Soft skills for TQM in a time of breakthrough

The aim of this paper is to explore to what extent soft skills are considered to be important for quality professionals and if so which skills are needed. A literature review shows that soft skills become increasingly important in new quality paradigms like Commitment and Breakthrough.
However, the term is often not or only vaguely defined. Soft skills refer to individual development (personal) and to management of interactions with others inside and outside the organisation (interpersonal). TQM-literature studied in this literature review focuses little on interpersonal skills and not on self-management skills, although the latter might become more and more important in the current context. A set of competences is proposed to fulfil the role of the quality manager in the breakthrough paradigm: a quality culture change agent.
Keywords: soft skills, TQM, personal and interpersonal skills, quality paradigms, emotional intelligence, quality culture

Introduction

Two American studies written about in *Quality Progress*, one by James R. Evans (1996) [1] and the other by Weinstein et al. (1998),[2] asked whether higher education in the United States was doing the right things and doing things right in providing education in Total Quality Management (TQM). Evans' survey of 13 winners of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award concluded that companies attach the most importance to individual employee's quality attitude. The most highly valued knowledge, skills and attitudes were customer orientation, continuous process improvement and teamwork. Further investigation indicated that graduates often did not have the requisite skills. After graduation, many needed company subsidized training courses. Such courses covered 16 of the 23 highest valued objectives in the field of TQM, with the primary focus on practical orientation. Evans concluded from his study that in the past, higher education has apparently not succeeded in teaching the required knowledge and skills. The second study, carried out by Weinstein, Petrick and Saunders, focused on the range of courses available. This second study supported Evans' conclusions. The main expectations of business are either insufficiently covered by higher education or not covered at all. The researchers therefore called for greater awareness of business needs and improvement of courses.
A follow-up study on the subject in Europe has been conducted by several companies and institutes of higher education from Finland, England, Belgium the Netherlands and the Czech Republic (Kemenade and Garré, 2000). In general, this study's results matched the findings of the two U.S. studies. Kemenade and Garré conclude that the traditional, school-type education is probably insufficient to meet the real needs of businesses. Not only should the study programs and teaching objectives be updated, but so also should the didactic work forms, study materials used and role of the lecturing staff in order to increase the 'soft' skills of the students. Bruch & Ghoshal (2003) state that for 50 years management theory and practice have adopted a technical, analytical approach in which the role of the so called soft factors like emotions and feelings has largely been denied. Kemenade (2012) concludes that the accreditation standards for higher education in management and business administration do require just little soft skills from its graduates.
In the meanwhile the importance of 'soft skills' or emotional intelligence has been acknowledged in several occupations, (e.g., *managers*, Boyatzis, 1982; *pilots*, Damitz, Manzey, Kleinmann, & Severin, 2003; *entry-level workers*, Holzer, Stoll, & Wissoker, 2004), across cultures (e.g., Nonaka & Johannson, 1985) and across job and pay levels (Wilson, 1997

as reported in Strauser & Waldrop, 1999). This literature review focuses on the importance and nature of soft skills for quality managers in the current context as a base for quality managers trainings.

Definition

The term 'soft skills' is widely used, but scarcely defined. Conrad (1999) states uncertainty of the precise origin of use of the term 'soft skills'. Early reference was discovered in military training documents from the early 1970s. In a 1972 training manual the US army defines soft skills as job related skills involving actions affecting primarily people and paper, e.g inspecting troops, supervising office personnel, conducting studies, preparing maintenance reports, preparing efficiency reports, designing bridge structures" (Fry and Whitmore, 1972). Many definitions, however, are vague. Joubert et al (2006, p. 28): "There is no ultimate definition of soft skills, but they include such skills such as ethics, attitudes, interpersonal abilities, communication and being a lifelong learner". Or even worse, "soft skills are doing the right thing at the right time, and doing it nicely" (Joubert et al, p. 29).

