

Running head: GLOBAL QUALITY LEADERSHIP

Global Quality Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of International Quality Leaders

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Abstract

The role of a quality leader is rapidly changing from a domestic only focus to a global perspective. To remain competitive, manufacturers and service providers are increasingly moving operations into foreign countries to meet the low cost demands of consumers. With this shift in strategy comes a challenge for organizational quality leaders to ensure the same high quality product and/or service once supplied domestically can now be provided from a foreign location. The international quality leader faces a new challenge in establishing robust quality management systems that work across borders and between cultures. The challenge for international quality leaders lies not only in knowledge of modern quality techniques, but also in the ability to work between cultures. Significant research exists in the study of international managers, but little focus has been placed on the specific role of the quality leader. This research study utilized a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of eight international quality leaders to better understand what characteristics, training, and education lead to becoming an effective leader, and how best to prepare future leaders for the challenge of managing quality from an international perspective. The research suggests that the technical skills of global quality leaders are no different to those needed by domestic leaders. Key characteristics of leaders supports previous research suggesting integrity, customer focus, and flexibility are critical to success. Aside from language and cultural awareness training, on-site mentoring and pre-assignment relationship building with international coworkers were the most effective methods suggested by the research participants to prepare for the challenges of an international assignment.

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Global Quality Leadership

More than ever we are living in a global economy in which consumers continually push retailers and service providers for lower costs and increasing levels of quality. To meet these needs organizations are moving their operations into countries with lower cost structures, which present a series of new challenges for organizational leaders. Providing the same safety and quality criteria for products and services supplied by foreign workers requires a robust quality management system. One could argue that with the challenges facing global organizations the role of the quality leader is becoming pivotal to long-term success.

Previous Research

Significant research has been conducted on international management and what makes a global leader effective (Accenture, 2001; Gregerson, Morrison, & Black, 1998; Javidan, Teagarden, & Bowen, 2010; Thomas, 2008). Research related to development of international managers has also been extensively studied (Javidan, Teagarden, & Bowen, 2010; Thomas 2008). The existing research has taken a holistic view of international management with little regard for specific functional perspectives such as quality management.

Minimal research was discovered relating to characteristics or competencies of quality managers or their development. The existing research focuses solely on the characteristics and technical skills of quality managers, continual improvement methodologies, and theories for improving quality leadership (Addey, 2004; Chen, Coccari, Paetsch, & Paulraj, 2000; Kenett & Albert, 2001; Lakshman, 2006; Waldman et

al., 1998). No research specific to international quality manager characteristics, competencies, or development was discovered.

Significance of the Research

A study of the characteristics and competencies of international quality leaders and their development is important for several reasons. First, the supply chains for many organizations are becoming global to reduce costs and stay competitive while meeting the demands of consumers for safe high quality products and services. Second, as organizations begin to outsource so too will come the need for continual improvement initiatives to not only solve current problems, but also to ensure proactive efforts are being taken to minimize future risk.

Third, to ensure consistency in product and service quality the use and knowledge of international quality standards will likely become a major component to an organization's international strategy. A final, and perhaps most important reason for the significance of this research, is the ever increasing litigiousness of society. The quality and safety of foreign products and services present a significant risk to organizations. For example, in 2007 there were 13 major recalls related to toys, food, and tires produced in China that exposed companies providing these products to litigation, and more significantly, serious illness, injury, or death to individuals who purchased the products (Fremlin, 2007).

Quality professionals will likely be the ones tasked with establishing strategies and initiatives connected to the aforementioned factors related to the significance of this research. One could also argue that as more organizations implement outsourcing strategies to remain competitive, the demand for international quality leaders will

increase along with the need to understand how best to prepare them for international assignments.

Traditionally, quality professionals possess the education, training, and experience to best lead activities related to supply chain quality, continual improvement, and the implementation of international quality management systems. The challenge will not likely come in the technical aspects of leading these efforts, but in working in a foreign country where the culture is different from the quality leader's homeland. Understanding what leads to success in a foreign land and how to develop future quality leaders represents a significant research opportunity that is likely to aid in helping establish organization's international strategies, and minimize their exposure to legal ramifications from unsafe low quality products and services.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand the experiences of international quality leaders. The study focused on the characteristics and competencies of an effective quality leader, and the development activities leading to success. Individual leaders were solicited through online business networking web sites LinkedIn, Plaxo, and Spoke, and online quality discussion communities Elsmar Cove and American Society for Quality (ASQ).

Study participants were interviewed through the use of an online questionnaire followed by email interviews where added clarity was needed. The study was limited to quality leaders experienced in development, implementation, and management of continual improvement (CI) initiatives, quality management systems (QMS), and/or supply chains in countries foreign to their native homeland.

Definition of Terms

ISO: International Organization for Standardization is the world's largest publisher of international standards.

Lean: A method of improvement based on Japanese manufacturing concepts that include mapping value streams within an organization, and identifying areas that include processes that are non-value added (those a customer is not willing to pay for), and either eliminating the process or minimizing it.

MBNQA: Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. This is an excellence achievement award given by the U.S. government each year to organizations in the service, manufacturing, small business, non-profit, education, and healthcare sectors.

QMS: Quality Management System. A management system used to define, document, and improve the processes used by an organization to manufacture a product or provide a service.

Six Sigma: A process improvement methodology used to reduce variation and costs leading to increased customer satisfaction and profitability. Statistically, six sigma is quantified as 3.4 defects per million opportunities.

TQM: Total quality management gained popularity in the 1980s as American companies tried to compete with their Japanese counterparts. TQM is focused on increasing customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, and teamwork.

Literature Review

The world is quickly becoming one global economy as organizations look to foreign countries to reduce costs, while continuing to maintain safe high quality products and services. With the increase in outsourcing over the past several decades, the

popularity of international management has risen, leading to significant research into several aspects of global leadership.

The concept of total quality management (TQM) made popular by Deming (2000) in the 1980s, and more recently, six sigma (Harry, 2000) and lean (Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1990) in the 1990s, has provided the impetus for a number of research studies related to the role of a quality leader. No significant research was discovered specifically focused on the function of the quality leader from an international perspective, however, this literature review aims to describe what is known about quality management and global leadership to help provide an understanding for the basis of this research.

