

Task Quotient™ (TQ) Case Study

Would you invest 8 hours to save \$50,000 & reduce your employee turnover to zero?

Application: if you or your clients are experiencing issues in any of these organizational issues:

1. Turnover - Higher than desired
2. Motivation - Undermotivated or unmotivated employees
3. Productivity - Low output, or missing goals
4. Task imbalance - Job activities not well distributed
5. Morale - Decreased or low

Introduction

I have always believed that you get what you pay for. Claims such as saving \$50,000 and reducing employee turnover to zero seemed unrealistic to me. Over-promise and under-deliver has been my mantra as the manager for a team of systems engineers and technicians responsible for installing and maintaining the network infrastructure for a large worldwide semiconductor company. The over-promising seemed apparent, but I had high hopes that even if the process didn't deliver on the over-promises that we would gain at least some advantage. To my delight, what I seemed to be over-promised, was conservative and actually delivered twofold.

In October my boss called me and told me of lunch he had with one of his old friends Kevin who had developed a new assessment called the Task Quotient™ (TQ) that he'd like me to talk to him. The goal was to see if the TQ process would help align our staff to the work that was the most rewarding to the employees in hopes that we could raise morale and reduce the department turnover. We had a pretty good organization and reasonable management, but I knew we could make strides beyond the small incremental continuous process improvements that we had been achieving using Management By Objectives (MBOs). We had built a stable organization, with well defined roles and objectives, yet the employee satisfaction, engagement and empowerment seemed to be in the general target area but missing the mark, and we were losing our experienced employees quicker than we could find new ones. Sound familiar? Our organization was a mature one and it was "business as usual" almost everyday, the excitement of being a new ground-breaking organization that had attracted the team members just a few years ago was gone, and now we needed to do something to reenergize them.

I met with Kevin late Friday afternoon in October to understand what TQ was and if it might be a solution to our turnover dilemma. Kevin told me "*Charlie the process is quite simple and straight-forward, I've designed it so that it will work at any working level of the organization, hourly employees, salaried employees, or even at upper management*". I asked Kevin to explain the concept and process. First he said that his research showed that when employees come to work they rarely if ever arrive at the job saying "*I can't wait to see how much I can screw up today, and accomplish nothing*". Per the work done by Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, people are the most motivated when achieving goal-oriented behavior. When you get the right balance between challenge and skills that you can get people into a state of "FLOW" or what is more commonly know as being "*in the zone*". The motivators for each person are different and you become a great manager by extracting the best out of every person on your team. The key is to get them to realize what motivates them and what doesn't, that is where TQ comes in.

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The Task Quotient

The TQ concept is simple, and statistically validated from 2.5 years of academic research, plus it has been successfully delivered to dozens of organizations. The fundamental premise is based work done by Bill Daniels in his work outlined in his book “BreakThrough Performance”, stating that the activities each one of us does on a daily basis can be segmented into 3 task types; 1) Routine, which is predictable and has a low-delay tolerance (meaning the work needs to be accomplished short-term and results are visible immediately), 2) Trouble-shooting or problem solving, which is unpredictable and has a low-delay tolerance, 3) Project, which is predictable but has a high-delay tolerance (meaning the work needs can be accomplished long-term and final results are sometime in the future). The proven TQ theory shows that each one of us has only 1 of 496 different ideal (natural) mixtures made up of these 3 task types. Identifying the ideal task mixture and placing us in an environment, work or play, that closely resembles that task mixture will raise our level of motivation and job satisfaction.

I wondered why no one had done this before? Kevin explained that there had been a lot for work and research done on the importance of a variety of tasks, but no studies had been completed on task type mixtures. I could give a worker 10 different routine activities to do, but could not significantly raise their level of motivation or satisfaction if I didn't align the work to fill their needs for the trouble-shooting or project tasks. This seemed intuitive to me and I was game to try Kevin's approach in my organization.

Getting Started

The process was straight-forward and easy for me to implement as a manager.

1. I advised the team that we were going to do the TQ process and to look for prework via e-mail. We would begin the prework this week and will hold the class 2 to 3 weeks from now.

Kevin acted as the consultant and the instructor for the 8-hour class. Since I was the test case to try the TQ process before it was rolled-out to the remaining 6 teams and 400 employees, we wanted to make sure that we could demonstrate behavioral change in the organization.

