CHAPTER - 1
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Introduction

Introducing the Theme
Organisations across the globe are in search of excellence in diverse activities. The pressure of circumstances and the newly-emerging challenges in the socio-economic scenario are prompting them to do so. Every organisation is getting more and more convinced as to what Tofler (1980) has warned in his book *The Third Wave*, “Things are going to happen much faster in the future and only those companies who will keep up with the fast pace will stay alive in the 21st century”. One of the most publicised aspects of the Japanese approach to quality has been the *Quality Circle* (QC). QC may be defined as a group of employees doing similar work who meet voluntarily, regularly, in normal working times, under the leadership of their supervisor, to identify, analyse, and solve work-related problems, and, lastly, to recommend solutions to management. QCs started in Japan in 1962 as another method of improving quality [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaoru_Ishikawa]. Ishikawa (1972) has been credited for creating QCs. He, who believes in tapping the creative potential of employees, started the QC movement to give the Japanese industry that extra creative edge. The movement in Japan was coordinated by the Japanese Union of Scientists and Engineers (JUSE). He has translated, integrated and expanded the quality concepts of Deming and Juran into the Japanese system.

The use of QCs has spread beyond Japan, in particular to the Scandinavian countries. QCs have been implemented in a large number of organisations in India and the Quality Circle Forum of India (QCFI) is promoting in a big way the growth of QCs in India. QCs, in vogue, are mostly found in the industrial/business organisations. But the use of QCs to bring about quality improvement in the social sectors, specially in the field of education in general and higher education in particular, has been largely ignored till now. Against this backdrop, the researcher has tried to explore the potential of QCs in enhancing employee involvement so far as the educational administrators are concerned in the field of higher education, particularly in the universities.
Review of Literature

Though there is an increasing volume of literature on Quality Management, including Total Quality Management (TQM), there is still not much available literature exclusively on QC. However, the researcher has made an attempt to touch upon and review the existing available literature on QC to the extent possible. QCs were originally associated with the application of Japanese manufacturing techniques. The introduction of QCs in Japan in the post-war years had its roots in the highly motivating lectures delivered in Japan by Deming in 1950, a statistician working for the USA government [http://deming.eng.clemson.edu/pub/den/deming_1950.htm]. Deming’s ideas were based on the experience of the US firms, operating yardsticks being the wartime industrial standards. Noting that the American managers had typically given the line managers (and the engineers) and the line workers about 85% and 15% respectively of their responsibility for quality control, Deming has argued that these shares need to be reversed. He suggested that production processes should be redesigned with a view to effectively operationalising quality control mechanism and continuously educating all employees in an organisation from top to bottom in quality control and statistical control techniques. QCs are the means by which this continuous education is to take place for production workers.

Deming has predicted that if the Japanese firms adopted the system of quality control advocated by him, nations around the world would be imposing import quotas on the Japanese products within five years and his prediction came true. Deming’s ideas relating to quality improvement became quite influential in Japan and he received several prestigious awards for his contributions to the development of the Japanese economy. A number of Japanese manufacturers applied his techniques widely and experienced high levels of quality and productivity. The improved quality, along with the lowered cost, resulted in creating an international demand for Japanese products. The Deming’s concept of QCs helps focus on quality assurance right from the very beginning and not just on quality control only at the post-production stage. Rather than relying upon post-production inspection to identify errors and defects, QCs can be functional in preventing occurrence of defects in the very first stage. As bonus,
machine downtime and scrap materials that occur due to product defects could be minimised. Deming's idea, that improving quality could increase productivity, has led to the development of the Total Quality Control (TQC) concept in Japan, viewing quality and productivity as two sides of the same coin.

Fiegenbaum (1986), a noted quality management expert, has defined the phase, Total Quality Management (TQM), as an integration of quality development, quality maintenance and quality improvement effort that should be carried out on a continuous basis by any organisation.

As time progressed, other quality management experts continued to adapt to the original theories of Fiegenbaum and Deming, each emphasising a different aspect of quality journey. These experts include Juran and Gryna (1980), Taguchi and Clausing (1990), and Crosby (1996).

Juran (1992), a famous quality management consultant, has preached that quality begins at the stage of designing and ends after satisfactory services are provided to the customer. According to him, it is not the standard of quality during manufacturing alone that one should be concerned with. Rather the focus should lie on Total Quality which is very important and is primarily responsible for the success of any organisation.

