OD, TQM AND BPR:
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to compare three approaches to the management of organisational change: Organisational Development (OD), Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Process Re-engineering (BPR). In order to achieve this comparison the article first defines each of the approaches and then identifies and compares elements of each. The article concludes that although the approaches all aim to increase organisational efficiencies, they are quite different both conceptually and in the way they are practised. This article does not attempt to argue that one of the approaches is better than the others — rather, its perspective is a contingent one. It argues that each of the approaches is suitable for different situations and that each approach can lead to increases in organisational efficiencies. However, the three approaches should be used as they were intended. They should not be utilised as off-the-shelf packages, as this does not allow problems that may exist in organisations to be diagnosed adequately.

INTRODUCTION

Organisations worldwide are facing increased competition and rapid advances in technology. Stable business environments that were once characterised by incremental, emergent changes have been replaced by dynamic environments, that often demand large-scale change interventions. In the last decade or so, a number of new change interventions have been developed and an extensive array of literature has emerged that introduces, applies, tests and critiques these various approaches. This article examines three approaches that have received considerable attention: Organisational Development (OD), Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Process Re-engineering (BPR). To the authors’ knowledge, this particular comparison has not been made before.

Because of the imperative for change within organisations, it is necessary to develop approaches that assist change agents in achieving effective outcomes. However, in order to utilise these approaches it is essential to develop an understanding of their characteristics, including their limitations.

Dunphy and Stace (1993) state that the OD model is inadequate as a universal approach to change management because other models that are vastly different have been successful in

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some organisations. However, this is not the contention of the current authors. The aim of this article is not to demonstrate that a particular approach is better than any other approach. Rather, it will be argued that the approach taken should be contingent upon the characteristics of an organisation and the nature and scope of the issues it faces. The article provides a comparison between the three models by describing and then identifying the aims, assumptions, and key drivers of each.

**ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT**

The origins of OD can be traced back to the 1940s when a team of researchers, led by Kurt Lewin, experimented with T-groups (Cummings & Worley 1997; French & Bell 1995). These were small, unstructured groups where the participants learnt various aspects of group behaviour from their own experiences. The researchers who initially facilitated the T-groups discussed the processes and outcomes of the sessions amongst themselves at the conclusion of each session. Eventually, the participants asked the researchers if they could be included in the review process. These review and feedback sessions were a rich learning resource for the participants (French & Bell 1995).

OD has moved on since this experimental phase. The term OD is now considered to be an umbrella term that includes many programmes and techniques for bringing about change (Burnes 1996). There is some contention as to which of these programmes and techniques come under the OD banner. However, it is commonly recognised that action research and process consultation are central to the philosophy and methodology of OD (Cummings & Worley 1997; French & Bell 1995).

OD incorporates a planned approach to change that aims to improve the performance of organisations through the people in them. It is important to note that not all change that occurs within organisations is planned. Many of the changes that occur are emergent — that is, they are unplanned, minor changes that occur during the natural course of doing business. While OD promotes a planned approach to organisational change, it is traditionally considered to be concerned with incremental change and orderly transitions rather than drastic and sudden changes (Dunphy & Stace 1988). While many authors would still argue that this is the case, others (such as Cummings & Worley 1997) would argue that transformational change is now considered to be under the OD banner.

Orderly transitioning is facilitated with the help of a change agent or consultant. The OD consultant works together with the client organisation to help identify problems and opportunities and to take appropriate action (French & Bell 1995). The role of the consultant is not just to guide the organisation onto the most appropriate path, but also to teach key organisational members how to solve their own problems in the future. This results in a decreasing reliance on the consultant over a period of time. Theoretically, OD is based on the eventual withdrawal of the consultant (Burnes 1996; Cummings & Worley 1997).

OD views organisations as complex social systems where changes need to be system-wide (Cummings & Worley 1997). Individuals within organisations are members of various groups. These range from friendship groups to departmental groups to work teams. These groups interact and are often interdependent. OD consultants recognise the important role that teams play in the formation and maintenance of organisational culture. A major implication of this assumption is that interventions must attempt to influence culture through attention to
workgroup subcultures. Indeed, if the culture is not changed then nothing else can successfully be changed (French & Bell 1995).