The Evolution of Quality Management

The quality management function has significantly evolved over the last several decades. In a traditional sense the role of quality was initially developed as a mechanism for ensuring control over the output of processes (Addey, 2004). The role of quality was to find defective product before it reached the customer, which placed the quality function in a position of policing an organization's products (Chen, Coccari, Paetsch, & Paulraj, 2000).

Deming (2000) popularized the notion that quality comes not from inspection, but improvement of the process, which led to a paradigm shift in quality management in the 1980s. Deming helped move industry from quality control activities being the primary role of quality, to one of quality assurance, where focus is placed on prevention instead of detection. As the quality function started to evolve from detection to prevention, continual improvement began to take hold in the quality profession with the rise in

popularity of international quality standards, most notably ISO 9000, and the concept of total quality management (TQM).

The ISO 9001 standard gained popularity in the 1990s to help satisfy the need for an international standard for quality management systems (Okes & Westcott, 2001). The widespread acceptance of the ISO standard expanded the scope of the quality leader toward a focus of compliance with the standard, and continual improvement initiatives aimed at improving organizational processes.

The concept of TQM is best summarized as a management system focused on customer satisfaction that involves all employees of an organization in continual improvement activities (Okes & Westcott, 2001). With a greater focus on improvement emphasized by the ISO standard, TQM became a complimentary addition to the responsibilities of quality leaders in the 1990s, elevating their value in organizations striving to compete globally.

Building on the concept of continual improvement grounded in the ISO standards and TQM, lean and six sigma evolved from the need to reduce non-value added activities, and minimize variation, respectively. The concept behind lean came from the Japanese automakers who gained significant market share over U.S. automakers in the 1970s and 1980s. The primary objective of lean is identifying value streams within organizations and labeling processes within the streams as value or non-value added from the perspective of the customer. Lean thinking suggests that by minimizing or eliminating non-value activities an organization can deliver products and services to customers quicker and at a lower cost with higher quality (Womack et al., 1990).

The most recent quality movement has been related to six sigma. The raw statistics of six sigma equate to 3.4 defects per million opportunities, nearly a perfect level of quality. The central focus of six sigma is based in the idea that quality is defined as meeting customer expectations with minimal variation. The process of six sigma can generally be described as defining and measuring the problem, analyzing data, establishing improvement initiatives, and implementing control mechanism to maintain the improvements (Harry, 2000).

There is no question that over the last three decades the role of the quality leader has changed significantly. The importance of this role has led to an expanded list of responsibilities that requires a multitude of unique abilities that come from experience, training, and education specific to the needs of organizations striving to compete on a global scale.

Characteristics of a Quality Leader

Despite the importance of effective quality leadership in organizations competing both domestically and internationally, little research exists in the study of characteristics of quality leaders. The American Society for Quality (ASQ), arguably the most recognized quality association in the world with over 100,000 members, offers a certification in the management of quality and organizational excellence that provides some basis in defining the competencies required to be an effective quality leader (ASQ, 2010).

The body of knowledge ASQ (2010) uses to test individuals seeking certification includes seven key areas that include:

1. Leadership

2. Strategic planning and deployment
3. Management elements and methods
4. Quality management tools
5. Customer focus
6. Supply chain management
7. Training and development

The leadership category includes an understanding of organizational structures and culture along with challenges faced by leaders in addition to the effective use of teams. Strategic planning development and deployment describes the use of different strategic planning models, methods for evaluating the business environment, and means by which to deploy a strategic plan. Management elements and methods focus on management skills and abilities, communication, project management, quality systems, and quality models and theories (ASQ, 2010).

The quality management tools category centers on problem solving methodologies, process management, and measuring performance. Customer focus revolves around identifying and segmenting customers and maintaining relationships. Supply chain management deals with selecting and communicating with suppliers, establishing performance benchmarks, creating certifications, partnerships, and alliances with suppliers, in addition to understanding the logistics of working with suppliers. The final category is training and development, which is comprised of developing training plans, completing needs analysis, creating training materials, and evaluating the effectiveness of training efforts (ASQ, 2010).

Based on the ASQ body of knowledge, an effective quality leader must possess a wide array of understanding in the multitude of roles required of the leader. Addey (2004) supports the ASQ requirements, arguing the role of a quality manager is divided into several unique roles. Addey suggests a modern quality manager plays many roles, some of which include salesperson, teacher, consultant, detective, researcher, strategist, and customer.

As a salesperson the quality manager plays a pivotal role in selling the importance of quality as an issue that affects everyone within an organization. In the role of a teacher the quality manager continues to act as a salesperson selling the concept of training to other managers. As a consultant the quality manager acts as an internal support system to others within the organization facing problems. Similar to a crime detective, the quality manager plays a key role in identifying the causes of issues creating quality problems (Addey, 2004).

In the researcher role a quality manager is always looking for a better way, and trying to understand theory to put into practice. Long-term sustainability is also part of the quality manager's role, always focusing on the future and ensuring initiatives created in the short-term lead to long-term advantage. A final role the quality manager plays may arguably be the most important as one of customer. The quality manager represents the customer in many ways, always ensuring their best interests are constantly in the minds of employees within the organization (Addey, 2004).

Citing the lack of comprehensive research related to success characteristics of quality managers, Chen et al. (2000) undertook a comprehensive research study to

determine the perception of quality managers in relation to the effect of seven factors that included:

1. Career path
2. Education
3. Product diversity
4. Organizational structure
5. Tools and techniques utilized
6. Program orientation
7. ASQ affiliation

Chen et al. (2000) describe career path as the notion that quality managers need to have in-depth knowledge of products and processes to have a true understanding of how defects could affect the function of a product. Education is divided into three categories including continuing education at colleges or universities, seminars, and ASQ related training. The researchers describe product diversity as the theory that higher diversity inhibits a quality manager's ability to succeed due to a belief that a more diverse product line equates to an increase in quality issues.

Structure defines the effect on reporting level of the manager on their performance with the belief that the person a quality manager reports to may have an effect on their success. Tools and techniques describe the methodologies used by the quality manager related to traditional quality methods that include many of the ISO 9000 processes including audits, document control, and corrective actions. Program orientation refers to specific methods used by the quality manager such as TQM and six

sigma. A final element in the research sought to understand if affiliation with ASQ had an impact on a quality manager's perceptions related to success (Chen et al., 2000).

