user experience to help the organization design and improve equipment and processes. Teams should be gathered to form quality circles, which have the ability of pulling opinions, ideas, and thoughts from the employees in the quality circle. Benchmarking is the technique of studying and implementing another organization's process. The process providing the best results would be studied and implemented. By applying the best processes used by competitors and other similar organizations, quality will add value for the customer in many possible ways. The value added is dependent on the process improved upon (Biswas & Sarker, 2008; Huang, Lee, & Hsiao, 2008). JIT is primarily concerned with providing goods and services as they are needed. Through continuous improvement and enforced problem solving, an organization will be able to eliminate costly inventory. With lower inventory, cash and space can be used to pursue other opportunities. The implementation of JIT-embedded processes generally improves quality assurance programs and cuts the costs associated of quality by generally allocating costs to inventory as it is slowly being reduced to minimum working levels.

Business-to-Business (B2B) Considerations in a Virtual Marketplace

Much of what customers define as quality goods and services are usually empirically based on their experiences. These expectations are, in turn, significantly enhanced by more choices offered by the ever-expanding use of

virtual marketplaces offered by companies to increase the realm of business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-customer (B2C) transactions. Businesses tend to decrease the cost of purchasing goods and services through establishing virtual marketplaces in which many buyers can be connected to one or more suppliers “to rid the supply chain of a host of inefficiencies” (Ramsdell, 2000, p. 174) in the procurement of materials, goods, and services (such as outsourcing). Ever-improving technology is allowing more such marketplaces to be developed, but certain factors must be met before a success can be claimed. One of the most essential parts of establishing successful B2B and B2C marketplaces is determining the best partner with which to begin, and appropriate evaluation must be done before designing the architecture of the marketplace based on inventory checks, quality, and supplier performance considerations (Chan & Kumar, 2009; Wan & Chen, 2008). Initially, as with some large companies that participated in Web-only brokers, they have “come to recognize the value of their spending volume and are now building their own sites” (p. 178). The primary reasons that these virtual marketplaces are sought after are grounded in their abilities to reduce costs by eliminating middlemen. By using a separate forum to replace their typical procurement procedure, they only changed whom they were doing business with, while not necessarily lowering their costs. By establishing their own B2B and B2C marketplaces, companies can now not only control the purchasing aspect, but also open it up to their buyers and gain more control over them, resulting in higher levels of quality assurance.

However, while some companies establish these marketplaces to improve efficiency through pricing, reducing prices and economies of scale will not suffice in the longer term. A quality-dominated marketplace is more than just a bargain bin for companies to use; if it was only used in that way it would not be a cost effective manner in which to do business, due to initial startup and maintenance costs. These marketplaces can also be used to reduce their total cost of ownership by reducing not only prices for supplies, but other supply-related costs associated with surplus inventories and supply chain management (SCM) quality control. Upper management has to be in strong support and must remain active in the application of the quality assurance-initiatives associated with these emerging marketplaces by playing a vital and transparent role in supporting the company's TQM efforts of funneling purchasing transactions through the marketplaces. Support for the change must be demonstrated at all levels of management to ensure a smooth transition, since many employees may feel hesitant to change (Shah, Chandrasekaran, & Linderman, 2008; Vinodh, Sundararaj, Devadasan, & Maharaja, 2008). If the bulk of employees are resistant to the change, the transition will be long, hard, and more costly than originally estimated.

Management has to decide the right time to enter the B2B and B2C virtual marketplaces for their companies. Some may not have the capabilities or resources to begin the transition. The long-term positive affects are hard to

establish, so as to be demonstrated in the following case studies, adequate preparation for long-term benefits as management invests in total quality initiatives should counter any negative cost affects associated with such initiatives. That is not to say that companies should not look into it and develop a strategy; it is equally important that they need to decide the correct time for them to implement it.

Customer Relationship Management Perspectives

Approximately a decade ago, many companies attempted a heavy investment in customer relationship management (CRM), which to be successful must be tied to any TQM-based initiatives by management. Many of these companies did not realize the promised benefits or return on investment. Despite the apparent failure, executives refocused on CRM techniques and were able to be successful by refocusing their efforts (Anton & Petouhoff, 2002; Baker, 2002; Smith, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008). Rigby and Ledingham (2004), for example, examined several problems and successes of CRM experiences and provided four questions companies should ask when developing a CRM program, namely: is it strategic, where does it hurt, do we need perfect data, and where do we go from here? It is important that management focus on CRM implementation via specific strategic tasks that were previously defined as problem areas so that management can minimize the initial investment, focus resources on the problem, and realize a financial return from the CRM solution.