In summary, OD has a number of distinguishing characteristics. Namely, it is incremental in nature and views organisations as complex social systems. This leads to gradual changes with a focus on culture and processes, and to the recognition of the importance of teamwork and collaboration between organisational leaders and members. OD practitioners also have certain characteristics. OD practitioners are facilitators, collaborators and co-learners, who teach organisational leaders, and members, continuous learning skills, thereby enabling the organisation to solve its own problems (French & Bell, 1995).

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Quality first became a concern in the 1960s when Japan began to introduce quality circles (McGraw & Dunford 1986). Quality circles have been successful in Japan as a way of encouraging innovation from the workforce. The members of quality circles develop ideas that allow the organisation to improve products, services and processes. This largely involves the simplification of processes and cycle-time analysis (Sohal, Terziovski & Beaumont 1997). However, quality circles have not enjoyed the same success in Western countries, such as Britain, the United States and Australia, as they have in Japan. This may be due to a lack of management support, a lack of training, inadequate resources (Field & Swift 1996), or a perception of inadequate empowerment. In Western countries, the members of quality circles were usually not empowered to act on their ideas and were required to report to management before making any changes. Naturally, if their ideas were rejected, morale would be reduced and they would be less motivated to generate ideas in the future (Field & Swift 1996).

TQM is an organisational change intervention that is concerned with quality. TQM can be defined as

... an approach to doing business that attempts to maximise the competitiveness of an organisation through the continual improvement of the quality of its products, services, people, processes and environment (Goetsch & Davi, 1995, p.6).

An obsession with achieving ever-higher levels of quality distinguishes TQM from OD and BPR (DiPietro 1993). In Japan such an obsession is known as kaizen (DiPietro 1993; Nasierowski 1997).

TQM has a customer focus and is based on the realisation that if the customer is not satisfied they will buy elsewhere (Bank 1992; Sohal et al. 1997). Customers, in this context, may include personal customers or industrial customers (for example, retailers or distributors). Research by Sohal et al. (1997) indicates that an increasing number of organisations are recognising both internal and external customers.

An organisation that implements TQM aims to meet or exceed customer expectations in order to gain a reputation for high quality (Goetsch & Davis 1995). However, quality is subjective and needs to be customer defined. Therefore, a system for discovering customers’ perceptions and expectations of a product or service is a critical element of an effective TQM programme. Nasierowski (1997) emphasises that TQM is about taking action based on rigorous data analysis.
There are three requirements for the achievement of quality: timely delivery; appropriate cost; and quality as required by the customer (Field & Swift 1992). Cost is important, as there is little use in designing a product of high quality if it is not competitive in the marketplace. TQM is concerned with reducing costs by minimising defects, rework, scrap, backlogs, late deliveries and surplus items (Bank 1992). It is based on the belief that defect-free work is possible most of the time and, therefore, the emphasis is on prevention, rather than inspection (Field & Swift 1992).

TQM overcomes many of the problems associated with quality circles because it involves restructuring the workforce into autonomous teams that are responsible for work methods and processes (Field & Swift 1996). TQM usually encompasses employee involvement, teamwork, innovation, review of work processes and an avenue for customer feedback (Goetsch & Davis 1995). Furthermore, many of the issues that were previously dealt with by management are passed down to employees. However, while the increased responsibilities that staff experience are usually welcomed, they should be supported with an appropriate system of recognition and rewards (Bank 1992). To enable employees to take on their new roles they will also require leadership, commitment from management, education and training, access to information and resources, and a unity of purpose (Goetsch & Davis 1995).

Organisational structure and culture are also important considerations when implementing TQM. The TQM approach views organisations as interactive networks consisting of communication and control (Flood 1993). However, communication is more difficult in an organisation characterised by a tall hierarchy. Communication between departments may also be poor or different departments may be competing with each other and pulling in different directions. In both instances employees lose sight of the big picture and inefficiencies occur. A change in organisational structure may be necessary to eliminate communication problems that occur because of the hierarchy. A change in culture may also be necessary to ensure that all departments are pulling in the same direction. That is, the urge to compete needs to be replaced by a tendency to share (Harvey & Brown 1996).

