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The Key to Macedonian Competitiveness Success

Elizabeta MITREVA^{1*}, Nako TASKOV¹, Zdravko KRIVOKAPIC², Jelena JOVANOVIC²

¹University "Goce Delcev" – Shtip, Macedonia

²Faculty of Mechanical Engineering Podgorica, University of Montenegro, Montenegro

*Corresponding author: Elizabeta Mitreva; E-mail: elizabeta.mitreva@ugd.edu.mk; elizabeta.mitreva@gmail.com

Abstract

The standardization in the management system has become a key task for the managers and a priority question for survival of the companies in the twenty-first century. Beside the process of fulfilling the wishes and the needs of the buyers, the contemporary market conditions imply the analysis of the competitors and their strategy.

The research in this paper was done with the aim to analyze the condition in the Macedonian companies in the domain of their competitiveness on the home and the global market. The data received from the research showed the Macedonian reality in the business world.

The analysis of the data as well as the principles and strategies derived from this research have helped and gave useful directions for the construction of an integral methodology for the projection and implementation of the TQM (Total Quality Management) system, which can be implemented in the Macedonian companies in order to increase their competitiveness.

Keywords: quality, TQM (Total Quality Management) strategy, methodology, competitiveness.

1. Introduction

The organizations continuously face changes on the market, as well as changes of ownership and changes in the society. The globalization process and the regionalization on the market make the companies think more about strengthening their competitiveness.

The Macedonian companies have still not realized that the competitive position is obtained only through a continuous quality development of the products/ services in the function of satisfying the needs of all the parts of interest. The way in that direction needs to be sought in the acceptance of new philosophies, an adequate usage of new strategies, concepts and knowledge.

The new TQM (Total Quality Management) strategy directed toward quality development, which is suggested in this paper, seeks new activities in the field of employees' education, an introduction of standardization of all processes, an introduction of statistic process control for non-defective working and a new approach in the analysis of the quality costs. All of this seeks a scientific methodological and planned approach, persistence and systematicity. This also means a drastic change in the behavior of the employees, radical changes in the organizational positioning, a clear definition of the rights, obligations and responsibility of each individual. Only the organization that works in a free market environment, with a motivated owner and in an organized country has the chance of persist in the quality development.

2. Literature review

The philosophy of the TQM (Total Quality Management) is based on the supposition that the organization cannot survive if status quo is maintained, because everything changes and the maintenance of the status quo means weakening of the orga-

nization. The organization needs to work in the direction for improvement and innovation in order to have a maintainable growth, because in the contrary it will cause the appearance of negative trends that lead to its downfall.

The management needs to be oriented toward the future in seeking the answers on how to foresee and conduct the changes, how to adjust to them and how the changes will be useful for all the interested parts.

The changes in the environment and the organizations themselves on one hand, and the organization's growth and development on the other hand can be complementary factors if a dynamic process for internal changes, which answer the external changes and obtain competitiveness on the market, is set in the company itself. This process of internal changes in the organization that give effective answers to the outside changes are part of the new TQM (Total Quality Management) philosophy.

In order to accept the new TQM philosophy, it is necessary to change the existing culture. This process is sometimes conducted very successfully (although it seeks a lot of energy and time) and sometimes only an adjustment is achieved (Latzko & Saunders, 1995; Olaru, et al., 2015).

The change of the business culture that causes the implementation of this philosophy creates a basis for the standards of the performances. The quality conduct means large participation of the employees in identifying and solving the problems, when the standards are being set and efforts for continuous improvement are made. The whole process starts with an analysis of the business organization, then follows the analysis on the requests by the internal and external buyers, and it is ended with a detailed definition of the process (Cooke & Schienstock, 2000; Djordjevic, et al., 2011; Escanciano & Santos-Vijande, 2014; McManus, 2006; Timans, 2014; Babatunde & Pheng, 2015).

The everyday practice of each employee shouldn't be only the control of the work, but the employees need to be trained to

act preventively. The employees need to have responsibility and power to correct their mistakes and to act on each problem related to quality (Mitreva, 2017b, Mo-Ching, 2011; Madan, 2010).

According to James (1996), the main difference between the TQM strategy and the classic methods of quality conduct is in the fact that the classic methods are based on the following approach: planning, organization and control. On the other hand, the TQM strategy follows this approach, but it also insists on correction through study and research of the problem and with that a continuous quality development is achieved.

Nowadays a large part of the organizations are based on the traditional approach and that causes the need for a reengineering of the work. However, the most important aspect that is being developed by the new philosophy is based on the organization that learns, say Cepujnoska and Bjen (2000).