The first question companies should examine is whether or not the targeted area or problem management has identified for a potential CRM-based programmatic solution is really strategic in nature. CRM programs are very expensive and time consuming, so it does not make sense to spend such resources on an area that is not strategic or vital to a company's competitiveness. It is also important to apply a focused CRM solution only to strategic areas with specific problematic areas. A full-scale CRM implementation would be too expensive and time-consuming, and would also cover many areas in which there are few or no problems, and which are not strategic issues that need to be addressed by such drastic implementations. Spending the resources in these areas is unnecessary and will not result in a positive return on investment for the company. It will also detract the needed resources away from the strategic pain areas where a CRM-embedded program should be focusing. This is why it is best for a company to evaluate the business functions and areas in need before deciding where to implement CRM programs (Kotorov, 2003). Not only will it minimize cost and confusion, but it will ease implementation and maximize benefits.

Companies must also realize that perfect real-time data is not needed in most situations (Rigby & Ledingham, 2004; Smith, 2003). Managers may think that providing these data will increase the benefits to the firm, but they should first assess the need, cost, and possible reaction to receiving these data. For

instance, many companies will not be able to react quickly enough to make receiving real-time information worth the high costs. Rigby and Ledingham (2004), for example, described that in some situations, such as available rooms at a hotel, management must have real-time information, but in others, such as customer feedback on cleaning service, perfect real-time data is not needed. Relatively current and high-quality data is needed and sufficient in most areas. As long as the hotel management staff receives enough information in time to make changes to the cleaning processes before major effects on the business take place, this will be sufficient. If good enough information will suffice, a company should not waste the time and money to gather perfect data, as the benefits will not exceed the high costs.

The underlying message Rigby and Ledingham (2004) finally presented is that when “evaluating and designing CRM systems, business needs should take precedence over technological capabilities” (p. 129). CRM technological capabilities have improved, and CRM suppliers will be willing to explain and review the many capabilities with an interested firm. It is in the firm’s best interest to first review the strategic nature, not just operational aspects, and make decisions based on the needs of its customers before examining the available technology. Only then should a company evaluate the CRM programs’ capabilities to address the specific strategic needs identified. This should be the only CRM solution implemented; once a company experiences success in this area it can look for ways to extend the reach of the CRM program and benefits. If applicable, new needs may be addressed, but managers should continue to use the evaluation process for future programs. On the other hand, management must exercise enough foresight to halt an unsuccessful program before it is fully implemented. For businesses which have already implemented a full CRM program and have experienced all the costs and confusion that goes along, more steps will be needed than to reassess and focus on pain points. In this case, the program may need to be backed out or uninstalled to clear up unnecessary steps for frontline workers, resulting in management probably not being able to recover many of the associated costs. Although CRM and TQM solutions may be complex, managers should review all possibilities to identify the costs and benefits of performing such tasks. Strategic planning and the pinpointing of specific problematic areas must be undertaken, but management still must decide how to best handle the already implemented CRM system.

CASE STUDIES OF TOTAL QUALITY AND CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Methodology

As the previous studies reviewed on TQM- and CRM-embedded programs and their applications usually considered a wide range of companies, it

was decided to document these activities mainly in the metropolitan center of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The three firms selected were Pittsburgh-based or associated companies that were within relatively easy geographic access, given permission to interview management professionals, and could be reviewed for the principles of the quality assurance and CRM and provided me an opportunity by to review a variety of service-related firms that closely linked its strategy with its desire to be best in quality. The particular firms (namely Calgon Carbon Corporation [CCC], National City Bank [NCB], and the Township of Moon Municipality [TOMM]) represented a variety of establishments, and through TQM-embedded initiatives all have tried to add value to the customer through increasing quality. Through a combination of professional work experience and academic research, the following sections will outline each company's applications of quality assurance followed by similarities and differences.

While these businesses are quite different in nature and scope, each faced challenges in utilizing their proactive systems in a highly competitive environment, with significant strategic consequences for getting it wrong. A combination of personal interviews of upper to middle management, as well as comments from convenient samples of employees, were used to gather perceptions of the accuracy of the various firms' perceived quality reputation and associated customer-support systems that help their drive for improved profitability and/or community acceptability. In addition, much of the factual information were obtained either from management or from the firms' Web sites, or a combination of both sources.