Weiss and Gershon (1989), experts in the field of production and operations, have called QCs as the best means today for meeting the goal of designing quality into a product.

Gregerman (1984), an authority on productivity improvement, has outlined a number of requirements for an organisation contemplating the use of QCs. The managers should be comfortable with this participative management approach. It is also important that the organisations have good, co-operative employee relations as well as the support of the middle-level managers for a QC programme. The managers must be willing and able to commit the time and resources needed to train the employees who will participate in the programme, particularly the QC leaders and facilitators. It may
even be necessary to hire facilitators if the necessary expertise is not available within the organisation. Some organisations may find it helpful to establish a steering committee to provide direction and guidance for the QC activities. Even if all these requirements are met, the organisation will benefit from QCs only if employee participation is voluntary and the employees are allowed to contribute so far as selection of problems is concerned. The managers must allow time for the QCs to begin getting desired results. In some cases, it can take more than a year to meet the expectations.

Successful QCs offer a wide variety of benefits for an organisation, e.g., they serve to increase management's awareness of employees' ideas as well as employees' awareness as to the need for innovation within the organisation. QCs also serve to facilitate communication and increase commitment among both employees and management. In enhancing employee satisfaction through participation in decision-making, such initiatives may also improve an organisation's ability to recruit and retain qualified employees. In addition, many organisations find that QCs further teamwork and reduce employee resistance to change. Also QCs can improve an organisation's overall competitiveness by reducing costs, improving quality, and promoting innovation. [Deming (1986); Juran (1980); Ishikawa (1972)]

Crosby (1986), a noted quality expert, has stressed that quality improvement is built on getting everyone to do it right the first time (DIRFT). Management really has three basic tasks to perform: (i) establishing the requirements that employees are to meet, (ii) supplying the employees with the resources needed to fulfil the requirements, and (iii) encouraging the employees and helping them meet those requirements. Crosby (1986) has observed that, if management policy is DIRFT, then everyone will DIRFT. He has insisted that the individual's role in enhancing quality must be understood by each and every employee in the organisation. Among the various steps he has prescribed, towards improving quality image and hassle-free management, is the formation of quality-improvement team. The team members should have the same or some educational base concerning the quality-improvement process so that the efforts
to enhance quality do not lead to a low-level motivation-improvement programme. This is where the interest in programmes, such as QCs, is observed.

QCs in a large number of organisations (including industrial/business ones) have been known to help increase productivity, improve quality, boost employee morale, and serve as a human resource development tool in a large number of developed and developing countries (including India). The same benefits may also accrue in one of the vital social sectors, i.e., the educational sector. In fact, QCs in some community colleges abroad have been used to solve problems in their administrative departments [Ladwig (1983); Moretz (1983)], and in their student-support service systems [Ladwig (1983); Cohen (1983); www.ericdigests.org].

Hirshfield (1983) selected eight college students from a large History class on East Asian studies to form a QC. Interestingly, the decisions made by the QC members altered the course structure and content. After two years of experimenting with QCs in the classroom, he felt confident that QCs are a valuable academic tool. QCs help increase students' familiarity with course materials and provide them with valuable experience in decision making and problem solving. Hirshfield (1983) and Murray (1983) have noted that QCs imbue students with a greater sense of purpose in the classroom and provide them with an enhanced sense of self-worth.

However, in the field of higher education, the concept of QC has been grossly unexplored and, to some extent, ignored. The researcher has not yet come across any documented study on QC in the field of higher education in India. This has encouraged the researcher to undertake this type of study, particularly to explore the potential of QC in employee improvement. The researcher has felt that the outcome of this type of study would contribute substantially to this relatively less-explored area.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to appreciate and analyse the perceptions of the officers' in the State Universities (SUs) in Kolkata with respect to the potential of QC in enhancing their involvement.
However, in order to achieve the *main* objective of this study, it is also necessary to get deep into certain specific issues which form the very basis of the main objective. Such issues can better be captured by formulating a number of *other* objectives of this study mentioned below.

An attempt has been made to gather the perceptions of the said officers by administering a structured questionnaire that has been designed keeping in mind the *main* and *other* objectives of the study.

