DEPLOYING TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT ON CONSTRUCTION SITES: INHIBITING FACTORS

Theo C. HAUPT¹ and Daniel E. WHITEMAN²

¹ Research Coordinator, Peninsula Technikon, Faculty of Engineering, South Africa. E-mail: hauptt@pentech.ac.za
² President, Coastal Construction, Miami, USA. E-mail: dan9969@aol.com

Abstract
Total Quality Management (TQM) potentially improves business results, greater customer orientation and satisfaction, worker involvement and fulfilment, teamwork and better management of workers within companies. Considering that construction has historically been an industry reluctant to implement change, it has been slow to embrace the concept. Consequently, it has remained behind where it should be on the implementation of TQM. Generally, contractors do not apply TQM beyond head office management. While several companies have attempted to introduce TQM within their management operations, they have struggled to transfer this effort to their construction project sites. This paper reports on a study identifying through a literature review and survey of contractors those factors that hinder the deployment of TQM on construction job sites. The study highlights that several of the necessary TQM “success” criteria are in reality management issues. This finding confirms the integral and pivotal role of management in TQM. In order to deploy TQM successfully on construction sites, construction project management and site workers need to be empowered, involved and trained in TQM principles. The study shows that construction companies need to invest more of their TQM training budget on training their workers to be self-motivated to improve the quality of their work. Further, the study confirms the importance of involving subcontractors and suppliers in the TQM effort. In particular, contractors should address their obsession with the bottom line and change the practice of predominantly awarding subcontracts based on lowest bid.

Keywords
TQM, customer satisfaction, management commitment, worker participation

INTRODUCTION
A cultural and behavioural shift is necessary in the mind-set of all participants in the construction process (Love and Heng, 2000; Kanji and Wong, 1998) especially top or senior management if the construction industry is to improve its performance and competitiveness. These authors argue that for innovation and continuous improvement to be encouraged and become a norm, traditional practices need to be unlearnt. Historically, the construction industry has been reluctant to implement change (McIntyre and Kirschenman, 2000). This process of change is especially difficult in the competitive environment in which construction takes place and where the bottom line is still the primary motivation of construction companies (Low and Peh, 1996). Further, companies are prepared to only implement those aspects of Total Quality Management (TQM) programs that will provide them with competitive advantage and improve their overall financial performance. Ironically, research conducted by others such as Zantanidis and Tsiotras (1998) and Sommerville (1994) identified quality as being the most significant provider of competitive advantage. Construction companies seem not to have bought into this finding in their daily operations on site.