Case 1: Calgon Carbon Corporation (CCC)

CCC is a global leader in services and solutions for purifying water and air, as well as food, beverage, and industrial process streams. Headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, CCC employs approximately 1,000 people at 13 manufacturing facilities and 12 sales and service centers. CCC has concentrated its efforts on ion exchange for purification of drinking water and industrial process applications, ultraviolet light for drinking water disinfection, and granular activated carbon for a multitude of municipal and industrial uses. In 2002, sales at CCC totaled \$258 million.

CCC actively participates in a major TQM/CRM principle, namely continuous improvement, in a number of ways. For one, each employee works with their supervisor to establish 7 to 10 goals for themselves at the start of each year. Generally, the goals should support one of four criteria; cost reduction, higher margins, sales growth, or safety. The employee is then reviewed at both midyear and end-of-year on how successful they were in reaching their goals. A second method for continuous improvement that CCC strategically leverages is assigning Process Excellence Projects (PEP), where a group of people is assigned the task of improving a specific

process or system. Management submits suggestions, which are reviewed annually and are then selected for PEP. Task-force groups usually consist of 7 to 10 people from various areas who are familiar with the group's specific goal. A Process Excellence Task Force oversees each of the individual task forces and manages their progress. Another important method that illustrates CCC participation in continuous improvement is their post-project review meetings. This meeting would be held after a project has been completed and shipped to the end-user in an effort to review the procedures, policies, and documentation contributing to the success of the project. A postproject meeting proves most useful on first-of-a-kind products, where considerable development has been done, but little production has begun. This brings manufacturing and engineering together to discuss how to improve the product for manufacturability and eliminate rework.

Employee empowerment, another previously discussed TQM/CRM principle, had mixed reviews, especially from employees. Many employees discussed in detail that one of the major components of employee empowerment—responsibility—was quite widespread, but the component of authority was still mainly in the hands of management. A number of employees felt that more recognition and authority should be placed in the hands of employees if improvements in quality assurance were due to the individual's or project group's suggestions, rather than direction from management. In essence, CCC is a company built on a number of levels of management, and the agility to leverage more self-direct work groups, at least at the time of the study, may still be in its infancy stages.

CCC actively uses benchmarking, a third TQM/CRM principle, to establish a standard for the companies own products to exceed. In the early development of their UV technology for drinking water disinfection they chose to identify their soon-to-be largest competitor and benchmarked themselves against their already existent product line. The company's availability of sizes, costs, capacity, and features had to meet or exceed the competition. Early indications are that CCC has developed a product which exceeds the customer's expectations, and has a competitive advantage over the competition in at least two of their four system sizes.

The fourth and last TQM/CRM principle to be discussed for comparative analysis, JIT, is widely used throughout CCC. One of the main objectives of JIT, namely delivery of goods just as they are needed, is especially useful in the original equipment manufacturing environment. Often times the products or designs change very rapidly and would negate any carried inventory. CCC chooses to purchase only the required amount of an item whenever possible. This enables management to identify any quality issues immediately following receipt of the item. It is the company's belief that the potential cost savings from not having any scrap outweighs the potential savings in cost from purchasing in higher quantities.

Case 2: National City Bank (NCB)

NCB, at one time one of the nation's largest financial institutions with assets over \$116 billion, closely implemented TQM/CRM into its corporate culture.¹ In fact, the management team at NCB believed so adamantly in having a corporate-wide effort to pursue excellence they set their principles based mainly on quality assurance concepts, which are theoretically framed in the primary concepts of continuous improvement, employee empowerment, benchmarking, and JIT.

Continuous improvement was expressed in the NCB management principles, including phrases such as, "We are driven to reach the highest possible standards of excellence in everything we do." Other key phrases such as, "Do it right, right now!" and "Own the result!" were displayed throughout each branch in highly-visible areas so both employees and customers could be reminded of NCB's commitment to CRM and TQM concepts. Another important principle of placing customers as the primary focus was also emphasized with NCB's assertion, "We offer all of our customers' high quality products and services delivered at the highest service level." The sales culture at NCB supported these efforts of executive management, which was demonstrated and routinely rewarded in their selling and customer support functions.

