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**Gaining Competitive Advantage through a
Quality Culture: The Role of Human
Resource Management**

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GAINING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE THROUGH A QUALITY CULTURE: THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

There is a good deal of evidence that, as technological transfer becomes increasingly rapid, the source of competitive advantage for many companies now lies within their workforces (Pfeffer, 1994). However, the issue of how to sustain and promote this type of competitive advantage may be more problematic than one based on keeping up-to-date with changing machinery and techniques. For some companies, investment in people and in the appropriate human resource practices to foster their development and commitment requires a consideration of the ways in which they have usually tackled such matters. For the human resource function this represents the opportunity to become involved in major change initiatives, but it may require a rethinking of traditional roles.

This paper considers the implications for both the human resource function and for human resource practices of the changes wrought within companies involved in the implementation of quality initiatives. Quality has become a key issue for companies seeking competitive advantage and recent research indicates that a focus on the human resource implications of these quality initiatives, although frequently a neglected dimension, may be critical to their long term success (Powell, 1995). The paper begins by considering some of the literature on the impact of quality programmes on the human resource function in particular and on human resource practices in general before reporting on the findings of research in some Irish companies.

QUALITY AND HUMAN RESOURCES: THE LITERATURE EVIDENCE

Quality and the Human Resource Function

An article by Giles and Williams (1991:29) poses the question 'is the spread of quality management a heaven-sent opportunity for personnel people ... or, will it kill off the personnel specialist on the grounds that people are too important to be left to the personnel department?' Involvement in quality may offer the human resource department the potential to become either a high-ranking, well-regarded player in strategic decision-making or an out-moded outcast, with responsibilities taken over by line management. There is evidence for both roles in the available research. A report by the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM, 1993) discusses the results of a study

which considered the role of human resource practitioners in the successful implementation and maintenance of quality management programmes. The research identified four roles that practitioners may play. These range from strategic, high profile, 'change agent' to operational, low profile, 'facilitator' activities and can encompass a large number of very different types of contributions to all stages of the quality programme. The report argues that 'HR participation is not optional - it is an essential component if quality management is to reach its full potential' (p. 66), but also suggests that 'quality management can result in a change in the way in which the human resource management function operates and possibly in a redefinition of the role of the function' (p.66-67). There is the possibility of the HR function gaining a more strategic role as a result of involvement in quality initiatives (Wilkinson and Marchington, 1995), and a strongly held view that 'the implementation of a TQM strategy cannot happen without HR's leadership' (Hart and Schlesinger, 1991:434). But Cowling and Newman (1995) in a study of two banks found that their HR departments did not emerge with enhanced status following the implementation of quality programmes and there is also the problem that conventional HRM practices may be at odds with TQM's demands (Schoenberger, 1994) and that HRM departments may be ill-prepared to cope with these types of changes (Van Sluijs, Van Assen, and Hertog, 1991).

The debate on the role that the human resource function may play in the implementation of quality initiatives is part of the larger debate on the nature of personnel/human resource management. For example, quality is one of the elements comprising Guest's (1987) model of human resource management with the emphasis on the quality of staff, performance and public image based on human resource policies. The elements that often surround the introduction of quality initiatives - teamworking, communications and a focus on commitment - are seen as some of the aspects of 'soft' HRM (Storey, 1987; Storey, 1992). The involvement of the personnel department in the formulation stages of quality initiatives requires participation in strategic decision making which is also seen as important in differentiating between personnel and human resource management (Storey, 1992; Guest, 1987; Hendry and Pettigrew, 1986). Critical evaluations of human resource management (Legge, 1995a, 1995b; Keenoy and Anthony, 1992) raise questions which are particularly relevant to a consideration of quality issues, especially where those issues are perceived as intertwined with a focus on competitive advantage. Thus, Keenoy and Anthony (1992:236) describe the HRM 'movement' as a 'self-seeking cultural product' that 'has

been installed to manufacture, mediate and administer cultural transformation in an environment softened up by recession and unemployment'. Legge (1995a:55) considers that HRM has been of value to three groups (academics, line managers and personnel managers) 'seeking legitimacy in a hostile climate' and that 'it has been in their interests to "talk up" HRM as a coherent new strategy of employee relations that paves the way to achieving competitive advantage'. Involvement in quality initiatives may therefore provide a vehicle for personnel managers to enhance their status within organisations. This first of all requires a restructuring of human resource practices.

