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The Criticality of Quality Management in Building Corporate Resilience

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1. Introduction

The link between the concept of quality and corporate demise has been long established to hold true. In a survey of 120 organizations wound up between 2000 and 2007 in five continents, Marwa and Zairi (2008a) established that there was some causation relationship between quality management and corporate demise. Ignorance of quality, if unchecked, inevitably triggers corporate collapse. Stamping corporate demise thus calls for managers to give best practice quality management principles a chance to thrive than they've been willing to do before. This is particularly crucial, with the economic recession, where corporations are worried about their level of economic exposure and what they should do to survive these troubled times? Bryan and Farrell (2008) argue that companies that acted prudently in the autumn of 2008 to cushion themselves against the adverse effects of recession, may not have probably produced short-term earnings, but may well have underwritten their survival. Arguably, attending to corporate quality flaws must therefore be at the heart of any effective post-recession strategy in order to build corporate resilience.

The article explores the linkage between recession recovery strategies and their association with the concept of quality management. Literature on recession/post-recession recovery strategies is reviewed and constructs of quality management inherent extracted. These constructs are then compared with those obtained from the literature review on quality management to establish commonality, which, if present, should point to the criticality of quality management in any effective post-recession recovery strategy.

Resilience as the on-going ability to anticipate and adapt to critical strategic shifts (Reeves & Daimler (2009), will become an increasingly important driver of future competitive advantage. Nonetheless, strategic resilience is not about responding to a one-off crisis, rather it is about rebounding from a setback (Hamel & Valikangas, 2003). Thus, strategic resilience, which is at the heart of this inquiry, is about continuously anticipating and adjusting to deep secular trends that can permanently impair the earning power of a core business. It is having the capability to change before the case for change becomes painfully clear. Hamel & Valikangas (2003) contend that resilient companies should balance between perceived opportunities and risk, while fostering attributes that prop them up, namely:

a. *Foresight* – actively monitoring key mega-trends and events that could create opportunities and risks to create a shared internal view of such trends,

b. *Agility* –willingness, preparedness and ability to adapt rapidly in response to, or in anticipation of, disruptive events and ensure a rapid response,
c. *Staying power* – stamina (human/financial) resources to survive unexpected changes,
d. *Entrepreneurialism* – exploring, designing and scaling new business models to fend off rivals,
e. *Diversity* – varied perspectives that are brought to bear on the task of adapting to new environments.

Prudent quality management is essentially about fostering these attributes and, as argued by Leavy (2009) better run companies like Nokia, Microsoft, General Electric and others are taking the need to invest in the future very seriously, even as they clearly consider improving efficiencies and reign on costs. So, it must be recognized by companies that cost control strategies alone will not be sufficient to help them set the pace within respective industries during recovery; and once the momentum behind an emerging business opportunity has dwindled; it is rarely easy to regain. Blieschke and Warner (1992), postulate that the way an entity reacts to signs of economic distress can make or break it, as evidenced in the case of State Bank of South Australia (an entity that had hitherto implemented TQM in 1988). Faced with economic distress of the 1990s the State bank overreacted by eliminating quality initiatives in favour of such short-sighted cures such as; down-sizing, restructuring and programme cuts. Initially the banks' TQM initiative successfully fostered teamwork, employee participation, innovation, risk-taking, and a corporate culture that focused on the customer. However, following recession, the bank lost its leaders, its reputation, and a great deal of money and performance plummeted. It was only when interest in quality was renewed in 1991, in form of a myriad of quality initiatives (cost of quality measurement, focus on waste prevention and keeping close to the customer) that the downturn was reversed. Thus, keys to enduring a biting recession must be an insistence on sustenance of the corporate quality initiatives whatever the cost.

2. Quality management

The concept of quality has been variously defined as 'satisfying customers' requirements continuously' (Kanji, 2001; Marwa and Zairi, 2008b), 'what customers perceive it to be' (Gronroos, 2005) and 'satisfying and delighting the end customer' (Zairi, 2005, Marwa and Zairi, 2009a). The rallying call of the quality concept is customer delight, which must be at the heart of any quality initiative. By extension Total Quality Management (TQM) refers to 'obtaining total quality by involving everyone's daily commitment' (Kanji, 2001; Marwa & Zairi, 2008b), and 'a positive attempt by organizations to improve structural infrastructure, attitudinal, behavioural and methodically ways of delivering to the end customer' (Zairi, 2005; Marwa & Zairi, 2009b). The common themes or constructs of excellence that commonly occur in the literature are summed up in Tab. 1.

