

NATALIA BATSUN

Irkutsk State Technical University, Russia

Quality of Life as a Concept in the Modern Society

Abstract: By now, neither socialist planned economy, nor market economy, nor the noble public environmental movements have brought reliable instruments of managing ecological aspects of the quality of life. Perhaps, it would be helpful to try to use here the methods of the concept of total quality management, so popular in business management.

The main aspects of the quality of life management deriving from quality management positions are: priority of consumer requirements, which in our case means that when evaluating any projects, human interests must be considered higher than any system interests; priority of quality, which means rejecting such alternative options as the “consumer society” concept and radically ecological one, and leads to considering life period expectancy as the main target index; managing processes, not product specific- quality; involvement of all the personnel of organization (the whole population); huge role of continuous training; formalization of input and output control, including standardization and certification procedures.

Key words: quality of life, modern society

This article is devoted to the problem of seeking a satisfactory concept of co-ordination of further development of production and protection of environment providing this development (at least as the source of raw materials) and the very existence of the mankind.

Nowadays, it is quite clear that these problems are interconnected. Therefore, the decision, acceptable for the society, should take into account both economic needs and ecological imperatives.

Understanding this interdependence that has emerged only in the second half of 20th century is nothing but knowledge which has become the background of today’s social life and has been slowly penetrating into industrial production.

Many thinkers believe that the nature degradation is connected with moral degradation, and its roots stick in axiological background of human activity, since people consider it as a means of achieving economic targets (Kulasov, 2009).

But such an understanding hardly meets another popular notion – the one of consumers society.

Most people nowadays seem to believe in the efficiency of market economy, in the efficiency of the mechanism of “an invisible hand” which automatically places everything in an economy so that resources are distributed most effectively for the final benefit of all members of the society. However, such liberal economy has also its off-products, and some of them concern just the environment quality.

This is why, within a market economy, there appeared social and ecological movements referred to as “green capitalism”, alongside with a well-known notion of “sustainable development”.

The ideas of “green capitalism” focus attention on the capitalist mechanism of reproduction, trying to formulate principles which could force the economy to act in more environmentally friendly way. As a result, there emerged the so-called “green markets”, arising under the influence of growing demand for pure products and for production which could be environmentally safe and clean (no pollution and damage to the environment). Another way to green market economy is the reduction of amount of waste and pollution through re-use and re-cycling which has become one of profitable economic activities. The logic of functioning of the market mechanism, according to supporters of “green capitalism”, can stimulate pro-ecological evolution of society.

Anyway, by now, neither socialist planned economy, nor market economy, nor the noble public environmental movements have brought reliable instruments of harmonization of the relations between mankind and environment, or, in other words, instruments of managing ecological aspects of quality of the life.

If we formulate the environmental problem as the one of quality of life, it helps to come to a conclusion that to manage this quality, it would be helpful to try to use the methods of one concept taken from another sphere. It is the concept of total quality management (TQM) which has become more and more popular around the world, being some kind of development of the marketing concept in business management. Its main principle is orientation at the consumer. The main idea of its methodology is responsibility of all workers not only for quality of production and services at all stages of development, production and use, but also for quality of functioning of the enterprise as a whole. In standards, quality is defined as a set of properties and characteristics of products or services providing satisfaction of the requirements.

Let us consider the main aspects of managing the quality of life deriving from quality management positions using the list of TQM’s main components as it is usually given in the books on TQM (Balashov, 1999).

– **Priority of consumer’s requirements.** This means that it is a consumer that is considered as a main goal of production. It does not contradict the general market principle of receiving maximum profit – after all, the source of profit is just the consumer. According to modern ideas connected both with marketing and quality management, a business which takes care of a consumer, as a result should get more profit, than those who take care of their profits above all.

In our case it means that when evaluating any projects, human interests must be considered higher than any system interests (economic efficiency, interests of the state, ideology or religion, etc.).

However, “human interests” make themselves a contradictory concept. Momentary interests of some group of population often do not coincide even with its own long-term interests.

Probably, when it is a question of ecological aspects of quality of life, there is a sense to be guided by the notion of “the environment” (a concept which is unlike the nature, subjective, anthropocentric). There are no unambiguous and standard criteria of what is good or bad.

For this reason, in the techniques of the UN, an objective indicator is used – life period expectancy. An assessment of the average life expectancy is a visible the most correct method of assessment of conditions of the population life. The higher it is, the higher the quality of life is.

– **Priority of quality.** If we express the interests of a consumer through the quality of life, their priority will just mean the priority of quality. To understand the importance of this concept better, let us consider alternative options.