Also a key element is the support of the Information technology and the continuous contribution to the development and the advancement of the processes (Aulakh & Gill, 2009; Zahra, 1999; Stevenson & Hojati, 2007; Amat & Perramon, 2011; Kitson, Martin & Tyler, 2004).

According to Kano (1996), there is only one way to success on the economy market: to be better and faster than your competitors. Only those that can win the market through special products can obtain their survival on the market.

According to Kerr et al., (2005), a competitor's advantage internationally are the innovations and changes on the product including an internal value system, a continuous process development and a strategy based on the total management of quality.

3. Methods in the research and analyses of the results

The subject of interest in this paper is the analysis of the Macedonian companies in relation to the key of their competitiveness for which a deeper analysis was done on the problems present on the global market (Sarría Ansoleaga, 2007; Uygur & Sümerli, 2013; Madan, 2010). The list of researched companies consist of 3109 Macedonian companies based in the defined aims of the empirical research, and it was done with the help of the Economic Chamber of Macedonia. During the selection process of the samples, special attention was paid on the analysis of the companies that have a quality system and those that do not have it, and at the same time to determine the differences among them.

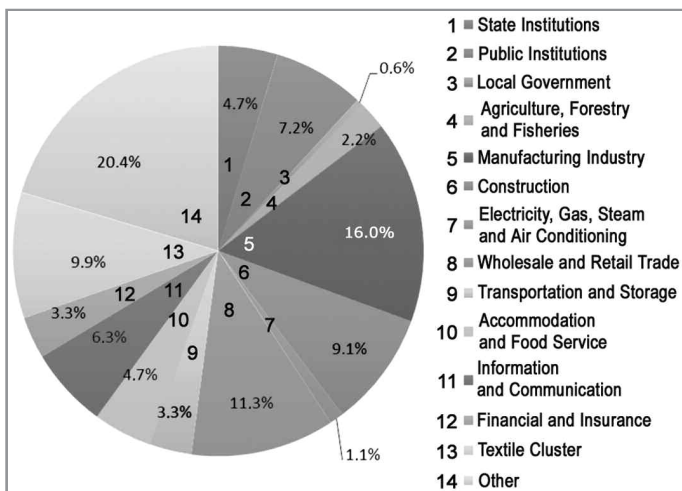


Figure 1. The participation of the companies in the researched according to separate economic branches

The research was done through a questionnaire, and also a detailed study on the companies by the research team. Although

the research was planned as an ambitious possibility to research the Macedonian companies (around 3109 from the created list), the process was realized with the participation of only 363 companies or 11.6% of the created base, which is a usual number for this type of research (Bohdanowicz 2005; Medina-Munoz & Garcia-Falcon, 2000). Because of the extent of the researched material, in this paper we have presented only the results in relation to the key of the competitiveness of the Macedonian companies and their readiness to accept the TQM philosophy.

The structure of the questioned companies-participants of the research, according to the economic branch to which they belong (National classification of jobs Res. 2 – “Official Gazette of RM”, no. 147/08) and changes and addition of the National classification of jobs applied since 01 January 2013) is given on Figure 1.

In the research participated representatives for the quality systems of those companies and institutions that have projected and implemented quality systems, while the first or the second level managers for those that haven't.

3.1. The need for an Internal Standardization and Quality Provision in the Macedonian companies

The key for the competitiveness of the Macedonian companies has been analyzed through one of the four pillars of the house of quality – an application of internal standardization. For that aim the following question is asked: **Have the Macedonian companies introduced a quality system according to ISO 9001:2015 and where are seen the contributions from its implementation?**

It is concerning that only 36.9% of the researched companies have a quality system according to ISO 9001:2015, which is a relatively small number. The need to qualify for work according to international standards and a strategic connection of the western countries has caused that certain managers and owners to implement a quality system. The start of the introduction process for a quality system is directly connected to the determination and readiness of the top management to chiefly improve the personal quality of work, and then to enable a competitive advantage on the market. For that aim we asked the companies that have already certified a quality system according to ISO 9001:2015 (only 36.9% of the researched companies) where they see the benefits from its implementation and we received the following data:

- 57% of the companies who have introduced the quality system, see the *benefits from its implementation in the higher quality of their products/services*, the decrease of the total costs and the satisfaction of the buyers;
- 38.6% of the researched companies *aimed only to obtain the ISO certificate without any other purpose or desire to essentially regulate the company*, to produce quality products or to regulate the business processes for a business collaboration with the buyers and partners all over the world;
- 4.4% of the researched companies who have certified a system for quality provision of the products/services, *say that the certificate brought unnecessary costs and bureaucracy*, and that they can't see the benefits, do not achieve the desired advantages on the market and do not fulfill the requests of the ISO 9001 standards.

