Embedding Social Responsibility Principles Within Quality Leadership Practices

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Quality improvement principles, such as "meet or exceed customer expectations" or "make data-driven decisions," direct the actions and behaviors of leaders, especially when the leader is affecting a culture shift. Collectively changing the behavior and activities of all stakeholders inside the organization requires skillful, long-term commitment. The same leadership behaviors that quality leaders use to shift culture for quality improvement purposes can be used toward shifting culture toward social responsibility.

Using ISO 26000 as a framework, there are seven principles of social responsibility: accountability, transparency, ethical behavior, respect for stakeholder interest, respect for the rule of law, respect for international norms of behavior, and respect for human rights. A better understanding of what to do and how to behave can direct quality leadership practices in ways that embed social responsibility principles during culture shift.

Key words: culture shift, ISO 26000, leadership behaviors, social responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Leaders of quality organizations are often the orchestra directors of a culture shift. Effectively leading culture shifts requires first understanding the principles upon which the desired culture is envisioned, and then second, relentless, authentic, collaborative attention and commitment to aligning organizational behavior to those principles. The same skills that determine what needs to be done to affect organizational shift for quality improvement can be applied when the topic moves to social responsibility. When it comes to embedding principles, whether quality improvement or social responsibility principles, the effective quality leader should know what to do and how to do it.

THE SEVEN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRINCIPLES

ISO 26000, the international standard for social responsibility (ANSI 26000-2010), is the definitive guideline for understanding the principles of social responsibility. After five years and more than 80 participants, ISO 26000 became the international guideline for social responsibility in 2010. In ISO 26000 social responsibility is defined as the responsibility of an organization for the impact of its decisions and activities on society and the environment through transparent and ethical behavior (ANS 2010, 3).

ISO 26000 is based on seven principles, which are intended to provide the fundamental basis for decisions and behavior. There are seven principles: accountability, transparency, ethical behavior, respect for

stakeholder interest, respect for the rule of law, respect for international norms of behavior, and respect for human rights. A deeper understanding of these principles can inform the quality manager about how to embed social responsibility within his or her behavior.

In addition to knowing what the seven principles are, the concept of stakeholders is critical to understanding social responsibility. Stakeholders are any individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity performed by the organization. For the quality manager, these might include employees, customers, suppliers, the local community in which the organization operates, shareholders of the corporation, and the natural environment affected by the operation. For a large, global manufacturing organization, stakeholders could expand to include those interested in the global economy, educational institutions local to globally disperse manufacturing sites, oceans, and other natural environments.

Let's better understand these seven social responsibility principles as applied to quality leadership. For example, *accountability* to the impact of decisions and activities is displayed by being open to criticism and controversy from stakeholders. This implies that an effective means of dialogue exists between leaders and their stakeholders. *Transparency* is exhibited by using honest, accurate, open, and available information on decisions and activities. *Ethical behavior* demonstrates the values of honesty, equity, and integrity. *Respect for the stakeholder* means that quality leaders respect, consider, respond to, and engage their stakeholders. *Respect for the rule of law* is behaving as if the rule of law is mandatory and non-negotiable. *Respect for the international norms of behavior* is particularly important when operating in developing areas where local norms may not be the same as international norms. Where conflicts exist, the socially responsible quality manager adheres to international norms. *Respect for human rights* is exhibited by recognizing the importance and comprehensive applicability of inalienable human rights.

LEADERSHIP AND THE QUALITY FUNCTION

The quality leader is often in the position of leading an organizational culture shift. This is an extremely difficult leadership effort, and this effort can backfire. Rather than achieving commitment and alignment of organizational behavior to quality improvement principles, leadership efforts for a culture shift can result in cynicism and burnout to slogans, punitive, or knee-jerk actions (Waldman et al. 1998). Collectively changing the behavior and activities of all stakeholders inside the organization requires skillful, long-term commitment to actions and reactions in alignment with quality improvement principles.

Self-awareness of leadership behavior can help during culture shift efforts (Wasylyshyn 2008). Introspection and reflection by a leader on his or her behavior can be an important activity. Leadership development should include "behavioral insights about how they lead people, as well as clarity about what they need to do to achieve successful business outcomes" (p. 329). Effective quality leadership, especially in the face of a culture shift, may be as much about *how* the leader behaves as it is about *what* activities he or she does.

Building a quality culture includes a long-term commitment to effective behaviors and actions. Inconsistent application of quality improvement principles can lead to cynicism and the opposite of the engaged and inclusive organizational culture desired. For example, consider a situation when there is no response to out-of-control conditions on a statistical process control (SPC) chart or no consequences for failure to initiate problem solving. Soon operators learn plotting accurate points and plotting fake points get the same response. They are no longer engaged in controlling their process. Diligence to applying effective problem solving to every SPC chart deployed is a part of building the quality culture. The commitment to principles requires appreciative inquiry by quality leaders on their leadership behaviors and actions.

