

**QUALITY ASSURANCE IN
DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND
BUILDING MAINTENANCE AS
THE IMPERATIVE OF A
GLOBAL MARKET ECONOMY**

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*Working paper 82/00
November 2000*

Abstract

A global market recognizes only those companies that gain and sustain competitive advantage. Such companies have low cost and differentiation of their products and services. They run their businesses through a modern quality management approach by comprehensive care for a safe and healthy environment. In order to compete in the global system, while focusing on safe and healthy environment, building companies should possess such quality assurance that provides customers with goods and services of appropriate quality. In this respect industrialized building organizations aiming to compete worldwide should take actions to gain and sustain superior efficiency, superior quality, superior innovation, and superior customer responsiveness. This would result in higher profits compared to other global competitors. If higher profits can be sustained in the long term, this would ensure a sustained competitive advantage supporting the issues of healthy environment.

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of global systems, business organizations are concerned with how to shape and structure their global operations to be competitive worldwide. Industrialized building organizations as “building blocks” of contemporary society are faced with the new value oriented perspective, modern quality management, that contributes to their global competitiveness [9]. Three quality movements of modern quality management (MQM) are accountability, sustainability and total quality management (TQM).

Over the past decade the understanding of quality management has changed from a business philosophy driven by customer satisfaction to new quality initiatives such as sustainability and accountability. Dalrymple and Drew [2] stress that customer satisfaction is provided through quality of design and process capability. Since the essence of process capability is reliability, quality management should be redefined as a systematic way of guaranteeing that organized activities happen in a way that does not pollute the environment.

The industrialized building organizations that successfully compete in the global market are faced with ISO 14000 and EMS 14000, the agreed audit schemes to take preventive measures in protecting environment against pollution. The Brundtland report covering sustainable development ensures that environmental protection is on the agenda of governments throughout the world [5]. The recent policy Treaty of Amsterdam confirms the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development throughout Europe [10].

It is recommended that global organizations are to operate socially and ethically in a global society by following the AA1000 and SA 8000 standards. The essence of AA1000, launched in 1999 in UK, is to link an organization's values to performance targets, while SA 8000, launched in 1998 in US, defines a set of standards protecting the rights of employees around the world [9].

A new version of the European Quality Model for Business Excellence (EFQM II) from 1999 defines quality as no longer being applied to product, process, but the organisation as a whole [16]. Russell found that many organizations applying current standards ISO 9001, ISO 14000 neglect the focus on excellence models [15]. Often such organizations separate current quality management systems from organisational mainstream management, what makes it difficult for them to compete successfully in the world market.

In the light of globalisation excellence implies moving to an open organisational management style, with empowerment of teamwork [2]. Recent research in UK and US showed that job satisfaction of empowered employees significantly contributed to quality improvement enabling organizations to sustain their competitive advantage [18].

The importance of applying the modern quality management in global competitive organizations is being widely recognized as affecting industrialized building companies [8]. These companies must apply MQM to gain significantly higher profits than their competitors if they want to remain in the world market. To do that they must provide quality assurance through superior efficiency, superior quality, superior innovation and superior customer responsiveness [17].

The aim of this paper is to highlight specific aspects of the global competitiveness of industrialized building companies in light of comprehensive care for a safe and healthy environment. The first section of the paper explains superior efficiency in design, construction and building maintenance. Section two analyses superior quality. Section three relates to the importance of innovations in industrialized building industry. The last section explains the importance of customer responsiveness. The paper ends with concluding remarks and future research directions.

SUPERIOR EFFICIENCY IN DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING MAINTENANCE

Superior efficiency is based on cost effectiveness. In industrialized building organizations it is accompanied by elimination of damage done by modern buildings to the occupants of the buildings.

Modern buildings represent an extraordinary achievement of industrialized civilization. They are cost-effective, making life easier to many users, but their construction causes massive side effects such as deforestation, air and water pollution, and the risk of global warming. Buildings consume 17 per cent of the world's fresh water withdrawals, 25 per cent of its wood harvest and 40 per cent of its material and energy flows [14].