TQM not only requires management commitment, it also requires employee commitment. If employees do not support the approach, success will be difficult to achieve. Management’s leadership and its ability to convey the benefits of TQM are of vital importance in getting employees excited about and committed to TQM (Goetsch & Davis 1995). Resistance to TQM by managers and resistance by employees can be impediments to the adoption and use of quality practices (Sohal et al. 1997).

In summary, TQM aims to achieve continuous improvement of products, services and processes through the involvement of people at the workplace (Nasierowski 1997). The TQM approach, therefore, views organisations as interactive communication networks. In terms of hierarchical level, communication is vertical as well as horizontal. Furthermore, the communication process includes not only members of the organisation, but the organisation’s customers, in such a way that the organisation interacts with suppliers and consumers to ensure that quality goals are met (Flood 1993).
BUSINESS PROCESS RE-ENGINEERING

Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) can be defined as:

... a radical scrutiny, questioning, redefinition and redesign of business processes with the aim of eliminating all activities not central to the process goals ... and automating all activities not requiring human judgmental input, or facilitating that judgment at reduced cost (Thomas 1994, p.28).

BPR was championed by Michael Hammer and James Champy (1994) in the book ‘Re-engineering the Corporation’ in which they advocated that old systems be discarded and replaced with new, more innovative and effective processes. BPR demands lateral thinking that extends beyond the current boundaries in order to achieve a more effective organisation.

BPR has been heavily criticised in the literature. One criticism is that BPR is focused on the implementation of new technology, rather than the improvement of business processes. Information technology companies are selling ‘solutions’ to business problems and are promoting the existence of problems merely to enhance sales of their own products and services (Thomas, 1994). BPR has also been criticised as being associated with downsizing and cost-cutting, with little regard for quality or long-term business objectives (Mumford & Hendricks 1996). However, Hammer has defended BPR, stating that it was not intended as a way to simply slash labour costs, but to streamline work processes, remove bureaucratic procedures and increase efficiency (cited in Mumford & Hendricks 1996).

BPR starts with a vision or idea. However, ideas only come from three sources — they can be copied from other companies (benchmarking), bought (from an IT company or consultant), or they can be original ideas (Thomas 1994). Benchmarking does not allow competitive advantage and buying the idea is expensive and often results in the purchase of a ‘solution’ which is not relevant to the business to which it is sold. While original ideas seem to be the only way to develop unique and relevant solutions, they are often developed within existing and constricting frameworks to maximise the chances of them being accepted. Indeed, original ideas are criticised by Thomas who believes that the acceptance of an idea is inversely related to its radicalness, especially when associated, as it is so often, with significant downsizing’ (1994, p. 30).

Perhaps it is the lack of constricting frameworks that has prompted many BPR initiatives to be conducted in greenfield sites. Indeed, large organisations have been known to set up new companies with new staff, new policies, and new methods to the parent company. This ‘starting again’ avoids the issue of organisational change and transformation which is complicated in BPR due to the frame-breaking nature of the changes (Thomas 1994). However, Patching (1995) argues that is possible to gain commitment and motivation during re-engineering through the use of the vision.

Although the radicalness of BPR can create many challenges, it also appears to be able to offer many advantages when it is implemented successfully. Furthermore, research shows that around eighty percent of organisations that implement BPR are satisfied with the results (O’Neill & Sohal 1997). An organisation that has embraced BPR and developed an original idea is likely to be the leader in their industry rather than the follower. This can lead to a competitive advantage and can positively and drastically affect organisational performance.
For the employees, the work is often more challenging and difficult yet, at the same time, more rewarding. Staff are required to perform many different tasks and to have an understanding of the entire business. They may enjoy more autonomy and more empowerment, but are also more accountable for their actions. Further, they are required to collaborate, often with people who have very different skills to themselves. Increased levels of interdependence facilitate team-based work and create a need for effective interpersonal skills (Finlay 1997).