Human Resource Practices

The rhetoric of the quality movement, with its focus on communications, involvement and teamworking, implies that work practices and terms and conditions of employment are not the same as those which operate within organisations structured on Taylorist principles. Central to this restructuring of work arrangements is the notion of employee involvement which is found in many guises throughout the quality literature. There is an emphasis on teamwork (Juran, 1988; Oakland, 1989; Wilkinson and Witcher, 1991) and a focus on initiatives such as suggestion schemes, communications programmes and teambriefing which aim to keep employees informed and interested. However, there is evidence that measures to increase involvement rarely progress past these superficial levels. For example, few organisations appear to include unions in the introduction or implementation of quality initiatives (Wilkinson, Marchington, Goodman and Ackers, 1992), although their inclusion appears to have a positive impact on the adoption of such measures (Kochan, Hoffer Gittell and Lautsch, 1995). Middle managers, whose role is pivotal to successful introduction (Hill, 1991), may be reluctant participants, with an attitude of compliance rather than commitment (Wilkinson and Witcher, 1991:49), and, as already noted, the personnel department, which supposedly has responsibility for ensuring good employment practices, is often bypassed (Giles and Williams, 1991). There is also little evidence that attempts at *involvement* actually result in *empowerment*. In fact, the reverse may be the case, with the introduction of quality systems actually increasing the monitoring and control of employees' work (Preece and Wood, 1995; Mc Ardle et al., 1995; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992).

While there is an acknowledgement that work needs to be restructured with the introduction of quality initiatives, the quality gurus pay little attention to the changes in terms and conditions of employment which may be altered by such initiatives.

Wilkinson and Wilmott (1995:3) point out that there are tensions within the definition of quality when applied to the method of organising work:

For quality management gurus, 'quality' does not necessarily mean the attainment of exceptionally high standards with regard to employees' terms and conditions of work. Instead, it means the development of 'uniform and dependable' work practices that are congruent with delivering products or services at low cost with a quality suited to the market (Deming, 1986).

But the fact remains that the introduction of such initiatives generally results in a change in the type of work that employees are required to do and in the responsibilities they are expected to shoulder. There are therefore likely to be changes in the way in which employees are recruited and trained and, as the success of these initiatives is also likely to result in additional profits for the employer, perhaps rewarded. Given these factors, a greater attention to human resource practices might be expected within the quality literature, with the links between quality and human resource management more closely explored. However, this is not the case. For example, Hill and Wilkinson (1995:8) point out that there is 'a marked antipathy to performance appraisal and performance-based remuneration in much of the prescriptive [quality] literature'. This attitude appears to stem from the premise that employees need to buy into TQM without coercion.

While human resource practices are often ignored in the quality literature, this is not the case with the HRM research. Here the discussions have centred on the increasing intensification of selection and appraisal systems in the management of labour and these are viewed as attempts to replace the traditional monitoring and control mechanisms which have disappeared with the introduction of quality programmes (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Townley, 1989). The issue of reward systems in quality contexts is also explored as the quality gurus tend to ignore the fact that traditional reward structures are based either on long service or individual effort, neither of which philosophy sits easily with a team-based quality focus. Reward structures will therefore need to be restructured with the introduction of quality measures; how this should be accomplished is perhaps less clear (Drummond and Chell, 1992; Hackman and Wageman, 1995). The current enthusiasm for performance related pay, with its individual approach, is unlikely to provide the solution and a performance management

system focused on group level appraisal and rewards may have more effect (Waldman, 1994; *Personnel Review*, 1994).

THE RESEARCH

Methodology

In May 1995 a survey was undertaken of the 249 listed Irish *Q Mark* companies. The *Q Mark* is an Irish quality audit and accreditation scheme originally based on ISO 9000 but also embracing a Service Quality Mark formulated on ISO 90004 guidelines and the Malcom Baldrige Award criteria. The survey is the third part of a longitudinal study of quality management in Irish firms. The first part of this study focused on customer service (Sinnott, 1994) and the second, a study of internal communications in organisations undergoing changes resulting from the introduction of quality programmes, is under completion. The aim of the third part is to examine the human resource implications of quality initiatives, the integration of communications processes in the implementation of these initiatives and the impact of quality programmes on the HR function.

The survey utilised a postal questionnaire to which 133 companies replied, giving a 54 per cent response rate which is acceptable for surveys of this nature. The questionnaires were addressed to the person responsible for human resource matters within the organisation, the name of this individual having been ascertained from telephone calls to all the companies prior to posting the questionnaires. The person responsible for such matters varied considerably within these organisations. In 52 companies there were structured personnel departments and the questionnaires were completed by specialist personnel staff. In the remainder, the respondents ranged from managing directors to production managers to professional staff.