THE QUALITY LEADER AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

To embed social responsibility principles within quality leadership practices, quality managers should take the important lessons they have learned during their quality culture shift and apply them to engaging stakeholders. Stakeholder leadership embraces open,

collaborative, shared power relationships between the leader and the stakeholder (Ford 2005). To embed social responsibility principles, the question remains: *What* should the quality leader do, and *how* should he or she do it?

The leadership focal areas required for a culture shift to social responsibility may seem very familiar to the quality manager. Leaders of social responsibility culture shifts need to focus on leading evolutionary organizational culture change through stakeholder and transformational leadership styles. They need to engage their stakeholders through influence and relationships, and they need to nurture the development of others in the organization toward social responsibility as a subject (Duckworth 2010). As stakeholders are engaged, there is a risk of negative perspectives arising from the stakeholders about the organization.

The long-term commitment and alignment to quality improvement principles may help lead stakeholders as they deploy social responsibility principles. The leaders should avoid slogans, or punitive or knee-jerk actions, when implementing social responsibility principles. They should focus on the long-term commitment to social responsibility principles and consistent actions and adjustments to affect the culture shift (Waldman et al. 1998). The quality leader may be the most practiced leader in the organization when it comes to knowing how to affect a social responsibility culture shift. Social responsibility principles are implemented in the same way that quality improvement principles are successfully implemented.

CONCLUSION

Quality researchers can expand their scope to include social responsibility factors and outcomes. Consider the research question: What are the aspects of a successful social responsibility culture shift? Many quality researchers may have the basis for answering this question. There is a dearth of research in the social responsibility field. Yet the similarities between a quality culture shift and a social responsibility culture shift seem remarkably similar. Testing this hypothesis is worthy work.

Quality leaders should be responsible for the impact of their decisions and activities on society and the environment. They should behave in an ethical and transparent way. They should be socially responsible. Figure 1 indicates some

Figure 1   Connecting social responsibility principles to quality leadership behavior

Social responsibility principle	Quality leadership behavior
Accountability	**What:** Seek criticism and opposing opinions from stakeholders on decisions and activities. **How:** Engage in introspection on the connections between leadership behaviors and stakeholder opinion.
Transparency	**What:** Provide honest and accurate information to stakeholders on factors, data, or outcomes related to decisions and activities. **How:** Build enduring and consistent stakeholder dialogue systems.
Ethical behavior	**What:** Demonstrate honesty, equity, and integrity. **How:** Walk the talk. Ensure alignment between motivation and action.
Respect for stakeholder interest	**What:** Use independent parties or mediators to facilitate decision making collaboratively with stakeholders. **How:** Actively engage in dialogue, not monologue, with stakeholders.
Respect for the rule of law	**What:** Test your organization for compliance to all regulations and laws. **How:** Proactively seek opportunities for improving system robustness.
Respect for international norms of behavior	**What:** Gather detailed information on local norms and make decisions to close gaps between local and internal norms of behavior. **How:** Stay curious and respectful about local norms without settling for substandard treatment.
Respect for human rights	**What:** Direct audits through the value stream (e.g., a supplier's suppliers) to ensure compliance to human rights practices. **How:** Seek to integrate social responsibility activities with quality assurance systems.

behaviors and actions that quality leaders may consider to embed social responsibility principles within their day-to-day work.

What quality leaders do and how they do it affects culture change. If done wrong, cynicism and disengagement can result. If done right, an enduring culture of engagement and alignment of everyone in the organization to quality improvement principles is built. Due to his or her work leading a quality culture shift, the quality leader is a maestro of this approach. Using the same approach can be effective when embedding social responsibility principles within quality leadership.

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BIOGRAPHY

Holly A. Duckworth is vice president of continuous improvement for Kaiser Aluminum. She leads the Lean Six Sigma, reliability and maintenance, sustainability, and training and development groups for the corporation. She has also held various positions for TRW Automotive and GE – Aviation in continuous improvement, quality management, and operations management. Duckworth has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Tennessee, a master's degree in management from the University of Southern California, and a doctorate in industrial and organizational psychology from Capella University. She is an ASQ Certified Six Sigma Black Belt (CSSBB) and Manager of Quality/Organizational Excellence (CMQ/OE). Duckworth is co-author of two books: *My Six Sigma Workbook* and *Social Responsibility: Failure Mode Effects and Analysis.* Since 2011, she has led ASQ's Socially Responsible Organization (TheSRO). She can be reached by email at duckworthha@gmail.com.