Chen et al. (2000) used the Thomas Register of American Manufacturers to sample individuals with job titles that included quality manager, quality control manager, and director of quality. Surveys were completed by 193 participants. Based on the analysis of the responses the researchers concluded educational and on the job experiences were perceived to be important to the success of quality managers. The researchers also found some support for the idea having the title of vice president of quality, director of quality, or chief quality officer enhances success. A final outcome of the research showed that procedures and techniques within the ISO 9000 standard also contribute to the success of quality managers. Summarizing the results, the researchers define the profile of a quality manager most likely to succeed as the following:

- Experience in multiple departments such as manufacturing, design, testing, assembly, production control, and inspection.
- Formal training in techniques such as statistical process control, inspection, and ISO 9000 provided by ASQ, local colleges, and consultants.
- Reporting to a high level within the organization.
- Stressing the use of traditional tools such as corrective actions and quality records.
- Embracing the teachings of Deming and Juran.
- Affiliation with ASQ and a regular reader of their journals and magazines.

International Quality Management Practices

A study comparing quality management practices in Mexico and the U.S. may provide some insight into the technical abilities needed to be successful as a global quality leader. Parast, Adams, Jones, Rao, and Raghu-Nathan (2006) conducted a quantitative study using a survey based on the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) criteria to determine if differences exist between quality practices in Mexico and the U.S.

A total of 200 quality managers in the U.S. and 113 in Mexico completed the survey. The findings of their research showed that no difference exists between the quality management practices in Mexico and the U.S. based on the MBNQA criteria. The researchers concluded that quality management practices appear to be universal, supporting a generalization of quality management practices. They do suggest, however, that social differences may play a role in the practice of quality management.

Characteristics of International Managers

No existing research was discovered related specifically to international quality leaders, but a significant volume of research does exist covering a broader perspective of international management. This research provides a generalized view and insight into what leads to the success of international managers. Coupled with the literature previously discussed specific to the quality function, this research helps to combine the technical aspects of quality management with the qualitative characteristics of international managers, thereby providing some insight into what may lead to a better understanding of developing and characterizing international quality leaders.

Gregerson, Morrison, and Black (1998) argue that all global managers need to have a certain set of context specific abilities, and a core set of characteristics to be successful. Their research concluded that one-third of a global manager's success is linked to specific knowledge and skills. These include understanding the organization's culture, knowledge specific to the industry in which the organization competes, and an understanding of the accepted management practices for the country in which they work. Two thirds of the characteristics apply no matter what level position the individual has, organizational culture, the norms of the industry in which they compete, or the management practices in the country they work. These characteristics include demonstrating character and business savvy, as well as embracing duality. What really stood out in their research as a catalyst to these characteristics is that successful international managers have an uninhibited curiosity to constantly be learning about what they do not know, and are motivated by a sense of adventure.

The subjects of the research conducted by Gregerson et al. (1998) consistently repeated that having a curious nature fueled their desire for increasing their knowledge of international business. The research also concluded that personal character is based on two components, connecting with people on an emotional level and demonstrating uncompromising integrity. According to the researchers, connecting with individuals on an emotional level is a three step process beginning with having a sincere interest in others, followed by making an effort to listen, and being able to understand the differing perspectives of other people. Creating this connection is critical in establishing trust. The researchers also found that integrity is a characteristic that is tested more often

when on an international assignment where corporate governance is not to the level as when working domestically.

International leaders also need to have the ability to deal with uncertainty. Gregerson et al. (1998) argue that while domestic managers deal with uncertainty as well, international managers must deal with it on a more frequent basis. The most obvious source of uncertainty relates to managers moving from their native country where they are likely most comfortable, to a foreign culture where a significant degree of uncertainty is bound to be encountered. The researchers argue that managers must have a high tolerance for ambiguity to better cope with the unknowns encountered when working in a different culture. The researchers also suggest that in addition to uncertainty managers must also deal with certain tensions of balancing local needs with those of global integration. The research suggests that those managers who are able to balance the two by not focusing entirely on localizing or globalizing all activities are more likely to succeed. The challenge lies in the ability of determining which activities should stay local and which should become global. A final characteristic identified by the researchers is savvy. Savvy can be divided into two categories that include business and organizational. Business savvy includes understanding the global market for the products and/or services the organization provides, whereas organizational savvy revolves around knowing the capabilities of the organization and how they can be best utilized to be successful in the execution of the business' strategy.

In a research study that consisted of several focus groups with participants from around the world including senior managers and CEOs, over 100 interviews with senior executives, and 200 survey respondents, Accenture (2001) sought to develop a profile

for the global leader of the future. The focus of the research was not to develop a model for leadership, but to identify the characteristics, competencies, values, and leadership issues that could give a leader an advantage in a marketplace that is constantly changing.

Accenture (2001) defines global leadership as, “an extraordinary capacity to unify a global workforce around a single purposeful vision, through demonstration of personal mastery, thinking globally, anticipating opportunity and using shared leadership networks” (p. 3). The research uncovered three key themes about the future of global leadership. First, global leaders constantly practice personal mastery. Personal mastery comes from a high degree of self-awareness by which individuals capitalize on their strengths, and identify the gaps in their competencies. Global leaders are also characterized by strong core and spiritual values, and have a high degree of emotional, business, and intellectual intelligence. The research also suggests global leaders are able to influence others both inside and outside of the organization, and can lead both formal and informal networks without having any formal authority. A final theme uncovered in the research suggests global leaders have the ability to build individual and organizational abilities by using differences in culture, style, and thought from around the world. They also appreciate the differences within individuals, and understand the needs of multiple age groups, and are able to motivate people at all age levels.

