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## ADAPTING TQM IMPLEMENTATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

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### ABSTRACT

Top, middle and first line managers were interviewed to identify their reactions to implementation of Total Quality Management. Their reactions, by managerial level, to various drivers and obstructions were nearly reversed in dominance. Based on this information, approaches to implementing TQM are recommended as follows: top management, negotiation and agreement; middle management, participation and involvement, first line managers, facilitation and support.

### CHANGE STRATEGY AND ORGANIZATION LEVEL

Effective implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) requires systemic change in organizations. Correct assessments of reactions to change efforts are not intuitively obvious, they require careful diagnosis. Even changes that appear to be positive and rational cause perceived losses and uncertainty.

### METHODS

I interviewed 35 managers from six organizations, eight top managers, 14 middle managers, and 13 first line supervisors. The interviews included the following question, "Think of a time when you really wanted to implement TQM quickly and effectively. Tell me what happened? These were followed by a similar series of questions beginning with, "Think of a time when you really did NOT want to implement TQM..."

### RESULTS

Responses were categorized and tallied. Responses to the "time when you really wanted to implement TQM" question were called drivers. Responses to the reverse question were called obstructions.

Level	Drivers in order of dominance (left to right)			
Top	tension	champion	task	social
Mid	tension	task	social	champion
First	task	social	tension	champion
Level	Obstructions in order of dominance (left to right)			
Top	threats	uncertain		
Mid	uncertain	threats	champion	social
First	champion	social	uncertain	threats

#### Obstructions by level

Some striking differences by managerial level were observed. The order of dominance of factors is almost reversed between top management and first line supervisors.

Champion--someone to provide inspiration and overcome obstacles. Top management support or TQM is widely believed to be a necessary driver for TQM. The first line supervisors in five of six organizations implicitly recognized the need for top management to champion TQM but indicated that the absence of that support was obstructing implementation in their organizations. For middle managers, the lack of a champion was second most important. For top managers not one offered the failure to champion TQM as an obstruction. Top managers were unlikely to see themselves (or peers) as obstructions for failing to support TQM whereas first line managers were more likely to see someone else as an obstruction.

Threats to vested interests were the most important obstruction to top managers and least important to first line supervisors. Again, an exact reversal of priorities from top to first line managers.

Uncertainty was the dominant obstruction for middle managers but played a lesser role for other levels.

Changing social relationships was frequent obstruction (three of six companies) for first line supervisors. Many TQM tools are team-oriented and require development of new relationships within and across workgroups. Only one of six companies offered this obstruction from middle management and none of the six at top management level.

#### Drivers by level

Not a single first line supervisor at any of the six companies gave credit to a champion for driving toward TQM. Middle managers ranked support by a champion the least important of all factors mentioned. Top management volunteered support from a champion as a driver in two of six companies. In both cases, these were mandates from a parent company to inaugurate TQM.

Tension was the dominant driver for both top and middle management. The source of tension varied by level but the common core was the observation of better ways to do the current tasks.

Task accomplishment, the feeling of job well done, was the most powerful driver for first line supervisors, second most for middle managers and top managers. Since all organizations had begun implementing TQM, they all had success experiences to report.

Changing social relationships, the restructuring of groups due to use of TQM teamwork, was disclosed as a driver similarly to when it was an obstruction.

### DISCUSSION

Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) warn that managers too often use the same strategy of change for all situations without a careful diagnosis of the situation. The interview results clearly showed different drivers and obstructions will be aroused at different levels of management.

#### Top management

The dominant driver was tension. Top managers saw the need for change but were obstructed by perceived threats to their vested interest. Kotter and Schlesinger recommend an approach of "negotiation and agreement" in this circumstance.

#### Middle management

The dominant driver for middle managers is tension. Middle managers in all six companies saw numerous needs for implementing TQM. They were also motivated by task accomplishment and improved social relations. Uncertainty about the changes coupled with threats to vested interests and lack of a champion were the obstructions. Kotter and Schlesinger's prescribed approach to change in this situation is "participation and involvement."

#### First line supervisors

First line supervisors were driven by seeing results of TQM, (task accomplishment) and obstructed by a perceived failure of top management to champion TQM. "Facilitation and support" is the recommended approach for first line supervisors.

Managers charged with the responsibility implementing TQM need to be sensitive to the differing sources of resistance (obstructions) inherent in TQM. Fortunately, in addition to the obstructions, TQM has certain drivers that can be amplified to help the change process. The key to success will be the manager's careful diagnosis of the situation and selection of the most appropriate change approach.