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## From TQM to BPR: Two case studies in personnel administration

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### Abstract

Business Process Reengineering (BPR) is often presented in opposition to Total Quality Management (TQM) although both techniques adopt a process view of improvement.

We recently had the opportunity to apply both techniques in two separate personnel departments of a large administrative organization. The first illustrates that the performance of administrative operations may be improved substantially by applying TQM. In the second case, TQM served only as an eye-opener, to convince all parties concerned of the necessity of a BPR approach. For both cases we describe the process of problem formulation and remedial action. The conclusion summarizes our experience with TQM and BPR in this environment.

*Keywords:* Business Process Reengineering (BPR); Total Quality Management (TQM); Personnel administration; Organisation

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### 1. Introduction

The organization in this study is a large public body with approx. 6400 employees. In 1993 a Total Quality Project was started in each department of the General Support Services of this organization. This paper describes two projects as they were carried out in the two personnel departments. These two departments focus on different types of employees and therefore have a particular structure and work organization. As they are part of the central services, they only have 'internal' clients. Because there is no internal pricing or invoicing,

the departments consider their clients as 'users', who do not pay directly for the services they get. Moreover, these two personnel departments have a monopoly position as it is impossible (and even forbidden) to get their services elsewhere.

The most important player in Total Quality Management (TQM) is the 'customer'. The TQM philosophy is aimed at building a long-term relationship with customers, based on trust, which will prevent them from running to the competitor. For the reasons mentioned above, this natural reflex is not present in every coworker of the departments in this study. To get the commitment to work on items such as quality, timeliness, customer satisfaction, etc., it is necessary to deal with a concrete problem that is perceived as such by everyone; e.g. a situation that not only irritates

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the customer, but also constitutes a nuisance for themselves.

Both TQM-projects were initially started in the same way, using the same TQM methodology (SORA), but they evolved in completely different directions: in department A, small changes lead to big improvements, while in department B the TQM-project turned out to be only an introduction to a major redesign of the organizational structure and processes, resulting in a full re-engineering program.

## 2. TQM-project

### 2.1. Personnel department A

Department A is responsible for the personnel management of a highly qualified staff of  $\pm 3600$  people. About 68% of this staff is temporarily hired, having contracts with a maximum term of six years (actually  $3 \times 2$  yr). The department is divided into two units, which are housed in different buildings. The unit 'Files' (six coworkers) is mainly responsible for the administrative part of the selection process and the career registration of staff members. The unit 'Salary Administration' (ten coworkers) draws up contracts, stores all relevant information on staff members, stores the data necessary for salary payment and executes these payments.

The role of department A is merely clerical. The actual personnel management and strategy belongs to the functional departments. They decide (occasionally after a screening by department A), who will be hired for the job and for how long. The reason is that we deal with very specialized and highly qualified personnel for very specific tasks, working in approximately 40 relatively independent departments (with decentralized personnel budgets).

### 2.2. Problem description

A quality survey among the users of department A, resulted in a list of problems. After discussion, the first quality problem chosen to work on, was

formulated as follows: "The procedure for hiring new staff members is too long, too complex, not-transparent and very time-consuming". A project team was designated to work on this problem. It was composed of the heads of the two units, a coworker from each unit and two internal facilitators.

### 2.3. The SORA methodology

A basic principle in TQM is to handle a problem step by step. A project team works on one problem at a time, in a structured way. We chose the SORA methodology [5], which contains four steps to analyze and solve chronic quality problems. These steps are

Symptom – Origin – Remedy – Action.

The idea is that after describing the symptoms of the problem, you first look for its root causes (Origin), before you can find and implement a solution (Remedy and Action). In this way we look deeper than the superficial and subjectively observed problems.

### 2.4. Symptom

The purpose of this first step is to make a problem description by delimiting the area, so that the team has a more or less clear-cut task. At this point it is also important to evaluate the size of the problem by some unit of measurement and to demonstrate the necessity of a solution.

#### 2.4.1. Measurement of the problem

"Contracts are *always* late", "Salaries are *seldom* paid at the end of the first month", "We have to fill in the same data *over and over again*": these subjective remarks of the clients did not convince the coworkers of department A of the seriousness of the problem. "Anyhow, clients are always complaining", they said. But "measuring is knowing" and making an analysis of the problem requires to start from objective material, accepted by everyone. To collect this information, the files of 40 recent hirings were retraced to measure the throughput times.

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