2. Prework - Kevin administered a 20 question (7 minute) web-based organizational health survey to my 24 employees. Confidentiality was maintained, results went directly to Kevin, no names attached.

We needed to have each participant complete the on-line TQ developmental assessment. This assessment identifies the person's ideal (preferred or natural), actual (adapted) and optimal (efficient-adapted) task mixture. The TQ developmental report is not shared with the participant until the TQ class.

3. Prework - Kevin sent out a response link and individual passcodes for the Target Training International (TTI) TQ assessment.

To come prepared for the class, the participants needed to track the tasks that they did on a regular basis for 5 typical days over the next 2 weeks.

4. Prework - Kevin sent out a daily tracking template and instructions. Tracking could be done electronically or by hand, whatever was easier for the participant.

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Once all of the prework was started we prepared for the 8-hour class with my staff. For ease of scheduling we broke the class down into two 4-hour sessions, one on Thursday afternoon and 1 on Friday morning.

5. TQ class part 1– During the first 4 hours of class each participant completed a building block simulation to demonstrate their preferred task mixture split, reviewed their individual TTI TQ developmental report, and identified their motivating and demotivating tasks and task types.
6. TQ class part 2 – During the second 4 hours of class the participants segmented all of the tasks that they had captured for the 5 typical days in their prework into the 3 task types and plotted them on a flipchart size blank grid which, once an overlay was provided, identified their most and least motivating tasks.

As you can imagine overlying a grid on top of the plot to learn and understand the tasks that were the most and least motivating to each individual, and why created some healthy and enthusiastically engaging group discussion.

7. TQ class part 3 – Once all of the tasks were plotted, each participant identified the tasks on their grid that they wanted to keep, the ones they wanted to get rid of and additional task types (routine, trouble-shooting) needed to match their ideal (preferred or natural) preference as reported by their TQ developmental report.

If you thought that the first portion of the class had some lively discussions, this portion created what sounded like a day on the floor of the New York stock exchange. I knew things would get interesting, but I had not expected this much excitement and learning.

8. TQ class part 4 – All of the tasks that each participant wanted to be sell (got rid of) were captured and I acted as the auctioneer. Everyone was able to bid on each of the tasks in whole or part. As the manager and the auctioneer I approved or declined bids in whole or part. We had 4 different task outcomes
 - a. sold in full or part to another participant
 - b. sold in part and split among 2 or more participants,
 - c. unsold – but identified as a future sale, with the skills/experience required to take on the task was identified as part of development plan for the participant interested in purchasing the task,
 - d. unsold – kept by the participant for future dispositioning

As you can imagine from the last item there were a bucket of unsold tasks that no one wanted to do. What to do? And can I save some \$ doing it?

Saving Thousands of Dollars

Now that I clearly saw who had a good TQ mixture, and I had the bucket of unsold tasks that no one wanted to do, this put the roadmap in my hands on how disposition all of the demotivating tasks. What was even better was I had the team's immediate buy-in for the identified tasks since they identified the tasks from the bottoms up and not the usual restructuring or redistribution from the top down. Normally as businesses grow you expand by the same support functions to support the growth. I needed to add more staff and I was getting ready to hire another network engineer with a price tag of about \$80,000 per year. I also had a bucket tasks that added up to 45 hours

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that my staff wanted to sell but no one wanted to buy. In review of the tasks, almost 100% were lower-level and more administrative than what the team wanted to do, and what I wanted them spending their time on. So I decided to bring in a contract employee, I could have also outsourced the work. The new employee cost my department is about \$30,000 per year and since they don't count in my headcount I run a leaner more pliable organization.

A secondary benefit was that now the 45 hours of lower-level unwanted tasks were removed from my staff's responsibilities. This meant that I could now give them more meaningful and rewarding higher-level work that balanced out their needed TQ task deficiencies and added more value to the company.

The Real Benefits

Saving \$50,000 (\$80,000 - \$30,000) is certainly a tangible benefit for the first year and each subsequent year. If you calculate all of the cost to the organization from your turnover, the \$50,000 may look more like pocket change. Since we were able get rid of all of the tasks that the current staff didn't want to do, it had a profound affect on the individual and group motivation. As a result the original promise to improve employee motivation, engagement and empowerment were all raised significantly. Kevin readministered the same 20 question (7 minute) web-based organizational health survey 90 days after the TQ class to my 24 employees to see if the changes were quantifiable, table 1 shows the results. However, the one result it doesn't show is my turnover rate. We were able to get the "undesirable" turnover to zero and maintain it for the last 12 months. This saves us significant time in recruiting, lost expertise, work redistribution, customer satisfaction, throughput/turnaround time, and quality. All of these elements are critical in the long-term view to maintain a sustainable world-class organization.