Definition of soft skills is most commonly based on competence management. Often they are restricted to interpersonal or social skills (e.g. Staden et al, 2006). Fan et al. (2005) give the following skills: coordination, persuasion, negotiation, communication with supervisors, peers, or subordinates; communication with persons outside the organization, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Boyatzis (1982) found evidence for 6 clusters as basic functions for management jobs: planning, organizing, controlling, motivating and coordinating.

Soft skills are strongly related to what is called emotional intelligence. Building upon and integrating a great deal of research, Goleman (1998) presented a model of emotional intelligence with twenty-five competencies arrayed in five clusters:

1. The Self-Awareness Cluster (incl. emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence);
2. The Self-regulation Cluster (incl. self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability and innovation);
3. The Motivation Cluster (incl. achievement drive, commitment, initiative and optimism);
4. The Empathy Cluster (incl. understanding others, developing others, service orientation, leveraging diversity and political awareness);
5. The Social Skills Cluster (incl. influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation and team capabilities.

So besides interpersonal skills, also personal self-management skills are mentioned. Chopra and Kanji (2010) present a conceptual model of emotional intelligence based on self-emotional skills, intrapersonal development and socio-economic factors and management excellence.

Klaus (2007) states that soft skills encompass personal, social, communication and self-management skills. Examples mentioned are: self-awareness, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, critical thinking, attitude, initiative, liability, influence, risk taking, problem solving, leadership and time management.

In an extensive literature study and research on the development and construct validation of a measure of soft skills performance Kantrowitz (2005) found 107 soft skills. They have been clustered with qualitative cluster analysis into 10 groups and reduced with multidimensional scaling to the following:

1. Self-management skills;
2. Communication/persuasion skills;
3. Performance management skills;
4. Interpersonal skills;
5. Leadership/Organization skills;
6. Political/cultural skills.

Furthermore a cluster is mentioned of skills that are counterproductive to job performance. Within each cluster several skills are mentioned, we here give an example regarding "self-management skills".

Self-management Skills
Acts aggressively/assertively
Acts calm during crisis
Controls emotions
Overcomes setbacks
Presents self with proper authority
Remains firm in decisions/doesn't vacillate
Shows an entrepreneurial spirit
Shows confidence
Solves problems
Takes initiative
Takes risks
Tolerates stress

Table 1 : Breakdown of soft skills in cluster "self-management skills" (Kantrowitz, 2005).

We here define *soft* skills as those skills *referring to individual development and management (personal) and to management of interactions with others inside and outside the organization (interpersonal).* Examples of *personal skills* are the above mentioned self-management skills, like controlling emotions, problem solving, risk taking stress tolerance. Examples of *interpersonal skills* are: communication skills; performance management skills (like inspiring people), interpersonal skills (like making rapport, listening, resolving conflicts), leadership (goal setting, showing a vision) and political skills (like understanding the political environment, adapting to the environment and people). These may relate to people partly inside, partly outside the organization.

Which skills are important for a quality manager?

In a literature review the importance of soft skills for quality managers has been studied. The soft side of TQM is often mentioned. Wilkinson (1992) defines the soft side of TQM as being "largely concerned with creating customer awareness within an organization, and as such, may be seen as a form of internal marketing or employee communications ". And: "The soft side thus puts then emphasis on the management of human resources". (o.c. p.325). Sureshchandar et al. (2001) state that HRM and other 'soft' issues play a dominant role in service organizations, unlike in manufacturing where the emphasis is on hard issues like superiority in product, process, technology. Also Waddell and Mallen (2001) see the evolution of quality management from its highly rational and purely statistical origins to its more recent focus on 'soft' concepts such as employee empowerment and involvement. Lewis

