



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Going Global? Take Quality Along

Today's organizations are focusing more and more on results. Implementing quality while taking into consideration an organization's culture has not been an easy task. The task is even more difficult in the context of global organizations.

It is interesting to note how leading multinationals with a global presence are tackling this issue. These organizations are well aware of what they want to achieve in terms of quality. They have also identified quality systems that will help them achieve their objectives. The challenge, however, is in implementing the systems in the varied cultures and environments that their facilities and subsidiaries operate in. Successful multinational organizations have been able to do this.

Ignoring cultural differences in different geographical locations can adversely impact the effectiveness of a quality system implementation. Companies should therefore be aware of this aspect while going global or when intending to invest in companies abroad.

In the US, for instance, the work culture is more inclined towards growth and flexibility. At the same time, in Europe people value steadiness, acceptance, and variety. In the US, individual performance evokes the most interest, and in European countries like Germany and the Netherlands, teamwork counts the most. In southern European countries like France, the workplace atmosphere is almost family-like. The person with the most knowledge is generally accepted as the leader of a group or a team. Therefore, managers taking up the implementation of a quality system should have first hand experience of these systems. They should also have a strong leadership orientation while taking up projects related to process improvement.

These are just some examples of geographic locations and their diversity in work cultures. Even within a country, the work culture can have certain intrinsic diversities. It is therefore important that organizations study the varying cultures and tune their approach accordingly. Organizations need to first understand the distinctiveness of a particular geographic region. They should then identify what needs to be done to make the quality system implementation meet the organization's objectives. Finally, the organization should set up appropriate structures to support the customized implementation.

Take, for instance, a country like the Netherlands where team performance is given greater value. Here, the quality systems have to be more centralized and should have an official ring to them. The work culture where individual performance is valued more requires an official quality system, but decision making must be delegated as much as possible. Certain countries, especially those leading the world in new technologies or products, are characterized by a thirst for knowledge. In such cultures, a quality system that is informal and provides flexibility for experimentation is suitable.

Measures While Going Global

Organizations going global can:



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- Send their managers to attend appropriate seminars and conferences, or involve them in overseas benchmarking exercises.
- Develop formal and informal contacts of people in the particular geographic region and gain from their input.
- Spend time learning the language and understanding the culture, especially where it has a bearing on the work. Values, communication and learning are aspects of a culture that cannot be ignored.

An organization needs time to adapt and operate in a new geographic location. Often they are seen spending both money and time helping their managers get acquainted with the foreign language and work culture. Some leading Japanese companies provide their managers with year-long training before they are posted in a foreign country. This is probably why they tend to be successful in their global business operations.

Quality, being a crucial issue in operations, needs to be an area of attention when an organization is global, or wants to go global.