Managing human resources for total quality

Contrary to the well-researched operations side of the total quality management (TQM), its human dimension TQM-based human resource management practices (HRMtqm) has started attracting attention of the scholars and practitioners only recently (Kumar et al., 2020). The critique is that compared to the intangible or the soft side, the TQM literature is heavily inclined toward the technical or hard side (Para-González et al., 2016). This interest of scholars in exploring the relationship between TQM and HRM recently is primarily driven by the latest findings that the human-related quality management creates a learning orientation and integrates knowledge to benefit the organizations (Gutierrez-Gutierrez et al., 2018). Thus, as we describe in the subsequent sections, the main objective of this special issue is to explore and examine the HRMtqm.

HRM, in the TQM framework, is guided by principles of human relations and developing employees. Though this exploration of the relationship between the HRM and TQM constructs is not restricted to recent studies, its resurgence is predominantly because of the (1) content and process-related dynamics that require continuous improvement, (2) growing role of HRM in the strategy formulation of the firms, (3) higher value attached to quality over quantity of the human resource and (4) dearth of studies that capture the recent developments in both HRM and TQM practices.

Scholars such as Donate et al. (2020) recently studied the relationship between high performance work systems and TQM. The authors considered TQM as an organizational philosophy. The authors argued, based on the literature, that both success and failure of a firm in developing and deploying the basic TQM principles are often rooted in the quality of the HRM practices. Thus, it would be of paramount significance for the firms to know “To what extent the high performing work systems and TQM are dependent on each other?”

Gutierrez-Gutierrez et al. (2018) used the dynamic capability view to examine the human resource-related quality management practices. These practices include training quality management managers to facilitate problem-solving that enhances learning orientation in firms because such training promotes intellectual stimulation, experimentation, dialog etc. In addition to training, according to the authors, empowerment and teamwork facilitate learning orientation. They emphasized on the need to explore and examine the contribution of such practices on strategic variables. Taking their agenda forward, the question that needs an answer is “What impact does human resource-related quality management practices on the strategic variables of a firm?”

According to Schonberger (1994), jobs, teams, titles and leadership are the HRM prerequisites for HRMtqm. The author, in 1994, observed a shift in the HRM premises and practices. For example, the shift was to process improvement is everyone’s job, teams would be multi-tasking, titles would be associates and leadership would be more of inspirational. The core argument of the paper was that the HRM pre-requisites are dynamic and need to be updated as and when required. It gives birth to a fundamental question: “What are the jobs, teams, titles and leadership in the present times required to facilitate HRMtqm?”

As pointed out by Wickramasinghe (2012), disruption in the HRM function post-TQM implementation does happen. The author argued that TQM upgrades the role of HR function, redesigns the existing HR practices to fit into the quality requirements, systematizes training and relates rewards and recognition to quality. Given the pivotal role of TQM in drastically changing the HRM function, the research examining this relationship is still scant. Thus, the
question yet to be answered comprehensively is “How TQM implementation disrupts the HRM function of an organization?”

On the contrary, Yang (2006) posited and examined the effects of HRM practices on the implementation of TQM. Their underlying argument was that the level of implementation of the HRM and TQM practices depends on the HRM and TQM practices that are followed by an organization. However, the authors mentioned their limitations of covering only a few aspects of HRM and urged the research community to come up with further studies to fully establish this relationship. Thus, the question central to this discussion is “Which and how HRM practices affect TQM?”

Thus, the research question that requires attention is “Does there exist a two-way relationship between the HRM and TQM practices?” A total of nine articles included in this special issue attempt to answer this question to a great extent in the subsequent section.

Articles in this special issue
The first article, “Examining the structural relationship between Employee Branding, TQHRM and Sustainable Employability Outcome in Indian Organized Retail,” authored by Urmila Itam and Merla Swetha mainly contributed by identifying mediating role of TQHRM practices in the relationship between employee quality management practices and service employee attitudes and behaviors. They found that three of the hypotheses suggested were supported. Furthermore, the study concluded that TQHRM partially mediates the EB effect on sustainable employability outcomes.

The second article, “Addressing Strategic Human Resource Management Practices for TQM: The Case of an Indian Tyre Manufacturing Company,” authored by Pratima Verma, Vimal Kumar, Ankes Mittal, Pardeep Gupta and Sung Hsu mainly contributed to the literature on key strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices by using SLR and measured by the TOPSIS method to rank and consider a tire manufacturing company as a case-based approach to gain high productivity and competitive advantage. The top three practices found were strategic planning and staffing, teamwork and leadership development.

The third article, “Exploring Human Resource Work Design, Learning Mechanism and TQM: through the Lens of Activity Theory and Contextual Learning Theory,” authored by Suchitra Ajgaonkar, Netra Neelam, Abhishek Behl, Le Trung Dao and Le Dang Lang mainly contributed to the organizational behavior studies through multi-level and cross-contextual approach by identifying the differential effects in context on the ways in which human resources and their activities are strategically managed for achieving TQM.

The fourth article, “Mastering Continuous Improvement (CI): The Roles and Competences of Mid-Level Management and their Impact on the Organisation’s CI Capability,” authored by Steven Fannon, Jose Eduardo Munive-Hernandez and Felician Campean proved the significance of the causal relationship between the CI leadership competences and the effectiveness of the CI capability within an organization. They suggested a framework to define CI Leadership roles and competence indicators.

The fifth article, “The new concept of quality in the digital era: a human resource empowerment perspective,” authored by Hadi Balouei Jamkhaneh, Arash Shahin, Sahar Valipour Parkouhi and Reza Shahin mainly contributed to the existing literature on the HRM Quality 4.0. They examined the cause-and-effect relationships between human resource drivers to adapt to the changes in Quality 4.0. They found 29 Quality 4.0 drivers of readiness and workforce ability.

The sixth article, “Does employees’ perception towards mobile human resource management application quality affect usage intention?” a moderated-mediation analysis, authored by Amit Shankar mainly contributed to the cognitive-motivational-relational (CMR)
The author used structural equation modeling and PROCESS Macro to conclude that navigation and contact significantly affect employees' mobile HRM usage behavior.

The seventh article, “Impact of Soft TQM practices on Employee Work Role Performance: Role of Innovative Work Behavior and Initiative Climate,” authored by Nitin Vihari, Mohit Yadav and Tapan Kumar Panda mainly contributed to the empirical validation at the intersection of HRM and TQM. They examined the relationship between soft TQM and employee work role performance. Structural equation modeling results indicated that soft TQM practices have a positive influence on work role performance.

The eighth article, “The Framework of Talent Analytics Using Big Data,” authored by Arnold Saputra, Gunawan Wang, Justin Zuopeng Zhang and Abhishek Behl mainly contributed by suggesting a big-data-analytics framework for HR and demonstrating its applicability with real-world case analysis. The authors did experimental analysis to find this framework.

The ninth article, “Impact of human resource management practices on TQM: ISM-DEMATEL Based Approach,” by Nishant Agrawal, Priyanka Pandey, Teena Saharan and Rakesh Raut provided a novel approach to implementing TQM practices. They used ISM methodology to examine the interrelationship between the identified variables and the DEMATEL approach to find cause–effect relationships. They found that customer satisfaction and corporate image depend on other practices.

**Conclusion and future research directions**

The aforementioned discussion reveals that the TQM practices affect the HRM practices and also, in parallel, reveals that the HRM practices affect TQM practices. It suggests the existence of a two-way relationship between the HRM and TQM practices. The articles included in this special issue not only identify such factors but also provide evidence to prove such a relationship.

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**References**


