

The Human Factor in Quality – Examining the ISO 9000 and Business Excellence frameworks in selected Greek Organizations

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Abstract - The aim of this paper is to theoretically investigate the implications of ISO 9000:2000 and EQA on HR issues in selected Greek industrial organizations in their road to quality improvement. The study sample consists of two selected industrial organizations that were judged as normal, ordinary, and representative. The data gathering was carried out through extensive and in - depth interviews in the two organizations asking several multiple informants. The study shows that organizations approach to quality is of great influence to effective human resource utilization.

There is a tendency to avoid the involvement of HR department on either certification or the EQA and also it is clear that HR department status and role is still very traditional. The small sample does not allow making any generalizations for the majority of Greek organizations in all sectors of the economy. This is the first step towards an understanding of the current context and content of HRM in organizations moving towards total quality management implementing ISO 9000:2000 or EQA model. However, further studies needed to investigate similarities and differences in an international basis. The paper provides a basis for understanding the present status of HRM implementation under ISO 9000 implementation and EQA model of selected Hellenic organizations and the results can be helpful for academics and practitioners

The author suggest that in order to have a reliable and objective depiction of the effect and influence of ISO 9000:2000 and EQA to the context and content of HRM, a thorough examination and analysis of relevant studies should be conducted which will include all the various approaches, practices and perceptions recorded so far in the literature - some of them based on empirical data and some deriving from rhetoric and “good-stories” or “how things ought to be” perspective.

Key words: *Business Excellence, ISO 9000:2000, HRM, Greek Industry, Empirical research*

I. INTRODUCTION

The new ISO 9000:2000 and the Business Excellence movement through the American and European Quality Awards are the prevailing approaches to quality improvement according to the majority of Quality academics. Both seemed to provide a basis for the implementation of a TQM philosophy, which provides a unique way of improving organizational performance and attaining competitive advantage. The TQM rhetoric calls for a cultural shift, emphasises self-control, autonomy and

have a significant effect in the way people are managed. In the context of these awards and the new ISO 9000:2000, new realities and perspectives emerge for the effective utilization of the organization’s human resources. In the literature, aligning Quality Improvement programmes and initiatives with human resources effective utilization requires radical changes in the way the organizations perceive their “human capital” and the way the organizations’ HR function operate [1],[2]. In the quality literature the importance of the “human or people element” in the quality improvement efforts are often been overlooked and according to Wilkinson, et.al [3] organizations are often engaged in a “production-oriented” perspective of Total Quality. Until recently, academics and practitioners seemed to be preoccupied with the study and implementation of the “hard” elements of quality improvement (mainly ISO 9000 certification), and the evidence is on the few books and articles published in the 90’s and the following years. Only recently a number of authors suggested that the shift on thinking about quality has major implications for the management of labor and has occurred in parallel to a shift in thinking about Strategic Human Resources Management ([1],[2],[4],[5],[6],[7],[8]). It has been argued that TQM cannot be applied in isolation. TQM is a total philosophy involving all organizational members and has high personnel content.

II. THE NEW ISO 9000:2000 AND BUSINESS EXCELLENCE (QUALITY AWARDS).

Since the introduction of ISO 9000 fifteen years ago there were a series of controversies and doubts over the role and the significance of ISO 9000 series on improving product and service quality, achieving internal and external customer satisfaction, and improving performance [9],[10],[11],[12],[13],[14]. According to Douglas, et.al [15] “ISO 9000 is a multi-million-pound industry with many individuals and organizations reliant on it for their livelihood, including quality consultants, lead auditors, internal auditors, supplier auditors, quality representatives/managers and software designers/sellers as well as the numerous training companies and certification bodies and their employees”. However, other authors and among them Kartha [14] argues that the new standards main purpose is to assist organizations to “identify mistakes, streamline their operations, and be able to guarantee a consistent level of quality”.

