Achieving a competitive focus through self-assessment

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ABSTRACT   *This paper reports on the outcome of an action-learning 'case-study' research study involving a number of companies from all sectors—private and public, industrial and service—nationally and internationally, during which some powerful diagnostic frameworks and models have been developed and applied, enabling companies to maximize the potential of self-assessment award frameworks and providing the educational and strategic thrust required to progress towards a more strategic quality management era (Kaye & Dyason (1994) Quality World, 20, pp. 524–529; (1995) Quality World, 21, pp. 9–13).*

Background to research study

This work builds on the authors' previous research examining the reasons why companies fail to make the necessary progress to achieve quality improvement at a strategic level and therefore remain rooted in the early quality eras where a more internal focus dominates, to the detriment of an external, customer focus.

Many organizations find that they are unable to cope with the radical organizational change required to implement a quality initiative successfully. It is reported that 80% of all quality initiatives fail, indicating a gap between quality management programme design and organizational strategy. The authors' study examines the characteristics of organizations at each 'quality era' or 'stage of progress of quality effort'. A pressing need is found for researchers and practitioners to address the issue of the so-called 'fifth quality era' (Kaye & Dyason, 1995b). This is because companies were mainly found to be rooted in the early quality eras of inspection and detection, failing to overcome barriers that prevented them from developing the external focus necessary to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage.

Certain characteristics were evident in those organizations that had progressed towards the 'fifth quality era' that were not present in earlier quality eras, including:

- the horizontal and vertical integration of continuous improvement activities into the whole of the organization;
- the existence of mechanisms (or business drivers) for continuous improvement internally and externally;

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- an external customer focus, with the capability and flexibility to respond to changing needs.

Continuous improvement at a strategic level (i.e. 'strategic quality management') was only achieved where there was a clear direction and focus and with constant measurement and analysis, both externally in order to monitor environmental changes and internally to ensure the appropriate infrastructure was in place and functioning, thus ensuring that all aspects of the business were capable of providing a competitive edge.

Current study

In this action-research study, the authors address the failure of companies to reach a sufficiently mature stage of quality required to be truly competitive and to exhibit the fifth quality era characteristics of so-called 'excellent companies' (Kaye & Dyason, 1995b).

The authors set out to answer some hard questions identified during their research: for instance, why was it that companies knew what they should be doing but failed to do it? Why is it that barriers to progress failed to be overcome? Why was there such a large gap between management theory and practice with regard to the implementation of strategic quality management?

In order to answer these questions, the authors have worked closely with 29 companies from all sectors—private and public, industrial and service—nationally and internationally, over a 2-year period. As a result of this, a series of fully interactive frameworks and models are being used as mechanisms with which to overcome the barriers identified in order to achieve a much more external, competitive focus. This paper describes the way in which the frameworks and models are assisting managers to identify and capitalize on strategic business opportunities.

Three themes emerge which offer a means of exploring these issues in greater depth. First, that of competitiveness; defining the key challenges faced by organizations today. If the ultimate goal of achieving competitive advantage through continuous improvement is to be achieved, there needs to be a thorough examination of current organization and economic demands. Second, an examination of the current state of the art with regard to total quality management (TQM): specifically, addressing what progress has been made in achieving successful implementation. Third, a critical evaluation of self-assessment frameworks follows: particularly the extent to which these are overcoming reported difficulties in achieving a strategic management orientation so vital to competitiveness.

Competitiveness: The challenges faced by industry today

It is clear that what is needed to survive into the next millennium is the ability of organizations to respond and adapt. This means competing on several dimensions to meet all customer needs. This will require visionary leadership and a change-orientation. Organizational results should be the driver and the acid test the extent to which the results match customer demands and expectations.

The great challenge is to place less emphasis on talking about the economic problems associated with the 1990s and more on preparing for survival in the millennium by striving to demonstrate the 'characteristics' of 'fifth quality era' companies, i.e. those exhibiting a strong customer and market focus (Kaye & Dyason, 1995b).

Current 'state of the art' strategic quality management: Where are we?

A gloomy picture emerges from a review of published research. The promised gains from the implementation of TQM approaches are not materializing (Zaire, 1995). Lack of visible involvement and commitment of top management and lack of integration of quality into strategic planning are at the heart of many of the findings. There is a resistance to change among managers. Organizations are unable to change and the inability or unwillingness to learn are significant contributory factors (Zaire, 1995). Managers' failures are catalogued and include the failure to provide adequate resources, to act on problems and implement suggested solutions. The point is made that senior managers need to be educated on how to provide the direction needed and how to measure performance at a strategic level. Financial measures dominate to the detriment of measures of customer satisfaction, with a preponderance of cost-cutting activities at the so-called 'small q' level at the expense of the fundamental strategic direction of the organization (Recardo, 1994). A change in mind-set to a strategic imperative is vital in order to achieve the quality maturity required to succeed.

There is a growing body of evidence that companies are moving backwards along the quality continuum, i.e. they are failing to sustain effort and motivation required to optimize results. Having made an 'all singing all dancing' start to their quality initiative, it eventually fails because there is a lack of ongoing management support (Weeks *et al.*, 1995). Managers seem to be at the root of the problem, failing to provide resources for ongoing activities, failing to act on staff suggestions and failing to resolve problems raised—managers failing to get involved and to understand process problems.

