Employee Lived Experiences and Initiative Success in Arkansas Quality Award Recipient Organizations

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Employee Lived Experiences and Initiative Success in Arkansas Quality Award Recipient Organizations
Carol A. Barton, PhD

Abstract
Employee experiences and their stories about their experiences influence quality management and continuous improvement initiatives. Transcript analysis of semistructured interviews revealed the most meaningful experiences were those with people, then materials, feelings, time, and space. The study findings also showed that people transferred problem-solving methods from the workplace to their homes and communities.

Problem
Businesses use quality initiatives as a strategy to increase their competitiveness, sustainability, and profitability. Given these imperatives it is surprising to discover that the failure rate for implementing quality initiatives varied between 60% to 90% (Mosadeghrad, 2014).

General problem
Companies with failed initiatives lose revenue, experience higher expenses, and have fewer market opportunities.

Specific problem
The impact of employee lived experiences on quality initiative success has not been explored.

The Arkansas Governor’s Quality Award is a state level business excellence award that uses the Baldrige Excellence Framework to increase Arkansas businesses’ understanding of the requirements for performance excellence. Organizations that received an award have demonstrated an understanding of the importance of a successful quality management system.

Purpose
To examine the lived experiences of employees in companies that received an Arkansas Governor’s Quality Award in order to discover if a relationship existed between their lived experiences and the implementation of successful quality initiatives.

Conceptual Frameworks
Offered inverse ways of looking at how people make sense of their environment.
• System of profound knowledge (Deming, 2013) and
• Theory of sensemaking (Weick, 1995)

Interpretive Phenomenology
• The lived experience can be classified into one or more existentials: (Van Manen, 2014).
• Relationality – the experience of relationships
• Materiality – the experience of things
• Corporeality – the experience of the body
• Spatiality – the experience of space
• Temporality – the experience of time

Final Questions
What are the lived experiences of employees contributing to organizations receiving the Arkansas Governor’s Quality Award?
• Subquestion 1: What stories are told in organizations recognized with an Arkansas Governor’s Quality Award?
• Subquestion 2: How does storytelling influence quality management and continuous improvement choices and thereby influence organizational transformation?

Procedures
Design
• Interpretive phenomenological study
• Semistructured interviews

Sample
• 11 people in 8 organizations
• Government, Education, Food Science, Health Care, Manufacturing
• Non-profit, publicly traded, privately owned

Data Sources
• Demographic information
• Recorded interviews
• Pre- and post-interview researcher bracketing
• Field notes and reflective journal kept during project
• Member check of experience summary

Data Analysis
The analysis included using the hermeneutic circle of whole, part, whole; descriptive coding, participant experience summaries, and a word cloud.

Findings
People changed themselves first and their organizations afterwards.
The most successful organizations had internal champions.
Adopting quality management success factors changes organizational culture.

Emotions affected participant experiences and the sense that they made out of those experiences.
Frontline employees are more likely to change the way they work when managers’ actions matched managers’ statements.

Social Change Implications
Stories and storytelling have the power to drive workplace and community change. People’s stories about their workplace experiences and how they solve problems follow people home.

People’s use of the problem-solving tools from the workplace to solve problems outside their workplaces produce a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement within their homes and communities.

People’s self-identity changes as they learn to solve problems in different ways. These changes affect how they interact with their environment.

Limitations
Study Design - Interpretive phenomenology relies on the researcher to act as the interpreter for the participant’s experiences.

Sample Size & Composition - Arkansas is a right-to-work state

Data Collection Environment
• Face-to-face interviews in person or via Skype
• Telephone conference calls

Conclusions
The outcome of receiving an Arkansas Governor’s Quality Award arose from the experiences of the participants. All participants said the effort of making the changes required to receive the award was worth it.

Confirmed the importance of human and social factors in the success or failure of a quality initiative and that these factors are not limited to a specific industry or size of organization.

Participants demonstrated the problem-solving model in Deming’s system of profound knowledge.