Employee empowerment is another TQM concept that is utilized in management principles. The management at NCB respected values and cared for its employees, operated as a winning team, and communicated openly and honestly with one another. Management should understand that in today's competitive and dynamic financial services environment, attracting and retaining the most talented and experienced individuals is a necessity in order to be successful; branch and support unit employees who deal with the systems and processes on a daily basis initiate almost every procedural change. At NCB, a corporate culture existed where employees were encouraged to document problems with systems or processes and to share them with lower and even upper management before problems being implemented.

An organizational TQM program could not be complete without benchmarking its processes against another organization that performs a process or activity at a level superior compared to all other firms. NCB sought to be innovative in the way it handled business with an effort to better serve customers and shareholders. NCB, however, historically lagged behind competitors in implementing new technologies and processes that gave their rivals a competitive advantage in certain areas. For instance, the bank recently upgraded its branch computer network, which were somewhat outdated and inefficient in terms of providing customers with the highest level of customer service. The previous system could not immediately provide customers with important information; instead, a bank employee would have to

call a help desk to get questions answered, resulting in an irritable customer whose experience with the bank was anything but enjoyable. After studying systems used by competitors and other financial service providers, the management at NCB invested heavily (\$350 million) to create and implement a new state-of-the-art branch network computer system. There are many more examples of the one described previously, where benchmarking has helped the bank improve its processes and procedures to remain competitive in the market.

The last TQM technique examined in this case study, JIT, is very popular in the manufacturing sector but financial service organizations such as NCB can also benefit from its use in order to provide continuous improvement and enforce problem solving throughout an organization. First and foremost, NCB (like most financial institutions) managed its internal funds in order to minimize its borrowing cost in the financial markets while maximizing profits when lending those funds back out to its customers. Since cash is the least profitable asset, the bank only needed to keep just enough liquidity on hand to satisfy transactions in the branches and to fund all loan proceeds. The current credit crunch amplified liquidity problems, causing banks to hoard cash instead of leading it to promote B2B and B2C transactions. What differentiates NCB, however, is that it took JIT one step further by the allowance of liquidity to form a buffer; such management understands that negative word-of-mouth (WOM) can have a serious consequence on retaining its customers by satisfying a problem or complaint immediately rather than later. Solving problems immediately when they are presented in a JIT fashion cuts the cost of quality, since it minimizes the time employees have to spend following up with a customer and allows employees to concentrate on more productive sales efforts. It also improves quality because solving customer problems immediately enables action to be taken quickly in order to limit any additional occurrences with other customers. JIT and customer tracking are powerful illustrations on how service-oriented firms, particularly financial service providers, can a competitive advantage.

Case 3: Township of Moon Municipality (TOMM)

The TOMM is a municipality located 19 miles west of Pittsburgh, which is run by the township manager and an elected group of board of supervisors. It is not a revenue-making business, but more of a service center that its residents rely on for safety, health, maintenance, leadership, disaster and contingency planning, and other vital and important services. TOMM consists of the administrative office with marketing and accounting departments, as well as the planning and building inspection department. This main administrative office is the core that enables the local fire department, police department, parks and recreation department, and the township library to operate smoothly and relatively seamlessly.

TQM and CRM initiatives were encouraged by the management of TOMM so that it could excel in the multidimensional aspects of products and services that are important to its customer base; these are important keys to any business entity, whether the company manufactures goods or performs services for others. TOMM participated in several of the TQM principles, including continuous improvement. For example, in the marketing department at TOMM, it is critical to try to “sell” and “brand” the township to draw more businesses and residents to the area, so annual campaigns were developed and promoted. At several points throughout the year, employees meet with the township manager and assistant manager, along with the board of supervisors. The objective of these meetings is to discuss what major projects the employees are interested in starting, how all of their projects are progressing, the timeline for each project, and the estimated costs of each project. Towards the end of each year, the employees typically make a wish list of improvements that they would like to see added to their appropriate capital-improvement funds. These types of meetings help to empower employers to meet certain targets, and they encourage employees to competitively strive for continuous improvement by creating a corporate culture that promotes competitive and creative goal setting and completion. Employees are periodically reviewed based on their work and their accomplishments, and if the review is very positive and their contribution significant in scope, they are appropriately rewarded for superior work efforts. Implementing quality improvement also rings true in this specific type of work that is highly customized and profitable to the firm. Hence, ultimately leading to the way to promote change is completed daily by the township manager, as its employees continuously improve the product, quality, and service. Employees are encouraged to build quality into the types of projects or services they are completing in order to reduce the probability of rework. For instance, the management and employees of the planning and building inspection department make it a point to hold meetings with every new business opening in the township to be proactive and to ensure that the various codes and regulations are understood. The inspectors host these meetings early on in the process, so that the owners understand the various inspections and permit requirements before construction.