The new revised standard was launched at the end of 2000 and according to Beckford [16], is “an attempt to

harmonize all the standards and remove the manufacturing bias. Several authors stated that the new ISO9000: 2000 is directed towards performance rather than conformance [17]. Coleman&Douglas [18] argue that organizations in order to achieve the new ISO 9000:2000 should demonstrate that have quality processes and procedures in place, but they are skeptical about what happens after ISO 9000 certification. Casadesús & Karapetrovic [19] studying the relationship between the “new” and the “old” ISO found that “the evaluation of the new ISO 9001: 2000 standard is generally positive”. Vouzas&Gotzamani [20] argue that there is no really negative impact but mention that the perceived benefits are less than the previous standard and that the level of reported benefits of ISO 9001/2/3: 1994 decreases with time, evidenced by two empirical studies conducted in 1998 and 2002. Overall argue that there is “an erosion of the perceived usefulness of ISO 9001: 2000 in the future, especially in terms of short-term benefits”. Martínez-Lorente & Martínez-Costa [21] further argue that organizations certified by ISO 9000 “may have gone a part of the way to TQM. However, the authors claim that it is only the “first part of the way, not its end, because there is a large amount of TQM requirements that ISO 9000 does not satisfy”. Research on ISO 9000:2000 all over the world is still going on and the perceived benefits and its integration to other quality initiatives is expected to clear the picture and provide a basis for further improvement of the standard [22],[23],[17].

According to Vouzas&Gotzamani [20], “careful analysis of the ISO 9000:1994 standards’ requirements compared to the basic principles of TQM and the requirements of the two most representative business excellence awards, the European Quality Award and the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, reveals several main shortages of the ISO 9000:1994 standards. The authors stated that lack of strategic quality planning, absence of top management commitment; lack of focus on customer satisfaction, lack of systematic training in quality. Furthermore HR competitiveness, benchmarking, and quality cost measurement are absent, as well as issues related to health, safety and the environment in a study in Greek EQA awarded organizations. However, many authors believe that the new revised ISO 9000:2000 series of standards is a significant improvement on the previous version in terms of its conceptual simplification, its process-based vision and its acknowledgement of the importance of customer satisfaction as a key requirement for verifying the effectiveness of the quality system [6]. The basic principles on which the new standards’ requirements are based (as found in the ISO 9000:2000 document) are much more TQM oriented.

On the other hand, Business Excellence literature is mostly based on rhetoric and “good stories” on EQA and MBNQA awarded organizations in Europe and USA. Bohoris [24] in a comparative analysis of the two main awards stated that “Quality Awards’ assessment procedures seem to be the only comprehensive means available to date by which TQM initiatives can be thoroughly monitored and assessed, providing any business with a competitive internal

mechanism necessary to face the imposition of future new barriers to trade in the form of technical or quality standards requirements. However, the criticism over “excellence models and awards” is growing [25],[26],[27],[28],[13]. According to Dale,et.al [25] the EQA “acted in response to the perceived tarnished image of TQM, whilst the consultancies sought to address the diminishing demand and increasing competition for their services”.

III. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND “HUMAN RESOURCES” - A LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned earlier, only recently quality experts, researchers, academics and practitioners realized that “human resources” issues can be at the core of the quality philosophy and that employee involvement and commitment is essential for the successful introduction and implementation of quality initiatives, programmes or practices and techniques ([2],[29],[1],[8],[30]. It is widely accepted that Total Quality Management has a high human resource context and that quality movement recognizes the importance of human resources utilization and states a conceptual and well-defined image concerning human behaviour and motivation [31]. Wilkinson et al., [3] state “putting human resources issues in the top management agenda is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of all quality improvement efforts”. Research evidence suggest that as TQ improvement efforts proceeds, a change in the corporate culture occurs, resulting in the establishment of a work climate in which participation, trust, responsibility for goal achievement and employee involvement takes place [32].

