

FIRST APPLICATION OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN OTTOMAN EMPIRE: AHI ORGANIZATION

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SUMMARY

The aim of the study is to bring forth some historical facts, with supporting scientific evidence, regarding the first Quality System (Ahilik) which was developed and applied by the Ottoman Turks, hence contributing to the Total Quality Management (TQM) by setting a historical perspective.

As was TQM, Ahi Order was adopted to create an organizational culture, to educate and train the employees via continuous training programs and to put in place a management system entirely focused on human relations. The quality was determined by the consumers and consumer rights were protected by the system. Ahi Organization, going beyond TQM system, had strict rules on professional ethics. Social behaviour was seen as an indivisible unit and consequently it was thought that any unethical behaviour in social life would reflect on the work place, thus ethics would control the social behaviour closely. Manufacturers and/or traders had to behave ethically in production, trade and even in their social lives. If a person was ousted by the organization, he could not sell his goods and make trade. Trust was much more important than money. Thus the social life of society was protected from unethical behaviour. There has been no other quality system utilized until now which has taken any precautionary measures for peaceful living in the society or provide guidelines on ethical behaviors in public. However, Ahi Order did not keep pace with the development of modern age, and unfortunately, it was forgotten.

Keywords: Total Quality Management, Ahi Order, İmece System.

1. INTRODUCTION

Total Quality Management, TQM, was a management philosophy which had an important place in evolving enterprises of the 20th Century. Nowadays, it has also begun to be perceived as *modus vivendi* and it is possible to mention TQM in every level of present life styles. This perception reminds us the Ahilik system which was founded in the 7th and 8th centuries and in the 13th century it was institutionalised. The concepts used in TQM such as shareholders' content, sustainable education and development, teamwork (İmece), zero error, awareness of neighbourhood, social order etc. are very essential in Ahilik system. The core attribute of Ahilik is the human being. In Ahilik, a real human-centred management was prevalent. It was a life style that was born out of the Turkish culture and Islamic faith. Imagine that TQM were invented in 7th century, developed and brought forward to present

day or suppose that the secrets of Ahilik were decoded and added to today's TQM. This could be considered as a new era in working life. It is worth adding that the secrets of Ahi Organisation are in the process of being decoded by the contribution of scientific methods.

2. AHI ORDER

The word of "Ahi" is explained as "generous and charitable" in the dictionary of Divan-i Lugat-it Turk (1074 CE) prepared by Kaşgarlı Mahmut which is accepted as the first encyclopaedia and dictionary of Turkish language. Ahi means brother in Arabic [4]. The term Ahilik, at the time when it was practised, could be described as an organisation that devoted artisans who like each other's company and respect each other, like helping the poor, were devoted to their work and at the same time, adhered to the principals of ethics [6]. Ahilik was a Turkish artisan union which was born out of historical and socio-economical necessities [2]. Ahi organisation achieved a very important role to arrange both commercial activities and social life of Anatolia in middle ages. It was not just a simple commercial and artisan organisation but it was an ethical system, together with certain duties and responsibilities [1]. The origin of Ahilik is rooted in the Turkic states of Central Asia. Research reveals that Ahilik was the foundation of craft, commerce, solidarity and mutual-help developed by Turkic peoples of Turkmenistan and Maverannehir in 7th and 8th centuries [5].

2.1. Aim and philosophy of Ahi Order

The philosophy of Ahi Order originated from Islamic mysticism. One of the most important rules of Ahi establishment, which had its foundations on generosity and trustworthiness, was that members referred to and considered each other as brothers [13]. The main doctrine of the Order was consumer protection with qualified and cheap production [10]. Economy was regarded as a tool in Ahilik and never allowed to be an objective. For humans, understanding of the logic of economy and of the management, which is focused on real humanity, was prevalent. If making money were the predominant aim in life, then those ethical values which were supposed to be the real aim become the tools; this was not congruous with the way of life they led [3]. Consequently, the majority of the principles of Ahi organisation were based on ethics. This, they thought, would bring sufficient profit as well as good customer satisfaction. The artisan, who made ample profit from his craft, spent his income to raise the quality of life of his society. As his society flourished, he would be flourishing himself as well. It is a remarkable fact that, after many years, in 1962, with the efforts of the quality control circles in Japan, the philosophy of: "*First improve the mind of the man, the improvement of the workshops, factories and the companies will follow!*" was adopted [12,14]. It should be emphasised that the services given by Ahi Organisation. Ahilik system had always been based on this principle.

