

Organizational Change as an Orchestrated Social Movement:
Recruitment to a “Quality Initiative”

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Abstract

Many attempts at organizational change take the form of “orchestrated social movements,” where elites seek to spark social movements rather than establish new organizational rules or roles. Programs are rolled out with a normative appeal to long-term career and organizational benefits, but few material resources. A small cadre of professionals plays the role of activists, involving workers and managers in training sessions and problem-solving teams. The hope is that positive feedback between the converted and the unconverted will lead new behaviors to diffuse and become self-sustaining.

We examine recruitment to one such program, that of a “quality initiative” at a global financial services corporation. A survey of bank employees indicates generalized endorsement of the total quality approach but less support for and much frustration with the bank’s program. The sources of attitudes parallel those documented in much social movement research: strong effects of individual values, forms of personal involvement, experience with related programs, expectations of program durability, and the attitudes of co-workers. We argue that the fragility of the initiative is explained in part by its difficulty in recruiting adherents, coupled with the fact that workers rather than managers are its strongest supporters.

Organizational Change as an Orchestrated Social Movement: Determinants and Implications of Recruitment to a “Quality Initiative”

Understandings of organizational change, like organizations themselves, are informed by assumptions of rationality, authority, and functional integration. The focus is on formal adoption of new procedures and their subsequent implementation. New rules are promulgated, organizational units or formal roles are created, and incentive systems are modified. The process may be messy and contested in practice --- organization members may resist and strategies backfire --- but these are problems to be sorted out through redoubled authoritative intervention.

We think some efforts at organizational change are better understood as social movements. In these contexts, a logic of mobilization replaces a logic of authority. Activists seek to recruit adherents and broadcast success. Normative appeals to individual or collective benefits substitute for material resources. The underlying assumption is not that leaders can enforce change, but that unmanaged positive feedback permits new behaviors to diffuse and become self-sustaining.

This argument follows the insights of Zald and Berger (1978), who forcefully point out that formal organizations are simply another type of polity within which social movements can arise. Zald and Berger suggest parallels between the overthrow of organizational leaders and coup d’etats, whistle-blowing and bureaucratic insurgency, and prison riots and mass movements. Scully and Segal (2002) extend this line of analysis to discuss the personal experience and strategies of “internal activists,” detailing how efforts to challenge structured inequality are sustained within organizations.

This paper examines the total quality initiative of a leading multinational bank, here named Global Financial. This “change effort” is quite different from those considered by students of social movements like Zald and Berger (1978) and Scully and Segal (2002). It is launched by organizational elites, not challenging groups, and seeks to further goals like performance improvement and cost containment rather than advocate oppositional agendas. We describe the initiative as an “orchestrated social movement” to emphasize both the formal staging involved and its top-down character.

The notion of an orchestrated movement may be sufficiently jarring that some conceptual unpacking becomes useful. We think the term “social movement” combines two central connotations: a processual component referring to activist-led mobilization of formally autonomous actors outside institutional channels, and a substantive component indicating that the mobilized group are challengers who contest structured inequities and lack ready access to power. The substantive connotation often carries the weight: for example, Tilly (1984: 306) defines a social movement as a “series of interactions between power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation...” We put the emphasis on process, referring to an “orchestrated social movement” rather than an “orchestrated activist-led mobilizing effort.”¹

While the sort of movement we have in mind does not come from the grassroots, we do not mean to imply that managers, professionals, and workers are the pawns of

¹ A case can be made that the “total quality” movement examined here stands in opposition to institutional power centers in the American corporation. Quality departments are marginal relative to finance and operational units, and seek to promote forms of organizational innovation that question established routines and lines of authority. While we see the force of this perspective, we develop a more conservative analysis of total quality as led from the top, and thus closer to the characteristic social movement in form than in content.

omnipotent executives.² To the contrary: They are the potential participants who elites hope to mobilize. By structuring a change program as a social movement, organizational leaders adopt a role akin to that of studio executives promoting a film. They can advertise, shape the product to appeal to key markets, court opinion leaders, and even lower prices --- but they cannot force people to watch the movie or recommend it to their friends.

Our goal is not to discuss definitions, however, but to see what is gained by approaching an organizational change effort from a social movement perspective. The first section of the paper thus describes Global Financial's program with an emphasis on its framing by the bank's CEO. The second and main section of the paper examines how employee support is mobilized, focusing on the role of individual values, personal involvement and prior experience, social networks, and expectations of program durability --- factors that parallel the determinants of mobilization documented in much social movement research. The third section considers the implications of who was recruited, and who was not, for the fate of Global Financial's quality initiative.

We should note that, like Chinese boxes, the intra-organizational process examined here arose within a larger extra-organizational movement. Japan's competitive success in the 1970s and 1980s led to widespread efforts among American firms to adopt a "new quality model" (Cole 1999) grounded in customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, and small group problem-solving.³ Quality initiatives were legion within

² Aguirre (1984) provides an analysis of more full-fledged orchestration in a study of collective behavior as symbolic display in post-revolutionary Cuba.

³ While the quality movement exhibits considerable longevity, in Zald, Morrill, and Rao's (this volume) language it should be coded as generating *low* external pressure. There are no legal or regulatory requirements that firms implement total quality, and inter-organizational coercion affected small suppliers of manufacturers like Ford but not elite banks like Global Financial. By the period studied here (the late 1990s), even informal normative expectations had become ambiguous at best.

the financial services industry in the 1990s (McCabe et al 1998), and Global Financial's program was well within this mainstream. We are struck, for example, by how closely the program we study mirrors Hackman and Wageman's (1995) depiction of typical forms of TQM.

The voluminous literature on total quality within organizational studies focuses on its impact on corporate performance (Conference Board 1991; Easton and Jarrell 1998; Ichniowski and Shaw 1996; Powell 1995) and on correlates of adoption (Lawler, Mohrman and Ledford 1995; Osterman 1994; Gittleman, Horrigan and Joyce 1998), with some studies doing both (Westphal, Gulati and Shortell 1997). There is much less attention to the logic underlying TQM programs, to social dynamics that emerge within the initiative itself, and to how employee responses affect program durability. A social movement perspective is well positioned to address these issues, opening up the black box of program adoption, impact, and abandonment to ask what happens in between.