A. ISO 9000 series implementation and Human Resources

The literature on Human Resources utilization and quality improvement efforts is rather limited, especially when the focus is on the relationship and the impact of the implementation of the ISO 9000 series. The majority of these studies are descriptive in nature, with many generalizations, and basically put the basis for a better understanding of the role of the personnel function in quality improvement efforts. TQM is often confused with quality initiatives, short-term projects and ISO 9000 series certification [7],[33],[34].

The launch and implementation of the new ISO 9000:2000 series of standards increases even more the companies’ expectations and the likelihood that the new systems will bring firms one step closer to TQM and Business Excellence [20]. The introduction of the five building blocks and the introduction of the process-based approach are an attempt by ISO to reduce the amount of documentation required. Even more, the new elements that it introduces to the certified companies belong to the “soft elements” of TQM, that have been proved to be the fundamental ones in the TQM system, with a very strong effect in improving company results [35]. However, up to now there is no major research done on the effects and impact of the new ISO 9000:2000 series of standards in Strategic HRM. The relationship between SHRM and ISO 9000 series certification is often seen as part of the HR function involvement in the design, introduction and

implementation of a quality assurance system certified by an external evaluator. Wilkinson, et, al [3] and the IPM [29] study suggest that HR function actually plays an important role in the design and implementation phase of a quality assurance system. On the other hand, there are cases in which a quality assurance system had been implemented within the HR department.

Furthermore, in the literature, it was found that in many organizations the human resource function plays an important role in the design and implementation of a quality assurance system [2],[3]. On the other hand there are cases in which a quality assurance system had been implemented within the human resource department. Its integration with human resource management is increasingly recognized as all level managers' and employees' commitment is a major component of success. Another striking finding is that HR professionals are willing to digest and implement the fundamental principles and practices of quality into their HRM practices. They also strongly believe that quality improvement efforts and the ISO 9000 series certification is one of the major challenges in their job.

Research evidence shows that when quality management evolves from quality control or quality assurance, it tends to focus on the "process" (technical) aspects of quality rather than on the "human" aspects [29],[36]. Thus, organizations being engaged in a quality assurance approach to quality improvement, do not usually allow sufficient room for staff contributions, and training is targeting only towards people involved in the production process. The personnel department usually is a peripheral function with a very traditional role. The IPM study shows that organizations placing emphasis on a "process" approach to quality tend to exclude human resource department from the design and implementation of quality assurance system such as ISO 9000 series. In most of the cases its role is limited and oriented towards increasing the awareness of the quality standard and handling the administrative aspects of quality efforts [29]. Human Resources professionals seem to participate in the various phases of quality initiatives and play a vital role (usually a facilitator role) in these efforts. Overall, the involvement of HR function in quality improvement efforts usually is materialized in three ways a) by participating in the design, introduction and maintenance of various quality initiatives b) by changing traditional personnel practices in order to support a total quality culture and c) by establishing a quality orientation within the function itself. However, we have to consider that the quality stage or level an organization is, instantly influences the embodied organizational changes, which in turn affect the way human resources considerations are formed in relation to strategic quality goals.

B. The Excellence Movement and the "Human Resources" element

Hendick&Triplett [37], suggest that implementing Total Quality initiatives requires continuous adjustments of every facet of work environment and corporate culture and the effective utilizations of organization's human resources through the HR department can play an important role in

TQM assessment, planning and implementing process as well as in annual monitoring and review. Furthermore, improving quality, meeting customer's needs according to the literature is part of everybody's job and everybody should feel responsible. Quality efforts should be based on a long-term perspective and be part of the overall business strategy including people-related issues such as education and training, performance appraisal, employee involvement, recognition and improving quality of work life. Absolutely necessary is also a quality policy that is understood and easily applicable by organizational members through a use of a common language.