Ahis, in their business and life, were required to have the following attributes: a) to be truthful, b) to be trustworthy, c) to be honest, d) to be generous, e) to be just, f) to be affectionate, g) to be kind and compassionate.

In their professional solidarity and organizational conducts the ethical rules that they had to adhere were as follows:

- Ahi must have a skill in his business (He was expected to add value to his occupation).
- Ahi had to deal with only one occupation dependent on his skill and not to engage in several jobs. (Expertise was essential. It was accepted that if the young apprentices, who were chosen because of their special attributes, educated properly, they would be very happy when working with maximum efficiency, and this would then create a happy and contented work force and also a society.
- Ahi had to learn his skill and occupation from experts and masters; and his general conduct had to model his masters.

- Ahi would help the poor and the jobless for their needs with the money he saved from his profits; thus, implementing a social responsibility project.
- Ahi had to be knowledgeable, respect knowledge and scholars so that when necessary even The Sultan (King) had to come to consult with him personally.
- Ahilik was like a tree grew out of earth of honesty, its leaves were decency, the root of it was in the belief in Allah. [3,4].

Ahis were against morally objectionable behaviour and tried to ensure peace and safety in the society. One of their aims was to contribute to peaceful living, with no conflict occurring between producer and consumer, rich and poor, workers and bosses, state and nation [11]. Compare this with today's companies which prepare strategic plans with strategic targets in order not to cause conflicts between shareholders. Ahi organisation paid attention to that principle as well. Ebn Battuta mentions in his Book of Travels that Ahilik played a very important part in the moral education of the people [10].

2.2. Mission and vision of Ahilik

The basic mission of Ahilik was to prepare perfect individuals to serve people and humanity in order to attain a perfect society. Ahi was TOLERANT or OPEN to 3 things and INTOLERANT or CLOSED to 3 things as shown in Table 1 [6]. The mission supports Ahis' and also that of TQM's philosophy of "The system flourishes if the individuals within the system flourish."

Table 1. The facts which support the Ahi's mission

	OPEN	CLOSED
1	His gate to guests	His eyes to illicit happenings
2	His pocket to brothers	His mouth to sin / curse
3	His table to all who are hungry	His hand to cruelty

Vision, which is one of the determining factors of today's contemporary management, constitutes basic management understanding of Ahi organization [6]. The values and future goal of the components of vision had clearly been identified in Ahi organization. The values rendered to the codex (Codex of Futuwwa) and Ahi knew those values and lived accordingly.

3. COMPARISON OF TQM AND AHILIK

Ishikawa specifies Total Quality Control as "a revolutionary idea" in management [8]. TQM is a human centred management concept which is founded on the happiness of all the shareholders, past and present. The TQM concept supports team-work rather than the work of the individual alone and improves the system as a whole as it improves the workers within the system. It favours zero error in its application and its built-in mechanism is inclined to prevent errors. Furthermore, the system, by interrogating itself continuously, tends towards perfection. Ahilik is a system which is capable of making up the infra-structure of TQM concept or even going a little bit further. Ahilik is a system which is human centred with its activities arranged for humans and it is a system which does not permit humans to be viewed as its tools [4].

3.1. Basic principles of TQM and Ahilik

Let us look at the five fundamental principles of TQM and make a comparative analysis of them with those of Ahilik.

Decisiveness of management and leadership: In TQM, management has to assert its authority over the employees. It does this by attending meeting, providing required financial resources, taking active role on cultural exchanges, giving direction and encouragement. In fact that is exactly what the employees want. In Ahi Organization, every order or guild had a Master. It was expected that Ahis would devote themselves to learning all the details of their

profession or craft from their masters [11]. Also, the Master would be responsible for the apprentice Ahi's wellbeing and their total education regarding their profession/craft. For this the Master would work on his apprentices until he becomes a qualified worker as though he is working on embroidery of a complex nature. When the apprentices attended their regular, periodic meetings or rituals of their Order, they felt their hearts were lifted; their belief in the leadership of their Master increased and their own confidence in their profession/craftsmanship became higher.