However, the building industry plays a key role in sustaining environment protection. By constructing buildings that are better for the environment the industry in fact will create buildings that are better for people.

Modern buildings are constructed with installed heaters and air-conditioning while old fashion buildings have heat from the sun or from burning biomass. Modern buildings use energy and water inefficiently, creating unhealthy indoor air. They are cost efficient but at great environmental cost. Modern buildings are faced with a sick building syndrome that comes from improper ventilation systems installed to protect air quality. Such systems cause headaches, nausea and easily spread airborne illness with consequences visible in high medical costs for the staff affected.

Although the building industry needs to focus on efficiency in the use of building materials, it should also concentrate on using materials that do not emit toxins and are renewable and recyclable. Thus designers should be aware of how much energy it takes to make a material. The less energy used to obtain building materials the less pollution is created. Traditional materials such as wood, stone, and adobe use much less energy than materials obtained from the steel industry. Statistical data from UK show that the use of steel, cooper, aluminum and concrete makes each square meter of floor space in a large office building two to four times as energy-intensive and pollution-intensive [12].

Building efficiency is dependent on designed technologies. If technologies are well designed the building efficiency will be improved. Contemporary lighting for instance, such as modern compact fluorescent lamps, is much more efficient than classical lighting. It lasts longer and produces light of comparable quality. Solar water heaters are popular in Australia, California and Florida. They produce hot water on site without burning fossil fuels or splitting atoms.

Such resource-efficient approaches need to be incorporated into building design to benefit to a healthy environment. However, the full benefit of ecological design cannot be created without governmental codes and standards. Codes and standards should encourage builders to apply them contributing to the development of an environmentally sensitive building market in the long run. Consequently, superior efficiency is not only a matter of the industrialized building organization, but governmental codes and standards as well.

SUPERIOR QUALITY IN DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING MAINTENANCE

Superior quality gives the industrialized building company a differentiated product for which the customer is willing to pay a premium price. Superior quality also contributes to the elimination of defects from a building process and hence to lowering costs.

In the building industry low cost and differentiation are dependent on ecological design. Since the use of mechanization and specialization should not sacrifice healthy standards, many national building industries apply principles of total quality management (TQM) improved by modern quality management (MQM). It implies protecting the environment against pollution and ecological disaster. It also implies integrative design.

Integrative design relates to easy communication among designers, contractors and investors. With proper communication, building teams are able to see the connection between what "they do and the world around

them". In this respect, before starting a building process designers in the USA consult environmental institutions. In Europe, they create environmental teams of engineers, architects, interior and landscape designers, scientists and future building users. For example, The International Nederlanden Bank in Amsterdam, known as "an organic" building, was created through the design team by efficiently using the energy and other natural resources healthy for its users. On the other hand, the Japanese construction industry uses an integrative building design by combining design, engineering, construction, maintenance, and building operation services still without applying the broad environmental and health impact of their work. The exception is Shimizu Corporation Construction Company that has adopted a Global Environmental Charter in order to incorporate environmental issues into its work. The company "has developed an advanced robotics system for constructing high-rises that allows for the just-in-time delivery of pre-cut building material to the site each day" [14].

According to common belief many problems in the building industry arise from disconnection between participants in the construction process, customers and environment. Thus, in order to facilitate communication, apart from integrative design, a teamwork approach is suggested. Instead of falling into the common pattern in which one person's solution becomes the other person's problem, the team works to find solutions that satisfy several needs and wants, simultaneously. Thus, teamwork can save the energy of a new office building for the amount of floor space by using good insulation and optimal use of natural lighting to supplant electric light. Teamwork can significantly lower the building cost as it does in the Swedish factories of assembled components.

In many developed countries a high percentage of new houses use factory-assembled components. Workers are mainly unskilled and low-waged, which creates significant advantage in gaining and sustaining high competitiveness.

Today, healthy building materials are an inseparable part of ecological buildings. Hence, many industrialized building organizations gain differentiation through marketing higher-quality products, or products that do not affect environmental and health concerns. In Germany and in the United States, for example, almost every major city has a store that provides a variety of healthy building materials.