In sum, the ten dominant constructs of excellence extracted from the above were:

a. *Leadership* – setting clear directions and values for the organization, creating customer focus and empowering the organization;
b. *Customer focus* – creating sustainable customer value;
c. *Strategic alignment* – emphasis on strategic development, alignment and planning;
d. *People management* – knowledge, skills, creativity and motivation of its people;

e. *Partnership development* – development of strategic long-term mutually beneficial partnerships with external partners (customers, suppliers);
f. *Process management* – effective management of processes that are the "engines", that deliver every organizational value proposition;
g. *Agility*- ability to move and change direction and position of the organization quickly and effectively while under control;
h. *Social responsibility* – encapsulates responsibility to the public, ethical behaviour, and good citizenship;
i. *Communication* – improvement of information flow; openness & transparency within and without;
j. *Continuous learning, innovation & improvement* - challenging the status quo and effecting change by utilizing learning to create innovation and improvement opportunities at individual or corporate level.

The presence of these constructs in a post-recovery recession strategy should therefore confirm the necessity of quality management in any effective post recovery strategy.

	Author	**TQM/Excellence Construct**	**Representative Constructs**
1.	Zairi and Whymark (2003) (11 constructs)	- *Leadership* - *Supplier quality management* - *Vision* - *Evaluation* - *Process control & improvement* - *Product design* - *Quality systems improvement* - *Employee participation* - *Recognition & reward* - *Education & training,* - *Customer focus*	
2.	Tari (2005) (7 Constructs)	- *Leadership,* - *Continuous improvement* - *Employee fulfillment* - *Customer focus* - *Process management* - *Quality data reporting* - *Partnership management & public responsibility*	
3.	Lytle (2004) (10 constructs)	- *Leadership* - *Service vision* - *Employee empowerment* - *Customers contacts service technology* - *Service standards and communications* - *Service failure prevention* - *Service failure recovery,* - *Service training & development* - *Service reward and recognition*	1. *Leadership,* 2. *Customer focus,* 3. *Process management* 4. *People management* 5. *Partnerships development* 6. *Social responsibility* 7. *Continuous improvement*

	Author	TQM/Excellence Construct	Representative Constructs
4.	Dayton (2003) (10 Constructs)	- *People & customer management* - *Supplier partnerships* - *Communication* - *Customer satisfaction* - *Orientation & operational quality* - *Improvement measurement system* - *Corporate quality culture* - *Quality planning*	8. *Strategic alignment* 9. *Agility* 10. *Communication*
5.	Xie et al. (1998) (9 Constructs)	- *Leadership* - *Impact on society* - *Resource management* - *Strategy & policy* - *Human resource management* - *Process quality* - *Results* - *Customer management & satisfaction* - *Supplier/Partner management & performance*	
6.	Nuland et al. (2003) (9 Constructs)	- *Results orientation* - *Customer focus,* - *Leadership & constancy of purpose* - *Management by process and facts* - *People development & involvement,* - *Continuous learning, innovation and improvement* - *Partnership development* - *Corporate social responsibility*	
7.	Hubbard et al. (2007)	- *Effective execution* - *Perfect alignment* - *Adopt rapidly* - *Clear and fuzzy strategy,* - *Leadership* - *Looking out, looking in* - *Right people* - *Manage everything* - *Balance everything*	
8.	Porter & Tanner (2004) (8 constructs)	- *Leadership* - *Customer focus* - *Strategic alignment* - *Organizational learning/innovation & improvement* - *People focus* - *Partnership development* - *Results focus* - *Social responsibility*	

Table 1. Constructs of excellence/TQM

3. Corporate resilience

Likewise, a literature review of recession/post-recession recovery strategies rendered it possible to extract constructs of quality management inherent therein (Tab. 2).