Global Financial's Quality Initiative

Global Financial's Corporate Quality Initiative began in the 1st quarter of 1997. It was not the first total quality effort mounted by the elite multinational --- most notably, there had been a substantial quality program in its credit card business in the early 1990s. Quality departments were also well institutionalized within Global Financial, most prominently in the Consumer Bank, and these departments were regularly involved in a variety of programs. But the Quality Initiative stood out as the bank's first corporate-wide quality program and the first total quality effort that had the personal support of the bank's CEO.

Global Financial's quality initiative was announced as a vehicle for profound organizational change. The organization's internal newsletter portrayed it as "the bank's breakout strategy..." Its CEO introduced the initiative in a taped interview distributed to all employees. In response to the question "The quality initiative—why now?"

"We must distinguish our presence. Its demanded by the world, will deliver services in a framework that's never existed. This program will touch every Globalbanker, all 92,000. We're living in a world where must energize everybody in the company, and historically we haven't done that."

Quality was framed as offering something for everyone. For the bank, the aim was to reduce errors in customer interactions and speed up operations.

"Let's improve by a factor of 10. So if it takes 6 months, let's do it in 6 days. If it takes 6 hours, let's do it in 6 minutes."

For employees, a vision of new opportunities was offered.

"The hierarchical management structure will have to give way to some collective activities that will improve our effectiveness in the marketplace. Decisions won't flow from a management level to people on the line who are expected to implement those decisions..."

We're telling everyone, choose a process, figure out what and where the problems are, work together to come up with solutions, and then put your solutions to work."

The CEO's last sentence introduces a principle of autonomous action. Employees are not informed that a new management system has been established; they are invited to

"choose a process," "work together," and "put your solutions to work."

Of course, some perception of reward is needed to motivate autonomous action.

The bank's CEO thus describes how the initiative would enhance life at Global Financial:

"This is going to be a much better place to come to work for every Globalbanker...We all spend a lot of our time fixing mistakes or overcoming problems. Its not only time consuming; it's frustrating and stressful....Dealing with our customers on matters of substance, rather than on problems that originate somewhere else, will automatically make us feel far more empowered."

But it was not expected that the initiative could be fueled solely by intrinsic benefits. The CEO added long-run personal advantage to the list.

“The best people in the company are going to surface.
Its going to change a lot of career paths.”

Career opportunities related to the total quality program were not built into the bank’s evaluation and compensation structure, however. They depended instead on the initiative of individual managers. Managers who got “on board” might well set up major projects under the quality umbrella and reward team leaders and participants who identified productivity improvements. But managers who saw total quality as limited or ineffective would not.

For a symbolically central program, Global Financial’s Quality Initiative possessed minimal organizational infrastructure. A Corporate Quality Office was formed under the directorship of one of the firm’s 12 executive vice-presidents, a long-standing corporate leader who had established the quality program in Credit Cards while directing that unit. A total of sixteen quality professionals made up the staff of the Corporate Quality Office. They were aided by an executive on loan from Motorola, whose Six Sigma™ methodology and cross-functional process improvement approach the bank built its program around.

The Corporate Quality Office did not act alone, of course. It worked in partnership with the bank’s established quality control departments, whose personnel within the United States alone numbered some 674 officers and 211 non-officer employees. But the Corporate Quality Office lacked line authority over these much larger units, whose directors reported to business heads within their divisions.

Early in the initiative, external consultants were central to program activities. They included Motorola staff who instructed bank employees in statistical methodologies and cross-functional process improvement techniques, as well as independent corporate culture consultants. For example, one of us observed a training session led by a quality professional from Global Financial's Consumer Bank, a senior trainer from a management consultancy specializing in corporate culture, and an independent consultant. As Global Financial personnel became experienced and formally licensed in the (proprietary) quality methodologies adopted by the bank, the proportion of in-house trainers and facilitators grew.

The idea was that quality was "everyone's job." Expansion of the bank's quality personnel and the formation of a powerful corporate office with line authority were avoided as fostering a quality bureaucracy. When asked who was responsible for the initiative, the CEO replied "each of us. This is how we are going to work....I'm going to have a few projects on my personal quality."

Operationally, the quality initiative involved three main activities. First, all bank employees were to receive formal *quality training*. This training was organized to cascade through the organization, with executives and top managers participating in a first wave of training, followed by their direct reports, and on down through front-line workers. Quality training involved two broad components: a statistical language for describing and analyzing organizational problems and a behavioral focus on team building, cooperation, and organizational values.

Second, operational units were asked to report their performance on a series of *quality metrics*, which counted "defects" in customer interaction such as delays in

account openings and credit decisions. The Corporate Quality Office maintained a database of scores across business units, whose participation was voluntary. In keeping with the central office's lack of line authority, business units were also permitted to redefine metrics to fit local circumstances.

Third, managers could form *cross-functional performance improvement (CFPI, or quality) teams* to address business challenges. Team sponsors identified a “critical business problem” and recruited participants, while quality personnel provided facilitation and support. The average project lasted about a year, with participants adding project tasks to their regular responsibilities.

Each of these activities was substantial in scope. While we lack a count of how many employees received quality training, the survey reported below suggests a figure of 82 percent among US employees. Two quarters after the initiative began, 36 of the bank's 46 major business units were reporting scores on quality metrics. And over 1200 quality teams were formed across Global Financial.

Employee Attitudes

In April 2000 we conducted a random sample survey of Global Financial employees working in the United States. Names were selected from a May 1999 employment roster, with the sampling frame defined as regular employees working 35 hours per week or more who had been hired before July 1998. Although 750 surveys were mailed, we later received personnel data indicating that only 649 sampled individuals were still with Global Financial in December 1999 (i.e., 101 of the sampled employees had left the bank in the last seven months of 1999). 245 completed surveys were received, for a response

rate of 37.8% (under the implausible but conservative assumption of no additional turnover between January and April 2000).

The quality initiative was thus more than two years old when our survey was mailed. This meant that the early resource constraints and growing pains of the initiative had been overcome, but it also meant that the bloom was off the rose. The great majority of quality initiative activities that would ever occur at Global Financial had already taken place, and this fact was apparent to many of our potential respondents. We think all of this strategic, because employees were well positioned to offer mature assessments and because the larger context did not promote forced enthusiasm for a new program.