The Companies

Two thirds of the companies are involved in manufacturing and one third are in the service sector and they are a mixture of small (30 per cent), medium (49 per cent) and large (21 per cent) firms. Just over half (58 per cent) are Irish and in nearly two thirds (62 per cent) quality initiatives had been in operation for less than five years.

Respondents were generally positive about the success of the initiatives undertaken within their organisations, although only 37 per cent described them as 'very

successful' while 60 per cent considered that they had been 'successful'. Only 3 per cent felt that it had been unsuccessful. However, this success rate may have been based on fairly limited expectations and goals. As table 1 indicates, the majority of respondents considered that the main aims of the quality programme related to improving the quality of the service or product and to increasing their advantage over competitors. These aims mirror those reported in the IPM study (IPM, 1993). Only about half were considering the wider organisational and culture changes which may be critical to sustaining rather than merely implementing quality initiatives (Hackman and Wageman, 1995; Niven, 1993). Some organisations were also experiencing difficulties in implementation and 11 per cent of respondents reported resistance to change from top management and just over a quarter reported resistance to change from middle management, staff and unions. The resistance to change was considerably higher in larger organisations with 250 or more employees ($N = 28$). Here a quarter of respondents reported resistance to change from top management, nearly a half reported resistance from middle management, and a third reported resistance from staff and unions. Some of this resistance may emerge where the quality initiative is seen simply as a transient whim or fad, as one respondent pointed out: 'initial scepticism and resistance; period of wait and see; acceptance only if it is seen as for real and not flavour of the month'.

Table 1 Aims of the Quality Programme

Aim	%
To improve quality of service or product	92
To improve competitive advantage	76
To stay in line/ahead of competitors	72
To increase employee involvement	63
To reduce costs	60
To improve productivity	56
To streamline work practices	46
To support organisational/culture change	45

$N = 133$

The remainder of this paper examines the evidence in relation to the impact on the human resource function and changes in human resource practices.

THE ROLE OF THE HR FUNCTION IN QUALITY INITIATIVES

The survey explored a variety of issues which surround the operation of the HR function in firms involved in quality initiatives. Questions were asked on the structure and role of the HR function within the organisation, the involvement in quality initiatives and the changes resulting from the introduction of quality programmes. Only 52 of the 133 organisations had a specialised personnel function and the data in this section therefore refers to these 52 companies.

The Structure of the HR Function

Respondents were asked for the title of their personnel departments. This question and one on the type of personnel practice was to ascertain the extent to which there was a sense of a HR, rather than a traditional personnel, approach. Of the 51 respondents replying, 20 were working in departments with the words 'human resource' in the title and 20 were working in departments with the word 'personnel' in the title, while 11 were in a range of other departments, including finance, quality and administration. The distinction between human resource and personnel was also reflected in the titles of the specialists who responded to the questionnaire with 18 describing themselves as human resource practitioners and 23 described as personnel practitioners. The remainder carried a wide range of titles. It was interesting to note the difference in the titles used to describe the personnel function from those found in an earlier study (Monks, 1992), where specialists or titles with the term 'human resource management' included were the exception rather than the rule.

The focus on the concept of 'human resource' was also evident in the responses to the question which asked respondents to identify the role of the personnel function within their organisations. 23 respondents indicated that in their company the 'personnel function is closely integrated with the business needs of the organisation and people are seen as business resources. Sophisticated systems operate and human resource issues are integrated into strategic planning'. The identification with this statement has been found to relate to personnel practices which could be described as human resource management (Monks, 1993) and can be linked to the 'architect' model of personnel practice (Tyson and Fell, 1986). The other respondents were divided between the other types of personnel practice with 10 respondents indicating that 'the personnel function is staffed by specialists with high levels of expertise in selection, training, pay and industrial relations. It is well

integrated into the business and valued by line managers'. The remainder of the respondents identified either an industrial relations role (5 organisations), an administrative role (5 organisations) or one which 'is concerned for both its staff and its customers. There is an emphasis on selecting and training staff and on providing excellent conditions and facilities in work'. However, in two of these cases where respondents indicated a focus on either industrial relations or administrative issues, they also stated that they were moving away from these preoccupations and towards a human resource approach.

The HR Strategy

The majority of respondents (82 per cent) indicated that their companies had a HR strategy, but in only a quarter of cases was the strategy written and given to employees, and in a third of cases it was unwritten. In nearly all firms (90 per cent), human resource issues were represented at board or equivalent level within the organisation, but in only half the companies was this representation made by the personnel manager.