Author	Strategy	Elements of Strategy	Quality construct
Berman, Davidson, Longworth & Blitz (2009)	Do more with less	*Cut costs strategically*	*Alignment*
		Conserve working capital	
		Protect cash reserves	
		Increase Flexibility & Responsiveness	*Agility*
	Focus on the core	*Create value for clients*	*Customer focus*
		Strip out non-value add activities	*Customer focus*
		Shift from fixed to variable costs	
	Understand customers	*Target value-oriented customers*	*Customer focus*
		Reduce complexity	*Process management*
	Exploit opportunities	*Disrupt weaker competitors*	
		Focus on growth markets	*Innovation*
		Acquire bargain-price assets	
	Build capabilities	*Protect and acquire critical talents*	*People management,*
		Establish infrastructure	*Process management*
		Invest in innovation	*Innovation*
	Change Industry	*Understand impact of current transformation*	*Process management*
		Pioneer new industry approaches	*Innovation,*
		Cultivate strategic partnerships	*Partnerships,*
	Make speed competitive advantage	*Empower leaders*	*Agility*
		Communicate strategy quickly, clearly and often	*communication*
	Manage risk	*Reduce risk & increase transparency*	*Communications*
Hamed (2009)	HR & L& D can add value	*Map activities & dependencies*	*Process management*
	Retain knowledge if not the person	*Create reservoir of knowledge*	*Learning*
	Communities of best practice	*Share best practices*	*Benchmarking*
	Learning	*Build capabilities*	*People management*
Review (2004)	Training people	*Building capability*	*People management*

Author	Strategy	Elements of Strategy	Quality construct
Review (2009)	Defend or attack,	*Survive, exploit or disrupt,*	*Customer focus*
	Respond to unpredictability	*Monitor change*	*Agility*
		Make decision quickly	*Agility*
		Willingness to change quickly	*Agility*
		Challenge long held beliefs	*Learning*
	Collaborate	*Tap into social networks*	*Partnerships*
		Liaise with struggling suppliers & consumers	*Partnerships*
		Partnerships with consumers	*Partnerships*
Singh, Garg & Sharma (2009)	Lean Strategy	*Cross training of employees*	*People management*
		Customer communication	*Communication*
		Reduced scrap & wastage	*Process management*
		Flexibility in reacting to changes	*Agility*
		Pareto principle (20/80 Rule)	*Process management*
Reeves & Deimler (2009)	Behavioural strategies	*Adjusting the customer offering*	*Customer centricity*
		Exploring new price models	
		Entering new markets & exiting old ones	*Agility*
		Making opportunistic	*Alignment*
	Social strategies	*Partnering with suppliers or customers*	*Partnerships*
		Partnering with competitors	*Partnerships*
		Shaping the environment	*Social Responsibility*
	Reproductive/regenerative strategies	*Rapid prototyping*	*Innovation*
		Incubation	*Innovation*
	Evolutionary strategies	*Innovation*	*Innovation*
Leavy (2009)	Cost-control strategies		*Alignment*
	Fresh ideas		*Learning*
	Investing in R&D		*Continuous improvement*
	Talent management		*People management*
	Customer care	*Current & potential customers*	*Customer focus*
Birdsall (2007)	Prepare when others are still indoors	*Focused attention to customer preferences*	*Customer focus*
	Give your brand a physical measurement	*Diagnostic analysis of brand*	*Performance measurement*

Author	Strategy	Elements of Strategy	Quality construct
	Focus on your strongest performers,	*Brand performance*	*Performance measurement*
	Teamwork		*People management*
	Teamwork reward		*People management*
	Ongoing brand management		*Innovation*
Selmer & Waldstrom (2007)	Careful downsizing	*Don't fire wrong people*	*People management*
Desmond (2009)	Talk to customers	*Find out their needs*	*Customer focus*
	Improvement & innovation	*Ensure drivers to innovate comes from the top*	*Leadership,*
		Environment to liberate creative thinking	*Social responsibility*
		Innovation systems to review creative ideas	*Innovation*
		Improvements part of every employees objective	*Leadership*
		Improvement focused learning	*Learning*
		Celebrate & reward efforts and success	*People management*
Owen (2009)	Look around you	*Copy idea*	*Agility*
		Solve problem	*Customer focus*
		Experiment ideas	*Innovation*
		Discount model	
Deans, Kansa, Mehltretter (2009).	Offensive strategy	*Revenue growth*	
		Acquisition of weaker competitors	*Alignment*
		Innovation of products or services & processes	*Innovation*
		Strategic investment	*Alignment*
	Defensive strategy	*Protecting revenues*	
		Staying in tune with customers	*Customer focus*
		Protecting profit margins	
		Benchmarking	*Benchmarking*
		Preserving balance sheet assets	
Thomson (2009)	Stay focused		*Alignment*
	Debt management		
	Funding freeze		
	Good times don't last forever	*Advance planning vital*	*Alignment*