To better understand the characteristics of a global leader of the future, Accenture (2001) asked two questions to help define the profile of a global leader of the future. The questions included, “What will effective leaders be like in the future?” (p. 13),

and “What competencies must a leader have to be successful in the changing global marketplace of the future?” (p. 13). From these two questions a questionnaire was developed to measure a future global leader on 14 dimensions. The quantitative data collected from this questionnaire was later validated through qualitative data that was collected in focus groups, thought panels, observations, and interviews. The research concluded that all 14 dimensions are important, and a leader will need to excel at all of them in order to be successful in the global marketplace of the future. The 14 dimensions include the following:

1. Thinks globally
2. Anticipates opportunity
3. Creates a shared vision
4. Develops and empowers people
5. Appreciates cultural diversity
6. Builds teamwork and partnerships
7. Embraces change
8. Shows technological savvy
9. Encourages constructive challenge
10. Ensures customer satisfaction
11. Achieves a competitive advantage
12. Demonstrates personal mastery
13. Shares leadership
14. Lives the values (p. 13)

In similar research conducted as part of the GLOBE project, researchers studying the attributes of successful global managers found several similar characteristics considered to be desirable by managers including integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, being able to communicate effectively, coordinate activities, and build teams. The research also uncovered some undesirable characteristics that include leaders who are ruthless, have big egos, or are highly irritable or antisocial (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, & House, 2006).

Javidan et al. (2006) also discovered attributes of successful global managers similar to previously cited research that include having what they call a “global mind-set” (p. 85), a high tolerance for uncertainty, and the ability to adapt to different cultures. The global mind-set is important in understanding new cultures and all the nuances that come with working in a foreign land such as the differences in political, legal, and economic systems in addition to the management paradigms of the culture. Also important is the ability to deal effectively with uncertainty. Each culture represents a potential to create the need to learn how to manage differently, which can pose a significant challenge to managers working in an unfamiliar culture. A final attribute found in the research linked to successful global managers, is the ability to quickly adapt to a new environment, and change behavior patterns to those that are acceptable to the local culture.

Javidan, Teagarden, and Bowen (2010) conducted interviews with 200 executives in the U.S., Asia, and Europe, and surveyed more than 5,000 managers around the world, expanding on the global mind-set concept previously discussed. In their research they focused on creating an understanding of what contributes to both

success and failure of international managers. From this research three main components of the global mind-set were established. The three components include the following:

1. Intellectual capital
2. Psychological capital
3. Social capital

Intellectual capital can be described as an individual's knowledge of international business and their capacity to learn, psychological capital is the ability of an individual to change and learn new cultures, and social capital describes the ability to make new connections with people who are not like you, bring together individuals around a common purpose, and influence others who are unlike yourself (Javidan et al., 2010).

Javidan et al. (2010) describe each of the components as having specific attributes. Intellectual capital is characterized by the attributes of global business savvy, which is based in a strong understanding of global markets; cognitive complexity, demonstrated by the ability to link together multiple scenarios consisting of several parts; and a cosmopolitan outlook, which is described as having an interest in cultural specifics (i.e. government, history, geography, etc.) of foreign countries.

Psychological capital can be characterized as a passion for diversity, a love of adventure, and having self-confidence. Social capital has the attributes of intercultural empathy, which is demonstrated in the ability to connect at an emotional level with people from a different culture; interpersonal impact, characterized as being able to bring differing views together to build consensus and maintain trustworthiness; and

diplomacy, described as the ability to listen to others and be able to discuss differences in a diplomatic manner (Javidan et al., 2010).

Developing Global Managers

Gregerson et al. (1998) suggest that based on their research in interviews with leaders of Fortune 500 organizations, “global leaders are born and then made” (p. 28). The researchers compare the process of creating effective global leaders to one similar to developing great musicians and athletes. To become the best, argue Gregerson et al., takes talent, opportunity, training, and education. The authors suggest that organizations that take a formalized approach to training perform better financially than those who do not. Despite this finding, their survey results show that more than 40 percent of organizations take an ad hoc approach to developing global leaders.

Gregerson et al. (1998) suggest the development process should take a global approach in understanding not just one country, but the entire world. Four strategies suggested by the authors include travel, teams, training, and transfers. Two unique travel suggestions by the authors are to take detours off the main roadways when traveling to get a better sense of the country, and spending time exploring markets, schools, shops, and homes to gain a better understanding of what living in the country is really like. Teams also provide a development opportunity to work with people from different cultures. Training is also an obvious strategy for learning about a different culture. A final strategy is transferring to a new assignment and immersing oneself in a foreign land. Eighty percent of the study’s respondents believe that working and living in a foreign country is the single most effective method of becoming a better manager.

Javidan et al. (2006) suggest that organizations start by making a large volume of information on global and cross-cultural issues and reports specific to different countries available to employees. The authors also suggest the use of multimedia programs and journals specific to international management. Consistent with the findings of Gregerson et al. (1998), Javidan et al. conclude that international assignments are the most effective method to developing global leadership capabilities.

Javidan et al. (2010) offer a more structured approach to preparing for an international assignment, suggesting the use of an assessment tool to gain a better understanding of an individual's weaknesses related to the global mind-set components. Based on the assessment the authors suggest a plan consisting of, "read, surf, watch, do, and listen" (p. 111). To improve intellectual capital the authors also suggest reading publications such as the Economist and Foreign Affairs to develop an understanding of international issues. Also suggested is watching television programs with an international perspective, and attending lectures, conferences, and workshops. Overall, the authors argue that improving intellectual capital is the easiest to improve of the three.

Psychological capital is the most difficult to improve, argue Javidan et al. (2010). The authors believe it is the most difficult to improve simply because there are limits to how much one can, or should, change their personality. Two questions are suggested by the authors to help individuals increase self awareness. First, how do you feel about things such as people and places that are foreign to you? Why do you feel this way? Second, do you feel it is necessary to change the way you feel, and if so, why? Javidan

et al. suggest once you answer these questions you will be better prepared to take on activities related to improving your psychological capital.

Building social capital is related to improving ones ability to widen your relationships with people outside of your normal circle of social interaction (Javidan et al., 2010). The authors suggest the challenge is to widen your perspective by interacting with people who have interests and viewpoints that differ from yours. Taking on assignments with international teams, traveling to foreign countries, and joining social networking groups such as those that include both face to face and online interaction are ways in which to increase social capital.