It is widely suggested that successful TQM implementation changes the dominant values, organizational structures, the way people work together and the way they feel about participation [38]. The above support the argument made by many authors stating that quality improvement efforts should become part of everybody's job and everybody should feel responsible. Quality improvements should be based on a long-term perspective and be part of the overall business strategy. In this context people should be considered as assets rather than as additional cost upgrading that way the role of the human resource function. Research in the US shows that in organizations, which were awarded the MBNQA, the human resource function's role was essential, but the overall rating on the HR utilization category was not satisfactory. In these cases the personnel professionals were part of the top management team and fully participated in the design and implementation of the organization's quality strategy. [2]. There are limited studies concerning the HR element of the European Quality Award and the reason is that in the academic community the EQA framework is not considered synonymous with Total Quality Managements but rather such as a business audit approach and a technique within TQM. [39],[28]. A study in Denmark shows that "Danish companies are acting in order to improve the use of human resources in the company and to keep up with competition in the market. The increase in the resource score reflects that companies are also more focused in 1996 on the effective use of non-human resources in such a way that company goals and strategies are supported" [40]. Hamzah & Zairi [41] in a study of British organizations winning the EQA give the following statement concerning people in one of the organizations studied " LL Bean Inc. is about people and respect for people. This is a way of respecting the talents within the organization. A lot of companies see people as the problem. We saw people as part of the solution" Xerox a winner of the European Quality Award uses extensively benchmarking for HR in the areas of "management development, recruiting, compensation and other personnel processes with the world class competitors". Vouzas& Gotzamani [20] in a study in Greece found that "EQA seems to provide a new platform for introducing new practices and upgrading the role of the HR function. Management and utilization of people is at the core of the EQA and it seems that the sample organizations are striving to focus on specific issues and measures, covering all HR-related activities. In some organizations the

strategic role of people is still not dynamic. It is considered to be very costly and complex, while respondents realize that there were still high opportunities for improvement in this area. It is obvious that human resources issues were not at the center of the quality strategy formulation and implementation within the sample companies.”

IV. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES IN GREECE - A LITERATURE REVIEW

It is argued that the majority of the Greek enterprises have neglected the human resources issues [36],[42]. Only recently SHRM issues have been thoroughly examined by academics. Studies conducted in the 80’s and 90’s revealed that in Greek industrial organizations, well-organized personnel departments is a recent phenomenon, and consequently personnel managers seemed to be a rare breed,

appearing only over the last fifteen years. The investigation of the current level of SHRM implementation in Greek organizations was mainly covered by the Cranfield survey covering several European countries including Greece [42]. The survey was conducted three times (1993, 1996 and 1999) and the sample was 150 organizations, which employed more than 200 employees. According to that survey, during the 90’s, Greek organizations tried to adopt methods and techniques already successfully applied by multinational. The main emphasis was on the increasing importance of training, the effort to link training to the firm's strategy, the higher involvement and collaboration with line managers. Furthermore, the Cranfield study argues that there is a tendency of Greek organization to adapt their HRM practices to international trends [43].