The first of them is connected with the “consumer society” concept.

In a broad sense, the needs of a person are boundless. Moreover, consumption is to a great extent defined by such a phenomenon, not quite learned and clear, as a fashion. Fashion change is a spontaneous process. But it is favorable to producers as the more often fashions change, the more goods are acquired and the higher the profits are. Therefore, producers, by means of promotion, try to manage this process and accelerate it.

For the same reason, producers are interested in equipment and other goods not serving long. Fast failure is put already in the design of new goods, in their materials. For the same purpose, producers slightly alter some non-basic functions of goods and sell them as “new” goods. Not always do these goods satisfy the existing requirements. The very requirements can be artificially created by means of the same promotion.

Meanwhile, the more goods are consumed, the more resources are spent – natural resources, above all. Thus, the modern consumer society, artificially forming new requirements, makes the mankind spend a huge number of irreplaceable resources, causing damage to their own environment.

The second, opposite alternative is radically ecological one. As modern production technologies are inevitably connected with damage to the nature, it offers to dismiss them, and to return to “windmills and sails” (Kulasov, 2009). And as this will obviously cause production output sharply be reduced, partisans of this concept find it possible and even desirable (they claim that it leads to moral improvement of the mankind) to reduce consumption, absolutely changing its structure and all axiological orientations.

From the positions of the quality of life, returning to windmills and sails will hardly lead to its increase. In any case, it will not result in an increase in life expectancy.

– **Managing processes,** instead of managing specific-quality products.

The very concept of “production greening” has been evolving for the last several decades (Kulasov, 2009). In the beginning it was supposed that it is a question of continuous improvement of environmental infrastructure and gradual achievement of certain standards of pollutants content in the environment. Later, it became clear that recycling and reuse can give a double effect allowing to save primary resources taken from the nature and to reduce the burden of the atmosphere, hydrosphere and dump. The aspiration to improve purely

production technologies which is urged to provide all the effects mentioned became the generalization of the concept.

– **Involvement of all the personnel of organization.** System quality management assumes that not only managers and not only engineers participate in it, but also the workers who realize the importance of processes quality and consciously seek for its increase.

In our case, active involvement is first of all participation in such prosaic business as separate collection of household waste. Here management, besides propaganda and promotion, includes at least the minimum effective activity of organizers. In many countries people consciously throw waste into different boxes and tanks, feeling their participation in business of the protection of the environment and quality of their own life – it is necessary that these boxes and tanks exist, and secondly, for their contents not to be cynically mixed up by collectors of garbage in front of the people.

– **Huge role of training.** It is necessary to retrain, firstly workers, to impart the understanding of quality management and the related approaches to them (and in our case – ecological consciousness and the related knowledge), and secondly, as both technologies, and administrative approaches are constantly improved, continuous professional development and continuous education.

In our case, it goes about continuous environmental education. Our experience of teaching environmental management at the departments of management and international economics shows that the students, future managers and economists meet consciously the ideas of taking into account environmental considerations in their profession.

– **Formalization of input and output control,** including standardization and certification procedures, at all stages of business processes. It is very important in connection with the greening of consumption. The latter is connected with active preference from a consumer to the goods which are supplied with “ecological” labels. And who can guarantee, that the goods supplied with a label “eco-”, “bio-”, etc. are really friendly to environment?

Different approaches to production certification are possible. We may estimate a product as the final result of production – and it is possible to estimate production and level of its impact on the environment, considering all stages: the raw materials production, the production itself, the logistics, utilization, i.e. full cycle. The latter option corresponds more to the ideology of quality management.

References

- Balashov, E.A. (1999). *Kachestvo upravleniya i kachestvo produktsii* (Quality of management and quality of the product). Moskva: AKDI Ekonomika i zhizn.
- Kulasov, P.P. (2009). *Ekologicheskaya modernizatsiya i ustoychivoye razvitiye* (Environmental modernization and sustainable development). In: *Ustoychivoye razvitiye i ekologicheskiy menedjement* (Sustainable development and environmental management). St.-Petersburg: Saint-Petersburg State University.

Natalia Vladimirovna Batsun, MA in Management, Irkutsk State Technical University, Russia, Chair of International Economics, Docent.

Born in 1962. Graduated (1999) from Siberian Institute of Economics, Management and Law, major – Environmental management; Spheres of research interests: general, environmental and personnel management.

adres/address: Irkutsk State Technical University,
ul. Lermontova 83, 664074 Irkutsk, Russia
e-mail: nbatsun@mail.ru