Contribution of all employees: In TQM, all employees make their contribution to the company management with their proposals. Proposals are made at the general annual meetings. In Ahilik everyone's opinions are sought at periodic Consultation meetings which had specific boundaries [11]. For example, any disagreements among the artisans were discussed at the Grand Assembly which was held at the last Friday of every month. There were 5 types of these meetings and their purpose was to increase commitment of the employees to the organization [2].

Stakeholder satisfaction: TQM is not only limited to internal and external customer satisfaction, but it is also based on satisfaction of employees, of shareholder and even of society; in brief, stakeholder's satisfaction is the real goal. It is important that it starts with the understanding: "*If we know what the stakeholders want, we can please them.*" and then establishes a close interaction with the stakeholders. In Ahilik, it is also essential to satisfy the internal as well as the external customer. Workers are responsible for protecting the rights of the bosses. Equally, the bosses are responsible for protecting the rights of the workers. Furthermore, the bosses are obliged to support the training of the workers. In Ahilik, production was customer-focused and customer was the benefactor [11]. The internal customers (experienced apprentice workman and lower grades of apprentices etc.) were trained systematically and as their hierarchical ascend in Ahi Order starts with splendid ceremonies, their loyalty to the Order increases. By guaranteeing a balance between the production and consumption, social peace was ensured. By standardizing the products, external customers were protected. Now and again, standards established by the artisans were turned into an ordinance by the decree of the Sultan [4]. Kanunname-i İhtisab-ı Bursa is the best example for this [15]. The Ottoman Sultan Beyazid II Khan decreed a law which became a Municipality law in 1502 and called "Kanunname-i İhtisab-ı Bursa" (literally meaning "a law enquiring and keeping the general wellbeing of the city of Bursa", Bursa being the first Capital City of the Ottomans). This law closely monitored the prices and the quality of food with the aid of feedback from the consumers of the region. There is a remarkable document which dates back to 1676 in the state archives of the prime minister. According to the ordinance, the fresh pears were sold in the small packages in Istanbul. However some consumers complained about this. Especially, poor people complained the pear to be too expensive and they wanted it to be sold without package. Sultan found a way that the pears should be sold as one-kg portions in the big packages [2]. It is a remarkable fact that more than 500 years ago, Anatolian consumers had quality awareness and were able to apply this to their day to day life; in contrast to some present day societies where this is still an on-going problem. The prices were determined according to the standards of the products in Ahi Order. For example, a customer knew how long to use his/her shoe according to its price. If the shoe wore out in advance, he/she took his/her money back [4]. *Narh* (price limits for products, limiting and controlling the market, setting a fixed price) system was also constructed to protect the customers [16]. People who did not obey *narh* and the standards were punished. This people were called "yolsuz" meaning "a person without a direction in life". Nobody gave any raw materials to these yolsuz people and bought his/her products. He/she was not accepted to the meetings of the society. Thus, the punishment taught a lesson to the person and was a warning to the community [4]. Orta sandığı (a sharing fund) was created by Ahi

Order for the protection of the members from the usurers. Orta sandığı would provide social security to the members. The principles of it were similar to those of the cooperative system. In fact John B. Higgins emphasized on this similarity and concluded that Ahi Order had important affects in establishing the world cooperative system. It is know that between 1828 and 1831 Michael Sandown who was one of the founders of the cooperative system, is known to have worked in regions where there was intense Ahi Orders activity [4].