Author	Strategy	Elements of Strategy	Quality construct
	Prudence in financial management		
	Cut-throat competition		
	Customer treatment		*Customer centricity*
	Supply chain management		*Partnerships*
	Poor management		*Leadership*
Hamel & Valikangas (2003).	Conquering denial – anticipate challenges	*Management seeing change as it happens*	*Leadership*
		Allow free thinking and criticisms from within	*Innovation*
		Anticipate strategic decays	*Continuous improvement*
		Deal with eviscerated strategies	*Alignment*
		Identify strategies being replicated by competitors	*Agility*
		Identify strategies being supplanted	*Agility*
	Valuing Variety	*Conduct breakthrough experiments year round*	*Innovation*
		Test promising strategies	*Process management*
	Liberating resources	*Free resources to support a broad array of strategy experiments*	*Alignment*
		Don't overinvest on "what is" rather than "what could be"	*Innovation*
		Relocate capital and talents to new initiatives	*Alignment*
		Distinguish between new and risky ideas	*Performance measurement*
		Get funds in the right hands	*Alignment*
	Embracing paradox	*Accelerate pace of strategic evolution*	*Continuous Improvement*
		Lay groundwork for perpetual renewal	*Continuous improvement*
		Enhance operational efficiency	*Process improvement*
	Make sense of environment	*Restless exploration of new strategic options*	*Innovation*
		Realign resources faster than rivals	*Alignment*

Author	Strategy	Elements of Strategy	Quality construct
Jimena (2009)	Focused CSR strategy	*Companies cannot thrive in collapsing societies*	*Corporate responsibility*
		Investing in society by building a whole new customer and suppliers base for future business	*Social responsibility*
Bellingham & Jones (2010)	Differentiation the key to success in the post-recession world	*Values & service – ethics, honesty*	*Customer service*
		Communicate – open and honesty	*Communication*
		Take responsibility – sustainable and collaboration	*Social responsibility*
		Cognition & connectivity – educate and inspire	*People management*
Birkinshaw (2010)	Critical need to reinvent management	*Understand – be explicit about management principles used*	*People management*
		Evaluate – assess suitability management principles to current environment	*Process management*
		Envision & experiment – try new practices to reinforce the choices made	*Innovation*
Crainer (2010)	Create products/services that add value to society	*Value creation*	*Customer focus*
Hubbard, Samuel, Cocks and Heap (2007)	Attributes of winning organizations in Australia	*Effective execution – timely delivery of results*	*Agility*
		Perfect alignment – systems alignment	*Alignment*
		Rapid adoption – rapidly accommodates change	*Agility*
		Clear & fuzzy strategy – mix-up	*Alignment*
		Leadership – build talents	*Leadership*
		Looking out, looking in – SWOT analysis	*Alignment*
		Right people	*People management*
		Manage the downside – be cautious	*Leadership*
		Balance everything – all round focus	

Author	Strategy	Elements of Strategy	Quality construct
Emerton (2010)	Global talent hunt	*Value – people with appropriate values*	*People management*
		Development – grow talent	*People management*
		Talent management –core strategic capability	*People management*
Gulati, Nohria and Wohlgezogen (2010)	Responses to slow down	*Prevention focus – makes primarily defensive moves*	*Process management*
		Promotion focus – invest more on offensive moves	*Agility*
		Pragmatic – combines both defensive and offensive	*Agility*
		Progressive – deploy optimal combination of defense and offense	*Agility*
Rao (2010)	Attracting employees	*Justice – values and rules that bind everyone*	*People management*
		Transparency – open to employees	*Communication*
		Learning – growing talents	*People management*
		Competence	*Innovation*
		Fun – work life balance	*People management*
		Flexibility – is work flexible?	*People management*
	Attracting suppliers	*Vendor relationship – antagonistic?*	*Partnership*
	Attracting shareholders	*Transparency and authenticity*	*Communication*
	Attracting consumers	*Delivering value*	*Customer focus*
Bird, Flees & DiPaola (2010)	Talent gap	*Quantify your leadership gap – rigorous analysis of leadership gap*	*Leadership*
		Deploy current talent more effectively -	*People management*
		Reduce demand for talent – use what is available effectively	*People management*

Table 2. Post recession recovery strategies

A closer examination of the constructs extracted (Tab. 2) revealed some commonality or semblance with those attributes of quality management (Tab. 1), suggesting that excellence should be an integral component of any effective post-recession recovery strategy (Tab. 3).