A comparison of background characteristics shows modest differences between survey respondents and non-respondents. 53% of respondents and 52% of non-respondents were men. The average respondent was 41 years of age, had been with Global Financial 10.6 years, and received a salary of \$69,991; non-respondents were also on average 41 years old, had been with the firm 11.1 years, and received a salary of \$67,832. However, managers and professionals were less likely to respond to our survey than were front-line workers. 74% of respondents but 82% of non-respondents were FLSA exempt.

Attitudes towards the Quality Initiative. While research on social movements often studies participation in specific events (like marching in a demonstration), we examine attitudes instead. An organizational change initiative is much less of a public phenomenon: it involves not collective action but many small-scale activities occurring in different parts of the organization. In addition, employee behavior cannot be treated as chosen in the sense that participation in protest movements can, since quality activities

may be assigned to the employee by his or her supervisor. We thus use employee attitudes as an indicator of successful or unsuccessful mobilization, and relate these to the employee's experience and organizational location.

We found that Globalbankers held strong views on the bank's quality program and on total quality more generally. One Globalbanker we surveyed told us "I think the focus on customer satisfaction is key to our long-term success." Other respondents took a less favorable view. In fact, one commented "Please don't make me go to other quality classes"!

We asked respondents for their opinion of the effectiveness of quality initiatives across five contexts, ranging from the most immediate ("this quality initiative...applied to the work you do") to the most general ("quality initiatives in general...applied to firms of all types"). While all responses were positively correlated, a factor analysis suggested two components: *local endorsement* (combining perceptions of the effectiveness of Global Financial's quality initiative for the respondent's work and for the respondent's department or division) and *generalized endorsement* (of total quality for firms in financial services and for firms of all types).⁴

A second common attitude expressed frustration. Many at Global Financial described the bank's quality initiative as "the flavor of the month." This characterization could refer to the intrinsic superficiality of TQM. Or it could imply a critique of Global Financial. In one employee's words,

"I have never thought that Global Financial is committed to quality. To me quality, if it is to be effective within a corporation, has to be as important as the bottom-line... To me, Global Financial's quality efforts are more 'show' (for the public,

⁴ We also asked about the effectiveness of the quality initiative for Global Financial as a whole. Responses here stood between and were correlated with views of both local and generalized effectiveness. We do not include this term in the factor scales to develop a stronger contrast between the two.

press, and share-holders).”

We measure *frustration* through responses to the statement “For me personally, Global Financial’s Quality Initiative has led to frustration with ‘flavor of the month’ programs” (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). While measures of endorsement indexes one aspect of mobilization around total quality, frustration captures the potential “demobilization” of Global Financial’s workforce.

Figure 1 indicates that Globalbankers express a mix of all three attitudes. When considering one’s own work and one’s own department, respondents are lukewarm at best towards the quality initiative, with 15 percent describing it as “not effective” and only 6 percent as “highly effective.” Somewhat higher levels of generalized endorsement are stated, with less direct skepticism and a stronger tendency to view quality initiatives as very effective. There is also a real sense of frustration, with many agreeing and few disagreeing with the statement that the initiative has generated frustration with flavor of the month programs.

<Figure 1 about here.>

One might expect endorsement and frustration to be inversely related. But there is no correlation between either form of endorsement and our measure of frustration. Once we control for generalized endorsement, however, the relationship between frustration and local effectiveness turns modestly negative. Two years into the initiative, we see a tendency to critique Global Financial’s program coupled with a more positive stance towards total quality in the abstract.

Sources of Employee Attitudes

We consider how attitudes towards Global Financial's quality initiative are rooted in individual values, concrete forms of involvement, experience with related programs, expectations about the program's future, and the views of co-workers. We then consider how attitudes vary across occupational positions within the bank, comparing managers, supervisors, professionals, and front-line workers.

With the exception of occupational position, each of the above factors has a long pedigree in explaining recruitment into social movements. Much social movement research focuses on the impact of individual values, prior or concurrent protest experience, network connections to movement supporters, and calculations of the probable efficacy of action in selecting participants from this pool. For example, McAdam (1988; McAdam and Paulsen 1993) considers the impact of attitudes, relations to other participants, and membership in related organizations in explaining recruitment to Freedom Summer.

Individual values. Some employees may be drawn to total quality because its underlying philosophy is compatible with their own. Total quality involves a vision of organizational change that is at once scientific (decision-making as statistical problem-solving), social (organizations as collections of teams), personal (individual commitment and skill development), and political (empowerment within top-down leadership). Drawing on academic reviews (i.e., Hackman and Wageman 1995), practitioner discussions (i.e.,

Garvin 1988; Juran 1995), and Global Financial's quality training documents, we asked Globalbankers to evaluate eight "TQM principles."⁵

Factor analysis indicated that evaluations of all eight items load on a single factor, distinguishing those who endorse TQM principles from those who do not. While support for TQM principles is not linked to frustration with the quality initiative as a "flavor of the month" program, it is tied to both local and generalized endorsement of TQM programs. The link to local assessments is modest ($r = .12$, $p = .07$) while that to generalized endorsement of quality initiatives is somewhat stronger ($r = .28$, $p < .01$).

It may seem surprising that these relationships are not stronger, since we are correlating responses to two sets of questions about the effectiveness of TQM: one as an abstract set of principles and the other as a concrete program. But the modest relationship between the two, particularly when the focus is on the respondent's own workplace, echoes much social movement research. Individual values often turn out to be necessary but distant sources of recruitment, identifying a pool of potential supporters whose behavioral choice to act or not is shaped by more proximate factors (see Klandermans and Oegama 1987). Here, the weak linkage may also reflect the ambiguity of the "total quality" framework and the potential slippage between TQM's rhetoric and programmatic realities (Zbaracki 1998).

Forms of Involvement. Formal program activities sought to directly involve employees.