Can you truly get substantial results from an 8-hour investment?

Yes! But, it has affected how I run my staff meetings and 1 on 1's. I haven't added any special TQ meetings, but I have 2 new activities that ensure the return on the 8 hour TQ class investment was obtained:

- First, at least once a month in my staff meetings we revisit the list of tasks that were developed in TQ class part 3 above to make sure the new distribution is working. If it isn't working, the staff resolves this to try and keep everyone's TQ in balance and ensure the work is getting done to meet the customer's expectations. This discussion activity doesn't take much time, and it demonstrates that I am committed as a manager to improve the work environment and our services to my internal and external customers.
- Second, I have a staff of 4 managers, who have 20 employees. I have always met managers in 1 on 1's every other week for an hour or so, or as needed during high activity times. These meetings have 2 parts to them, the deliverable review section to see how well they are doing to meet their MBOs and goals, and a developmental section to make sure they are growing and learning personally and professionally. Since we have implemented the TQ process I ask each employee to bring their task mapping that was developed in

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the TQ class part 3 with them so we can make sure the activities that they are working on are getting as close to their optimal experience as possible. Having motivated and satisfied employees makes my job as a manager significantly easier.

Conclusion

As a technical manager, and in particular in a service organization, there are new challenges that show up daily. I have found that if you pay attention to the employees and getting them aligned with what motivates them, then the daily challenges seem to get resolved faster and easier. It comes down to a pay-me-now or pay-me-later decision. Investing the time up-front, and on continuous basis, to build a strong and vital organization reduces the reactionary activities that you are plagued with when you have a fluid organization. Spending most of your time filling open positions or back-pedaling with your customers due to delays or decreased quality always feels unproductive. The Task Quotient™ allowed my staff and I to quantify what I believe many knew intuitively but were unable to quantify and communicate. We now have, 1) a common language to converse, 2) a way to self-manage our tasks to stay as motivated as possible and, 3) a method to quickly rebalance tasks as a team that is more objective than subjective.

You'll find that the improvements to employee satisfaction, engagement and empowerment help to get your organization stabilized, growing and firing on all cylinders. *"Satisfied employees result in a better bottom line"* (Pfau, B. and Kay, I., 2002, xxvii).

Next Steps

Determine if it is important for your organization to improve its employee turnover, motivation, productivity, morale, or task balance. If so, consider using the TQ developmental assessment tool to help you take the first step to improving your organization. If you are a manager start with your own staff, get their buy-in and get them using the process so that they become advocates, this will make it easier for them to get their staffs or peers to want to come on-board. For the full benefits of the TQ process use the 8 step process outlined above in this case study.

Good Luck,

Charlie G.
Information Technology Systems Manager

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Table #1

Sample results after TQ was applied (90 days)	% Change
In my work group, we have effective communication.	4.43%
In my work group, we look for ways to change processes to improve productivity.	5.26%
I have the tools and resources to do my job.	11.81%
There is good cooperation among people in my work group.	6.43%
There is good cooperation between my work group and the other functional groups in my organization.	14.16%
My potential and my contribution to Intel is being fully utilized.	9.52%
I can easily modify my work tasks to keep me engaged in my work.	12.68%
My level of job satisfaction is high.	26.34%
My level of motivation to do my work is high.	10.29%
I have as much (or more) enthusiasm for my work as I did one year ago.	6.06%
Overall, I would recommend my work group, as a great place to work.	10.33%
The goal(s) that I am expected to accomplish are clear.	-4.17%
The goal(s) that I am expected to accomplish are challenging.	-4.47%
I have the skills necessary to accomplish the goals that are expected of me in the time and manner requested.	2.41%
I am able to track and rate my progress against my goals on a daily basis.	9.45%
On a regular basis my day goes quickly.	9.38%
The level of routine work that I am expected to accomplish is about the correct amount of what I would like.	20.37%
The level of trouble-shooting or problem-solving work that I am expected to accomplish is about the correct amount of what I would like.	-5.98%
The level of project activity I am expected to accomplish is about the correct amount of what I would like.	-1.11%
Total	7.54%