Those companies that apply a real management system for quality, unlike those that do not, have the following benefits: obtaining quality of the products/services that satisfy the buyers' requests; improving the quality of the business processes; achieving compatibility between the strategic and the operative management of the companies. The system for management quality according to the ISO 9001:2015 standards represents a basis for a continuous development of the quality and an

application of the TQM strategy, and one of the most important benefits is the introduction of order and discipline in the work (Mitrevva, 2011; Mitrevva, et al., 2017). The Macedonian companies with an international certificate and standards have an easier approach to the foreign markets, greater export and competitiveness.

Our researches have shown that the Macedonian companies that have only formally certified a system for quality provision to the products/services do not fulfill the requests of the ISO standards and do not have any benefits. *The reality shows us that the Macedonian companies still have not built a serious approach toward certification.*

Having implemented international standards eases the approach to international markets even in conditions of political crisis, and the quality of the certified product is recognizable among the business partners. However, the number of companies that apply those standards is very low. The certificate is more often sought and valued only as a document for a legal safety and easier way to obtain authorizations and permissions.

Lately, we can note the tendency for using the certificates only for certain aims, and not for an improvement of the work of the company as a whole.

The most applicable are the ISO 9001 and 14001 standards during the conduct of the environment, but also the system for health and work safety that has become a legal obligation for the Macedonian institutions and companies is more and more present. The businesses oriented toward export have the largest application of international standards. The multiple benefits and their profitability is bigger than the price that needs to be paid for the certification of the standardization (which depends on the size of the company and the number of employees). The benefits are in the competitive advantage, the international recognition, the decrease of the costs from certain fines for violation of the legal requests and the improved reputation and confidence in the business environment.

3.2. Establishing Policy and Strategy in the Macedonian companies

In order to note how the company formulates, develops and re-examines its policy and transforms it into plans and actions. On the question what is the key for the company's competitiveness on the market, we got the following results. During the analysis of the data, the question about the competitiveness produced the following responses. It can be seen that 189 of the participants (52.1%) stated the quality of the products/services as a key factor for the competitiveness of their products/services. The others stated the following:

- 10.7% of them, confidence;
- 9.4% of the participants stated the latest trends;
- 7.2% of them stated the long-term tradition; and only
- 4.7% have stated the innovation of the company;
- 4.7% of them stated the low prices;
- 11.3% have chosen "other" (an adjustment to the needs of the market; the quick resolution of the problems; the cordiality and the politeness of the employees; the modern technology; the marketing and the knowledge for promotion of products and services; specialized expertise or special products; understanding of the foreign markets).

The percentage company's innovativeness is very low (4.7%) as a key to the company's competitiveness toward which strive the world companies. This is a logical result from the inadequate attitude of the top management toward the innovativeness (they do not value the employees' innovativeness, do not award it, and do not invest in innovation, research or development). According to all researches around the world, innovativeness is on the second or the third place as a key factor in competitiveness. The Macedonian companies are aware of

the necessity to obtain quality products/services as one of the preconditions for being competitive on the market.

The key factors for competitiveness in all the production companies are in the same sequence: quality of products/services, confidence, long-term tradition, trends, except for the manufacturing industry where the innovativeness is on the second place.

This is true chiefly for the Macedonian companies that create knowledge and have monopoly on the Balkan and abroad such as a large number of IT companies, but also Mikrosan, Alkaloid, MZT pumpi, Brako, Zito Luks, Vitalia, Vitaminka etc.

The key for competitiveness in the Macedonian companies is the following: although it sounds absurd, the non-development of the Macedonian bank system is the largest protection in this financial crisis. The Macedonian companies are conservative and concentrated mainly on collecting deposits and giving out credits to the government, while the investment banking is still unknown. None of the banks has complex financial instruments nor is open to the risk markets. The Macedonian banks are relatively well capitalized. The profitability of the banks is on a record level. The indicators for capital and active retraction are constantly improving, which are the main reasons for the obvious interest of foreigners to buy banks in Macedonia. If the confidence in the banks starts to decrease, then the citizens will start to retrieve their deposits. This is the greatest danger for the Macedonian banks, because unlike the world banks, they are completely dependent on the home deposits. On the other hand, the typical European banks depend on deposits for approximately 40% of their business, then 30% for an interbank lending and borrowing, and the rest are stocks, mergers and acquisitions, corporate lending and borrowing. This will be a large problem in a situation with retrieved deposits, and it will have a large impact on the normal functioning of the banks.