TABLE I. LITERATURE ON TOTAL QUALITY/ ISO 9000 AND HUMAN RESOURCES IN GREECE

Authors - Type of research/Methodology	Issues addressed
Lipovatz,et.all (1999) Survey in 111 organizations 85% manufacturing	Training of the executive members, Training of personnel, difficulties and reactions during the preparation, benefits, perspectives after the implementation
Vouzas & Gotzamani (2005) Survey, 17 EFQM awarded org.	EQA more vital and challenging than ISO, a mean to promote TQ awareness, dominant role of senior management, lack of integration between EQA and the existing quality assurance systems
F. Vouzas (2004) Survey in 10 ISO 9000 industrial org.	ISO 9000 a primary concern for quality, a process –orientation in managing human resources, no involvement of HR department in quality.
Stavroulakis D (1997) Case study manufacturing org. (Japanese, Western Foreign)	Lack of formal quality teams, resistance from top management, ISO dominates the quality efforts blocking collectivism
D. Lipovatz (1998) Survey in 29 organizations	Involvement in leading TQ, consistent TQ culture, timely recognition and appreciation of efforts and successes of individuals and teams, involvement with customers and suppliers
F. Vouzas (2002), Theoretical -conceptual	State-of-the –art literature review, analysis of the main elements of the TQM- HR relationship
F. Vouzas (2003) Case study (Six industrial organizations)	Situations of limited autonomy, QC possess insignificant bargaining power, satisfaction of demands depends on management benevolence, suggests that future research s focus on the relationship of QC autonomy and creativity.
Kufidu&Vouzas (1997) Survey 15 organizations	HR issues low in the Quality agenda, lack of resources regarding training, peripheral role of the personnel department. Lack of a Quality culture based on people management.
Tsiotras & Gotzamani (1996) Survey on ISO 9000 certified companies	The main motives that lead Greek companies to ISO 9000 certification, were the performance improvement and the overall, internal and external, benefits or positive results
C. Valasoglou Pilot survey under the ADAPT initiative in three (3) companies	Process orientation the key to quality improvement, investment in the people element a factor that organizations not yet realized.
Dr. E. Deligiannakis Survey on 42 certified organizations	Interest in certification under government financial support, competition forces certification, lack of training, consultant involvement, use of ISO for technical and administrative

The literature on the Total Quality Management/ISO 9000 and its relationship to Strategic HRM is rather limited and is focus on commentaries from academics and practitioners and in a few studies. The reasons for such lack of interest can be traced as mentioned above to the small number of certified organizations and the lack of organized HR departments in the majority of the certified organizations. Furthermore quality professionals seemed to ignore or depreciate the “human” elements of the new ISO 9000:2000. The majority of studies shows that the main approach used by the majority of Greek industrial organizations were the adaptation of a quality assurance system through the ISO 9000 series certification [44],[5],[20]. Kufidu&Vouzas [36] in the first attempt to investigate these issues found that “concerning quality improvement efforts, emphasis also seemed to be given to the “system” side of TQM in the majority of the Greek

industrial organizations and the reason for that could be traced in the ISO 9000 series certification campaign in Europe and recently in Greece - in many cases reinforced by European Union - and to the fact that most Greek organizations are moving from a quality control phase towards a quality assurance phase.

V. SURVEY OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In this paper, the author suggest that in order to have a reliable and objective depiction of the human resources element in the Business Excellence and ISO 9000:2000 quality improvement frameworks, a thorough examination and analysis should include all the various approaches and perceptions recorded in literature -some of them based on empirical data and some deriving from rhetoric and “good-stories” or “how things ought to be” perspective. The sample consists of two selected industrial organizations

(one Greek and one multinational company) that were judged as normal, ordinary, and representative, one being certified with the new ISO 9000:2000 series and the other took the EQA award of the EFQM. The data gathering was carried out through extensive and in - depth interviews in all two organizations asking several multiple informants i.e. the plant manager, the production manager, the personnel manager, using a semi-structured questionnaire with open - ended questions. The main purpose was to collect data and produce basic information, enabling qualitative

observations concerning organizations' Quality and HRM efforts, the role and the status of Quality and HR professionals, and the implementation of various human resource initiatives from people being directly involved. Each site was written up as an integrated case study, with the focus on drawing out the commonalities of meaning and understanding each site. The data analysis provide some ground for generalisations, even though subjective judgements were also made from the analysis of the cases.

TABLE II. SUCCESSFUL GREEK ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CATEGORIES OF THE EUROPEAN QUALITY AWARD 2004-2005 (SOURCE: EFQM)

European Quality Award Categories	II. Number of organizations	Sector	Award Year	Size	Ownership
Committed to Excellence	16	Service: 11 (in which 2 public) Manufacturing: 5	2004: (8) 2005: (6)	Large: 7 SME's: 9	Foreign: (1) Greek: (18)
Recognized for Excellence	2	Service Organizations	1 in 2004 1 in 2005	SME's	All Greek
Award Winner	1	Manufacturing	2004	SME	Greek
Prize Winner (same company)	1	Manufacturing	2004	SME	Greek

VI. FINDINGS

A. Excellence Company A

The company A is the only Greek organization that had won the European Quality Award in the past five years. Company's A journey to quality started through ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 series certification and continued with the EQA (first attempt was on 1997). The main reason for going for the EQA was the organization's effort to establish a very good brand name domestically and abroad and to move a step forward on its quality improvement efforts.