	Table 2 - Quality Constructs	Frequency (No. of authors)	Table 1 – Quality Constructs	Differences
1.	Agility	6	*Agility*	
2.	Customer focus	12	*Customer focus*	
3.	People management	6	*People management*	
4.	Leadership	3	*Leadership*	
5.	Innovation/ Continuous improvement/ Learning	7	*Innovation/Continuous improvement/Learning*	
6.	Partnerships	4	*Partnership development*	
7.	Communication	4	*Communication*	
8.	Alignment	3	*Strategic alignment*	
9.	Benchmarking	2		Benchmarking
10.	Work environment	2		Work environment
11.	Performance measurement	2		Performance measurement
12.	Process management		*Process management*	

Table 3. Elements of quality management

Of the twelve constructs of excellence extracted from the strategies, nine corresponded (word for word) with those originally identified as constructs of excellence (Tab.1). Nonetheless, further examination of the three made it possible to conclude that perhaps only one of them, (benchmarking) stood distinct. The other two (work environment and performance measurement) were undeniably embedded in "people management" and "process management"; constructs, hence, already included in the comparative analysis.

Moreover, this exploration revealed that in reality, constructs of quality management/excellence though critical to resilience, rarely feature prominently and independently as standalone recession combat strategies. Rather, often these are lumped together with others and/or concealed beneath other strategies, which thus relegates them to the periphery. The danger with this "concealment" is that quality management issues may not get the attention deserved despite their centrality in building up corporate resilience. The upshot of relegating quality management to the periphery will, if unchecked, frustrate recovery and/or herald corporate instability and ultimate demise.

4. Fortifying resilience via TQM

The old saying that “the best defence is a well thought-out offence” applies both in times of recession too. So, the best business approach for combating recession is to plan for recession ahead of time. A management team that is adroit at planning and implementing recession strategies may actually use the circumstances of recession to expand its market share (Bigelow and Chan, 1992). There has to be a shift in focus from short-termism objectives to long-term survival and health of the enterprise. Corporations must be willing to invest more resources than ever in total quality analysis, just to look for leverage points and errors to improve upon (Vargo and McDonough, 1993). There has to be genuine concerted efforts to continually build up corporate resilience, not on short-term basis but rather enduring longer objectives. Industries must focus on maintaining portfolio quality and creating effective risk management strategies (O'hare, 2002). Rafts of measures have been suggested to prop-up corporations and stop them from sliding into demise.

Suffice to argue that even in the face of the current global economic meltdown, companies must continue to pursue quality and pay the price, because the alternative is unpalatable– demise! It is with these clear options in mind that building a robust post-recession recovery strategy must essentially embrace elements of quality management as listed hereunder:

4.1 Leadership

Leaders must become aware of their business practices by re-examining everything a company does and making emotional connection with its management team. Leaders have to realize that no one person can make a company successful during a period of recession; it requires more hands. However, one person with a command of leadership amongst the management team can transfer sufficient influence by creating an enabling environment for the management group to thrive and guarantee success. Bigelow and Chan (1992) assert that leaders should plan for recessions or downturns the same way they do in good economic times. Executives must now take a more flexible approach to planning: each of them should develop several coherent, multi-pronged strategic action plans, not just one and, pursue them quickly as the future unfolds (Bryan and Farrell, 2008). Managers who find themselves in a recession without pre-planned strategies must now spend time analysing situations carefully, identifying predominant issues affecting their businesses and carefully developing appropriate goals and strategies, bearing in mind that post-recession a position is just as important, if not more, important than immediate cost cutting (O'Hare, 2002). During a recession, progressive leaders encourage their organizations to discover what works and combine those findings in a portfolio of initiatives that improve efficiency along with market and asset development (Gulati, et al., 2010). Smart leaders must insist on scoring decisions, so as to utilize resources effectively, reduce costs and create better customer relations that positively impact the bottom-line.