The role of self-assessment frameworks

Self-assessment awards and frameworks claim to be a vehicle for organizational learning in the journey towards 'business excellence'. The evidence suggests, however, that there is comparatively little use of self-assessment models and awards (3% of UK companies use self-assessment against the 'Business Excellence' Model (Source: British Quality Foundation, 1996). Further investigations reveal some significant shortcomings in the interpretation and value of the models in achieving the so-called 'excellence' or state of competitiveness (Conti, 1993). First, the validity of the business results category is questioned due to the bias introduced by the 'user's judgement' and the difficulty with measuring the link between internal improvements (enablers) and business results. Second, and more significantly, are the problems inherent in interpreting the model. Shortcomings include the language used in the model and lack of knowledge of participating managers about the company, particularly the ability to identify 'key processes'. Researchers conclude that a certain stage of quality maturity is required before award frameworks and models can be used in a meaningful way (Reed *et al.*, 1996). The days of uni-dimensional performance monitoring are no doubt numbered and new dynamic models of corporate performance are needed to meet the demands of the 21st Century (Murray, 1996).

There is growing evidence that companies are beginning to seek assistance with defining 'drivers' in order to achieve the focus and impetus against which self-assessment can take place (Sinclair & Zairi, 1995). Although existing performance management frameworks offer the potential of a fully integrated strategic performance measurement system, there are two main drawbacks: first, they are generic so opportunities for learning are limited; and second, they are inflexible and unlikely to offer the responsiveness to change required (Feure & Chaharbaghi, 1995). Key to strategic learning is the ability to reflect on outcomes. Any performance management framework therefore needs to embody sufficient information to

enable reflection and evaluation to take place; it needs to encourage the dynamism necessary to cope with complex and changing conditions.

The authors' main findings are that, while companies are keen to use self-assessment frameworks and models, the companies are a long way from the 'quality maturity' needed to address fully the criteria associated with self-assessment frameworks. They have identified two key inhibitors that companies are experiencing in preventing them from maximizing the potential of self-assessment frameworks:

- obtaining the commitment and involvement of all managers in striving for business excellence;
- developing strategic performance measures.

While self-assessment is potentially a valuable vehicle for organizational development, there is a need also to develop in managers a greater understanding of business priorities in an environment which demands a quick response and positive outcomes measured in strategic terms.

Approach adopted in this study

Given the above findings it was clear that any approach would need to provide an opportunity for learning and for the practical application of the ideas and concepts. This could be achieved through an in-depth action learning case study approach, facilitated by the researchers. Such an approach offered an opportunity to bridge the gap between management theory and practice (Choppin, 1995).

The methodology involved the application of the principles of dynamic model building:

- to investigate the issues associated with the failure of organizational quality initiatives;
- as a means of critiquing (non-dynamic) approaches and closing an existing theoretical gap between quality management programme design and organizational strategy.

The overall aim of the study was to develop a dynamically modelled approach that would, on the basis of testing and validation, have applicability to both private and public sector organizations.

Sample groups

The first sample group comprised seven companies operating in the UK (collectively termed UK Quality Management Partnership Programme) and the second sample group comprised 22 companies operating in the Far East (Malaysia) (collectively termed Malaysian Quality Management Partnership Programme). The term Quality Management Partnership Programme was chosen by participants who considered that the term best reflected the following, mutually beneficial, objectives:

- to share each others' experiences and the learning process;
- to overcome barriers to progress with quality management initiatives;
- to overcome company-specific 'competitive' problems that were preventing companies from capitalizing on strategic business opportunities;
- to develop, in conjunction with the authors', quality management models and frameworks that would assist in the advancement of progress;
- to test practical experience against theoretical concepts and to contribute to the

adaptation and enhancement of such concepts to increase their value as a means of achieving a more strategic, competitive focus.

The sample groups comprised senior managers who were prepared to commit their organizations to the implementation of the ideas and theoretical concepts and share their findings with the other group members. This approach necessitated the active participation of managers at all levels within those organizations within the UK and Malaysia and therefore of various nationalities and cultures.

The development, implementation and evaluation of the frameworks and models were carried out in two stages. The first stage was conducted with the sample of seven companies. Companies were chosen to reflect a diverse range of industries, including manufacturing and service industries and companies operating in the public and private sectors.

The frameworks and models were developed, tested and applied through a process of 'action-learning cycles'. These cycles were based on the 'action-research cycles' concept (Elliott & Adelman, 1973) and reflect the four stages of learning: (1) identify general idea; (2) action steps; (3) monitoring implementation and effects; and (4) reconnaissance and summary of learning.

During the second stage, an equally representative sample group, as described earlier assessed the reliability of the frameworks and models produced by the first sample group. This was done by following, the same reiterative process of 'action learning cycles' conducted with the first sample group, as explained in the preceding paragraph.

Testing, validation and evaluation of the frameworks and models

At the conclusion of each 'action-research cycle' participants and researchers together critically evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the approach adopted at each stage of the cycle in relation to the extent to which the objectives were achieved. This involved evaluating the outcome of the practical implementation of the framework or model being tested at that time. In each case, the test was

"To what extent has this intervention (i.e. the implementation of the author's framework or model) assisted our company to make progress in achieving continuous improvement at a strategic level?"

The evaluation process involved analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the approach as far as each participant's company was concerned. The test was:

"What was helpful about this approach?"
"What were the problems experienced with this approach?"

In order to change the approach adopted, enhance an existing model or framework, or develop a new one, the researchers with participants identified what was required. The test was:

"What needs to happen in order to overcome the problems experienced with this approach?"
"What was useful from this intervention that can be carried forward into the next seminar?" (i.e. cycle).