Quality training includes instruction in statistical methods and methods of group decision-making, role-playing scenarios designed to promote cooperation rather than

⁵ These principles are "focus on customer satisfaction," "focus on cross-functional processes," "group effort rather than individual effort," "openness to experimentation and change," "development of interpersonal skills," "empowered to directly implement change," "roles based on expertise, not status," and "structured problem-solving techniques and statistical tools."

competition, and discussion of the bank's corporate culture. Developing and implementing quality metrics drew attention to customer interactions and needs. Participation on cross-functional process improvement teams gave participants an extended and meaningful experience of team-based problem-solving. We asked whether Globalbankers had been involved in the initiative in each of these ways.

Figure 2 shows that employees who received quality training and participated on quality teams are more likely to endorse quality activities within their workplace. Participation on quality teams also spills over to boost endorsement of quality initiatives in general. By contrast, work with quality metrics has scant influence on employee attitudes.

<Figure 2 about here.>

These effects are consistent with much social movement research emphasizing the importance of personal experience in building commitment. The most intensive and demanding form of involvement (quality team participation) has the largest and the broadest effect, while the most distant and impersonal (quality metrics) has a negligible impact. Our own observation of quality training showed us that Globalbankers could be strongly engaged when questions of individual commitment and personal authenticity were raised within a small group setting.

These results are also consistent with Sine and Strang's (2001) cross-national analysis of quality teams. Team participants across eleven countries expressed substantially stronger endorsement of the quality program than the average respondent in

the random sample survey reported in this paper, with variation in attitudes linked to group dynamics within the team as well as cultural orientations. Sine and Strang (2001) and Strang (2002) document the reciprocal relationship between individual attitudes and the spread of quality team activities, with the strongest causal effects running from activities to attitudes.

Experience with related programs. In evaluating efforts at organizational change, Globalbankers were neither naïve nor inexperienced. Many had been involved in other quality programs, both within and outside Global Financial. And total quality has much in common with other organizational change efforts, like business process reengineering (whose approach to process improvement is almost indistinguishable from quality's CFPI projects) and corporate culture programs (whose attempts to build commitment and trust parallel attention to the "human dimensions" of quality). We consider three measures of program experience: other quality efforts at Global Financial, past involvement in related programs,⁶ and current involvement in related programs. To simplify a complex picture, we distinguish between those who have had no experience of each sort of program, one program experience, or two or more program experiences.

Figure 3 indicates that prior or concurrent program experience generally boosts support for the quality initiative, as does experience with related programs. But there are signs of sharply diminishing returns. In most cases, experience with one program produces stronger endorsement than does experience with two or more programs. This is true of other quality programs at Global Financial and of past involvement in related programs. Current involvement has more consistent though more muted effects, tending

⁶ These eight programs are quality circles, problem-solving groups other than quality circles, reengineering projects, self-managing work teams, culture change initiatives, flextime, telecommuting, and gainsharing/group incentive pay.

to raise generalized endorsement while lowering local endorsement (perhaps through competition for employee attention and energy).

<Figure 3 about here.>

Frustration tends to grow with program experience. It rises most sharply with past involvement in related programs, where those with any amount of prior experience are significantly more likely to see the quality initiative as simply the “flavor of the month.” Frustration also increases steadily with quality program experience and current involvement in related programs.⁷

These results speak to the long-term viability of the quality movement. If prior experience with quality and related programs leads to individual commitment and support, total quality might win the war despite losing most of the battles. But if exposure leads to cynicism or resignation, past programs will tend to undermine and ultimately extinguish new initiatives. Our results suggest both positive feedback (through a generalized sense of the effectiveness of total quality) and negative feedback (through frustration with ‘flavor of the month’ programs).

Figure 4 helps explicate how attitudes evolve by crosstabulating local endorsement and frustration. Interestingly, numbers of the two “pure” types (those who endorse and are not frustrated, and those who do not endorse and are frustrated) shift little with past program experience. Instead, the main impact of past program experience seems to be to turn contented skeptics (those who neither endorse nor are frustrated by

⁷ We also examined the impact of experience with quality programs at firms outside Global Financial, which tends to depress local endorsement but has little relation to generalized endorsement or frustration (perhaps because of the wide variety of programs that different respondents were reacting to).

total quality) into frustrated advocates (who endorse total quality but are also frustrated by it)!

<Figure 4 about here.>

Perceptions of program trajectory. Globalbankers were well aware that change programs often have little staying power, and were wary about boarding a sinking ship. To do so meant not only wasted effort but also potential political damage (for example, if quality team proposals antagonized “process owners”). On the other hand, overt skepticism towards a successful and long-lasting program could be costly.

We asked respondents about the trajectory of the quality initiative in four contexts: change over the last year within their department, change over the last year within Global Financial, expected change over the coming year within their department, and expected change over the coming year within Global Financial. These were scored on a five point scale, where 1=Discontinued, 3=Same Level of Activity, 5=Greatly Increased Activity. All four perceptions were strongly correlated (the lowest correlation was .65, $p<.01$), suggesting that bankers used recent experience to estimate where the program was going next, and may have generalized from the quality activities of their unit to those of the larger organization.

Figure 5 shows how expected change in the quality initiative over the next year is related to assessments of total quality. The first two panels indicate that bankers who anticipate program decline evaluate quality initiatives less positively, while those who anticipate an increase view quality as more effective. A more surprising pattern emerges

when we examine employee frustration. While those who expect program activity to decline are more frustrated than those who expect it to increase, both groups are more frustrated than those who see the program as stable. Big increases in activity may suggest that the program is the “flavor of this month” just as big decreases make it clear that the program was the “flavor of last month.”

<Figure 5 about here.>

Social networks. Relationships to other participants are one of the strongest conduits of social movement mobilization (Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen 1980). We asked how the quality initiative was viewed by three reference groups: the respondent’s direct reports, the respondent’s peers, and the respondent’s supervisor. Questions took the form: “To the extent you can judge, how does view Global Financial’s quality initiative?” (responses on a five point scale: 1=Not Important, 5=Critically Important).

Table 1 indicates that respondent attitudes are strongly tied to the views of their supervisors, peers, and direct reports. Globalbankers are much more likely to view the quality initiative in their workplace as effective if supervisors, peers, and direct reports see the program as important. But more than a practical local assessment is involved. Endorsement by peers and supervisors also translate into perceptions that total quality initiatives generally work. Frustration, by contrast, is uncorrelated with the views of co-workers.

