

Re-engineering versus Total Quality-There Is A Difference!!!

Michael J. Stickler, President
Empowered Performance, LLC

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND RE-ENGINEERING CAN BRING A VARIETY OF BENEFITS DEPENDING ON YOUR APPLICATION OF THAT KNOWLEDGE.

Today, many people are trying to define re-engineering and its role in their organization, Perceptions range from the enthusiast's "It's an art," to the cynic's "It's a management fad." To others, re-engineering is just another term for total quality - concentration on improving business processes.

While closer to the truth than the "art or fad" definitions, this generalization misses the essential difference that one must grasp to make either re-engineering or total quality a successful endeavor. While the total quality philosophy assumes the process is sound, re-engineering begins with the opposite assumption.

Micro vs. Macro. One simple way to differentiate total quality from re-engineering is to apply a micro vs. macro model. While total quality focuses on a process, re-engineering concentrates on the processes, as they comprise the entire business system. In other words, total quality takes a process, "zooms in" on it and systematically analyzes it to identify opportunities for incremental improvements and waste elimination. Typically, it is implemented from the bottom up.

Re-engineering, on the other hand, considers the entire system - the big picture - in order to identify ways to achieve radical improvements (50 percent or more) by eliminating not just waste, but as much non-value added work as possible throughout the entire business system. To be successful, re-engineering must be implemented from the top down with success measured in bottom line payback directly tied to the effort. A breakthrough effort. Understanding the difference between total quality management and reengineering can bring a variety of benefits depending on your application of that knowledge.

Here's an example: Since 1988, I have been writing at least one column a month for various industry publications. At first, I would begin a few days before my article was due by writing an outline. From then on, it was a torturous process of edit and rewrite until I was satisfied with the final product.

I tried improving the process. I began working earlier and wrote more detailed outlines. My focus on incremental improvement of the accepted process yielded diminishing returns. I focused on time, word count and content scope and began creating additional work not only for myself but for my editors.

I knew I needed to re-engineer my process but I didn't know where to begin. Finally, circumstances forced me out of my box and led me to a radical redesign of my process. Under stringent time constraints, I found myself facing two deadlines. With no outlines prepared, I panicked. That night, before I went to bed I came up with a good first sentence for one article. I resolved to get up early the next morning and devote every waking hour to writing and rewriting.

The next morning, I sat down with my lead sentence and began to write. Three hours later, I had my 1,000-word article! I took a break, read it again, made five minor changes, and faxed it off to my editor - one day early! To my surprise, the editor called me back and said "Mike, that's the best one yet. You found your voice!" I tried my new process on the second article. Recalling my topic, I jotted down a few key points and waited for that step-off sentence to appear. In a few days, it did, and I went to bed that night focusing on how I would tell the story. To my surprise, it worked again. I awoke the next morning and completed the article in just a few hours. Again, editorial praise.

In short, a crisis forced me to blow up my process and, instead of a disaster; I came up with a better total writing system. Since then I've described my breakthrough to several professional writers who meet not two, but at least a dozen deadlines a month. Most tell me they had the same breakthrough - and with it radical improvement in their writing.

Leveraging the basics. Total Quality's focus on enhancing the process through incremental improvements characteristically gets bogged down. When that happens, it's imperative to step back and open yourself to the possibility of big, holistic change - re-engineering.

Every industry and every company must conform to certain business imperatives. The process of reengineering identifies these imperatives and redesigns the process to leverage them and enhance the relationship with the customer.