et al. (2005) define the soft criteria of TQM as " those which are largely related to the behavioural aspects of working life such as leadership, human resource management, suppliers' relations and customer focus" (o.c. 965). Vouzas and Psychogios (2007) discern the 'hard' (or technical) side of TQM from the 'soft' (or philosophical) side. They associate the 'soft' side with management concepts and principles. They signal that there indeed is a disagreement on what exactly composes the 'soft' side of TQM and identify nine key principles. At least two are related to personal management (total employee involvement, continuous training), at least five are related to the management of interpersonal interaction (teamwork, top-management commitment and support; democratic management style, customer/citizen satisfaction and cultural change).
Also Fotopoulos and Psomas (2008) confirm that soft elements are important for total quality management. They state that quality improvement and the consolidation of the company's market position are influenced mainly by adopting "soft" TQM elements and secondarily "hard" TQM elements. Ali et al. (2010) focus on the soft or people issues. "The 'soft' or HRM aspects in the literature review stand as the fundamental issue of concern for organizational management in quality planning and creating a quality working climate to ensure successful expected performance" (o.c., p.117). Dahlgaard-Park (2012) explores and discusses the role of trust and closely related ethical core values in a managerial and organisational context and links these factors to employee motivation, commitment and loyalty. The empirical findings of her research shows that the spiritual/ethical dimension is the most important for understanding people's loyalty and commitment. "A company's vision that is shaped based on the common value set of all employees is often a strong 'guiding star' and such a vision in terms of goals, values and missions helps employees in maintaining commitment" (Dahlgaard-Park, 2012, p. 138).
In the literature under review the importance of the soft side of quality is also related to soft skills for quality managers. Addey (2004) concludes his survey on the modern quality manager, that companies will need Quality Managers " who are able to understand complex business matters and who can address both hard en soft quality issues in an effective way". (o.c., p. 888). Yang and Chen (2005) come to the conclusion that: "in addition to 'hard skills' (e.g. statistical quality techniques), there are 'soft skills' (e.g. team learning skills, sharing visions and learning climate development) that should be regarded as important, as well as team-based quality management activities. Soft skills may increase the power of hard skills and together with hard skills, lead to the continuous quality improvement in an organization" (o.c. p. 739). Dervitsiotis (2006) –in the sideline of his research- makes the remark, that a 'soft skill' such as the proper interpretation of language data is not as well or as widely developed as technical skills employed for quantitative variables. He stresses the importance of building trust, which enables interacting elements (within and between organisations) to share information, cooperate and coordinate to generate value for all stakeholders. Hagen (2010) pleas in her literature review for training in soft skills in Six Sigma training courses and agrees with Brady (2005), stating that training in soft skills, *such as leadership and coaching* often take a back seat to more technical skills.
In terms of Kantrowitz (2005) the TQM literature studied in this literature review focuses on performance management skills; leadership skills; communication skills and political/cultural skills as being needed in the TQM environment (see table 3). Little on interpersonal skills.

Soft skills (Kantrowitz, 2005)	TQM literature	
Communication/persuasion skills	Interpretation of language data Employee communications	Dervitsiotis, 2006 Wilkinson, 1992
Performance management skills	HRM Total employee involvement; Continuous training Team learning Quality working climate Coaching	Wilkinson, 1992; Lewis et al., 2005 Vouzas and Psychogios, 2007 Vouzas and Psychogios, 2007 Vouzas and Psychogios, 2007 Yang & Chen 2005 Ali et al, 2010 Brady 2005; Hagen, 2010
Self management skills		
Interpersonal skills	Teamwork	Vouzas and Psychogios, 2007
Leadership/organization	Leadership Top management commitment Democratic management style Sharing visions Building trust	Lewis et al, 2005; Brady 2005; Hagen, 2010 Vouzas and Psychogios, 2007 Vouzas and Psychogios, 2007 Yang and Chen, 2005 Dervitsiotis (2006)
Political/cultural	Relation with suppliers and customers Customer awareness Customer satisfaction Cultural change	Lewis et al, 2005 Wilkinson, 1992 Vouzas and Psychogios, 2007 Vouzas and Psychogios, 2007

Table 2 : Results of soft skills for TQM mentioned

It strikes that self-management skills (see table 1) are not mentioned at all. That conclusion is in line with the results of Conrad (1999) who did not find in the literature he studied regarding managers a reference to personal skills like self-management and self-esteem. Furthermore the skills mentioned are very general and seem to be fit for every quality manager in every stage of development of the quality management within the organisation. The skills mentioned are very vaguely defined. In the practical training of quality managers more specific competences are needed within specific contexts/ quality paradigms.