The ingredients of success according to quality manager were the high top management commitment and the participative approach used to design, implement and communicate the various elements and requirements of the EQA framework. However, emphasis was also on improving competitiveness and increasing productivity mainly through financial management techniques (cost reductions). The organization is on a spectacular development stage and a very strong export orientation and establishing strategic supplier alliances abroad.

TABLE III. PROFILE OF SAMPLE ORGANIZATIONS

	Quality Approach	HR Philosophy, Goals and Vision	HR practices	HR dep't Involvement to Quality
Company A	EQA Winner ISO9001:2000	HR vision and goals part of the corporate strategy embedded in line management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corporate Social Responsibility ▪ Performance-based pay ▪ EEO ▪ Employee development plans, employee participation ▪ strong people-driven culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education and Training for EQA ▪ Awareness Building ▪ Team design and support ▪ Internal and External communication ▪ HR Processes justification and measurement
Company B	ISO9000:2000	Absence of a written policy and Vision for HR Not quantitative long-term HR goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traditional/bureaucratic HR practices ▪ HR function plays peripheral and supportive role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimal, training program ▪ Awareness building ▪ HR manager not in quality steering committee

The organization is a champion in providing Equal Employment Opportunities (70% of personnel are expatriates from the former Soviet Republics and there is also a large amount of disabled employees). Some of the organizations best practices concerning HR issues are the

continuous encouragement for employee involvement through suggestion and improvement plans, the open and sincere communication between employees and top management in monthly meetings, employee satisfaction surveys on regular basis, competence-based training, zero

accidents (SAFE award from the EU) and family working environment. The HR function implements a series of non-financial rewards such as financial support (loans), Sunday trips, and flexible working hours for disabled employees, special awards and happenings and recognition schemes to valuable employees. Based on the above policies and practices the organizations display a spectacular improvement in many areas. According to company data ninety five percent (97%) of employees consider working in a safe and pleasant working environment, the working hours lost in last two years decreased significantly, career opportunities and career development had been more systematic, almost ninety percent (90%) of employees believe that the products they produce are of highest quality and finally expressed happiness and satisfaction from the training and development programs participated in. The HR function is involved in annual employee attitude surveys aiming at improving working conditions and enhancing employee morale and commitment. However, top management is reluctant to upgrade the HR function and the HR manager role and this is due to the small size of the organization and the predominant role of the owners of the company in all aspects of business activities. The involvement and the role of the HR function in quality efforts and especially in the European Quality Award was essential for achieving the award and for setting a new standard for improvement in the issues related to management of people. A series of HR practices were re-evaluated, documented and measured such as performance appraisal and rewards and others were better utilized i.e. internal communication methods, recruitment & selection and employee training. The most challenging task for the HR was the to support the organization toward building quality awareness for all functions and changing the existing corporate quality culture by incorporating HR issues to all quality procedures and by creating a climate of trust and commitment.

B. ISO 9000:2000 Company B

Company B is a multinational organization operating in Greece for many years with a very recognizable brand name and a big market share in its sector. Its main approach to quality improvement is ISO 9000:2000 and is considered very successful in achieving high quality products and increasing productivity. The main reason for ISO 9000:2000 certification was firstly the pressure from the “mother” organization and the increased competition and secondly quality improvement and efficiency in operations. Speaking with the quality manager, the HR manager and the Managing Director it was clear that all considered employees to be very valuable resource and that played a key role in achieving strategic quality goals and objectives. This of course is contradictory with the overall picture of the organization’s HRM practices, the role of the HR department and the lack of a vision and mission for the personnel.