Involvement of the HR Department in Quality Initiatives

Table 2 indicates the level of involvement of the HR department in the four stages of foundation/development, implementation, maintenance and evaluation of the quality programme.

Table 2 Involvement of HR Department in Quality Initiatives

	Very Involved %	Somewhat Involved %	No involvement %
Foundation/ Development	44	42	14
Implementation	42	42	16
Maintenance	35	46	19
Evaluation	38	40	22

N = 52

Changes to the HR Function

The extent to which the HR department was involved in quality initiatives varied considerably between organisations, but less than half were described as 'very involved'. The impact of this involvement can be seen in the changes to the function which occurred as a result of the quality initiatives and which are identified in table 3.

Table 3 Changes to the HR Function

Changes	%
More focus on training & development	67
Involvement in a greater range of activities	53
Increased involvement in strategic decisions	53
A more business oriented approach	51
A consultancy role for the personnel department	51
Decentralisation of personnel activity to line	47
More focus on administrative issues	24
Decrease in staff in personnel dept	14
Increase in staff in personnel dept	10
Involvement in a smaller range of activities	4
No changes to the personnel department	6

N = 52

Considerable changes appear to have taken place to the HR function in most of these companies and the greatest impact was in the area of training and development. The other changes give an insight into their impact on the role and status of the HR function. In about half the companies there was a perception that the introduction of quality initiatives had increased personnel's involvement in strategic decision-making. There is involvement in a greater range of activities and a more business-oriented approach to HR management. However, again in half the companies, a decentralisation of personnel activity to line managers was reported and the emergence of a consultancy role for the personnel department in advising line managers had emerged. This data suggests that involvement in the introduction of quality initiatives may prove to be a double-edged sword for the HR function. It may lead to increased participation in strategic decision-making, but if more personnel activities are decentralised to line management, will this relegate the HR function to a consultancy role, with long-term negative consequences for its power

and authority? However, the majority of respondents considered that the quality programme had had a positive impact on the HR function with 20 per cent describing it as very positive and 62 per cent as positive while only 18 per cent considered that it had no impact. The majority of respondents also reported that quality principles had been extended to the HR function, although only 39 per cent did this to a great extent and 12 per cent did not do it at all.

Finally, the HR department's role in solving problems incurred as a result of the introduction of quality initiatives was explored. A third of respondents indicated that the HR function was involved to a great extent in solving problems, with a third reporting some involvement and a third not at all involved. This corresponds to the extent of involvement reported in the British study (IPM, 1993).

THE IMPACT ON HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES

The survey investigated the impact of quality initiatives on HR practices by considering the approach adopted towards employee involvement and the specific changes to human resource practices and the employee relations climate occurring from these initiatives. The data in this section refers to 133 organisations.

Involvement Initiatives

Table 4 shows the general changes which had occurred in these firms following the introduction of the quality programme.

Table 4 Changes Resulting from the Quality Programme

Changes from the Quality Programme	%
Improved communications	81
More emphasis on teamworking	70
Improved reporting systems	61
Focus on participation & involvement	58
Improved management systems	51
Change to organisational culture	50
Devolution of responsibility	46
Cross functional teams	41
Flatter hierarchy	27
Creation of semi-autonomous work groups	23
Performance based reward system	19
Fewer control systems	15

N=133

The changes indicate a mixture of increased involvement and communications and some devolution of responsibility, but, at the same time, improved reporting systems with only 15 per cent of respondents indicating that there were fewer control systems as a result of the quality initiatives. Comments from some respondents indicated an appreciation of increased involvement:

It has helped management to specify and quantify goals/benchmarks which can be communicated more clearly to employees, thereby ensuring targets are understood by all. If then the employees feel they are unattainable targets they can discuss them with management and have adjustments made. This allows employees to have an input into organisational goals etc. which in turn keeps people motivated. (Human resource manager, telecommunications company)

Employees now participate in the day-to-day running of the organisation.
(Personnel manager, dairy company)

The survey also explored the measures used in increasing communications and involvement. These are shown in table 5.

Table 5 Communications and Involvement Measures

Measure	%
Teambriefing	74
Teamworking	73
Communication programmes	68
Quality teams	55
Suggestion schemes	53
Special newsletters	38
Attitude surveys	34

n = 115

There was evidence that companies were using a range of communications and involvement measures as part of their quality programmes. Surprisingly, given that the operation of these initiatives is seen, at least within the standard personnel textbooks, as within the remit of the HR department, this was not necessarily the case in the organisations studied, as table 6 shows.