New quality paradigm

Kemenade (2010) gives an historical overview of quality management asking what we can learn from this history and what it can tell us about the direction in which quality management is heading. Based on Beck & Cowan (1996), Jouslin de Noray (2004), Shiba (2005,2006), Hardjono (2005), Shiba & Walden (2006), Vinkenburg (2006) and Kemenade (2009), he created a set of paradigms: control, continuous improvement, commitment and breakthrough. Table 3 breaks down the four paradigms by the characteristics (object the definition of quality, the focus of quality management) and the theoretical concepts [*Organisational Capacity* by Hardjono (1995); *Value orientation* by Beck & Cowan (1996) *Quadrants* by Wilber, (2000) *The third logic* by Friedson (2001), *Breakthrough* by Shiba and Walden, (2006) and *Generations of QM* by Foster & Jonker (2007)]. Added are the characteristics of the quality manager (role and competences) in each paradigm.

The control paradigm is characterised by order and goes back to Taylorism. The organisation emphasizes its material capacity. The focus is on products and processes. The quality professional in the control paradigm is the inspector, who mainly needs technical and statistical skills to build and maintain the control system.
From control quality management developed to continuous improvement. The paradigm shift from control to continuous improvement (Total Quality Management) is confirmed by Grant et al. (1994); Dalrymple & Drew (2000) and Singh & Smith (2006).

In the continuous improvement paradigm the object is the organisation as a whole. The organisation emphasizes its commercial capacity (Hardjono, 1995). It is characterised by

success. The quality professional in the continuous improvement paradigm in terms of Kantrowitz (2005) needs, besides the technical skills, more performance management skills and political skills, to support staff in quality improvement, to promote customer focus, skills to support improvement programs and self-assessment.
Drucker (2002) does not discuss the matter of quality management paradigms but sees a shift in the last centuries from the manual labour to the machine-driven economy and now towards the knowledge-based society and economy. People are now the most important asset in a company. Maguad (2006) predicts "a move towards greater integration between the analytically based 'systems and statistical engineering approach' to quality and the psychologically based 'human relations approach' (referring to Conti et al., 2003; p. 238)". This is in line with what Schijndel (2007) and Schijndel & Berendsen (2007) call 'relational quality". In Higher Education for example many researchers state the bankruptcy of control (McInnis et al., 1994; Harvey, 1997; Trowler, 1998; Barrow, 1999; Newton, 2001; Nault & Hoey, 2002; Harvey & Newton ,2005; Hoecht, 2006; Anderson, 2006; Kemenade, 2010). The continuous improvement paradigm has not always been successful (Koch and Fischer, 1998; Koch, 2003; Sirvancy, 2004; Temple, 2005; Carter and Swanwick, 2006; Houston, 2007; Ursin et al, 2008; Minelli et al, 2008). A crucial element is the characteristics of the (academic) professional, who does not want to be managed. In a small survey Kemenade (2009) asked 31 at random chosen lecturers in an institute of higher education to choose as focus of the quality management system of their organisation between the control, continuous improvement or commitment paradigm. None of the respondents choose for control, 10 for continuous improvement and 21 for commitment.

The commitment paradigm focuses the most on people, on the interaction between professional and their environment. The commitment paradigm is characterised by community and the organisation emphasizes its socialisation capacity. The quality expert in the commitment paradigm should be e.g. self-critical, have the skills of a facilitator and act as reflective practitioner. In terms of Kantrowitz (2005) the quality professional in the commitment paradigm needs to add self-management and interpersonal skills.