The question on the price policy of the Macedonian companies produced the following data:

- 50.4% of the companies-participants determine *the prices of the products/services in accordance to the costs and the personal policy*;
- 23.2% of the companies-participants *determine the prices by comparing it to the competition*;
- 19% of them do it in accordance to the supply and demand;
- 7.4% of them do it under the influence of the foreign partners.

Our comprehension of the practice shows that the detailed analysis of the competition and the needs of the market have a large influence in forming the prices of the Macedonian products/services.

The process of establishing policy and strategy in the Macedonian companies in comparison to the best practice and by using the bench marking strategy has turned into a process of imitation, a direct copying of the competitor or i.e. a direct support of the competitors' products. This situations and trends have become massive and a certain way for manipulating the buyers. All of this leads to a non-inventive approach, a destruction of creativity and the work standards etc. The successful companies that use bench marking as a possibility for creation and not imitation.

On the question which companies are compared during the creation of the personal policy, we received the following data:

- 66.9% of the participants have stated that they do a constant comparison of their own abilities in relation to the competitors in the same field and they take measures for quality development;
- 17.6% of them do not do any comparisons;
- 10.5% of them do a comparison to the best companies in the world;
- 5% of them only do a comparison to the competitors from

the same field, without taking any measures for improvement.

In order to improve the competitiveness of the Macedonian products/services, we need to motivate the innovators, to apply the innovations and the new technologies, to develop research centers and to follow the world achievements. The effects are achieved by buying licenses and other rights by establishing a collaboration with the foreign partners.

The competitiveness is also improved by practicing regular training and acquiring an additional knowledge by the employees for developing their qualification potential. In order to realize the modernization of the business processes is essential for connecting and collaborating with the scientific and research organizations, Universities, consultant organizations etc.

The marketing activities in the Macedonian companies need to be directed toward enriching the variety and the quality of the products/services, confirming the constant markets and obtaining new markets and a better collaboration to the foreign investors.

4. Conclusion

The conditions in the business sector in Macedonia are a result of the general level of economic development in the country. For the improvement of these conditions lacks ***the integral methodology for projection and implementation of the TQM system*** (Mitreva, 2011). This methodology can be applied when planning new changes in the employees' way of thinking, when the company wants to apply the TQM strategy or strives to be a "world class" company. In order to achieve those aims, the managers and the employees need to gain additional theoretical and practical knowledge that will help them in the conduct of the business processes (Mitreva, 2013).

The application of the TQM strategy in the Macedonian companies is *a true way to achieve perfection*. The benefits expected from the implementation do not have only an educational character, but its practical application leads to an increased efficiency and productivity of the companies and their sustainable development.

The application of the new philosophy of a total management for quality is connected to the selection of people appropriate for the realization of the business processes in accordance to the education, the motivation and the ability of the employees.

The possibility for a more creative working, giving professional contribution, respecting the personal opinions and views, the feeling of being involved in the conduct of the company, the mutual spirit to succeed are all elements of team work. All of

these activities will contribute to the development of a mutual confidence and respect, devotion, openness, patience and loyalty to each other and to the company itself. The company's manager staff with its good will and determination should include its personal human resources by forming teams from all profiles, by integrating their knowledge in order to achieve a complete rule of the quality in all the processes in the company at the lowest costs of working.

In this way the possible defects will be prevented on time and the problems will be eliminated through the elimination of the eventual causes. The usual resistance and fear of changes is quickly surpassed and the wish for a change of the constant condition is imposed by a new approach toward quality and a complete devotion to the client, the employees, the environment and the country.

The application of the new strategy means a projection of a well documented quality system that embodies all of the business processes of the company and it represents an essential basis for a successful application of a statistical processed control (SPC) and an efficient team work, which couldn't be set in a case of a bad quality system. In this way, we have a guaranteed realization of the views of the top management that are contained into the policy of quality and a positive climate and informational basis for the development of the team work are being created. The final aim is the realization of perfection based on a perfect practice and business results.

In this paper we propose a methodology for the advancement of the business processes, which means a daily improvement that leads to an increase in the business processes, satisfaction of the buyers/users, the satisfaction of the employees, suppliers and the environment. This methodology was applied in different Macedonian companies from different economic branches (Mitreva, et.al., 2016a; Mitreva, et. al., 2016c). During this process the defined quality was achieved, the buyers were protected from the defective products, and that caused an increased competitiveness and profitability on the market, better quality, lower defects and costs in working, an increased satisfaction and the participation of the employees in making a decision. This points to the fact of the universal application of this methodology in practice regardless of the economic branch of the companies. **Q-as**

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