In the light of this, the researchers developed an amended plan which was introduced at the beginning of the next cycle. As a result of this validatory process, a new framework or model was developed that built on the positive aspects of the existing one and introduced new

features to overcome deficiencies identified. This reiterative process of implementation, monitoring implementation and effects and learning formed an important part of the testing and evaluation of framework and model development.

This validation process took place through discussion with participants prior to implementation, through discussion with participants following implementation, from written feedback and through in-company facilitated workshops.

The reliability of the frameworks and models was tested by a two-staged sampling process. The findings from the first sample group were compared with those of the second sample group (as explained). The purpose of this reliability test was: "To what extent do the frameworks and models assist companies to develop the quality maturity required?" "Can they be applied 'universally', i.e. to other companies and to other cultures?"

In order to overcome some of the difficulties experienced during the research study and to meet the needs of participating companies at every stage, the following frameworks and diagnostic models evolved over a period of time:

- framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration;
- culture change questionnaire;
- management development cycle;
- business improvement cycle.

The models and frameworks each represented a powerful diagnostic tool with which to facilitate progress towards a more strategic quality management era.

The authors define a 'framework' as a map or reference point with which to advance an individual organization forward through the quality eras and a 'model' as a tool to assist in the decision-making process about what actions need to be taken, bearing in mind the specific needs of individuals and the organization concerned. Their interactive nature enabled the frameworks and models to be both an educational tool and an aid to the management decision-making process.

Each framework and model had a particular contribution to make, depending on the type of problem to be overcome, for example, where there was a need for the development of managers or the development of a more pervasive quality culture, they were developed with the close cooperation and participation of the sample companies over a 2-year period.

These group sessions were supported by in-depth studies with participant companies to monitor progress on a one-to-one basis and to assess the extent to which the frameworks and models were helping to meet specific company competitive problems—for example, the need to manage more effectively supply chain relationships in order to offer a consistent level of service to customers.

The framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration (Kaye & Dyason, 1995b) helped companies to identify where they were within the 'quality eras' (namely the eras of inspection, quality control, quality assurance or strategic quality management) by comparing their own companies' 'characteristics' with those characteristics typically found at each era. While this framework provided an overview and useful starting point, the culture change questionnaire built upon the contents of the framework, thereby allowing the issues to be explored in more depth. It was evident from the questionnaire results that there was a need to educate all managers in the leadership role required to achieve the integration of quality at a strategic level. This process was facilitated by the use of the 'management development cycle'. The 'business improvement cycle' built on this approach still further but, this time, with the emphasis on agreeing organizational direction and focus. Table 1 is a summary of the key features or characteristics of each framework and model. Each of these will be explored fully in future papers.

Table 1. *Characteristics of authors' frameworks and models*

Framework/model	Characteristics
Framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration	To identify the current status of the company's quality effort in relation to the quality eras. Enables a company profile to be established by comparison against 'typical era characteristics'. Gives practical assistance in what needs to happen in order to advance. Can be used as an aid to business planning.
Culture change questionnaire	A vehicle with which to assess culture and the extent to which quality management is integrated into the organization.
Management development cycle	An educational and diagnostic model which assists managers in establishing a plan of action to address strategic quality management issues. Applies the learning cycle to the integration and evaluation of quality initiatives.
Business improvement cycle	Developed in-house by management teams; thus, is a powerful management team-building model. Facilitates the agreement of direction and measurement at a strategic level. A profile of current against desired performance can be created, i.e. for strategic gap analysis. Ensures that benchmarking is focused.

Findings (barriers to progress)

The following barriers emerged from the sample groups during the course of the development of the models which needed to be overcome if progress was to be made.

Sample group 1 (UK Quality Management Partnership Programme)

Companies had not moved beyond the early quality eras of inspection and detection, characterized by an inward, non-customer, focus. Common barriers included a lack of organizational direction and lack of measurement at a strategic level. While managers were committed to quality, they were not involved at a strategic level. These problems were compounded by the reactionary response of managers to strategic pressures, resulting in cost-cutting activities which conflicted with quality ideals. Additionally, where top managers were found to have successfully managed to instil a culture that was conducive to the continuous improvement culture required, they were often moved on and continuous improvement was not sustained and built upon.

An in-depth analysis of company-specific problems (i.e. those of a competitive nature, as illustrated in Table 2) revealed the underlying cause to be a lack of strategic focus and direction, coupled with a failure to identify the key elements of performance that were critical to success and to measure these.

Sample group 2 (Malaysian Quality Management Partnership Programme)

These companies were operating in the quality eras of control and quality assurance, characterized by the emphasis on quality standards such as ISO 9000. Common barriers included issues of culture, for example, the attitude of the workforce and resistance to change, the predominantly autocratic management style of top managers and the lack of attention to

Table 2. *Progress made by companies in addressing their 'competitive problems'*

	Framework or model	Operational quality problems overcome
Company A: Hospital		
Strategic competitive problem:	Framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration	Assisted to resolve conflicts between professional and managerial values by focusing on organizational issues.
Change in core business competencies required from 'hospital' to 'preventative health care and community interventions'	Culture change questionnaire	Board have appointed manager at a strategic level (reporting to the Chief Executive) who has visible involvement in quality. Quality management has therefore been given a much higher status. Job purpose of the new senior manager is to implement the authors' frameworks and models with a cross-functional, multi-level group reporting to the main board.
	Management development cycle	Managers now have key result areas defined that link closely to a performance management system.
	Business improvement cycle	Multi-disciplinary strategic business units established to service needs of community. (One example is the disability rehabilitation unit, comprising physiotherapy services and learning for people with disabilities.)
Company B: Building society	Framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration	Emphasized need to empower staff and reduce dependency on checking in order to meet new competitive pressures.
Strategic competitive problem:	Culture change questionnaire	Identified the need for management development and 're-education' as a priority. Used as a culture change strategic planning framework to establish the gap between existing and desired culture.
Company merger has thrust them into new business and new market	Management development cycle	Programme of re-education of managers, effectiveness of which is measured in key outcomes and contribution to 'delighting the customer + 1'.
	Business improvement cycle	A focused benchmarking programme has assisted them to identify where they need to focus effort in order to succeed in a new market (e.g. introducing a new telephone banking service).