SUPERIOR INNOVATION IN DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING MAINTENANCE

The industrialized building organization gains competency in innovation through: (a) achieving close integration among design, construction and building maintenance functions of the company through cross-functional product development teams, (b) applying new building materials that have positive influence on the environment, (c) building gradual changes.

Industrialized building organizations are distant from each other and from either end of the process creating concerns for the environment and people who receive the finished product. Such separation makes it hard for designers to conceptualize how their decisions about buildings can substantially affect the environment. The recent application of construction projects' programs that facilitate the flow of information in the design process can significantly help designers create a positive interaction between new buildings and the environment. These programs are known as collaborative working practices. In the building industry they create a flow of information across heterogeneous software. The Distributed Artificial Intelligence program, for example, facilitates the collaborative design of light industrial buildings, particularly portal frames. The program is suitable for geographically distributed teams to use when negotiating optimum design solutions [6].

Design decisions relating to local government problems, regional and global problems, as well as health problems influence the global orientation of industrialized building organizations. Raw material turned into buildings is essentially dirt: clay for bricks, gravel and sand for concrete. When these materials are on sites they obliterate foliage and scar the earth. A similar situation occurs with using metals and plastics. Although some of raw materials are recycled material, the majority pollutes the air. The use of some plastics such as polyvinyl chloride generates carcinogenic dioxins. Germany's Health Ministry and the American Public Association have called for replacing it with viable substitutes [11].

Another aspect of good design can reduce energy needs and provide buildings that properly respond to the indoor climate by adapting the building better to its immediate environment. Large buildings with a climate sensitive design may significantly reduce the environmental impact by losing less heat when it is cold outside, and having less heat when it is warm outside. Small buildings are less adjustable to the outside climate, which makes insulation a priority.

Flexible buildings contribute to superior innovation. Such buildings are adaptable to gradual changes, such as exteriors of buildings to be changed every 20 years, floor covers every three years, while new wiring, plumbing and climate control systems should be replaced every 7-15 years [1].

Building facilities can be bought on the open market. If unsold for different reasons, such as being unpopular, they can cause financial disaster for the organisation. Accordingly following the conservative culture of providing buildings to the open market, the industrialized buildings organizations reduce the risk of failure at the expense of innovation. This is a major concern to fully exploit the innovation in the industrialized building industry in order to gain competitive advantage.

SUPERIOR CUSTOMER RESPONSIVENESS IN DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING MAINTENANCE

To achieve superior customer responsiveness the industrialized building organization must be able to identify and satisfy needs of its internal and external customers better than competitors [7].

Internal customer questions mainly relate to design, construction, and proposal of maintaining the building after erection. On the other hand, external customer questions relate to the maintenance of erected building.

Customer responsiveness relates to time, timelines, completeness, courtesy, consistency, accessibility, convenience, and accuracy [4]. Electronic-business can significantly improve the customer-care system. Web site specifically designed for customer care enables automated e-mail response and live text chat with customer-care representatives [3]. Live-chat helps the organization to respond quickly to customer questions. A database of customer questions and answers serves as a decision support system for quality assurance improvement. It creates appropriate responses to customer questions from the knowledge base, suggesting an area in the self-help section or directing the inquiry to a support representative for further assistance.

Care for customers is the measure of value added activity that sets the organization apart from the competitor [13]. It affects design, construction and maintenance. Design and construction are based on building industry standards. In developed countries, oriented towards globalisation, these are also based on standards that protect the environment against pollution and distraction. Maintenance relates to the quality of service provided. If based on electronic service through the Internet it is expected to contribute to superior customer responsiveness.

CONCLUSION

In order to gain and sustain competitive advantage industrialized building companies are faced with quality assurance through the implementation of modern quality management in design, construction and building maintenance. Low costs and differentiation of building products and services lead to the achievement of superior efficiency, superior quality, superior innovation and superior customer responsiveness based on safe and healthy environment. If industrialized building companies apply this, they are able to compete globally.

Future research directions relate to the influence of low labor cost to the achievement of cost efficiency to both building organizations that compete globally and those that do not compete globally.

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