4.2 Corporate responsibility

WBCSD (2008) reports that a number of companies are gradually pursuing responsible CRS strategy and cite Wal-Mart, which has just signed a sourcing agreement with its suppliers that require factories to certify compliance with certain environmental standards and laws, which are now being applied to filter out suppliers. When leaders exercise discipline and focus on mobilizing employees to respond to customers' interests and values, they increase the chance that, when the downturn ends, they will come out on top (Shirazi, 2008). Tan (2008) and Thawani (2008) reinforces the view that in a downturn, business improvement methodologies provide a more prudent approach for reviewing organizations and should be utilized by companies that are seeking to reinvent themselves in terms of practice, processes and human resources. WBCSD (2008) has reported that organizations that instituted effective management and supplier management systems, reduced production wastes, improved planning and business forecasting, have continued to thrive, even in the face of a recession.

4.3 People management

People management relates to both internal and external customers. Leaders who understand best practice and invest in their employees, through development and training will maintain competitive advantage and grow market share by taking it from the competition (Johnston, 2008). Shirazi (2008) asserts that since high-impact talents tend to be poached by competitors in a downturn, companies should provide development experiences and rotational assignments that ensure high retention. Retraining and developing top talents ensures that everyone is informed and encouraging questions, new ideas, creativity and innovations (Coombe, 2008). Leaders must therefore, encourage constructive conflicts that challenge the status quo and fuel good decision making, by encouraging questions and new ideas, while making it safe for employees to raise them. Management must be open and acknowledge that they don't have all the answers to the myriad of issues and should therefore solicit employee inputs, thereby empowering their people to contribute their best ideas (Shirazi, 2008). WBCSD (2008) has established that companies that have invested in their social capital (improving their manpower skills) and had a transparent rewarding system, have been able to improve their bottom-line without compromising on their social performance and compliance to quality standards during a recession. HRfocus (2010) further contends that talent management must mesh with business goals for post recession success. Companies need to accommodate different lifestyles and work choices and find ways to balance these with business needs to ensure high level of product and performance. The best and most talented people are not going to want to hang round a company that isn't signalling that it has faith in its own future growth potential (Leavy, 2010).

4.4 Customer focus

McKay (2008) contends that businesses can survive the downturn if only they cherish their existing customers. Since it costs 5 to 7 times as much to acquire a customer as it does to retain one, companies should optimize existing relationships by making their customers more appreciated. For example by using the Ritz Carlton formula; treating every customer as if they are their best customers, every business can thrive even in a recession. Such initiatives as respecting customer's time, keeping promises, keeping customer in the information loop, delivering same day customer purchases and showing genuine interest in the customers' satisfaction and success amongst others will pay dividends (Berman, et al., 2009; Reeves & Deimler, 2009). Organizations should always look for additional touch points, while at the same time, anticipating customers' needs and working flat out to meet such needs (Deans et al., 2009). Moreover, since customer service is often a primary target for cost cutting, when hard times hit, it must be kept in perspective, that customers are the reason firms exist. IIf customer service can be re-organized, so that same or superior level of service is offered at reduced cost, then that would be acceptable (Belingham & Jones, 2010; Craner, 2010). However, should cost-cutting measures cause reduced customer service, then that may possibly trigger a chain reaction for the worse from customers to the detriment of organizations. Thus, re-familiarization with own customers, and giving them the best service ever, businesses will guarantee their fastest turnaround possible.