Table 2.—(Continued)

Company C: Manufacturer		
Strategic competitive problem:	Framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration	Emphasized the need to focus on people issues as a priority.
	Culture change questionnaire	Designed and executed a people satisfaction survey based around culture change questionnaire criteria.
		Implemented a company-wide communications strategy with which to communicate corporate vision and goals.
New entrants to the market are increasing competition	Management development cycle	Integration of strategic quality management competencies into managers' job profiles.
	Business improvement cycle	Provided a model for the development of new strategic business units on de-centralization, i.e. helped new managers to develop a more holistic view of their new business.
		Self-assessment against the EFQM model became more focused, with reported improvements in people management and business results categories.
Company D: Electronics		
Strategic competitive problem:	Framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration	Assisted senior managers to increase awareness of the need for change to a more external focus.
Company niche market under threat from competitors	Culture change questionnaire	Conducted external customer needs/expectations survey to ascertain important attributes to customers.
	Management development cycle	All managers were involved in developing an improvement programme by committing themselves to specific actions (e.g. greater collaboration between R&D and Manufacturing Department).
	Business improvement cycle	Identified two new critical success factors as a result of analysis—competitive pricing and greater innovation.

people management issues. Top managers were generally considered to be 'too busy' to focus on strategic quality issues; there was a general lack of leadership and direction and an apparent obsession with financial and productivity measures as opposed to strategic competitive improvement. Competitive pressures had resulted in an emphasis on productivity and numbers with little emphasis on quality as a strategic imperative.

The high level of labour turnover was a major cause for concern, with staff leaving before they were fully trained. With speed of output essential, valuable time was lost in perpetually training new staff. People management issues needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency, but managers did not seem to know what to do.

The issue of survival in the longer term was paramount. Companies realized that while they may be successful today, to be successful tomorrow they required the necessary infrastructure in place so that they could be ahead of the competition. The barriers to progress identified from the study were found to be preventing the flexibility and competencies required to respond to customer demands and market changes.

A culture for learning and continuous improvement

Continuous improvement at a strategic level can only be achieved if an organization is able to learn that it has the capability and responsiveness required to take on the competitive pressures of the market-place. This requires an ability to understand and learn about organizational performance, and particularly the impact of 'enablers' on 'results' (to use the language of the EFQM 'Business Excellence' Model) that can only be achieved by focusing on strategic performance measures that are relevant and will help to sustain the momentum for change. Managers have to open their minds and their organizations to the creativity and innovative responsiveness required to compete successfully. This failure to learn and to learn how to change is a fundamental barrier to achieving quality maturity, as illustrated in Fig. 1. The results of the culture change questionnaire revealed a decreasing level of effort as companies proceeded through the learning cycle from commitment through to evaluation, indicating a failure to continue beyond an initial 'commitment' phase to review and evaluate the effectiveness of 'enablers' on organizational results.

The role of the authors' models in creating a culture for learning and continuous improvement

The purpose of applying the model-building methodology was to test the extent to which these dynamic models would assist in driving the progress necessary to lead to the required
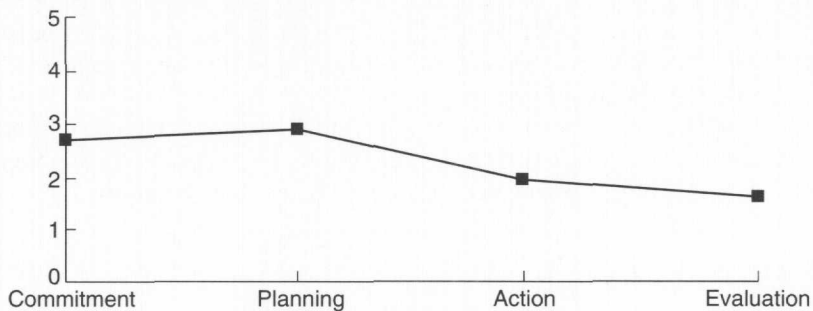

Figure 1. Culture change questionnaire: progression throughout the learning cycle (1 = awareness: "thinking about it"; 5 = responsiveness: "have learned and adapted approach and/or methods through experience").

'quality maturity'. To achieve this it was necessary for the researchers' models to overcome the problems associated with other, self-assessment models and performance management frameworks. This was achieved through the development of frameworks and models that had a distinct advantage over other self-assessment models. These advantages included the following key features:

- they were tailored to individual organizations, using their terminology and addressing issues that were critical to them;
- they provided a vehicle for change management where there was a change in business direction, resulting in the need for realignment of the enablers;
- the diagnostic nature of the management development cycle and the business improvement cycle enabled strengths and areas for improvement to be pictorially represented, thus allowing the interrelationship between 'drivers' and 'enablers' to be more fully understood, and their impact on 'business results' interpreted so that specific areas could be targeted for effort and improvement.