Employee empowerment, which consists of involving employees at virtually every step of the production process, is highly used by the management at TOMM. It is the corporate culture at TOMM that seniority of service is not the only measure of expertise and ability to contribute, since they focus more on being a team and working together to innovate and make quality improvements for their residents. One of the major aspects in empowering the employees is the open line of communication with every department, allowing each employee to be open with their supervisors. Management tries to distribute the responsibility and workloads, allowing all employees to

become more involved, to interact and to open lines of communication internally, and to allow departments to contribute to each project.

Benchmarking, which involves selecting a demonstrated standard of performance that is the represented as the best performance, is used indirectly by management at TOMM. Although this type of work is more of a service to the community and residents, there is still measurable competition between the neighboring townships. For example, it is essential to get more businesses like Baker and Nova Chemical, major Pittsburgh manufacturers and service providers that contribute heavily to the local economy, to commit and build in the area, instead of their locating in nearby Robinson Township, in order to keep a consistent tax base without raising the rates, which is a common practice in financially difficult times. As the TOMM is service-based center, there are many residents who complain daily about issues ranging from their roads not being cleared from snow in a timely manner to the police not doing their jobs enforcing speed limits and resolving domestic conflicts. Many of the best practices for resolving customer complaints are already implemented into the TOMM system statistics, such as response time and number of complaints, which are monitored frequently and are compared with other neighboring townships. Employees who deal with such residents' complaints strive to respond quickly to the customers and use computer software applications to track and summarize the complaints. The complaints are resolved as quickly as possible, which helps to establish creditability and trust between TOMM and the residents.

The last principle of quality assurance, namely JIT, which promotes a process of having the minimum inventory necessary to continue function properly, has meaning for a municipality. Although it would be very beneficial for the TOMM to use this type of system in a "pull" fashion, there are many instances where the quality of data is not sufficient to fully implement such as system. Ordering appropriate amounts of salt for roads is very dependent on the cost of salt, maintaining it in useable condition and in quantities needed, and the unpredictability of weather conditions; these factors must all be balanced with each other. This balance is extremely crucial, as it would be disastrous for TOMM and its residents to go without salt on its roads for even one day in severe weather. Unfortunately, the TOMM management generally places an order after something has completely run out, whether it is building permit applications or simply laminate paper for a marketing portfolio. Without implementing JIT in creative ways for a service center, the township is risking losing quality due to the usage of older inventory that is no longer as efficient. It is also losing money, since some of the inventory was ordered in such large quantities it is being wasted, tying up financial resources and capital that could be used for other necessary projects. Since lack of implementing JIT may create a warning to an organization for its potential loss of quality, it is essential that the TOMM, as well as similar

service centers, investigate its application and begin to use this type of system.

Implications of TQM

In these case studies of service-orientated organizations and their success in implementing aspects of quality assurance and CRM-embedded initiatives, CCC, NCB, and TOMM may be compared in a conceptual manner. Table 1 illustrates how they are all similar in their service marketing orientation, although they represent different industries. Continuous improvement has been applied to all three organizations as evident from their management's overall commitment. Although each organization provides different products and services, they have very similar strategies for increasing quality and adding value for customers. All three entities stress the need to innovative in their search for new ways to make processes and procedures progress in their efforts for customer retention and satisfaction. Management at NCB was especially noted for implementing continuous improvement by focusing on the customer's direct needs. TOMM and CCC have taken into account the customer's direct needs, but have also focused on processes and procedures which indirectly focus on the customer.