In summary, re-engineering is about rethinking and redesigning organisational processes in order to achieve dramatic improvements in performance, including cost, quality, service and speed (Hammer & Champy 1994). However, this can be impeded if those implementing BPR feel that they are constricted by the existing framework within which the organisation is operating.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Table 1 provides an outline of the similarities and differences between each of the three approaches under investigation. The subsequent paragraphs explain these comparisons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description:</th>
<th>OD</th>
<th>TQM</th>
<th>BPR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Change:</strong></td>
<td>Planned, incremental</td>
<td>Planned, continuous</td>
<td>Planned, frame-breaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim:</strong></td>
<td>Increase organisational efficiency and problem solving ability.</td>
<td>Keep existing customers by meeting or exceeding their expectations concerning products and services.</td>
<td>To redefine existing work methods and processes to improve efficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Driver:</strong></td>
<td>Often triggered by a problem such as a communication or culture breakdown.</td>
<td>Increasingly competitive market and the need to compete for specific customer demands. May also be driven by specific problems such as high costs or poor quality.</td>
<td>Competitive pressures and intense need to cut costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change Agent:</strong></td>
<td>External or internal</td>
<td>External or internal</td>
<td>External consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning process:</strong></td>
<td>Single or double loop</td>
<td>Single or double loop</td>
<td>Double loop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of culture change:</strong></td>
<td>Fundamental focus on core values and people issues</td>
<td>Customer focused values</td>
<td>Values objectivity, control, consistency and hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change to team based work:</strong></td>
<td>Assumption that organisations are complex social systems based on groups.</td>
<td>Often requires a shift to team based work</td>
<td>Yes. Requires a shift to team based work because the work is process based rather than task based.</td>
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</table>

Description
Methods for each of the approaches vary greatly. Because OD is an umbrella term it encompasses many approaches that are characterised by various techniques and individual and group development programmes. However, all OD interventions rely on methods based on behavioural science techniques, therefore, there is a certain degree of consistency across the various approaches. Each approach tends to follow a basic problem solving model such as: determining what the problem is through data collection and diagnosis; action planning — generating and examining various options and choosing the most appropriate option; acting on the chosen option; and evaluating the effectiveness of the chosen option (Beer, cited in Cummings & Worley 1997).

TQM can be implemented in a similar way to OD, but in addition to the steps outlined above it is necessary to identify the customers and determine their needs and wants. The problem is then based around whether customer expectations are being met and the aim of the options generated are often to exceed rather than just meet customer expectations (Bank 1992). Various authors have outlined steps that could be followed in order to implement TQM. Such steps may involve: defining outputs, establishing project teams, creating a mission, identifying the customers, defining customer requirements, developing output specifications, defining team processes, identifying measurement of output, evaluation of output, and measuring customer satisfaction (Bank 1992).

Unlike the other approaches, BPR does not have a particular set of steps for managers to follow (Mumford & Hendricks 1996). However, some steps can be identified. Thomas (1994) suggests that because this approach is based around core processes the first step would be to identify the core processes of the business. The next step would be to eliminate processes that were adding only marginal value to the organisation. This would then be followed by the re-engineering of core processes. This may involve contracting out some processes, changing the organisational structure, changing the physical structure of the organisation, and changing individual jobs. This method is fundamentally different from the other approaches and involves creating new systems and structures rather than fixing those that are currently in place.

Type of Change
Probably the most basic similarity shared by the three approaches is that they are each concerned with planned change. Whereas OD concerns incremental change, BPR concerns frame-braking change. That is, BPR concerns a radical change in work processes, which requires a culture change and often entails change in the organisational structure. On a continuous scale between incremental and frame-braking, TQM is situated in the middle, although more towards the incremental end of the scale. However, in terms of time orientation, the type of change for each of the approaches is quite different. TQM is seen as a continuous programme that continually strives towards an ideal such as zero defects or 100 percent customer satisfaction. OD is a long-term process that may involve several cycles of change in order to fine-tune the changes, but eventually the organisation will achieve the desired results and consider the programme complete. The programme may be reactivated at a later stage, but it is not necessarily continuous.