<Table 1 about here.>

Organizational position. Finally, we consider the employee's position as a manager, professional, supervisor, or (front-line) worker. Occupational position speaks to key aspects of individual identity, orientation towards the firm, and the costs and benefits of the quality model.

Advocates contend that total quality makes work more fulfilling. According to Joseph Juran, "the human being exhibits an instinctive drive for precision, beauty, and perfection." Adler (1993) argues that team-based opportunities to redesign work processes turn Taylorism into a "learning bureaucracy." While this implies that all sorts of employees can benefit from total quality, it also suggests that the benefits may be greatest for front-line workers, whose occupational position furnishes the least autonomy and opportunity to challenge organizational rules.

Critics view total quality as intensifying managerial surveillance while offering the pretense of solidarity (Parker and Slaughter 1993; McCabe et al 1998; Sewell 1998). While some workers may be "bewitched" by these promises, the bulk are likely to be "bewildered" by its apparent appeal for others or "bothered" by its impact on the organization (Knights and McCabe 2000). Absent a strong argument for false consciousness, a critical analysis suggests that managers and supervisors should be more supportive of total quality than professionals or front-line workers are.

A third argument is that quality is something the top gets the bottom to do to the middle. Supervisory authority is undercut by the expanded role of front-line workers, who are empowered to make policy proposals directly to higher managers. Managers and workers gain power while foremen and supervisory managers lose power. This argument

is often buttressed by a cultural analysis of supervisors as ill-prepared to practice the sort of participatory, enabling style of leadership required in an empowered workplace.

We identify four occupational groups: managers, supervisors, professionals, or front-line workers. These categories are derived from responses to the survey questions “Do you supervise the work of others?” and “If yes, do individuals who you supervise themselves supervise others?” Respondents are coded as managers if they replied “yes” to both questions and as supervisors if they responded “yes” to just the first question. Among those without supervisory responsibilities, we distinguish professionals from front-line workers on the basis of their EEO occupational classification (professionals are designated for EEO purposes as managers, professionals, or sales; front-line workers as technicians, office and clerical, craft, operatives, and service workers).

Figure 6 indicates modest but consistent differentials in attitudes across the four groups. Front-line workers endorse total quality most strongly (a statistically significant differential when we compare workers to all other groups). Professionals are least likely to endorse the initiative, though the gap between their views and that of managerial and supervisory personnel is small.⁸ Frustration towards the quality initiative is less connected to organizational position, though it is notable that managers express this sentiment most strongly.

<Figure 6 about here.>

⁸ Zeitz (1996) comes to similar conclusions in a study of TQM in a government office, arguing that total quality celebrates the competence of those closest to the task.

These results are more compatible with a positive assessment of total quality as addressing worker concerns than they are with the critique that TQM “tightens the bars of the iron cage.” In addition, the gap between front-line workers and the other occupational groups widens as the question moves from “firms in general” to the employee’s own work situation. It seems unlikely that false consciousness or a tendency to follow the official line is at the bottom of these differentials.

Multivariate analyses. The bivariate relationships discussed above may conceal substantial interdependencies. For example, employees whose values are aligned with total quality may be more likely to participate on quality teams, and employees with more extensive experience with total quality may have more current involvement as well. We examine multivariate models that focus on a reduced set of factors that capture the major relationships discussed above. Since network influences provide by far the largest single source of employee attitudes, we consider models that first exclude and then include supervisor and peer support for the initiative.

Table 2 shows that multivariate relationships are largely consistent with the bivariate relationships discussed at length above. Individual values, personal contact with the initiative, experience with related programs, and expectations that the initiative is on an upward trajectory all lead to endorsement of quality initiatives. Support for TQM principles boosts generalized endorsement of total quality. Front-line workers are more positive towards the quality initiative within their unit than managers, supervisors, and professionals are.

<Table 2 about here.>

Table 2 also underlines the way employee frustration flows from positive evaluations of TQM rather than negative ones. Respondents sympathetic to TQM principles are more frustrated, not less, as are employees with extensive prior involvement in related programs. Belief that the quality program was gaining steam tended to counter these frustrations, though perhaps not for long.

Peer and supervisor support for the initiative (added in models 4-6) markedly boosts assessments of total quality, especially within the respondent's workplace. Network effects also interact with a number of the relationships noted above. Most importantly, the impact of occupational position and expected program trajectory diminish sharply and lose statistical significance when peer and supervisor support are added as explanatory factors.

The relationship between social network effects and anticipated program trajectory seems transparent. Departments where co-workers and supervisors see the initiative as important are also likely to be departments where quality program activities are maintained or are increasing. And expectations of the program's future trajectory in the bank are strongly connected to observation of one's own department in the recent past.

More puzzling is the relationship between social network effects and occupational position. Why are differentials across occupational positions connected to the influence of supervisors and peers?

To investigate, Table 3 shows how perceptions are structured within Global Financial. The rows indicate whose views are perceived; the columns, who is doing the

perceiving. For example, the value of 2.98 in the last column of the first row indicates how respondents who we code as supervisors rate the views of the bankers they report to (and who if they were included in the sample would be coded as managers).

<Table 3 about here.>

Table 3 indicates widespread and systematic misperception. Very consistently, the same occupational group is seen as more supportive from “below” than it is from “above.” For example, front-line workers describe supervisors as rather supportive of the quality initiative (an average score of 3.64) while managers see supervisors as more skeptical (an average score of 2.35). These differences are probably tied to role-based presentations of self --- bosses may feel obliged to boost corporate programs within their units, and subordinates may tend to respond with skepticism. Peers, who are perhaps in the best position to judge, rate each group’s support for the initiative at levels between the (over)-estimates of subordinates and the (under)-estimates of superordinates.

The net result is that lower-level employees receive more positive messages about how the bank regards total quality than do higher-level employees. At the extremes of the organizational hierarchy, the CEO receives only negatively slanted impressions while front-line workers receive only positively slanted impressions. The greater tendency of front-line workers to endorse the initiative thus seems in substantial part a product of where they stand in a system of (mis)communication.