The contribution of the frameworks and models in achieving 'quality maturity'

The frameworks and models developed by the authors made a major contribution to the quality maturity, i.e. the ability of organizations to learn and to focus their improvement efforts in critical areas of the business, as may be seen from Table 2. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that these frameworks and tools may be applied by organizations wishing to achieve a more strategic competitive focus. The reasearch findings indicated that they could be selected by companies, according to their particular stage of quality maturity (as illustrated in Fig. 2). Managers' 'quality maturity' refers to the extent to which managers are educated in the principles and philosophy of strategic quality management. Companies' 'quality maturity' refers to the extent to which the principles and philosophy of strategic quality management are integrated and embedded in the vision and mission and supported by the infrastructure of the organizations, as measured by the framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration. Where a high standard of quality maturity had been achieved, there was a need for a mechanism to ensure that the philosophy and achievements were sustained throughout changes in leadership personnel. Such a mechanism was provided by the management development cycle. The leadership and strategic quality orientation categories contained within the author's 'culture change questionnaire' can be used to facilitate a discussion about where a company might place itself on the 'organizational and management maturity grid' (Fig. 2). The value of this 'grid' is in the selection of an appropriate framework or model to apply. For example, the results of this study indicate that a company low in quality maturity with managers of low-quality maturity would find the framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration to be of educational value and a guide to identifying and overcoming barriers to progress.

Some illustrative examples follow of how the frameworks and models have assisted companies to make the required progress. Figures 3 and 4 reflect the findings of the companies and are therefore representative of those companies in the study.

Implications of the findings

The findings of the companies in the sample groups emphasize the gap between management theory and practice. Companies remain rooted in the early quality eras and require assistance in order to overcome the barriers to progress. This assistance was provided in the form of a
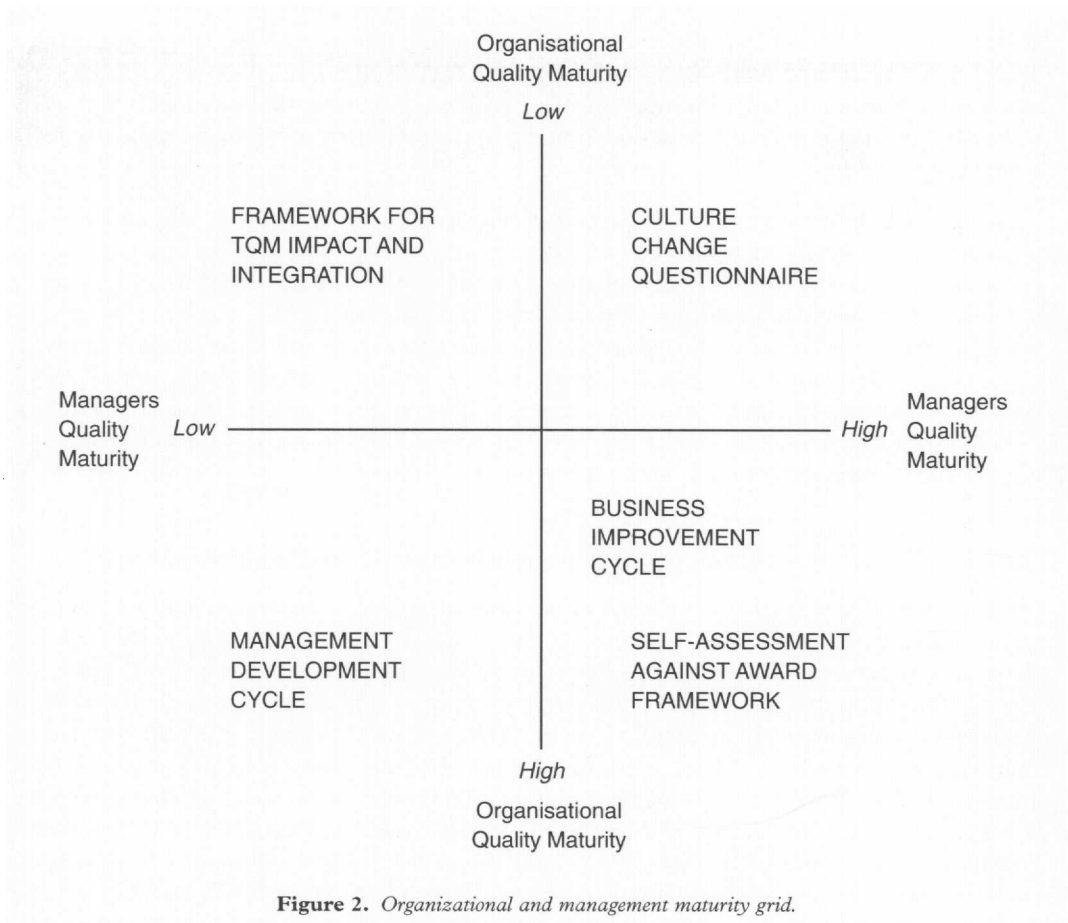
Figure 2. Organizational and management maturity grid.

The grid shows two axes. The vertical axis is labelled "Organisational Quality Maturity" with "Low" at the top and "High" at the bottom. The horizontal axis is labelled with "Managers Quality Maturity" on the left ("Low") and "Managers Quality Maturity" on the right ("High").

