



## 'TOTAL QUALITY,' PUBLIC SECTOR SLOW TO WAKE UP TO NEW MILLENNIUM

**Memo: Quality at Work**

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As we advance in the new millennium, Africa needs to wake up to the need for Total Quality Management. As this management philosophy grows in the business sector, the big question is whether public and nonprofit organizations also recognize the need for a process that brings quality.

Taxpayers of any country desire to be treated as customers of that country. They want their tax monies spent efficiently. They want services delivered effectively and they would certainly not mind if government runs continuously improved operations. Organizations that practice Total Quality could deliver on all of these points.

For business leaders who must compete and profit to exist, the question of practicing Total Quality really isn't whether to do it - it's how to do it. In the public sector, the necessity for quality management may not seem so clear.

I recall a recent seminar in New Orleans, LA where I was called on to explain how Total Quality is being applied to education. The seminar had both public school superintendents and private school administrators in attendance. During the seminar it struck me that the questions and comments coming from the private school administrators were of a different nature than those from public schools. It seemed as though each group had a quite different perspective of the subject of Total Quality in education.

While each group nodded in affirmation, there was a distinct concern about bureaucracy in the public schools as compared to that of private schools. The public school officials cited obstacles and impediments, while those from private schools were more concerned with implementation strategies.

One public school superintendent suggested to me that his board would not take the time to learn the language, and therefore would present an obstacle if he moved on Total Quality. His concern was understood because the job life of a public school superintendent is on the average short. Boards show too little interest in quality in the private sector as well, according to a recent survey by the American Society for Quality Control and the Gallup organization.

However, I was quick to point out that my experience in working with another Public School District was different. That district's board, while receiving no monetary reward, had in fact spent more than two weeks in the first year learning about Total Quality, or Quality Management as they call it. The Board President made provisions to train two new board members and others in the future. The superintendent's eyes glazed over when he heard that, and responded by saying that perhaps it could work if his board members understood and backed it.

Clearly, it will take leadership at the top for Total Quality to make inroads in the public sector. The same is true in private companies. But public officials may need to take an extra step to realize the need for quality.



Perhaps they are like the top brass of American auto manufacturers in the late 1970s. Japanese companies, some of which have practiced Total Quality since the 1950s, were driving away with U.S. customers before American automakers even realized they had a problem.

School and government officials aren't facing Japanese companies, but they are looking at taxpayer revolts, budget crunches and a widespread belief that their organizations must improve.

Just as the U.S. automakers finally woke up to the need for Total Quality, there is the need for our public officials in Nigeria and Africa at large to do the same. Once our leaders see the need for Total Quality, the obstacles to implementing it won't loom so large.

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