All three organizations associate quality circles and group meetings to ensure and encourage TQM are being achieved. Through the use of these circles and meetings, managers are able to empower employees while keeping tabs on progress. By encouraging employee participation, TQM will be easier achieved through the ideas, opinions, and thoughts of the employees. CCC actively pursues benchmarking as exemplified in their implementation of UV technology which was used by competitors to disinfect water. NCB had plans to implement a system to increase accuracy and

TABLE 1 Comparative Summary of Total Quality Management- and Customer Relationship Management-Embedded Components Among the Three Case Studies

	Calgon Carbon Corporation	National City Bank ^a	Township of Moon Municipality
Continuous improvement	Committed	Committed	Committed
Employee empowerment	UV technology from competitors	Branch help desk	Actively pursuing benchmarks
Benchmarking	Quality circles and group meetings	Quality circles and group meetings	Quality circles and group meetings
Just-in-time (JIT)	Traditional approaches to product and supplier oriented strategies	Provide service to customers immediately	Implemented in office supply management, but few other examples

^aIn late 2008, National City Bank was sold under protest to PNC Bank.

decrease the amount of time associated with answering customer questions; similar programs are used by its competitors. Unfortunately, the financial industry is experiencing a current and massive wave of consolidation, resulting in significantly reduced demand for products and services in the service sector.

Management at TOMM has established that there is a need for benchmarking, as neighboring communities compete for business and residents who are both sources of income. However, they are in the planning stage to implement processes and procedures from other communities to reach their goals. JIT techniques are heavily relied upon by CCC, as the organization uses these techniques to lower inventory and free cash from aligning suppliers so only products are stored which are soon needed. Although financial service providers such as NCB do not produce tangible products, JIT is critical for promoting customer relationships built on service and trust. TOMM uses JIT techniques in a very loose and unstructured manner, as management struggles to implement best business practices in various contingency scenarios. All three organizations were concerned about liquidity issues, especially in the prevailing economic downturn, and management perceived that implementing quality assurance and CRM measures would significantly improve their financial situations.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

Since management has started to recognize the importance of total quality and its affects on customer relationships, the number of tools available to manage and measure this process and revenues has dramatically increased. Smith (2002) suggested, "Addressing customer service issues are extremely critical for the firm's continued survival and long-term success, but these services are merely academic if the firm ignores to enhance customer loyalty and retention through the development of trust" (p. 156). Without key performance measurements, customer relationship and support processes would not be recognized as major strategic assets. Although there have been mixed results on the success of the measurement of the management tools, few would argue against the implementation of TQM- and CRM-embedded initiatives. It seems that many managerial tools are simply "buzzwords" used by upper-level management; buzzwords that make it easier for managers to mask the true nature of organizations' problems. It is easier to call a strategy "re-engineering" than it is to use the terms "massive layoffs" and "cost cutting." The application of certain tools, such as re-engineering and downsizing, has contributed to decreases in employee morale. This leads, in turn, to massive erosion of the basic levels of trust that employees and associates have for many firms. As mentioned by some younger employees who voiced their concern that older managers and associates complain about

people from their generation, namely that they have no loyalty and are “career-hoppers” with no direction. One young executive illustrated this concern in an interview:

I disagree with this assessment. I think this unattached mentality has formed because people in my peer group have not been treated with loyalty from the firms. Often the career hopping is forced due to down-sizing and layoffs. Therefore, we like to have the flexibility to leave for better offers and opportunities to expand our careers with different experiences at different organizations. I think that this makes people of my generation more marketable because we have a broader collection of experiences that can make us meld into organizations more easily. I think that people of my generation are aspirational careerists because of the fact that our careers are free from the borders of industry and companies.

As some firms are too focused on operations and cost-cutting measures rather than the strategic decisions that could have placed more value on the human aspects of the organization, there is value in promoting these initiatives of quality assurance, as well as both internal and external customer satisfaction. It appears from the case studies that the implementation of TQM and CRM has placed more current emphasis on strategic planning and the redevelopment of mission and vision statements. However, the validity of these tools may be questionable. Sometimes mission and vision statements are full of words with little action. The key is how the mission and vision statements are developed, and whose key points are driven home to the hearts and minds of the employees. The statements must become a part of their every day work life in order to make them meaningful. Otherwise, it is just a nice thought, but not actionable, and thus will not make for a sustainable competitive advantage. From the case studies of CCC, NCB, and TOMM, in order to remain competitive and continually improve their business operations a serious commitment to the tenets of TQM and CRM processes are necessary. However, management introduction of TQM and CRM processes should be designed to create and maintain a people-focus approach that makes accomplishing these numerous quality performance goals meaningful in the hearts and minds of the people who work in these well-managed organizations. In short, it is interesting to find that despite engaging in different industries, these processes are still an important concept to investigate and engage the entire corporate culture.

NOTE

1. In late 2008, NCB was sold under protest to PNC Bank for approximately \$3.1 billion, which all major legal obstacles settled in early 2009.

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