The existing literature on quality leadership and international management suggests that the role of a global quality leader requires a myriad of knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be gained through experience, education, and training. Coupled with the challenge of working internationally that includes dealing with language and cultural barriers, the role of being an effective global quality leader becomes even more challenging. Not only must the leader utilize their technical abilities to establish robust quality management systems to ensure product and service quality and a constant effort to improve both, they must also learn to work in a culture where norms and expectations may not be similar to their own. With minimal literature published on what makes an effective global quality leader and how best to prepare them for taking on this role, this literature review provides a basis for further argument in the need to conduct this research. This research may help provide a starting point from which to build a knowledge base in what will likely become an increasingly important role as organizations continue to capitalize on the benefits created by globalization.

Research Methodology

This research study used a qualitative approach to examine the experiences of international quality leaders. The research focused on two primary questions:

1. What individual characteristics, education, training, and experience lead to becoming an effective international quality leader?
2. What development activities are most important to becoming an effective international quality leader?

The research methodology utilized a phenomenological approach to solicit the experiences of international quality leaders by means of an online questionnaire and email interview follow up questions. Based on the responses to the questionnaire and follow up interviews, data was coded and segmented, and themes were identified to help answer the research questions.

Phenomenological Research

The primary focus of this research study was on the experiences of international quality leaders, making the phenomenological methodology the most appropriate method of research. Creswell (2009) describes phenomenological research as a method of inquiry in which research participants describe their experiences related to a specific phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) suggests that the phenomenological method is ideal for research in which it is important to understand the shared or common experience of multiple individuals related to a phenomenon.

By studying a small number of participants the researcher begins to uncover patterns and relationships of meaning around a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Boyd (2001) suggests two to 10 research participants is adequate to

reach saturation, while Creswell (2007) recommends long interviews with up to 10 participants, making the phenomenological methodology ideal for using small sample sizes to gain a solid understanding surrounding a common experience.

Data Collection

Research participants were solicited through posting a brief description of the research and the ideal characteristics of participants (see Appendix A) to online business networking web sites LinkedIn, Spoke, and Plaxo. The posting was made available to members of groups related to quality and process improvement. Participants were also solicited through ASQ and the Elsmar Cove online discussion forums popular with quality professionals. All postings were made in April 2010. A convenience sampling method was utilized primarily due to the time constraints in completing the research study. Despite the use of a convenience sample methodology criterion was established to ensure only expert commentary was used. The online postings were used to reach as vast an audience possible in the time available.

Respondents to the postings were asked to complete an online profile survey (see Appendix B) using kwiksurveys.com to help determine whether or not the individual had the appropriate background relevant to the research. The minimum requirements for the research participants included:

1. Quality, continual improvement, or supply chain role within an organization.
2. At least one year of experience working in a foreign country.

To ensure ethical research, an informed consent (see Appendix C) was utilized (Holloway, 1997; Kvale, 1996). The consent form was emailed to participants who were asked to reply to the email stating they agreed with the consent parameters. Consenting

participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire (see Appendix D) using kwiksurveys.com. The questionnaire remained available to the participants for a period of two weeks in May 2010 to allow ample time to formulate a response. Participants were also given the option to type their responses into a Microsoft Word document instead of using the kwiksurvey.com form.

Study Participants

A total of 24 participants responded to the online postings and completed the profile survey in April 2010. All 24 respondents came from the postings made to LinkedIn. Two participants were eliminated due to their work experience being limited to only their native country. Eight of the remaining 22 participants completed the study questionnaire. Two of the participants were female and the remaining six were male. The average age of the participants was 44. The youngest was 32, and the oldest 55. Three of the participants were from the U.S., two were from Brazil, and the remaining three were from Venezuela, Mexico, and South Africa.

The eight participants had an average of 13 years international work experience. The least experienced participant had five years of experience and the most experienced had 23 years. The countries in which the participants had experience working in included Mexico, U.S., U.K., Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, China, Indonesia, Brazil, Germany, Denmark, Argentina, Scotland, Taiwan, Ghana, Tanzania, Lesotho, Swaziland, Egypt, France, Spain, Columbia, Venezuela, and Peru. Five of the participants had experience in the service industry, four had experience in manufacturing, and two had experience in healthcare, non-profit, government, and education.

All eight participants had international experience working only in organizations with 500 or more employees. Four of the participants were managers, two were directors, and the remaining two were a technician and an engineer. Seven of the participants had previous experience as a manager, six as an engineer, one as a technician, and one as a director. Five of the participants had a masters degree, two had doctoral degrees, and one a bachelor degree.

Data Recording

Data for each participant was recorded on the kwiksurveys.com website and from the Microsoft Word form and exported to an Excel spreadsheet. Each participant was coded based on a sequential number related to the order in which they responded to the initial posting for study participants. The true identity of participants was only available to the researcher. All data was stored on the password protected laptop of the researcher or on the kwiksurveys.com website accessible only through the secure login of the researcher.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data of this study was done through a six step process as suggested by Creswell (2009). The steps included:

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This included formatting and sorting the data to begin the process of analysis.
2. Read through the data. By reading through the data the researcher began to identify the general ideas the participants were stating in their responses. Notes were also taken by the researcher during this process to aid in the analysis.

Questions to further clarify the answers were emailed to participants during this step of the process.

3. Code the data. Coding is a process by which textual information is segmented or grouped to help create meaning in the data (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The responses were coded to aid in establishing themes within the data (see Appendix E). Word frequency software was also used to quantify keywords that were repeated the most in the participants' responses.
4. Use the coding process to establish themes in the data. The themes were used to describe the findings in the data.
5. Determine how the themes will be described. Several options existed for describing the themes through narratives or visual representations.
6. Interpret the data. This final step included determining what had been learned from the data, and also led to new questions for future research.

Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research is based on ensuring the findings are accurate from the perspective of the participants, researcher, or the readers of the account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell (2009) recommends multiple strategies be used to ensure validity. Member checking, researcher bias, and peer debriefing were utilized to ensure the validity of this study.

Member checking is a process by which the researcher presents the findings to the participants for their feedback in relation to the accuracy of the results (Creswell, 2009). Before the final research paper was completed, each participant was given a copy of the results and discussion sections for review and comments.

Researcher bias can be used to help describe to the readers the potential bias the researcher may have based on their background and experience (Creswell, 2009). A narrative description of the potential bias the researcher may have is included in the limitations section of the paper contained within the discussion chapter to help the readers understand how the findings may have been interpreted based on the background and experience of the researcher.

