

## **Fostering the Culture of Creativity & Innovation in the Organization through Quality Circle** **- Ronald Reddy**

On a boring Monday morning, as you entered your office, you notice that the office has been swept clean and contains an aroma of freshness. On the side of your office sits a vase with varieties of flowers just plucked out from the nearby gardens within the company boundaries. Your day just got lit up. Your mind is all ready to tackle the day's work. Did you even realise how that happened? Yes, it was the clerk, who came to work early that morning to ensure that the office was in a conducive working environment. Cleaning wasn't part of her job. As soon as she found out that the housekeeper is not coming, she decided to get creative and innovated the concept of a freshly plated vase with local flowers and aroma of cleanliness to lay the foundation for her manager to have a good day, to make good decision and to sustain the business. Such minute and insignificant things happen at all workplaces so as to seem. Eventually, it makes enormous impact to the business but goes unnoticed. How do we capture such innovative ideas, and how does a culture get formed for sustainability purposes?

Creativity and Innovation are unique but yet so simple to comprehend. The question that we as practitioners need to ask ourselves is:

- How do we foster such qualities which are embedded into the minds of people or our employees and lead to business or process improvement?
- How do we recognize such minute concepts and ensure that such pattern of thinking is sustainable in the organization?

One such brilliant productivity program is Quality Control Circles. A quality tool that is associated with the following:

1. Encouraging creative and analytical thinking leading to innovative concepts
2. Enhancing employee engagement throughout the organization
3. Guiding an organization in a direction to achieve ultimate quality results thus improving overall productivity

### **1. Encouraging creative and analytical thinking leading to innovative concepts**

Human beings generally have a tendency of being recognised. This makes us feel good and thus we do well.

On a personal note, all forms of recognition must be genuine and should spring from the rationale of having an impact being made in the organization. To this effect, a tool that can be used to ensure that an organization continues to nurture creativity and innovation is called Idea Generation.

This concept is about creating, developing and communicating an idea. The overall process of this productivity drive may seem complex but it can be localised to leverage the essence of its output. For example, one of the organizations uses it effectively to ensure that its employees feel empowered to project their creativity and lead innovation. So how do they do it? The Idea

Generation Concept is derived and approved by the management team and involves three stages:

### ***1. Identification of the Innovative Idea***

This can be anything from anywhere. For example, a shop floor employee can suggest an idea with a \$100 worth of initial investment that can lead to an overall cost saving or profit earnings of \$5,000 monthly and be also sustainable for the business. The idea can also spring out from a department with creative thinking employees or further more as process owners, it could be from a Quality Circle team combining the efforts of one or more departments or business areas. Quality Circle teams are also encouraged to list all their Problem Log in separate Idea Generation sheets. Once the QC Teams have selected their projects from the Problem Logs, the rest of the ideas are to be passed to next level for further vetting

### ***2. Selection of Idea***

Since the innovative idea can come from various areas or employees it needs proper vetting. This needs to be done through department managers who are Quality Drivers or QC Managers from QC Teams. This is the checkpoint to ensure that the idea has substance to the current and future business needs. If it doesn't have much value to it, then the initiator is commended for his/her efforts and is encouraged to pursue better innovative ideas.

### ***3. Implementation Phase***

These vetted ideas are presented to the management level. The management then decides the prioritization of pursuing the idea through this concept and the need for the business.

To further add value to this concept, it is important to recognise the efforts of employees, departments and QC teams. Recognition in forms of Insignia and Cash is given for Most Innovative Concept and Most Cost Saving Concept to continually encourage such ideas from flowing freely from one level to other thus making continual improvements.

## **2. Enhancing employee engagement throughout the organization**

Quality Circle is also a tool used to empower employees. Experiences and trends show that empowered employees are better engaged at work and overall productivity results outshine the below par performance of individuals in such organizations.

QC raised the engagement level of one organization to new benchmarks with a 9.2 index and an eNPS (Employee Net Promoter Score) of 69%.

In addition to this listed below are some experiences of people that initially impeded to be part of the QC Concept:

- **A Motivated Team Manager:** “QC experience - for first ever QC experience it was tremendous. Firstly our team got recognized and we got first ever enrolment in the QC team registration. Personally quality circle has boosted my knowledge and enhances my ability to present myself in public. Quality circle - by itself is a morale boosting tool for employees. Our team was super excited when we were announced as winners and they knew their struggles have paid off. This journey would never have been so sweet without the continuous support of the management supporting us thick and thin throughout the journey. Being part of Quality Circle makes us feel recognized and that feels heartwarming. For those who are yet to taste the sweetness of the quality circle journey, I urge that this journey will make you feel more part and parcel of our organization.”
- **An Upcoming Team Facilitator:** “It helped me to improve my leadership role, to see that all the procedures are followed as required by the company. Small things count. Do the right thing at the right time with the right attitude.”

In true essence of this Quality Circle journey it has created wonders for employee engagement in many organizations.

### **3. Guiding an organization in a direction to achieve ultimate quality results thus improving overall productivity**

The most important factor of fostering creativity and innovation is the driving force.

The leadership team’s commitment and involvement is vital to ensuring that such programs are always given positive reinforcement and it becomes a cultural aspect of the organization.

As a practitioner, this is not always an easy task as many organizations have executives with a broad spectrum of thinking analogies with different perception of quality and productivity. So, how do we reach out and “sell” such productivity programs to such executives, or for that matter to show the executives the benefits associated with having such programs:

- **Draw out a QC Plan** - This forms the basis of an incorporated strategical move. It should also contain the total calendar plan for the program, the role of each executive, the mechanism for measuring quality through the concept, the promotion of individual development and the relation to organizational growth and promotion. More importantly, the plan should detail the **RECOGNITION SYSTEM** for such program
- **Roll out the Plan to the Employees** - This will involve the lead by the Head of the Organization or a nominated rep in the Executive position. Employees must see the importance of this program and the drive
- **Conduct the Necessary Training** - Source out Training Providers to conduct the training for the identified QC Leaders.

- **Monitor and Motivate the QC Teams** - Employees need support and continuously reinforce this with positive and reasonable words and facts. Relate experiences, contribute extra time if possible, and coach them to see their talents from different perspectives.
- **Update the Management Team on Progress** - Present papers on progression and project innovative and cost saving or profit making concepts. Management must see that QC is not just any concept but it is a concept for productivity in relation to their organizational sustainability.
- **Organize Internal Convention and get things Moving** - Create an atmosphere of healthy competition. Employees must see themselves as ones making the change. Advertise and market the initiative. This brings out the very best from people.
- **Feedback** - Important for the management to see the ROI aspect.

The involvement and commitment of the management will ensure that the culture of innovation is encouraged and contained on a positive note. In addition to this, the management must always ensure that there is impartiality in terms of **RECOGNITION** for employees involved in the program. Neutrality is essential and this must be visible to the workforce. This will form the basis of a **Cultural Revolution** aligning to innovation and will benefit everyone involved.

Fostering the Culture of Creativity and Innovation is possible through the Quality Circle Concept. For an organization, the lead and direction must come from its leaders and there should be an ingredient to sustain the program. It should have the ability to reach down to the shop floor level and these employees without any prejudice and voluntarily must have the ability and empowerment to drive their innovative ideas and eventually become part of a circle for current and future improvements.

### An “Innovative Formula” for a Sustainable Culture