The Impact of Employee Attitudes

At best, the corporate quality initiative failed to win the “hearts and minds” of the Global Financial’s workforce. Our survey, conducted well after the bloom was off the rose, found modest to low support and much frustration with the quality initiative. More bankers saw the quality initiative as ineffective than rated it as highly effective. And about half of all respondents reported frustration with “flavor of the month” programs.

Even more consequential than average levels of endorsement and frustration may be the way these attitudes are distributed across occupational positions. The most favorable assessments come from non-supervisory personnel “on the line,” while managers, supervisors and professionals are significantly more skeptical. This is bad news politically, since the views of executives, managers, and professionals count for much more in determining the fate of an organizational program than do the views of the organizational rank and file.

In fact, Global Financial’s quality initiative was brought to an end approximately eight months after our survey was conducted. Some members of the corporate quality office including its director left the bank, and the office itself was attached to Global Financial’s Consumer Bank and given a narrower mandate. The quality initiative had had a short (though not uncharacteristically short) run of little more than three years.

The proximate cause of the corporate quality initiative’s demise was a change in bank leadership. The CEO whose “personal conversion” had helped launch the initiative left the bank, while the new CEO viewed total quality with unabashed skepticism. A highly favorable political opportunity structure (Tarrow 1998) had been replaced by a distinctly unfavorable one.

We would argue, however, that weak internal support made the quality initiative vulnerable at Global Financial. The new CEO's position was astute precisely because the program was neither taken-for-granted nor normatively legitimated within the bank. The fact that front-line workers rather than top managers formed its strongest constituency further reduced the quality program's political viability, making its elimination a nice way to symbolize change in bank leadership.

The long-term implications of the attitude formation process described here are also of interest. Global Financial's quality initiative was just one chapter in a long list of programs stressing cross-functional processes, participation, empowerment, and teamwork. Just as the experience of prior quality and related programs influenced recruitment to the quality program studied here, it in turn will presumably impact how Globalbankers respond to future organizational change efforts.

There is some indication that the quality program probably generated some "pockets of commitment" that could facilitate future efforts. The strongest endorsement of total quality comes from those with the most extensive involvement in the initiative --- bankers who participated on quality teams and whose departments maintained high and increasing levels of quality activity. These departments might continue to use quality techniques despite the demise of the larger corporate initiative.

The more typical experience, however, is frustration with the gap between what was promised and what was delivered. The most strongly voiced sentiments in our survey were those of employees who felt that the bank had failed to carry through. For example, one employee described "A lot of lip service but no senior manager commitment," while another said

“it has turned into a ‘flash in the pan’ program. No data is given to us, no follow-up information or training programs have been implemented.”

There are thus real signs that the corporate quality initiative may have undercut future corporate change efforts. It is telling that employees who had experienced multiple programs were less impressed by total quality than Globalbankers who had experienced a single program. And frustration increases with prior experience. This trajectory is familiar from the study of social movements, where cycles of protest wind down from exhaustion as well as from adverse shifts in political opportunity.

Discussion

Students of organizations generally invoke the notion of a social movement to describe extra-organizational institution building and political action. Davis and Thompson (1994) develop this sort of argument to dissect the rise of shareholder activism. Robert Cole employs the same imagery to describe the diffusion of total quality within the American business community: “In the course of responding to the Japanese challenge, a social movement developed, filled with zealots, nonbelievers, inspirational leaders, opportunists, and institutional builders” (1999: 231). The participants in the quality movement, thus understood, are gurus like W. Edwards Deming and organizations like SEMATECH and Goal/QPC.

We think a social movement framework has utility for understanding mobilizing efforts inside as well as across organizations. This follows the lead of Global Financial’s quality director, who spoke to us of “skeptics” and “converts” and of strategies for moving Globalbankers from the former category to the latter. We see the director as orchestrating a social movement rather than implementing a program, and have sought to

explicate some of the mechanisms underlying recruitment (or more fashionably, “micromobilization”).

Recruitment to Global Financial’s quality initiative has much in common with recruitment into social movement protest and activity. First, support for the change program is strongly connected to the immediate personal experience of involvement. McAdam (1988) details how the collective experience of Freedom Summer’s orientation camps had a defining influence on idealistic young middle-class youth. Similarly, if less dramatically, Globalbankers who had participated on quality teams and who had been involved in a variety of organizational change efforts were more likely to endorse total quality than Globalbankers lacking those experiences.

Second, endorsement of total quality is strongly conditioned by location within social networks and organizational units. The presence of ties to other participants is a robust predictor of social movement mobilization, and Global Financial is no exception. Those whose peers and supervisors supported the initiative were likely to endorse it themselves. And bankers in departments that established many quality activities held more favorable views than those who saw the initiative announced and then not carried through.

Finally, social movements seek recurrent mobilization without the aid of strong institutional supports, making exhaustion and burnout a common by-product. This is clearly true at Global Financial, where higher levels of quality activity bred not only endorsement but also frustration. This frustration was sufficiently great that the program probably diminished the life chances of related future efforts.

Parallels between attitudes towards a quality initiative and participation in social protest are striking because the two contexts are so different. Social protest centers on the dramatic conflict between the politically marginal and the politically privileged. Whether individuals can be mobilized for risky forms of collective action with unclear payoffs is highly problematic (for example, see Gould 1995). Stark opposition between the benefits and costs of action (whether framed as why people would put themselves in harm's way, or in paler form as a social dilemma) motivates the study of social movement recruitment.

An organizational reform initiative is much less dramatic. Action is on a smaller scale, and there is no equivalent to the highly public, episodic character of social movement participation. While we see the program as social movement-like in form, we would not describe it as collective action. Organizational reform is structurally closer to a religious movement (Snow 1976) than to a political movement.

If we step back, what benefits does the development of a social movement perspective offer the study of organizations and organizational change? First and foremost is its dynamic character. In our reading, most research on TQM develops contingency arguments about the technical, infrastructural, and cultural conditions that facilitate or block success. For example, Sitkin et al (1993) contend that total quality is most effectively applied where the relationship between means and ends is well understood. McDuffie (1995) documents the multiplier effects of complementary human resource practices. Douglas and Judge (2001) examine the impact of structural control systems and information flow on TQM implementation.