Top-left quadrant: FRAMEWORK FOR TQM IMPACT AND INTEGRATION

Top-right quadrant: CULTURE CHANGE QUESTIONNAIRE

Centre: BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT CYCLE

Bottom-left quadrant: MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT CYCLE

Bottom-right quadrant: SELF-ASSESSMENT AGAINST AWARD FRAMEWORK

number of frameworks and models which were developed jointly with companies during the research study. The frameworks and models were each found to make a particular contribution to progress depending on the quality maturity of the company concerned (as shown earlier).

The next section considers the overall contribution that the frameworks and models have made to the research study.

Evaluation of the authors' frameworks and models

On analysis of the frameworks and models, the findings revealed that the contributions of the frameworks and models, i.e. framework for diagnosis of TQM impact and integration, culture change questionnaire, management development cycle and business improvement cycle, lay in the development of managers and the development of companies towards a more strategic and external, competitive focus. Table 2 illustrates the actions brought about in three companies as a result of using these frameworks and models. The contribution of the frameworks and models can be summarized as follows.

Educational

There were three main strands to the educational contribution; first, the contribution to the development of managers; second, to the development of organizations; and third, to the development of a culture for learning and continuous improvement.

Organizational
Quality Maturity

Low

"Gained the commitment of professional users to company mission. Helped users to understand how mission is delivered, i.e. what it means in practice"[1]	"Identified the need for management development and re-education as a priority."
"Integrated Strategic Quality Management into business plans and an organizational development strategy"	"Used Culture Change Questionnaire as a strategic planning framework to establish the gap between existing and desired culture"
"Educated the Quality Committee in Strategic Quality Management—provided a framework of issues for them to address"	"Designed and executed a People Satisfaction survey based on criteria contained in Culture Change Questionnaire"
	"Implemented company-wide communications strategy with which to communicate corporate vision and goals"

Managers Quality Maturity
Low

Managers Quality Maturity
High

"Programme of re-education of managers was established, the effectiveness of which was measured in key outcomes and contribution to our company mission: delighting the customer + 1"	"The Business Improvement Cycle provided a model for the development of new strategic business units on decentralization. It helped new managers to develop a more holistic view of the new business"
"Managers now have key result areas defined which closely link to a newly developed performance management system"	"Self-assessment against the EFQM Model became more focused with reported improvements in People Management and Business Results criteria"
	"A focused Benchmarking Programme has assisted us to identify where we needed to focus effort in order to succeed in a new market and, as a result, a new service has been introduced (i.e. telephone banking)"

High

Organizational
Quality Maturity

Figure 3. *Organizational and management maturity model UK Quality Management Partnership Programme.*
[1] *'Professional users' was the term used to describe the users of a service whose work brought them in contact with the service, for example solicitors and the police. This distinguished them from 'non-professional users' with whom the service dealt more directly (for example defendants and witnesses). The professional users were therefore closely involved in service-delivery and consequently influenced the quality of outcome for non-professional users (Dyason & Kaye, 1992).*

The development of managers

The models provided a framework of ideas which stimulated management development and learning through debate and questions, sharing experiences with others and challenging assumptions about what it was managers should be doing. The tools were found to be simple and easy to use and were not viewed as a 'theoretical concept'. They therefore offered managers the opportunity to learn new skills and develop new competencies in a way which was integrated fully into their day-to-day activities. Thus, they were instrumental in bridging a gap between theory and practice.

**Organizational
Quality Maturity**

Low

"Have developed a more comprehensive range of customer satisfaction measures (previously measures were concerned with dissatisfaction)"[2]

"The framework for Diagnosis of TQM Impact and Integration was used as a discussion document with other managers about where change in emphasis was required in order to achieve a new business orientation"

"Have established systems to reduce errors and re-work and improve in the area of continuous improvement (internal) through team feedbacks at the end of each shift"

**Managers
Quality
Maturity**

Low

"We have developed a system to measure performance against key customer attributes"

"Educated all managers in their responsibility for quality and for identifying training needs. For example, the need for training in quantitative tools and techniques such as SPC"

"Monitor performance of suppliers more closely and offer an award for the best supplier"

"The Management Development Cycle is being used as a means of incorporating all design elements expected by customers in products. It enables an assessment to be made of the extent to which customer demands are being met"

"Have implemented a People Management system to invest more in training and development and reduce labour turnover which was a key factor prohibiting our speed to market"

"The Culture Change Questionnaire provided an educational tool for managers at all levels"

"The Questionnaire has enabled us to take stock of the company, to do a detailed analysis, to investigate and report. Actions have been agreed with top managers who say there is a better company in the making"

**Managers
Quality
Maturity**

High

"A customer needs analysis is being conducted, together with a "competitor gap analysis""

"Have developed a longer-term view by investing in new technology and improving in all areas which impact on our critical success factor: high productivity. We had previously tried to increase output by setting higher targets which were not realistic"

"Have defined critical success factors and key processes as a management team. We are now considering where partnerships in industry would be beneficial"

High

**Organizational
Quality Maturity**

Figure 4. *Organizational and management maturity model Malaysian Quality Management Partnership Programme.*
[2]*That is, number of complaints recorded and number of defects recorded.*

The frameworks and models helped them to focus their effort on leading and providing the vision and direction, found previously to be so lacking, through concentrating on the issues that were going to make the most strategic impact and not on the trivial day-to-day operational problems. An effective manager needs to be seen as one who is good at providing strategic direction, not one who is good at fire-fighting. There was a need for new management 'role models', and this was a significant step in the right direction.