Table 6 Involvement of HR Department in Communications

	% HR departments very involved	<i>N</i>
Teambriefing	60	43
Suggestion schemes	58	26
Attitude surveys	71	28
Newsletters	48	23
Teamworking	52	42
Quality teams	35	34
Communications programmes	64	47

The issue of involvement was explored in more detail by considering the extent to which specific sections of the organisation, the key players or stakeholders, were involved in the quality programmes. Table 7 indicates the extent to which various functions were involved in driving, steering and facilitating the quality programme.

Table 7 Responsibility for Quality

Responsibility	Driving	Steering	Facilitating
CEO/Board	56	15	12
Senior Management	56	33	21
Middle Management	13	21	31
Quality Department	21	31	37
Production Department	19	17	21
Personnel Department	13	25	40

Note: total exceeds 100% as in some organisations the initiative was facilitated by more than one level/dept.

The responsibility for driving and steering the quality programme was generally centred at the top of these organisations, but it did range across functions and was often not the sole responsibility of any one department. This fits in other research (Olian and Rynes, 1991; Pimblott, 1990; Schiemann, 1993) and has been seen as critical to the success of such programmes (Hackman and Wageman, 1995). However, in some companies quality appeared to be confined to specific functions and this raises questions as to how quality was viewed within these firms and whether it had permeated the entire organisation. Responsibility for facilitating quality was fairly widespread, but middle management, which might have been expected to take the most active role in facilitation, was involved in only 31 per cent of companies.

Involvement of the Union

Of the organisations involved in the survey, 38 per cent were non-union, 24 per had one union and the remainder (38 per cent) had two or more unions. Table 8 indicates the extent of involvement in the various stages of the quality initiative.

Table 8 Involvement of Unions in Quality Initiatives.

Stage	Very Involved %	Somewhat Involved %	No involvement %
Foundation/ Development	5	24	71
Implementation	12	32	56
Maintenance	10	20	70
Evaluation	4	16	80

N = 75

There is little evidence of any acceptance that unions may have a role to play in the development, maintenance or evaluation of quality programmes, and less than half the unionised companies included the unions in the implementation of quality programmes. But there had not been any major deterioration in employee relations as a result of this lack of involvement. Only two unionised companies reported strikes, seven demarcation disputes and 16 pay claims which could be attributed to the introduction of quality initiatives. At the same time there was no evidence where the unions were involved that the quality programmes were any more successful.

Reasons for the lack of involvement emerged in follow-up interviews. One personnel manager, when discussing the issue of union participation remarked:

the unions are gone. They're dead. The workforce want to negotiate with management and they don't want the unions doing the negotiating for them. The unions are the one with the tin hats and the guns. They're there as a fall back position if the negotiations go wrong, but they haven't a central role.
(Human Resource Manager, computer firm)

This comment raises an interesting issue. Does the introduction of quality initiatives, by increasing employee participation in work processes, make employees more interested in becoming actively involved in a wide range of work-related arrangements and less content to accept negotiations by a third party on their behalf to alter those

arrangements? It would appear that management, by increasing involvement throughout the organisation, is accomplishing two things. It is first of all making individuals more aware of the potential of involvement and more interested in taking part in activities which increase this involvement. Second, whether purposefully or not, it is reducing the power of the union and marginalising the role that it may play. Where employees perceive that they have a right as individuals to involvement, then the role of the union as spokesman and negotiator rapidly diminishes; the union becomes reduced to the role of a security net. Thus, the lack of involvement of the union in quality initiatives may not stem from the organisation's unwillingness to encourage union participation, but from a lack of desire on the part of the union membership to continue investing in the union's traditional right to such participation. Another element which appears to exacerbate this situation is the structure of the union organisation which is hierarchically based and does not mirror the structures and processes which exist in many quality driven organisations.

Changes in Human Resource Practices

Respondents were asked to indicate whether human resource practices had intensified following the introduction of quality initiatives. Such intensification does appear to have been introduced in some organisations (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Townley, 1989) perhaps in response to the reduced monitoring resulting from the introduction of new work practices. The responses are shown in Table 9.