Likewise, Coorey (2008) suggests that beating recession calls for a raft of strategies; significantly knowing why customers buy from an enterprise (define your offer to ensure clarity amongst employees) and ensuring customer satisfaction (on all product/service offerings traded), thereby invigorating the customers' experiences. Choudhury (2008) also argues that CRM is critical during a period of economic downturn and, suggest that companies should work towards improving relationships with existing customers, by investing carefully in ideas and systems that helps keep the customer base connected and reassured, as well as improving their own branding (cleaning-up and positioning brands in the marketplace. Coombe (2008) buys into the view and opines that recession can be effectively overcome through looking after one's customers and, suggests that businesses should work out what they can do for their customers that gives them a better return and extra value for money. Leavy (2009) advocates taking a fresh look at customers and potential customers using two tools: customer consumer chain and a mapping of the attributes of products/services. Consumer consumption chain analysis involves analysis of a whole set of activities that consumers are going through as they seek to meet their own needs, identifying those that are useful and/or might be valuable to the organization, while discarding those that are not useful. Mapping of product/service attributes on the other hand allows for reconfiguring of an organization's offers to better match what customers are really looking for. The mapping takes a customer segment and assesses the extent to which certain attributes are positive, negative or neutral from their perspective, and then assesses their emotional response to these attributes. Sometimes customers may be happy to reward companies for adding more of those things they want and will pay for, or even taking out those which they don't easily care about. Likewise, Reeves and Daimler (2009) support the contention of adjusting the customer offering and argues that a recession may offer opportunities to introduce new services that enhance a firm's proposition for budget strapped customers (new sizes, new looks, price models).

4.5 Agility/process management

Watterson & Seeliger (2008) argue that entities can prosper even in a recession if only they can guarantee their survival, by aggressively investing in operational excellence tools (including Lean and Six-Sigma) - as is evident in some aircraft companies, where staff has been empowered with the right tools to tackle business challenges. Choudhury (2008) equally emphasizes that companies must get lean and efficient, rather than merely cutting costs and jobs. Organizations should consider mapping all processes and embrace workflow efficiencies, through interventions, like Six-Sigma. Similarly, Johnson (2008) concurs that businesses should constantly build advantages into the organization at a much greater rate, while eliminating disadvantages. By taking advantage of opportunities presented by the economic meltdown, organizations should vigorously pursue creativity and innovation, so as to offer their clientele, innovative solutions to current challenges. In addition to simplification of value propositions (highly customizable product ranges), organizations should focus on providing both superior frills/options (for the high end market) and incremental frills/options (for the most basic customer needs). A focus on scientifically determined features that drive customer choice and purchase, and consequent trimming down of product bundle to what can be offered profitably, will enable entities to maintain a firm grip on their markets (Singh et al., 2009).

Proactive entities should embrace recession because of the opportunities it offers (Gilati, et al., 2010). By being the first to anticipate the recession's impact and acting quickly to provide customized solutions that leads to dramatic improvement in relative positioning and performance will secure such entities a firm footing. Sewell (2008) challenges organizations to prioritize activities by auditing resources they're using to deliver services and provide clarity on all services being provided. In sum, it's about corporations making sure that their enterprise performance management engine is properly attuned to support the entity in these exciting times (The Hackett Group, 2008).

4.6 Learning/innovation & improvement

In conditions of high uncertainty, organizations need to invest in learning rather than in analysis. Leaders have to take step-by-step approach to innovation and growth that limits risk exposures at each step, while maximizing their learning capacity (Leavy, 2009). Since recession forces customers to make tradeoffs (Reeves & Daimler, 2009), organizations should be on the look-out for new opportunities for growth; exit or entry into new markets, different potential offerings and/or vital changes to business operations that requires adoption to reflect the changing consumer demand (Rao, 2010). A crisis is a chance to break ingrained structures and behaviours that sap the productivity and effectiveness of many organizations (Bryan and Farrell, 2008). Such moves aren't short-term crisis-response, but rather long-term.

Therefore smart leaders must know their corporations well during crisis and demonstrate this knowledge in managing challenges arising from illiquidity, plummeting profits, employment and redundancies (Coombe, 2008). The strains resulting from the crisis generated by the recessions must continually be reviewed and flexible approaches adopted that cushions the entity against further stress. Roles need to be streamlined to offer greater collaborations and prevent antagonistic and wasteful competition (Desmond, 2009). During difficult times, employees can either be the most valuable asset or the biggest liability (McGhee, 2008). The difference between those two outcomes depends on how employees are handled.