In contrast, BPR is seen as a one-off event aimed at creating new systems and processes. The organisation may then establish another programme such as TQM to fine-tune the processes that exist within the newly created framework (Nasierowski 1997). In fact, a study by Zairi
and Sinclair (1995) showed that the integration of re-engineering with a TQM philosophy of continuous improvement can be highly effective.

Aim
Each of the approaches being examined shares the basic aim of increasing organisational efficiency. Other approaches such as Quality of Working life (QWL) and Workplace Democracy (WD) are society centred whereas the approaches being examined herein are organisation centred — that is, their primary objective is to satisfy organisational needs (Skelley 1989). OD and TQM are also concerned with the needs of people within the organisation and achieve organisational efficiency through the better use of people. By contrast, BPR often operates from a management vision, which may or may not be employee-friendly. Having said this, an approach that is approved by employees is far easier to implement and managers are aware of this conundrum.

Key Driver
A key driver, or catalyst, of any organisational change programme may be the recognition that problems exist within the organisation. Symptoms may include a loss of profit, decrease in market share, high turnover or absenteeism, customer dissatisfaction, or a high level of defects. However, whichever approach to organisational change is chosen it is necessary to determine the problems rather than just the symptoms. For example, customer dissatisfaction could be the result of poor quality, late delivery, unsuitable packaging or prices that are not competitive.

OD is concerned with determining the cause of the problem and taking whatever action is needed to remedy the problem. In comparison, TQM relates to the quality of products or services and is useful where quality is seen as a way to increase competitive advantage. Quality is relative and is often measured in terms of competitors’ products or services or customer demands. The key driver for a TQM initiative, therefore, often relates to increasing competition in the global marketplace and the need to develop and deliver better products or services than competitors.

Unlike TQM, BPR is not narrowly focused on quality and defines improvement more broadly. However, the key driver is also related to the increasing level of global competition: this is the purpose for which it was originally designed (Finlay 1997). This was confirmed in the study by O’Neill and Sohal (1997), which found that the two most significant catalysts for introducing BPR in Australian organisations were competitive pressures and an intense need to cut costs.

Change Agents
TQM and OD may involve either an internal or external consultant to help the organisation achieve its goals, whereas BPR is often implemented with the aid of an external consultant (Moosbrucker & Loftin 1998). However, it is important to note that the line between internal and external change agents is somewhat blurred. Internal change agents responsible for driving TQM and OD initiatives are often consultants that are employed by the organisation on a contractual basis.

As a process, OD is often utilised when those internal to the organisation do not know what the problem is, or are not sure how best to overcome the problem. An additional aim of OD is to help organisations improve their problem solving ability. As stated previously, this usually
involves a third party working in close collaboration with the client organisation in order to teach them how to solve emerging problems. This is particularly the case with process consultation.

However, while external consultants and internal project-based consultants can bring an extensive array of specialised skills into an organisation, the use of a skilled consultant does not guarantee results. Some consultants utilise the various approaches to change as if they were pre-packaged or off-the-shelf solutions. This is particularly true for TQM and BPR that are often seen as having particular steps which, if carried out, will achieve a particular aim. However, such an approach rarely works and such attempts (and subsequent failures) have lead to negative publicity for the approach concerned (Dunphy & Stace 1993; Miller & Cangemi 1993; Mumford & Hendricks 1996).

Learning Process
The terms ‘learning organisation’ or ‘continuous learning’ refer to the ability of an organisation to build skills and knowledge that enable it to continually adapt and change. Although these terms came about after the establishment of the three approaches being examined herein, they do embrace the learning processes of these approaches. Single-loop learning refers to problem solving that occurs within the present boundaries or frameworks. Double-loop learning, however, allows the organisation to go outside these boundaries and enter unknown territory. Double-loop learning is concerned with challenging current procedures, policies and norms: it recognises that the way things are done may not be the best way and that alternative ways may exist (Robbins 1998).