While contingency arguments are of central importance, they provide an explanatory account driven by relatively fixed exogenous conditions. A social movement approach buttresses comparative statics through close attention to the way programs gain or lose momentum. Attention to the process by which support is won or lost explicates mechanisms through which structural effects operate and points to causal factors --- like network effects --- that arise within mobilization efforts themselves.

Second, a social movement framework adds a political dimension to the largely cognitive emphasis of much work on organizational change. For example, Robert Cole's *Managing Quality Fads* (1999) probes the difficulties of organizational learning, detailing how Hewlett-Packard first underestimated and then misunderstood the total quality approach. To questions like "what is this program?" and "what evidence is there that it works?" a social movement analysis adds "who supports the program?" "how were they mobilized?" and "how much influence do they have?"

Third, a social movement perspective diminishes the "manager-centrism" of most discussions of organizational change. There is a strong tendency in the business literature to treat top management commitment as the holy grail that ensures program success and durability. But while CEOs can start and stop programs (as they did at Global Financial), they cannot control whether social movements flourish or fizzle. Our analysis suggests that the "commitment" of many actors --- the CEO, top executives, middle and supervisory managers, change agents, professionals, technicians, and front-line workers --- forms an evolving and interdependent system.

Finally, we should note that further development of a social movement perspective would reintroduce the extra-organizational movement neglected in this paper.

Zald, Morrill and Rao (this volume) argue that low external pressure leads to symbolic or low-cost compliance, an insight that explains much about the fragility of TQM and related change efforts. A promising research direction is to marry the study of movement dynamics within and across organizations, asking how external social movements provide resources that lead internal social movements to become self-sustaining and institutionalized.

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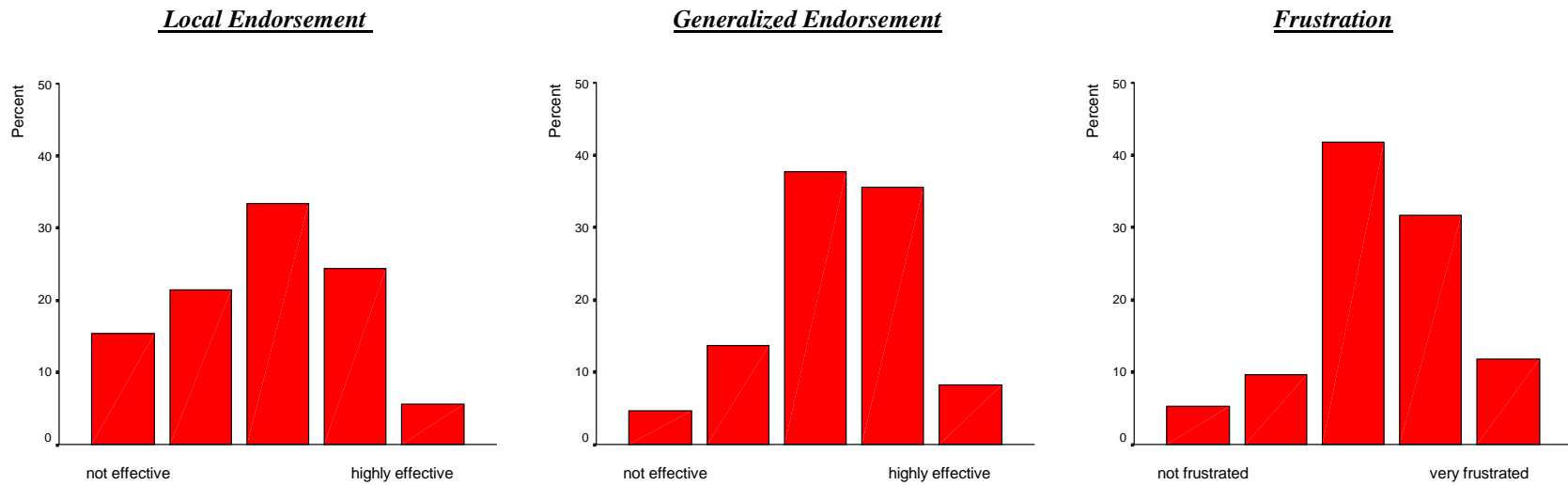
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Figure 1. Attitudes towards the Quality Initiative



“How effective is Global Financial’s Quality Initiative when applied to your work and your department?”

“How effective are quality initiatives in general when applied to firms in financial services or firms of all types?”

“For me personally, Global Financial’s Quality Initiative has led to frustration with ‘flavor of the month’ programs”