Peer debriefing is done through sharing the research with a peer of the researcher who can offer a second perspective of the findings to add to the validity of the research (Creswell, 2009). Without compromising the identity of the participants, the researcher shared the findings with a peer for independent review.

While validity ensures the accuracy of results, reliability demonstrates the researcher's approach is consistent between different projects and researchers (Gibbs, 2007). Reliability ensures that using the same process another researcher could complete the study with similar findings. Several options exist for ensuring the reliability of the research. Three methods for reliability were utilized in this study.

The first method, suggested by Yin (2003), included documenting of all procedures and processes used in the solicitation and collection of data (see Appendix A, B, and D). A second method, suggested by Gibbs (2007), included defining all codes used to segment the data (see Appendix E). The third reliability method utilized used what Creswell (2009) defines as "intercoder agreement" (p. 191). This process involved reviewing text by two or more individuals to ensure consistency in the coding of the data.

Results

The research questions utilized in this study focused on gaining a better understanding of the challenges faced by global quality leaders, and the technical skills and characteristics needed to be successful in an international role. A secondary focus was placed on the methods utilized by the research participants to overcome the challenges, and how they would prepare future leaders for an international assignment.

Challenges to International Assignments

Communication was the most commonly cited challenge for the participants. Working in a country in which one does not know the language presented a significant communication challenge. Overcoming the language barrier was most commonly addressed through self-study or the use of a local tutor. Learning the language not only improved communication, it also helped improve relationships illustrated by the response: "I heard it so many times in Mexico that they appreciated me because I took the time to learn their language and spend time with them after work."

Cultural differences were also a challenge faced by the research participants. Working in an unfamiliar environment created a lack of identity and sense of belonging. Strategies for overcoming this challenge included studying the culture through both formal and informal training, brief trips to areas within the region to experience the culture, and by finding others with similar interests and cultural backgrounds to build social networks and help establish a sense of belonging.

The research participants also stressed the importance of listening skills as a critical component in improving communication, especially when utilizing a second language. Illustrative responses from participants included: "You need to be able to

listen, as well as understand when you are being understood, as opposed to just acknowledged,” and “I found that many of the local plant personnel to be on the same playing field, just misunderstood.”

Technical Skills and Characteristics

The research participants suggest that technical knowledge of global quality leaders is no different than the knowledge needed by domestic managers. To be an effective quality leader basic quality management tools such as corrective and preventive action, knowledge of continual improvement methodologies that include lean and six sigma, and an understanding of international quality standards such as ISO are important to being effective as a global quality leader. Illustrative responses from participants included: “In terms of technical skills it is the same as here in the U.S. You need to know ITIL, ISO, etc.,” and “I wouldn’t focus too much on the technical [skills]. These aspects are pretty much standard across the globe.”

Having a deep understanding of the business was also cited as a critical component to being successful. Global quality leaders not only need to understand the quality aspect of the organization, but they also need to have a knowledge base built around what drives the organization and the industry. Connecting with customer needs was also believed to be an important competency. Understanding the needs of customers and ensuring the organization is meeting those needs is a challenge faced by quality leaders working both domestically and internationally.

Being flexible was a common response to characteristics needed to be an effective leader. Dealing with the multitude of changes the research participants were faced with, having the ability to work through a changing environment often switching

from the local situation to issues being raised by other company locations, often issues promoted by headquarter locations in another country, make the need to be flexible increasingly important in a global role. The need to deal with a problem or initiative from a local cultural perspective and also from the perspective of the culture in other countries in which the organization operates also influenced the need to be flexible.

Integrity was also a key characteristic believed to be necessary as a global quality leader. The responsibility of quality leaders includes making certain that both product and services provided by the organization meet the needs of consumers and that no harm will come to them through their use. What is unacceptable in one culture might be considered acceptable in another. Participants believed that their actions in a foreign country should mimic those of their native homeland regardless of what is considered acceptable.

Respecting the local culture was also cited as an important aspect to gaining the support of coworkers. Instead of trying to force their cultural norms on the people they worked with and managed, the research participants learned the cultures they were working in, which helped to build a trusting relationship with those they managed and interacted with. Illustrative responses from participants included: "One of the biggest problems was the U.S. employees coming to the plant as gods and treating everyone there as if they were idiots. It really caused many problems and if they would have learned a little about the culture it would have went a long way to solve problems," and "I spent months getting to know people and working with them many times before trying to change manufacturing processes. After all these years it seems like a minor in

psychology would have been extremely beneficial in learning how to deal with different types of people.”

Preparing Future Leaders

When asked how their organization prepared them for their first international assignment the overwhelming majority of participants stated they had little to no preparation provided by their company as illustrated by the comment: “The main reason I was chosen to work in [country] and [country], was that the need for someone to go was very urgent. And I had a passport. That’s really true. I had no preparation at all.”

To understand what their organization could have done to better prepare them for the assignment participants were asked to look back at their initial assignment and identify what they would do differently to prepare. Two major themes in the responses included on-site mentoring and relationship building before starting the international assignment.

An on-site mentor with an understanding of the local culture and the organization’s workforce made the transition into an international role easier for some of the research participants. Acting as a guide, the on-site mentor was able to quickly acclimate them into the new role by offering advice on how to deal with the cultural differences between their native country and the country they were working in. Having a similar cultural background was also believed to be important in having a successful mentoring relationship. Building a relationship with fellow workers before moving to a foreign country was also believed to help ease the transition. Video conferencing, telephone conversations, and email between the research participants and those

working in the foreign country helped to build a relationship before the transition, which helped minimize the culture shock after arriving on-site to begin the assignment.

Discussion

The objective of this research had a dual purpose to better understand what characteristics, training, and education lead to becoming an effective global quality leader, and how best to prepare future leaders for taking on this role. The findings from this research help to reinforce what has been discovered in previous research, and also offers areas in which to study further to better understand what makes a global quality leader effective and how best to develop them for the challenges they will face.

The key characteristics defined by the research suggest integrity, flexibility, respect for cultural differences, business savvy, and a focus on customer needs are important in becoming an effective global quality leader. Integrity is somewhat of a universal leadership characteristic (Javidan et al., 2006). The research reinforced Gregerson et al. (1998) in the argument that when working internationally integrity is more susceptible to compromise, and successful leaders can increase the levels of trust throughout the organization by acting with integrity. The research also supports living the values of the organization, one of several characteristics Accenture (2001) found to be important in their research in building the profile of the future global leader.