Formal written HR strategy, policy or quantitative goals regarding the management of human resources were absent and this was due to the focus of the organization to other

“strategic” areas such as marketing, operations, and public relations. The involvement of the HR manager to the design and launch of ISO 9000 certification was minimal and covered only the development of training programs for quality and awareness building. The HR manager had no authority to review and adjust HR procedures in order to support ISO 9000:2000, to analyze and re-examine past job descriptions, to evaluate previous performance standards for employees, to suggest training methods and learning activities and ways to increase motivation. The HR manager mentioned that he took part in meetings regarding ISO certification (after certificate granted) and received information regarding quality strategic orientation, but he was not part of the quality steering committee. The quality manager claimed that a written policy or quantitative goals for personnel is not prerequisite for ISO 9000:2000 certification and considered as unnecessary and costly. A serious obstacle to the involvement of HR department to ISO 9000:2000 certifications was also the existence of serious interdepartmental communication problems as well as internal disputes and conflicts. Having that in mind it was extremely difficult for the HR professional to develop a sound, clear and integrated HR policy that can support the certification process and the establishment of an “ISO culture”.

The HR department role in the organization can be characterized as a “peripheral” or “supportive” representing the average small and medium Greek enterprise. The HR department had only two employees, one secretary and one accountant and its most common HRM practices were administrative in nature such as, data filling, employee payroll, employee complaints, disciplinary action, and traditional HR practices (such dismissals, demotions, transfers, working hours and shift patterns). There were no major indexes and matrixes for HR issues (turnover rates, employee satisfaction, evaluation of education and training programs, induction, labor productivity, etc) and core HR practices like performance appraisal system, rewards and recognition schemes were absent for employees at the shop floor. The above come to support research evidence that when “hard” approach to quality is adopted combined with a weak HR department with no strategic orientation, then “people” issues are often neglected and the quality improvement efforts are partially satisfied. The argument is more realistic since top management commitment in ISO certified organizations is poor and furthermore top level management is probably not aware of the advantages the “new strategic HRM” practices and the effect these practices might have to the organization’s overall quality effectiveness and efficiency. Furthermore, in the organization studied the existing organizational HR culture and generally the overall corporate philosophy of human resources utilization seemed to promote quality improvement efforts through ISO 9000 series in a rather bureaucratic manner in which there is no innovation, promotion of new ideas, opportunities to be gained and best practices to be implemented.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

It is quite obvious from the above analysis that there is an enormous distance between the HR requirements of the awards and those of ISO 9000. The ISO 9000:2000 is no more than an “audit of procedures” with not substantial HR context and content and on the other side the awards are concerned with HR both in relation to people management and satisfaction/results. The ISO 9000:2000 seemed to represent the minimum effort on HR practices and policies an organization should present in order to achieve third party certification but quality award and specifically EQA award requires proof of systematic design and implementation of HR policies and practices. However, many argue that a company cannot win one of the quality awards without first being able to satisfy the requirements of the ISO 9000.

It seems that ISO 9000:2000 certified organizations although are aware of the fundamental principles and tools of continuous quality improvement but still are in the early stages of a company-wide approach to quality improvement. The author believe that one of the most prevailing factors contributing to the delay of the establishment of a “quality-based” culture and a move towards strategic Total Quality Management are the short period of systematic implementation of quality assurance systems and the preoccupation with the so-called “hard” aspects of quality.

The existence of vision and a mission for Human Resources followed by systematic design and implementation of Strategic HRM practices seemed to be the main issues that differentiate ISO 9000:2000 organizations from EQA organizations according to the literature. However, according to other studies EQA organizations problematic area is that of Human Resources (Vouzaz&Gotzamani, 2005; McAdam&O'Neill, 1999). The prevailing HR practices absent from the ISO 9000:2000 organization are the communication to employees of the corporate quality mission, designing and implementing programmes for employee empowerment and developing or applying TQM principles, practices and techniques within the HR function.

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