4.7 Communication

Good work environment and communication between an organization and its employees is critical and more so times of recession, where the team approach should be embraced in all forms of communication (Bellingham & Jones, 2010). Business leaders should keep their employees informed, engage with all staff inclusive of those at lower level ranks and make sure everybody in the organization knows how the organization is faring. Since staff will always perceive if something is amiss, being open with them in difficult times often pays dividends in terms of loyalty and commitment (Coombe, 2008). Shirazi (2008) suggests that business leaders should seek to manage the heart, communicate authentically (honestly, freely and openly or transparently), create positive vision and attitude to their employees, by acknowledging reality and the challenges they are struggling with, rather than stonewalling them. Leaders are often tempted during difficult times to make unilateral decisions, thereby developing dictatorial tendencies, which is unwise. Authentic brands are more than promises made to employees and staff (Buckingham, 2008); they are promises delivered and there is nothing quite like tough economic conditions to prohibit entities from forging a sharpened customer-focus. Whether faced with a market downturn or not, the internal communication community has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that employees engage with the brand (Ahmed, 2009). To bridge the engagement gap leaders should: always role model an open-door policy; especially in turbulent times, be honest with its people and readily empathize, which are the personal qualities needed in tough times (Rao, 2010). Thus, it is important that leaders take a regular reading of the "corporate temperature" (measure the impact of internal communication constantly) and seek out and promote positive role models and good stories that continually reinforces corporate core values.

4.8 Partnerships/social strategies

Reeves & Daimler (2009) assert that firms should explore whether there are opportunities for banding together "socially" through cooperative relationships:

a. Partnering with suppliers or customers – explore ways of working together to remove direct, inventory, or transaction costs from the system for mutual benefits,
b. Partnering with competitors – explore opportunities of coming together with competitors to say share: services, capabilities or assets. See whether open –source innovations models can lower costs and spur growth,
c. Shaping the environment – is there an opportunity to argue for favourable changes to regulatory regimes – independently or in concert with competitors?

Such partnerships create invaluable networks that companies can rely on to build their excellence programmes and deliver value to their customers.

4.9 Benchmarking

Choudhury (2008) suggests that entities should never stop learning; instead they should have continually access available knowledge base (from best practice entities), rethink corporate staff development strategies and apply them. Cutting wastes and harvesting best practices from other corporations and using them must be the "modus operandi" in today's corporations (Adam, 2008). Corporations should learn from best practice, competitors and be open; the more an entity is open, the more it stands to benefit from a benchmarking initiative (Coombe, 2008). Cavanaugh (1995) observe that in the mild recession of early 1990s, companies that outgrew recession were those that focused on both best practice benchmarking and technical benchmarking (numerical). Whether it is customer focus, relative value, market dominance or indeed, looking for end-to-end, companies who deployed these approaches to improve performance, expanded and/or indeed improved their global standing. Likewise Vargo and McDonough (1993) argue that by seeking out the best practices of other companies, can serve as an eye-opener for an entity in areas with potential for improvement to zero in on. This way, an organization will be able to provide the best value for money and should be the driver that catapults enterprises to success.

5. Implications

That some corporations are struggling to fight off recession is not anything surprising if the evidence adduced in this paper is anything to go by. For some organizations perhaps the concept of quality management, may not have been brought to the fore as an effective means to combat recession, but rather "concealed" beneath other strategies whose effect is relegation of quality management initiatives to the periphery. Leaders need to prioritise quality initiatives and align quality management with their corporate strategies so as robust quality management initiatives are pursued alongside other equally deserving strategic initiatives to prop-up organizations. An effective realignment of quality management with corporate strategy that affords an overlap of initiatives has the potential to underwrite resilience and prop-up organizations in these difficult economic times.

6. Conclusion

In a recession companies are being "squeezed out" if they are not making smarter decisions for these challenging times and must therefore dominate through superior quality management, smarter decision making and rapid responses to challenges through overall improvement of efficiency. In times of economic hardship smart corporations not only survive' but also position themselves to take advantage of opportunities that arise as the market improves. Top performing corporations continually invest in their people, processes and technology by differentiating themselves from the rest of the pack and so should be with all corporations aspiring to survive this recession. Ultimately, the margin between winners and losers in this game will be the quality of their deliverables/offerings. Quality management should be at the centre stage of any effective post recovery strategy and robust quality management initiatives should be pursued as an integral element of a robust recession recovery response strategies to secure corporate sustainability.

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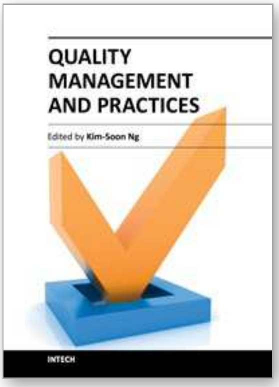

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