- to assess the potential of QC in promoting employees' job satisfaction and satisfying their achievement need
- to assess the potential of QC in improving employees' abilities and developing themselves
- to assess the potential of QC in team building
- to assess the potential of QC in improving employees' communication through group activities which take place frequently
- to assess the potential of QC in helping employees solve their day-to-day problems at the operational level
- to assess the potential of QC in reducing absenteeism and grievances among employees
- to assess the potential of QC in improving quality image

**Research Methodology**

The study is essentially empirical in nature.

- *Selection of the State Universities (SUs) for this Study*

In West Bengal, there are 17 SUs, out of which 9 (named below) are located in Kolkata.

- University of Calcutta (CU)
- Jadavpur University (JU)
- Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU)
- Rabindra Bharati University (RBU)
- West Bengal University of Animal and Fishery Sciences
- West Bengal University Of Technology (WBUT)
- The West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences
The researcher finally decided to cover two very important SUs in Kolkata, i.e., University of Calcutta and Jadavpur University, in order to make the study an intensive and focussed one. While deciding on such universities, the researcher also took into consideration the facts that both these internationally-reputed universities have been recognised by the University Grants Commission (UGC) as the 'University with Potential for Excellence' (UPE) and have been reaccredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) with Grade A. While interacting with some senior officers of the SUs in Kolkata, the researcher came to know that both University of Calcutta and Jadavpur University are contemplating in terms of institutionalising some specific Quality Management mechanisms in order to improve the quality of functioning of their administrative departments in future. This input prompted the researcher to focus on these two Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) with a view to assessing the potential of QC in employee involvement. Also the researcher observed that, except in the RBU, many officers’ posts in the other SUs in Kolkata are lying vacant. Even most of the officers in such SUs, very few in numbers, are only on deputation.

The researcher observed that there are three levels of officers (class I, class II and class III). The researcher found that an overwhelming majority of officers the SUs, selected for the purpose of this study, belong to the class II and class III levels though some of them are enjoying at present class I and class II pay scales respectively through Career Advancement.

Data Source

This perceptual study is totally dependent on primary data collected by administering a structured questionnaire among the existing population of the officers in the universities covered in this study.
Before administering the questionnaire, the researcher undertook a *pilot study*, covering a few selected officers in those two SUs in Kolkata and, based on such *pilot study*, necessary additions, deletions and alterations were made in the items and the final questionnaire was accordingly designed.

The questionnaire comprises two parts (i.e., *Part A* and *Part B*).

*The Part A* contains some biographical variables that are considered important in the field of social sciences, viz., age, gender, qualification and level, to gather relevant biographical information about the respondents.

*The Part B* contains some items with a view to capturing the perceptions of the respondents *vis-à-vis* the role/potential of QCs in employee involvement.

The researcher decided, *inter alia*, to relate the respondents’ responses (with respect to the items in the *Part B* of the questionnaire) with the above-mentioned biographical variables (mentioned in the *Part A* of the questionnaire) to make the study meaningful.

Apart from the diaries and annual reports of two SUs covered, other relevant documents available with the university officers’ association in West Bengal and the respective officers’ associations in each of such SUs have been considered for the purpose of preparing a comprehensive list of officers.

Also various publications of the QCFI, including the various issues of its journal and newsletter, have been used.

For the purpose of the study, the field survey took about six months (September, 2009 to February, 2010).

❖ *Statistical Tools Used*

After collection of relevant data by administering the structured questionnaire, through an extensive field survey, covering the two SUs in Kolkata, such primary data have been tabulated and processed.
So far as the statistical analysis of data is concerned, apart from the use of Descriptive Statistics, a Non-parametric Test, i.e., Kendall Coefficient of Concordance, has been used. [Siegal (1956); Kothari (1985); Bhattacharyya (2003)]

Chapter Planning

- Chapter1: Introduction
  - Introducing the Theme
  - Review of Literature
  - Objectives of the Study
  - Research Methodology
  - Chapter Plan
- Chapter2: Quality Circles - Concept and Philosophy
- Chapter3: Quality Circles – Development Over the Years
- Chapter4: Tools for Quality Circles
- Chapter5: Operationalising Quality Circles
- Chapter6: Empirical Survey and Its Findings
- Chapter7: Making Quality Circles Effective