

HIGHER EDUCATION AND TQM: NEEDS, CAVEATS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR 'EMPLOYEE SURVEYS'¹

Walton H. Owens, Jr.
Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634

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Introduction

For many years public opinion pollsters have been asking the public questions concerning things about which many respondents have little knowledge, no interest, and sometimes neither knowledge nor interest. With the proliferation of polls for the general public and scams that attempt to use a polling ploy to sell something, the public seems increasingly reluctant to participate.

In the movement to Total Quality Management (TQM), however, I see a much more fulfilling role for professional pollsters, because in employee surveys we ask questions that respondents not only are well qualified to answer but also are vitally interested in discussing.

Since the 1980s there has been a movement by forward looking organizations, such as Ford Motor Company, Xerox, and Proctor and Gamble (and more recently by agencies in the public sector), toward the implementation of TQM. What preceded this was the phenomenal success of the Deming management techniques in Japan, beginning in the 1950s and continuing to the present day. It was not until the 1980s, however, that American businessmen discovered this American scholar-- Dr. W. Edwards Deming -- who had become a legend in the field of management. The Deming method is one approach to management that is encompassed by the TQM umbrella.

One of the principles of Deming's philosophy is the empowerment of the worker. That involves having the worker supervise him/herself and take care of quality control. It also involves having the individual workers sense problems and suggest solutions.

Thus, one of the important tools in the conversion to TQM is the employee survey. It is important, because it is the worker who knows best what changes need to be made to make the process more efficient. It is also important as a tool to measure the morale of the unit's workforce and to find out what might be done to improve it.

I believe that the proper implementation of TQM in both the private and public sectors is absolutely necessary to America's competitiveness in the global economy. I also believe that employee surveys are a critical step in the implementation of TQM.

The theoretical focus of this survey is faculty opinion relating to their work and to the administration. The universe was the non-administrative faculty at a public, research university, one that is in the planning stages for transition to TQM.

Method

A two-page questionnaire was delivered to 991 faculty members (without administrative positions) at the university which has 56 departments divided into 10 colleges. Six hundred and twenty usable responses were received, for a return rate of 62.6%.

Confidentiality was assured; the only identifying symbol on the questionnaire was the code number of the R's department. R was asked to return the instrument either by interoffice mail, by first-class mail, or by taking it directly to the office of the sponsoring body, the Faculty Senate. (Many chose the second two options.) The instrument was designed by the Faculty Senate's Policy Committee (of which this author is a member), and the project

was executed by that Committee. This was an initiative of the Faculty Senate; the administration played no role in it.

The Faculty Senate went to extraordinary measures to assure that the press did not know about the project. Later, the administration did its own press release of the findings and the result was an article in local papers, followed by editorials and letters to the editor. The general findings of the survey became known to the public, but individual scores did not.

Results

The survey was used to identify problems at the university, college, and department levels. It did, in fact, identify salient problems that management was unaware of. Because the findings were distributed campus-wide, it also made the faculty in individual departments aware of the fact that the problems they sensed were also sensed by faculty in many other departments. Most Rs added comments, many filled up the 1/3 page allotted for comments, and one wrote five typewritten pages. The enthusiasm and appreciation of the faculty for the survey were indeed enormous. Their comments were moving and reflected a deep commitment of the faculty to excellence in teaching and a concern that the administrative structures in higher education in the United States do not support that function.

After receiving the findings, the administration responded positively. Almost immediately it asked that copies be sent to each member of the Board of Trustees, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the President's Leadership Council. Then the administration set up a committee to identify corrective measures. Recently, the administration has suggested that the findings of the survey would be useful in setting goals and in measuring continuous improvement by comparing the findings of this survey with those of future surveys.

Findings

Faculty were asked to rate the performance of their

department head, dean, and president on a scale of "0" to "10." The means of performance ratings for department heads varied from 1.67 to 9.27. The standard deviations of performance ratings for heads varied from .84 to 4.47.

For deans, the means ranged from 2.92 to 8.00. Standard deviations ranged from 1.59 to 3.43.

From an administrative standpoint, several correlations would be of interest to presidents and deans. First, the faculty member's evaluations of his/her dean and of his/her department head had a correlation coefficient of .44 ($p < .001$). The faculty member's evaluation of the president and of his/her dean had a correlation coefficient of .35 ($p < .0001$).

These data also suggest the possibility that certain non-personnel policies would impact significantly on the evaluation of the president. For example, the quality of the relationship between faculty and administration was significantly correlated with the performance rating of the president, with $r = .53$ ($p < .0001$). Whether or not the faculty perceive the administration to be dedicated to excellence in teaching in higher education was also highly correlated to the president's rating, with $r = .53$ ($p < .0001$). Whether or not the central administration (president and/or provost) were quick to respond to problems was also significantly correlated with the president's rating, with $r = .43$ ($p < .0001$).