Table 9 Changes in Human Resource Practices

	Much more intensive	More intensive	unchanged
Staff training	25	63	12
Management training	24	62	14
Induction	19	60	21
Performance appraisal	19	59	22
Recruitment/selection	13	50	37
Pay systems	3	37	60
Performance related pay	4	29	67

N = 133

The main changes to human resource practices were found in the areas of training and development and very few organisations had not changed their practices in this area. Changes also appear to have occurred in the recruitment and selection, induction and appraisal of employees as a result of the quality initiatives, thus perhaps indicating that there are trends towards monitoring staff through such techniques as the direct controls formerly used become outmoded. In the case of pay systems little has been changed, even though the implementation of quality initiatives frequently result in employees carrying out more work or increasing the level of their responsibilities.

Impact on Employee Relations Climate

The impact of these changes on the employee relations climate within these firms was also assessed as this may give some insight into the operation of the human resource practices. Table 10 indicates the extent to which training, communications, employee relations, absenteeism and labour turnover had improved as a result of the quality programmes.

Table 10 Changes in Employee Relations Climate

	Greatly improved	Improved	Remained same	Disimproved
Training	40	50	9	2
Communications	26	60	9	1
Employee relations	11	62	25	2
Absenteeism	5	13	78	4
Labour turnover	3	14	79	4

N = 133

The majority of respondents reported improvements in training and communications resulting from the introduction of quality initiatives, while a minority reported improvements in absenteeism and labour turnover. Employee relations were perceived to have improved in three quarters of companies and respondents in unionised companies were more likely than their non-union counterparts to report improvements.

DISCUSSION

This paper provides several interesting insights into the role of human resource management in organisations pursuing competitive advantages through quality initiatives. As far as the human resource function is concerned, the evidence from the 52 companies with structured human resource departments indicates that some firms are heavily involved at all stages of the quality programme and in some instances were taking primary responsibility for championing this programme. There were indications that quality programmes were changing the role of the human resource function within organisations, with more involvement in strategic decision making and a move away from traditional personnel approaches.

To what extent did the involvement initiatives which appeared to be widespread throughout these organisations actually result in empowerment? While the terms involvement and empowerment are often used interchangeably, there is an understanding that involvement may be superficial and relate simply to the way in which work is organised, while empowerment implies a redistribution of the decision-making authority within the work itself (Kerfoot and Knights, 1995) and 'a genuine shift in the locus of power away from management and to the shopfloor' (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992:106). The survey provided mixed evidence in relation to this issue. Certainly there existed a belief in some organisations that there was a focus on participation and involvement resulting from the quality initiatives and there was evidence that measures had been introduced to encourage teamworking and communications. Yet, there was also a greater emphasis on reporting systems which have the potential to monitor and control employees' contributions. In addition, the role that the union may play has not yet been established. A study by Kochan et al. (1995:220) found 'significant potential for advance in workplace innovation through strategic partnership between unions and management'. Few of the Irish organisations were adopting this line of approach, but there was some evidence to indicate that this was not necessarily based on a desire to bypass or ignore the union, but rather that involvement was perceived as involving all members of the organisation, not simply their representatives. Yet the Irish unions have indicated an acceptance of and enthusiasm for involvement in quality initiatives (SIPTU, 1993; ICTU, 1993); the issue for organisations, but perhaps more particularly for human resource departments, is how to harness this enthusiasm.

In relation to human resource practices, the main focus of attention within these organisations is on training, teamworking and communications. These elements may be innovative and exciting, but some of the more basic issues appear to be ignored. Thus, there was little evidence that companies are restructuring their reward systems, yet a fundamental rethinking of the way in which employees are rewarded may be critical to the long-term success of quality initiatives. The quality gurus may be opposed to the notion of paying for quality, but a revision of reward systems which have been based in Taylorist views on work organisation may be required. Reward in a quality environment may therefore need to be distinguished from pay, but given that employees still operate within a capitalist economy where money is the standard unit of currency and where pay and effort are perceived as interrelated, attempts to introduce non-pay rewards for additional effort may not be met with much enthusiasm.

Overall there is a good deal of evidence that the human resource elements of quality programmes are introduced in the opportunistic and pragmatic manner reminiscent of traditional personnel management, but without the acceptance or rejection of such initiatives by the union. Yet union involvement traditionally tempered the introduction of new initiatives and at the very least resulted in duly negotiated rates of pay and working conditions. From the perspective of the employees at the receiving end of the new initiatives, a 'new, improved' human resource function or innovative human resource practices may have little to offer.

The interpretation of the findings of this survey are limited by the very nature of quantitative information and can only describe the 'what' rather than the 'why' issues (Whetten, 1989). The next stage of the research will explore the human resource implications of the introduction of quality initiatives in more depth through case study analysis.

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