The breakthrough paradigm focuses on all the above mentioned objects product/process, organisation and people within their context. Shiba and Walden (2006) state that breakthrough management, rather than core competencies and TQM, is the key to winning in the new globalised world. They defined breakthrough as 'a fundamental change in an organisation's direction—as response to an abrupt, radical change in the business environment'(Shiba and Walden , 2006, p. 31). The breakthrough paradigm is characterised by synergy. The organisation's emphasis is on spiritual capacity. This is in line with the results of Dahlgaard-Park (2012). The leader should be visionary. For the quality manager a technical working group of the European Organisation for Quality (EOQ) developed the Quality Change Agent competence scheme.

Paradigms	***Control***	***Continuous improvement***	***Commitment***	***Breakthrough***
Characteristics				
Object	Product/Process	Organisation	People	Product, process, organisation and people with the context
Quality =	Fitness for use (Juran)	Stakeholders value	A cultural change process	Transformation
Quality management =	Note deviations from the norm	Satisfy or delight customers expectations	Optimize interaction between all stakeholders	Adjusting to the context
Theoretical concepts				
Organisational Capacity (Hardjono, 1995)	Material capacity	Commercial capacity	Socialisation capacity	Spriritual capacity
Value orientation (Beck & Cowan, 1996)	Order (blue)	Success (orange)	Community (green)	Synergy (yellow)
Quadrants (Wilber, 2000)	It (outer, individual)	I (inner, individual)	We (inner, collective)	Its (outer, collective)
The third logic (Friedson, 2001)	Management logic	Customer logic	Professional logic	-
Quality paradigms (Shiba and Walden 2006)	Control	Continuous improvement	-	Breakthrough
Generations of QM (Foster & Jonker, 2007)	First generation (measure)	Second generation (judge)	Third generation (understand)	-
Characteristics of the Quality Manager				
(Main) role of quality manager	Inspector	Coach	Facilitator	Quality Change Agent
Competences of the quality expert	Technical skills • statistical data analysis skills; • precision.	Adding performance management and political skills • skills to support staff in quality improvement • promoting customer focus • skills to support improvement programs and self-assessment	Adding self-management and interpersonal skills	Competences of (EOQ) Quality Change Agent

Table 3 : Characteristics and theoretical concepts of the four paradigms

The skills and roles of the quality expert in the paradigm of continuous improvement and commitment can be characterised as increasingly “soft”. Furthermore in the development from inspector (that says what to do) to coach (that helps you to decide what to do) to facilitator (that arranges the situation wherein change can happen) there is an increase in “letting go”. The quality change agent combines the competences and is able to decide what of the repertoire to use in what situation.