Discussion

The less than sterling performance ratings given administrators by the faculty were not unique to this campus. At least three other institutions have used somewhat similar surveys and obtained lower than expected evaluations of administrators.

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with those of a national survey sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1989). The Carnegie survey found that at research universities 39% of the faculty rated their administrators "fair" and 34% rated them "poor" (The Carnegie Foundation, p. 107). As to administrative style, 31% rated their administrations very autocratic; 41% rated them "somewhat autocratic" (The Carnegie

Foundation, p. 108) Forty-nine percent disagreed with the Statement, "My institution is managed effectively" (The Carnegie Foundation, p. 111).

The survey reported here was the first survey to be conducted professionally at this institution. An earlier survey had been done, but there was no confidentiality. In fact, faculty were asked to turn in the completed questionnaires *unsealed* to the department head, who could then examine them before forwarding them to central collection.

It would appear from these findings that a dean aspiring to a high evaluation by his faculty would give priority to assuring that his/her department heads were highly regarded by the faculty. From a management perspective, this means continuous and thorough evaluation of the department heads with the real possibility that a head might be removed in mid-year, if conditions warrant. This contrasts sharply to traditional, Tayloristic management practices which specify that the evaluation of administrators occurs only at certain intervals, such as the five-year interval. It would appear that, if faculty have a poor department head, morale will decline quickly and the faculty will attribute part of the blame to the dean. Likewise, it would appear that faculty will credit the dean with the selection and retention of competent heads.

It would also appear from these findings that a president aspiring to a high evaluation by his faculty would place a priority on assuring that his faculty have managerially competent deans. It would appear that the faculty will hold the president liable for ineffective deans and give them credit for good ones.

TQM involves a change in the culture of the administration. That means the President must first staff the management team with deans and department heads who can manage from a basis of leadership (Deming, Chapter 8), rather than a basis of authority, and that they have a solid understanding of TQM.

A professional managerial survey can identify those deans and heads that may need to be removed from office. Subsequent surveys can monitor the effectiveness of administrators.

In an institution that has fully converted to TQM, there would be no apparent need for department heads, only rotating chairs.

In evaluating the performance of administrators, the standard deviation is also helpful. A low SD can be an indicator of uniform treatment. Conversely, a high SD can be an indicator of factionalism and favoritism in a department or college. In the present study, those department heads who already had a reputation for factionalism and favoritism did obtain high SDs. There is no room in TQM for either factionalism or favoritism.

A strong caveat is that the survey be conducted under professional standards. In public higher education the administration cannot do it, because faculty do not trust the administration. Actually my interviews with non-random samples of faculty and administrations at many institutions reveal considerable hostility between administrations and faculties. Perhaps this hostility would be one explanation of the Carnegie survey's finding of a low sense of community in research universities. (Thirty-eight percent said the sense of community was "fair" and 39% described it as "poor" [p. 115].)

Many observers attribute problems in higher education to funding shortages. Other analysts of higher education believe that current funds would yield more results if the administrative system were of higher quality. In TQM, opinions of the operators, here the faculty, are of prime importance in developing a high-quality administration.

Another strong caveat is to note that it is crucial for investigators researching "employee opinions" in a TQM perspective to be knowledgeable of traditional and contemporary management theory, of traditional and contemporary organization theory, and of Total Quality Management -- a current and dynamic umbrella theory that is the focus of attention in avant-garde organizations. This knowledge is necessary in order for the investigator to relate to respondents in in-depth interviews or focus groups and to know what questions to ask. It is also necessary in the establishment of criteria for the evaluation of leadership and in the interpretation of the data.

As to the need for high morale and good management, Lester Thurow, Steven Schlosstein, Clyde Prestowitz and others have made a good case for our taking seriously the challenges of the 21st

Century. Industry, they note, will need the support of a well-managed government. It will also need the support of well-managed institutions of higher education. They state two reasons why industry will need both of these. First, only well-managed institutions can produce the quality of graduates that industry requires, both now and in the future. (This need is well defined in *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages: The Report of the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*.) Second, industry -- indeed all sectors of the national effort -- desperately need creativity. And creativity flourishes best in a workplace that is free from the traits of traditional management (fear, factionalism, favoritism, intimidation, authoritarianism, cronyism, misrepresentation, and vindictiveness); creativity flourishes in a workplace that is supportive of individual and group research efforts, designed to achieve well-defined goals.

In sum, we can no longer afford to keep the low quality of education administration a secret. If this nation is to be competitive in the world marketplace of the 21st Century, it must have well-managed educational institutions that meet the needs of all of their clients (industry, government, parents, and students) with service of the very highest quality.

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