Academic institutions have an important role to play in the development of these new 'role model' managers. Indeed, they have a role to play in bringing together academics and practitioners in industry through collaboration and mutual learning. The frameworks and models have already been used on postgraduate management courses. Positive results have been achieved from the implementation of actions (examples of which have previously been

illustrated, see Table 2) and the desire of participating companies to continue the collaboration through the Quality Management Partnership Programme.

The development of organizations

The 'driving' nature of the frameworks and models facilitated a more external, customer-oriented organization in that they provided the focus and the impetus required to achieve a clarity of direction. Arguments that had centred on the difficulty of identifying the customer, and the problems with satisfying conflicting customer needs, which had resulted in inaction or reactive, defensive responses from managers, were replaced with constructive debate about "What is critical to our business?" and "What makes us better than our competitors?" Immediately, effort and energy were channelled into creating a cohesive, integrative and supportive organization, replacing the 'disconnected' ones typically found in the authors' study.

The development of a culture for learning and continuous improvement

The most common and significant barriers to progress were those which prevented organizations from learning, for example, autocratic management styles and bureaucratic and hierarchical structures. The frameworks and models assisted in the transformation of closed, inward-looking and divisive systems and structures towards a more visionary, creative, responsive and dynamic organization. It was not possible to use them without bringing people together across different functions and levels. Focusing on the goals of the business involved learning from each other and appreciating each other's contribution. Sights were gradually moving outwards, through the identification of suitable benchmarking partners. There was a recognition between the sample groups that there were commonalities, indeed commonalities not just between manufacturer and manufacturer, but also between diverse companies, such as a building society and a government department.

Like lemmings, managers followed fad after fad, not learning from the causes of failure of the previous fad. The preoccupation with fire-fighting left no time to stop and think, no time to learn, because the next crisis was always about to happen. New, potentially exciting and tempting themes are emerging to tempt the manager, including: "Beyond TQM, Beyond BPR ... now ... into the millennium", but how far into the millennium will we be before we realize nothing changes unless companies change? Unless companies learn there will be no change. This is why the authors' approach is unique—it combines learning with doing. It is written by managers for managers in their own companies—'self-styled' as one company referred to it.

Performance management

Performance measures were produced from the application of the frameworks and models. The dynamic nature of this approach meant that these measures could be adapted in line with changing external conditions. They were strategic and specific to each company. For example, one company introduced measures relating to its responsiveness and the effectiveness of the treatment process when previously measures had related to quotas, activities and throughput of business, an approach that had caused dissent and disharmony amongst the management team. Separate management agendas could not prosper with this approach because the performance measures reflected the outcomes critical to the success of the company, i.e. the priority being what was important to the customer and not the shareholder,

as is the case with financial indicators. If continuous improvement exists at a strategic level and the company is therefore more likely to be better than the competition, will not the shareholder be delighted in any event? Everyone agrees what is important and functional barriers are therefore broken down.

The frameworks and models provided an opportunity for companies to learn what they did well and what they did badly. Through the frameworks and models, companies were able to analyse and understand the interrelationships between enablers and the link between enablers and results. For example, the business improvement cycle assisted the management group to identify main business drivers and to identify systematically the supporting 'enablers' for each business driver. This interactive process brought about a more focused approach to self-assessment against the award frameworks and assisted in identifying the main business priorities.

A step up to self-assessment

The frameworks and models provided a much needed lever and company-specific strategic backdrop against which to perform self-assessment. Each of the frameworks and models has a contribution to make in facilitating progress through the quality eras and therefore enhancing 'quality maturity'. In the fourth era—strategic quality management—companies are ready to conduct a full self-assessment activity against an award framework. These contributions are set out in Fig. 5.

Companies which had used the frameworks and models approached self-assessment with a clearer knowledge and understanding of their companies' direction, hence areas for improvement were prioritized against the needs of the business and not against the standard of the self-assessment model alone. In other words, the ability to attract and sustain customers and remain a competitive force in the market-place becomes the 'standard', and the basis upon which performance is judged becomes the proactive interaction with the market-place, and self-assessment against award frameworks taking place against this.

The role of the authors' frameworks and models in the preceding analysis

The purpose of applying the model-building methodology was to test the extent to which these dynamic models would assist in driving the progress necessary to lead to the required 'quality maturity'. To do this it was necessary for the researchers' models to overcome the problems associated with other self-assessment models and performance management frameworks. This was achieved through the development of frameworks and models that had a distinct advantage over other self-assessment models. These advantages included:

- They were tailored to individual organizations, using their terminology and addressing issues that were critical to them.
- A vehicle for change management where there was a change in business direction and a need for realignment of enablers, for example the purpose of one company operating in the health sector had changed from the provision of medical care on one site to a preventative health service operating in the community. A change requiring the identification and development of new skills and competencies.
- The profiles produced from the management development cycle and the business improvement cycle visibly identify the strengths and areas for improvement in a way that allows the inter-relationship between 'drivers' and 'enablers' to be understood
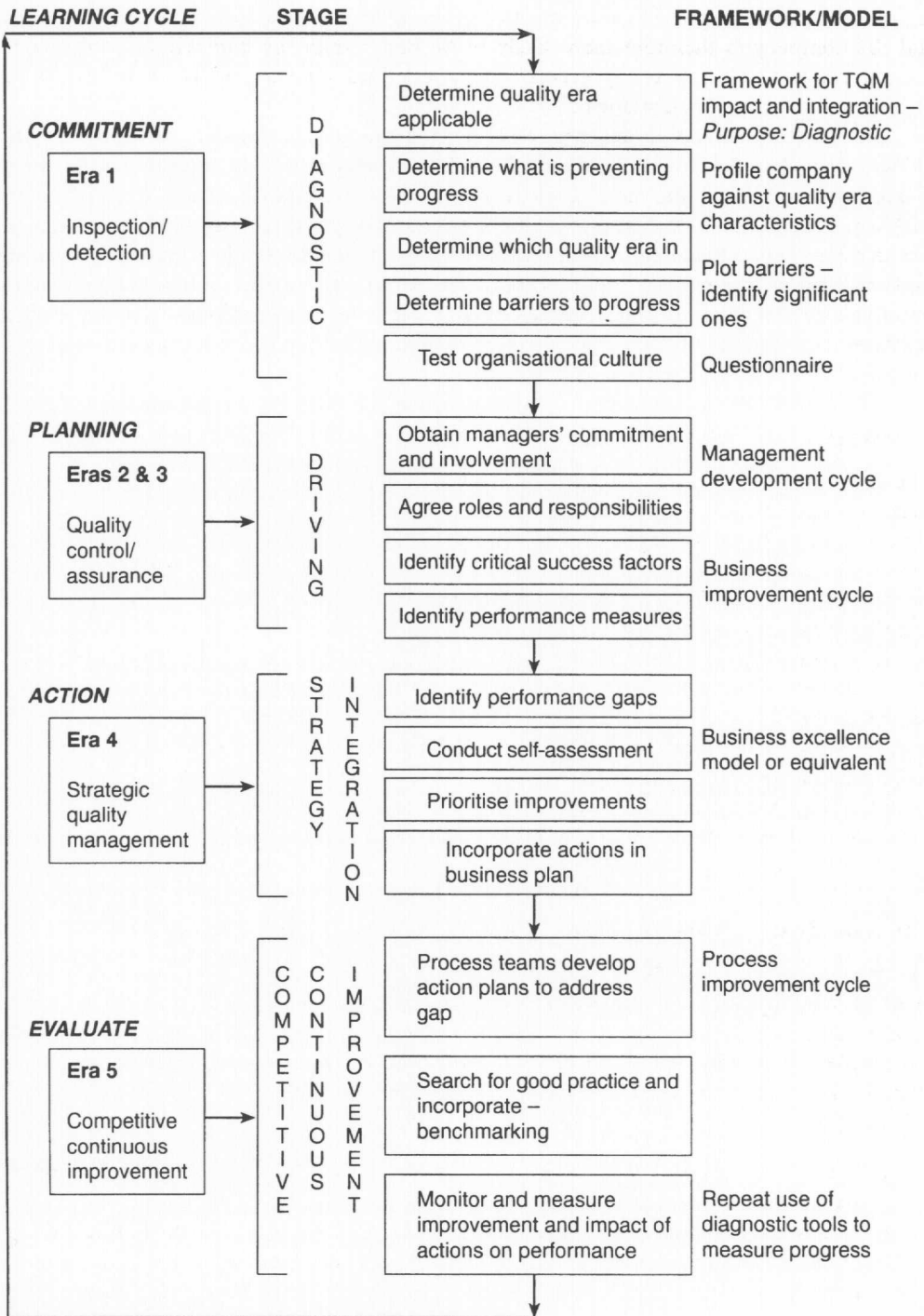
LEARNING CYCLE	STAGE		FRAMEWORK/MODEL

COMMITMENT

Era 1

Inspection/
detection

D I A G N O S T I C

Determine quality era applicable	Framework for TQM impact and integration – *Purpose: Diagnostic*
Determine what is preventing progress	Profile company against quality era characteristics
Determine which quality era in	Plot barriers – identify significant ones
Determine barriers to progress	
Test organisational culture	Questionnaire

PLANNING

Eras 2 & 3

Quality
control/
assurance

D R I V I N G

Obtain managers' commitment and involvement	Management development cycle
Agree roles and responsibilities	
Identify critical success factors	Business improvement cycle
Identify performance measures	

ACTION

Era 4

Strategic
quality
management

S T R A T E G Y **I N T E G R A T I O N**

Identify performance gaps	
Conduct self-assessment	Business excellence model or equivalent
Prioritise improvements	
Incorporate actions in business plan	

EVALUATE

Era 5

Competitive
continuous
improvement

C O M P E T I T I V E **C O N T I N U O U S** **I M P R O V E M E N T**

Process teams develop action plans to address gap	Process improvement cycle
Search for good practice and incorporate – benchmarking	
Monitor and measure improvement and impact of actions on performance	Repeat use of diagnostic tools to measure progress

Figure 5. *Steps to self-assessment.*

and their impact on 'business results' interpreted so that specific areas can be targeted for effort and improvement.

Conclusions

It is evident that the authors' approach (i.e. the development and implementation of the frameworks and diagnostic models) overcomes a number of shortcomings experienced with other approaches. It is in this respect that it makes its key contribution, i.e. the educational aspects, for managers, for organizational development, to encourage a culture for learning and continuous improvement. The approach recognizes and supports the need for a dynamic and cyclical process to business improvement, and it leads to in-house, tailored strategic measurement systems which provide the much sought after 'step up' to formal self-assessment models.

The companies' achievements demonstrate that the frameworks and models succeed in 'bridging the gap' between theory and practice, and the action-learning methodology adopted has contributed significantly to research in the field of strategic quality management.

Each of the authors' frameworks and models will be explored in more depth in a future paper.

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