Double-loop learning is fundamental to the successful implementation of TQM and BPR as they are primarily concerned with large-scale change and a rethinking of current systems and processes. While OD may involve double-loop learning, this is not fundamental to its operation. OD examines the nature of the problem and then determines the best approach to solve the problem. The change agent involved often determines whether this is done within the current boundaries. Because of the focus that OD has on problem solving it is tempting to think of TQM and BPR as more proactive approaches. However, in reality many organisations only begin a change process as a reactionary measure to a problem. For example, a large number of customer complaints may be the catalyst for a TQM programme.

Culture Change
Each of the three approaches recognises that a culture change may be necessary in order to implement organisational change successfully. The chosen approach must fit the organisational culture in order for the approach to be embraced by workers. If the current culture is not congruent with the chosen approach, then culture change is required. Changing an organisation’s culture is a lengthy and difficult process, but it is possible (Robbins 1998).

As shown in Table 1, OD is a humanistic approach. As such, a culture that embraces the development of human resources, open communication, employee involvement and quality of working life issues would be best aligned with OD (Cummings & Worley, 1997). Such a culture would be built on some basic values that would include flexibility, participation, emotional expression and teamwork (Moosbrucker & Loftin 1998). TQM is customer focused and requires all employees to be similarly focused. Like OD, a TQM culture would also facilitate the development of human resources but, in this instance, the development would focus on customer service skills, technical skills and other skills that would improve service
quality. In contrast to these approaches, BPR is more objective in nature. BPR is about redesigning systems and so requires a culture that will be willing to accept one-off, frame-breaking changes. Adaptability to regular change may also be required where various systems need to be fine-tuned.

**Team Based Work**

Although the approaches seem to differ in many respects they are all based on very similar assumptions. Each of the three approaches supports a shift away from individual, highly formalised work practices in favour of team based work. However, TQM and BPR demand more innovation and input from the workforce in terms of new ideas for work processes and methods. In some instances, however, BPR is instigated from the top down with little or no consultation with the workforce (Moosbruker & Loftin 1998). OD involves the workforce for consultative or collaborative purposes, but not for the purpose of creating new processes or systems.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

OD, TQM and BPR all aim to increase organisational efficiency, but attempt to do this through very different means. The key driver can be a similarity between the approaches, as most organisations implement change as a way of dealing with a particular problem. The major difference on this aspect is that TQM and BPR are often triggered by the realisation that the organisation is operating in an increasingly competitive market, whereas OD may be implemented to solve other problems such as communication barriers within the organisation.

The approaches are also very different in the way they are practiced. BPR is clearly the most divergent as it is concerned with frame-braking change that attempts to create new systems rather than repairing old systems. For this reason, BPR may be the most suitable approach for an organisation that seeks dramatic changes. It is commonly used by organisations that have widespread problems or are close to bankruptcy, but it is also suitable as a way to stimulate innovation for improvement, rather than survival. TQM is clearly a suitable approach where the quality of the products or services is the major concern. OD is, by contrast, a more generic approach that is suitable for a variety of problems. It is particularly useful where the problem itself is unknown. However, it is not useful for organisations that are after a radical solution.

In conclusion, there are conceptual differences and similarities between OD, TQM and BPR. Each of the approaches can be effective for improving organisational efficiencies and the approach used is contingent upon the perceived organisational problem and the desired outcome. The approaches are not off-the-shelf solutions and should not be used as such. Rather, they offer a range of options for managers and consultants so that they can achieve the outcome that is most suitable for their organisation.
INSTRUCTIONAL COMMENTARY

This article explains the conceptual differences and similarities between OD, TQM and BPR. The three approaches offer both managers and consultants a degree of choice in terms of their approach to organisational problem solving. Each approach is concerned with finding the right solution for individual organisations. They were not designed as pre-packaged or off-the-shelf-solutions although some consultants have utilised them as such. Despite this, the three approaches have emerged as dominant processes of planned change in the current business era and continue to prove their usefulness.

1. Consider a symptom of a problem that exists (or has existed in the past) in an organisation in which you work. Which approach would you use to diagnose and solve the problem? Why would you use this approach?

2. Consider a business that has considerable and numerous problems related to operational processes and methods which is suffering financial loss as a result. Which approach would be the most appropriate? Why?

3. Consider some of the risks of failure associated with your choice of approach in the above questions.

REFERENCES