Sustainable development: It is one of the most important principles of TQM. As a result of the training programs, which were provided to all employees under the direction of the management, development teams were established. These teams performed studies of sustainable development focused on the satisfaction of the stakeholders. The main principle of these studies was not accepting the status quo but creating a constantly evolving process. Training was accepted as inevitable for continuous development. In Ahi Order all apprentices of all categories received training. Vocational training and general training were given as a whole. Vocational training contained practical-oriented skills and was carried out in the work place. Master had to teach all the intricacies and secrets of his job to his apprentices. When teaching a craft or profession, professional ethics was also taught. Education process started with studentship at the early age of 10 and continued to the grade of apprenticeship at 12-year old. Afterwards, the apprentice became a straw (comrade) after a 1001 day training (This training period was 20 years for learning difficult crafts such as being a goldsmith). The straws had an exam at the end of a 3-year training and became master with a ceremony [4,11]. Other accepted factors for continuous development were Imece and the periodic meetings.

The goal is perfection: TQM which adopts zero-error principle and denies that error is an act of faith; it strives towards perfection by continuous development/enhancement. However, as achieving perfection at the end of a fixed period might be ordinary i.e. not perfect for later stages, it is therefore, important to have sustained continuous development from the point of view of chasing perfection. Main mission of Ahilik was to reach the state of excellent community. The goal of Ahilik was to form excellent individual, excellent system and excellent community. In this case, formation of the excellent product was inevitable. An artisan, who was found out to be selling a poor quality product, used to find his shoes thrown to the roof of his shop. After nearly 8 centuries, this expression: “his shoes are thrown to the roof” is still used colloquially. At this juncture, it is perhaps appropriate to explain where this saying comes from. The founder of Ahilik, Ahi Evran, used to do his usual rounds in cobblers market, checking all the shoes if they were up to the standard. If he found shoes which he thought were faulty or not coming up to scratch, without any further discussion, he used to throw the shoes to the roof of the shop. It was a great shame for the cobbler whose shoes were thrown to the roof and they used to be shunned by the public. Since that time, this saying has been used for people who do not perform to expected standard [11].

3.2. Continuous development to perfection teams and an Anatolian application

Ahilik and Ahi Orders (i.e. units or guilds which adopted Ahilik system) were established by Anatolian Turks in 13th century which regulated, in particular, production and trade and survived until the 21st century. Within the Ahilik culture, there was the Imece system, which is in essence nothing but a slightly different version of the quality circle of the TQM. This Imece system was not only applied to manage the commercial life but often the social life as well. As in the quality circle of TQM, Imece system entirely worked on the principle of volunteerism and it is still utilized by women in some rural areas of Anatolia in Turkey, in order to solve certain problems related to women only. Women come together voluntarily, help each other, bring synergy and solve the problem in a short time. It is the duty of the leader woman who organizes the duties during preparing foods for winter, cooking of wedding dinners, harvesting crop etc. She knows who makes the best job and then she

delegates the duties accordingly. Every day one woman's work is completed. At the same time, Imece is a feast and festivities. Young people and children are also included at these get-togethers to help their parents. The women had great importance in Ahi Order. Bacıyan-ı Rum was the name of the Women's branch of the Ahi Order. Some researchers suggested that it was the first women organization in the world. This type of organization is very important and helpful for women to be organized in production and in social life [6].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of quality-consciousness is greatly affected by the environmental conditions. The concept of quality in a society is the end result of economic, social and cultural developments [9]. Ahi Organisation had been institutionalised as result of the inception of the concept of "economy for people", Turkish Culture and the political developments in Anatolia and continued until 21th century. From the perspective of quality, it is seen that there are similarities to today's TQM system. In fact, the popular concept of "work ethic" which is talked about when discussing quality management systems, is the focal point of Ahi Organisation. In 1206 the Seldjuk Sultan had it engraved the words: "One okka (approx. 1.282 kg) of science badly needs one dirhem (approx. 3.7 g) of manners" on the gate of Gevher Nesibi Faculty of Medicine. Ethics were the keystone of Ahi Order and the organization raised upon it. It was this reason why it became so successful. In conclusion, people and societies have much to learn from Ahi Order. For this reason, in order to research Ahilik more systematically, it is suggested that graduate programmes within the social science institutes may be set up. In addition, the principles of Ahilik, as a subject taught in vocational school for skilled technicians will illuminate the business world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Prof. Dr. Ender Olcayto and Bahattin Kimyacıoğlu for editing the manuscript.

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