The research also supports the idea that global leaders need to be flexible. The capacity to manage uncertainty is supported by the research conducted by Gregerson et al. (1998), furthering the argument that global quality leaders need to have the ability to deal with a higher level of uncertainty than that typically experienced as a domestic manager. Respect for others was also found to be important in helping to bridge the

cultural gap between cultures of local people and the global quality manager. Javidan et al. (2010) describe this as “intercultural empathy” (p. 111), which is part of social capital, one of three attributes they found to define successful global leaders. The research participants found that by respecting not only the local worker, but also their culture, a more cohesive relationship could develop faster than taking the perspective of their personal cultural background and forcing it on the local workforce.

Two final characteristics included business savvy and a focus on customer needs. Having strong business acumen is supported by several research studies characterizing effective global leaders (Accenture, 2001; Gregerson et al., 1998; Javidan et al., 2010; Kenett & Albert, 2001) as well as an emphasis on customer satisfaction (Accenture, 2001). This study supports the argument that global quality leaders not only have to be capable of leading quality related activities, but also need to understand what drives the business and related industry, and have a deep understanding of the needs and desires of customers.

This research also suggests that the technical skills, education, and training specific to global quality management are no different than those needed by domestic managers. Little research exists in the study of international quality managers, hence the primary reason for this research, but what does exist supports the conclusions of these findings (Parast et al., 2006; Spencer, 1994). The primary focus of quality management is to ensure product and/or service quality with a focus on continual improvement, and one reason why no difference was uncovered may be due to the general belief that no matter where a consumer resides they expect to receive a quality product and/or service. Based on the findings of this research an argument could be

made that the standard tools for quality improvement can be utilized effectively in all cultures despite the differences that may exist between them.

A general lack of training given to global quality leaders was also uncovered in this research, which also supports previous studies (Enderwick & Hodgson, 1993; Thomas, 2008; Tung, 1981). This research also concluded that on-site mentoring and pre-assignment relationship building were the most effective methods to development. In country training has previously been found to be one of the most effective means to developing international leaders (Eschbach, Parker, & Stoeberl, 2001; Feldman & Bolino, 1999; Selmer, 2001), and previous research on the effects of on-site mentoring (Feldman & Bolino, 1999) reinforce the conclusions of this research, supporting the argument that mentoring can increase the chances of success in developing global quality leaders.

The challenges faced by global quality leaders also supports previous research. Cultural differences and language barriers were cited as two of the largest barriers in succeeding. Cultural differences have previously been argued as a barrier to success by several researchers (Javidan & House, 2001; Thomas, 2008) as well as the challenges of working across language differences (Church, 1982; Mol, Born, Willemsen, & Van der Molen, 2005; Thomas, 2008; Thomas & Fitzsimmons, 2008).

To summarize the findings of this research, global quality leaders have many similar characteristics as domestic leaders such as integrity and customer focus, and the need for comparable technical experience, education, and training. There appears to be a greater focus on the need to develop the business and industry knowledge, and the ability to become more flexible when taking on an international assignment.

Developing new leaders should focus on the obvious challenges such as language and cultural awareness both of which can be addressed through formal and informal training and education. Establishing relationships with future coworkers before leaving on an international assignment should also be part of the development process. Creating these relationships will likely help support the language and cultural training as well as begin to establish mentoring relationships that appear to be a major factor in contributing to success once the leader arrives in a new country.

Implications

This research addresses a limited viewpoint of quality leadership from an international perspective, and represents one aspect in creating a global quality strategy. The research offers suggestions on selecting potential global quality leaders based on key characteristics, and identifying and establishing methods that may lead to the most effective development in their ability to succeed. In addition to the findings of this research, numerous additional elements of global quality management, such as varying degrees of quality expectations between cultures, workforce training and development, and management support, need to be considered when developing a global quality strategy.

Limitations

While Boyd (2001) and Creswell (2007) suggest 10 research participants are adequate to reach data saturation, the time constraints to complete this study did not allow for the sampling of this many individuals. With fewer participants, the conclusions reached by the researcher may not truly reflect an appropriate response to the research

questions, but despite this limitation the study will likely help establish some direction for future research where ample time exists to further investigate the subject.

The participants in this research were selected entirely online based on the response to the researcher's solicitation for participation in the study. This could have created the potential for participants to be dishonest regarding their experience, education, and training in relation to the research focus. While it was nearly impossible for the researcher to verify the backgrounds of the participants in the time allotted for the study, a thorough review of the participant's profiles on LinkedIn, Plaxo, and Spoke was completed by the researcher, along with Internet searches using the participant's names to help validate their background and experience from third party sources. The interviewing process was also conducted entirely online, which may have limited the depth of the responses. Face to face interviews may have led to different conclusions.

All research participants worked only in large organizations with greater than 500 employees, which may have affected the results. Based on the findings of this research the same conclusions may not have been reached if smaller organizations were studied. The participants also came from a vast array of industries. The results of this research may have come to different conclusions if only a single industry was studied.

To minimize the potential bias in this research the aforementioned validity techniques were utilized, however, in summarizing the results of this study it is important to note that the potential bias of the researcher may have influenced the interpretation of the results. To provide full transparency of that potential bias a full description of the researcher's background is provided. With this information disclosed, the reader will be able to gain a deeper understanding of how the researcher's

experience, education, and training may have influenced the interpretation of the participant's responses to the research questions.

The researcher's experience includes 19 years in the manufacturing industry, all of which have been in the U.S. This experience includes primarily roles in quality and manufacturing engineering, operations, and management. Educational background of the researcher includes undergraduate degrees in technology and engineering, a graduate degree in business, and as a doctoral student studying management. The researcher is also a member of ASQ, and is an ASQ certified quality engineer, manager of quality/organizational excellence, and six-sigma black belt.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this research two areas are recommended for further research that include the process for on-site mentoring and pre-assignment relationship building. Limited research has been conducted in the process of on-site mentoring (Feldman & Bolino, 1999), and additional research should be conducted to better understand what leads to an effective mentoring relationship specific to global quality leaders. Two questions that may provide further insight include:

1. What process leads to the most effective mentor-mentee relationship from a quality management perspective?
2. Is it important that the on-site mentor also be in a quality related role?