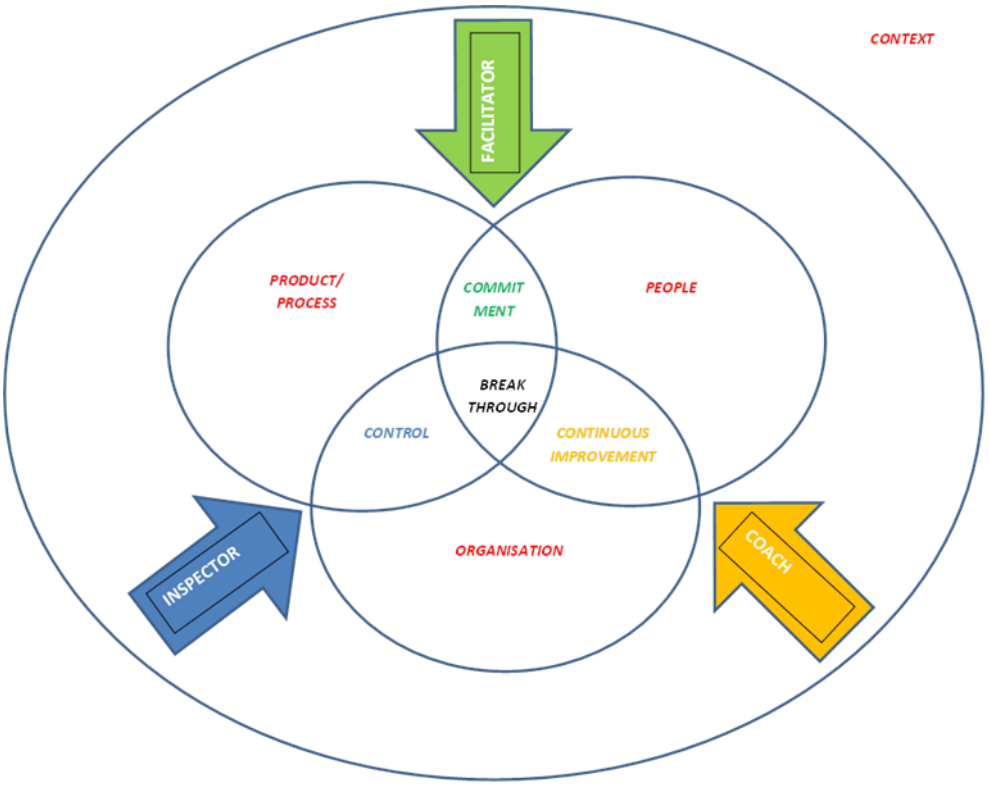

Figure 1: Kemenade & Vanremoortele (2012), Roles of the quality manager

The Quality Change Agent

The EOQ Quality Change Agent fits in the role of the quality manager within the breakthrough paradigm. This EOQ Quality Change Agent possesses competences required to implement change in an organisation and to foster a quality culture. This involves the ability to:

1. Initiate change
2. Foresee the change impact
3. Facilitate and prepare change
4. Execute change processes/projects
5. Lead change
6. Learn
7. Be present
8. Evaluate, report and consolidate the change

The EOQ Quality Change Agent has specific knowledge and skills in quality management, change management and organizational psychology. In terms of skills the EOQ Quality Change Agent demonstrates hard skills but especially soft skills, meaning personal skills referring to individual development and interpersonal skills referring to the management of interactions with people inside and outside the organisation.

This includes personal and interpersonal skills on the levels as defined in the following table related to the relevant tasks:

Learning taxonomy
A recognize (have an overview of)
B understand
C apply
D analyze results and evaluate them

Task descriptions for Quality Change Agent	**Related competences:** **the quality change agent should be able to**	**Learning taxonomy**
1. Initiate quality change	create the case for change, secure credible sponsorship, open the hearts for change, inspire people for the change by influencing the change culture in a positive way, show passion for the change, show presence.	C
2. Foresee the change impact	orient on the context, scope the breadth, depth, sustainability and returns of a quality change strategy, analyse interdependencies in the organisation, status of organisation/department in view of the overall organisational strategy	C
3. Facilitate and prepare change	help others to gain insight in the human dynamics of change and to develop the confidence to achieve the change goal use change intervention techniques, visualize the change.	C
4. Execute change processes/projects	formulate and guide the implementation of a credible quality change project/process, apply Quality Management principles and methods to specific processes/projects (cf. EOQ Quality manager), moderate creative workshops,	C
5. Lead change processes/projects	influence and enthuse others, build a team, work with large groups, deal with different people and stakeholders, handle conflicts in a diplomatic way.	C
6. Learn	scan, self reflect, identify learning issues, show learning progress.	D
7. Be present	demonstrate high personal commitment to achievement of change goals through integrity and courage while maintaining objectivity and individual resilience, be there for people to stimulate change and individual growth.	D
8. Evaluate	evaluate, report and consolidate the results of a change process/project in view of the overall organisational strategy.	D

Conclusion

Wilber (2000) mentions that there has been too much focus on the outside of individuals and collectives and it is time to look inside. The 'new' paradigms like commitment and breakthrough require new 'soft skills'. The skills and roles of the quality expert in the paradigm of commitment and breakthrough can be characterised as increasingly "soft". A new set of competences is required to be able to prepare the Quality Change Agent for his task. A competence scheme is presented. Based on this competence scheme quality managers can be trained to acquire the skills needed in a time of breakthrough.

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