

" Quality Management Is Essential For Development "

Wilfred Ndongko

Wilfred Ndongko, professor of development economy, former director of the Institute of Human Sciences, and adviser to the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, explains the importance of the new management concept to Cameroon.

What is the concept of Total Quality management all about?

According to many students of modern business management practices, Total Quality Management is a philosophy of complete organisational involvement in improving all aspects of the quality of a product or service provided by an organisation. Total Quality management is generally achieved through, employee empowerment and decision making, facilitating things in organisation, individual responsibility for products and services, a strong customer service orientation, working from a set of values, maintaining commitment and professionalism, sustaining motivation, prioritising tasks, cooperating and collaborating with others, communicating effectively, and finally, seeking to continuously learn and grow.

How can the concept of Total Quality Management be effectively introduced in the Cameroon management system?

It is a very important concept. I think it can be introduced in Cameroon, especially within the context of the present economic policy which emphasises efficiency and utilisation in economic policy, fight against corruption, and the necessity of improving the lives of all Cameroonians on a long term basis. Like any new concept, there has to be preconditions. What we need to do in Cameroon for the concept to work, is to undertake the following: firstly, to be able to change our culture and way of thinking in terms of the way we look at management. In other words, we shouldn't see management as a one-man show where the Minister or a director general of a State Corporation is all and all and a de factor personality.

We should consider management in Cameroon as involving all stakeholders, in the process of delivering goods and services to the public. Those who are appointed, those involved in producing services, all actors within and outside a business organisation should all be concerned with management. The main objective here is to jointly work together to improve the quality of service and product that are provided to the public. With TQM, we make sure that the solutions we provide to problems are not short term but ones that are long lasting. The TQM emphasises on the importance of the customer in the management chain. In other words, the person asking for services is the most important. Finally, the TQM ensures that everyone (from cleaner up to the highest authority), takes responsibility for what they do in the organisation or government institution.

What are the benefits that can be drawn from the T.Q.M. concept?

Some of the bottlenecks we face in the past years whether in the public or private sector will be eliminated. Under the traditional system of management, we have the hierarchical system where the absence of one person in the line of management can block the whole process for that period. With the TQM, we are working on a team basis.

Another advantage with the TQM is that offices do not belong to individuals but to the public. While those occupying them are away, their colleagues should have access to them and to the files so as to attend to the customer whenever necessary. The TQM breaks down bureaucracy, delays and file chasing.

Within the context of the TQM Concept, what are the factors that determine the quality of a product or service?

Contrary to what many people think, that it is the price that determines quality, the quality of a product or service is determined by the ability to meet the needs and expectations of the customer. Let us take the health care sector for instance. When you enter a hospital, the rapidity with which the doctor or nurse attends to you, diagnoses and resolves your problem is an indication or measure of the quality. Very often, this is not the case. You find a situation where wrong drugs, are prescribed to the patient because time was not taken to diagnose the problem. Whether we are talking about the public sector or private sector, the consequences are the same; poor quality of services. In education for instance, the seriousness with which a teacher prepares his lessons, and delivers his lectures determine the quality of the products (education) imparted on a student. In fact, there are many measuring rods for quality depending on the sector we are talking about.

We would like to imagine that the TQM has worked in several other countries. Can we have an idea of such countries and how it succeeded there?

It is very important to emphasise that for the system to work, there should be a radical change. Let us take the example of a country like Japan which was relatively backward with a lot of tradition, but have been able to change their culture of thinking and introducing positive things that had nothing to do with their culture. It is through the implementation of the total quality management that the Japanese economy has been transformed over the years. Today, Japan is the second largest economic power in the world. Today, we see Japanese product not only exported to America but are produced in the backyard of America. The TQM has also been used partially in Britain. I think it can be introduced in Cameroon.

How soon do you think the concept should come to Cameroon?

Evidently, I cannot say very soon, because there a lot of preconditions. Presently we do not have the preconditions. We need to be more serious, committed, sacrificial and change our mentality. We need to know that when we say seven O'clock at work, it is not eleven O'clock. We close at 3.30 p.m not 12 noon. We need to put the interest of our country first. Unless we are able to do this, the concept cannot succeed in Cameroon.

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