Additional research should also focus on how best to build relationships before an international assignment begins. With a greater understanding of how best to establish these relationships an organization may be able to ease the transition of

global quality leaders into a new culture. Questions that future research should address may include:

1. How soon before an international assignment should the relationship building process begin?
2. What methods lead to the most effective relations (telephone, email, video conferencing)?
3. How significant of an impact does relationship building have with on-site mentoring?

With a greater understanding of on-site mentoring and relationship building before an assignment begins organizations may be able to better prepare future leaders and increase their likelihood of success.

Conclusion

This research study suggests that global quality leaders need to have similar characteristics to their domestic counterparts such as integrity and a focus on customer satisfaction. A greater emphasis is needed in the ability to understand the business and industry, and in the capability to be flexible in an environment of rapid change. The research also points to the conclusion that the training, experience, and education of global quality leaders are also similar to those of domestic leaders.

The results of the research also imply development of global quality leaders should focus on language skills and cultural awareness as a foundation for success. Reinforcement of both language and cultural differences may also lead to higher performance when done in conjunction with relationship building activities taking place before the international assignment followed by on-site mentoring.

The role of the global quality leader will likely continue to develop and take on greater importance as organizations seek to capitalize on the advantages of globalization. By taking a proactive structured approach to not only selecting, but also in the development of the global leader, organizations will arguably have a greater chance of succeeding in an ever increasingly competitive world wide business environment.

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Appendix A

Research Participant Posting

Looking for international quality leaders for doctoral research project

I am working on a research project to better understand the characteristics of effective international quality leaders, and what leads to the development of these leaders.

If you have international experience and would like to contribute to this study please contact me at the email below.

Your involvement will be completely anonymous and a copy of the research will be provided to you once completed.

Scott Thor
scott.j.thor@gmail.com

Appendix B

Research Participant Profile Survey

1. Name
2. Sex
3. Age
4. Native country
5. Country where you are currently working and/or living
6. Countries in which you have worked
7. Industries in which you have worked:
 - a. Service
 - b. Manufacturing
 - c. Health care
 - d. Non-profit
 - e. Government
 - f. Education
8. Size of organizations in which you have worked:
 - a. Less than 10 employees
 - b. 10-100 employees
 - c. 100-500 employees
 - d. 500 or more employees
9. Number of years of experience you have with international assignments
10. Current position held with company:
 - a. Unemployed
 - b. Technician
 - c. Engineer
 - d. Manager
 - e. Director
 - f. Vice President
 - g. President
 - h. CEO, COO, CFO, CQO
11. Positions you have held with a company:
 - a. Technician
 - b. Engineer
 - c. Manager
 - d. Director
 - e. Vice President
 - f. President
 - g. CEO, COO, CFO, CQO
12. Highest level of education completed:
 - a. GED
 - b. High School Diploma
 - c. Associate
 - d. Bachelor
 - e. Masters
 - f. Doctorate

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this research study. This document outlines the purpose of the study, a description of your involvement, and your rights as a participant.

Purpose: The central focus of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of international quality leaders. This research will help answer two primary questions that include:

1. What individual characteristics, education, training, and experience lead to becoming an effective international quality leader?
2. What development activities are most important to becoming an effective international quality leader?

Involvement: Your involvement in this study will at a minimum include the completion of an online questionnaire in which you will describe your experience as an international quality leader. You may also be asked follow up questions via email or telephone interview by the researcher if added clarity is needed for the answers provided in the questionnaire.

Risks and benefits: There are no associated risks with this study outside of the use of your time to contribute. Benefits of the study will include the receipt of the final paper that may help you become a more effective international quality leader.

Your rights: You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time for any reason. All participant's personal information (name and email address) will be known to only the researcher who will not disclose the information to anyone. The data will be stored on the researcher's password protected laptop and on a secure web server accessible to only the researcher. Participants will be identified with a number code to ensure anonymity.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the researcher using the contact information below.

Scott Thor
scott.j.thor@gmail.com
661.204.9448

By responding to this email with the words "I agree" in the body of the message you are stating that you agree with the conditions of this consent and will participate in the research study.

Appendix D

Research Participant Questionnaire

1. Describe your first international assignment. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced both on and off the job? How did you overcome those challenges?
2. Looking back on your first international assignment and knowing what you know now, what could you or your organization have done to better prepare you for the assignment?
3. What do you believe are the most important characteristics or traits needed to be an effective international quality leader?
4. What knowledge and/or skills do you believe are most critical for becoming an effective international quality leader?
5. What additional information do you think would be valuable to the researcher in better understanding what makes one an effective international quality leader, and the process of developing these individuals?

Appendix E

Data Analysis and Coding

Data was analyzed using Excel word frequency counting software to identify which words were used by the participants the most. Common words such as “the”, “and”, etc. were removed from the analysis to better understand the keywords in the responses.

The data was also coded based on reading through the responses several times and linking key themes to specific codes.

Coding of the responses fell into one of four categories:

1. Challenges (questions 1 and 5)
 - a. XCOM-communication themes such as language and listening
 - b. XCUL-cultural issues
 - c. XFAM-family issues
 - d. XNET-networking, social issues
2. Characteristics (questions 3 and 5)
 - a. CINT-integrity
 - b. CFLX-flexibility
 - c. CVER-versatility
 - d. CREL-reliability
 - e. CCUS-customer focus
 - f. CVIS-vision
 - g. CTEM-team player
 - h. CDEM-decision making, execution
3. Technical knowledge, education, and/or training (questions 4 and 5)
 - a. KQMS-quality management system (corrective/preventive actions, auditing, ISO)
 - b. KSS-six sigma
 - c. KBIZ-business and/or industry knowledge
 - d. KTEM-team building
 - e. KSYS-systems thinking ability
4. Preparation (questions 2 and 5)
 - a. PLT-language training
 - b. PCA-cultural awareness training
 - c. PMEN-mentoring
 - d. PRB-relationship building through email, telephone, and video conferencing
 - e. PASQ-ASQ membership