Figure 2. Forms of Involvement and Attitudes towards the Quality Initiative

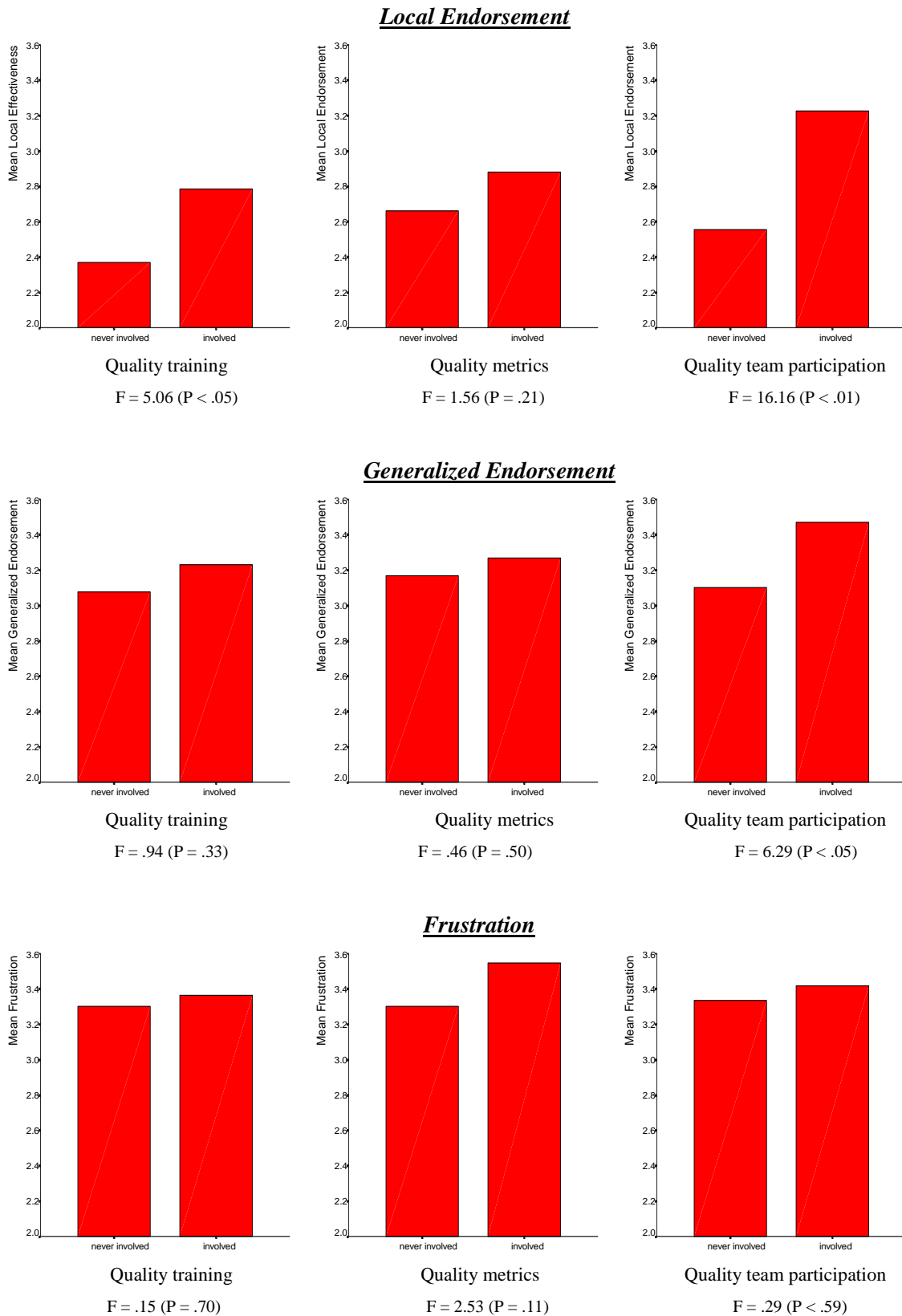


Figure 3. Experience with Other Quality Programs and Attitudes towards the Quality Initiative

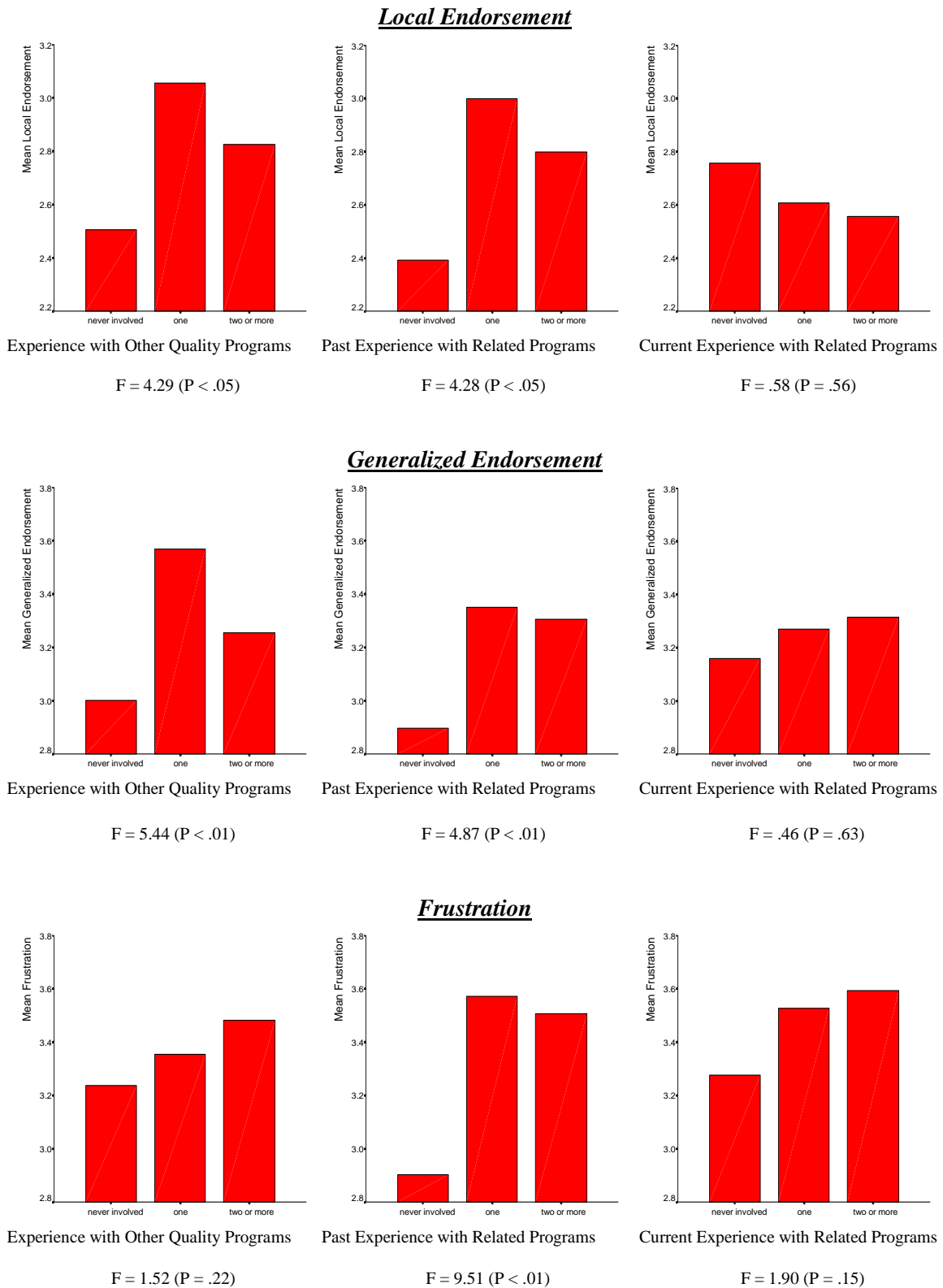
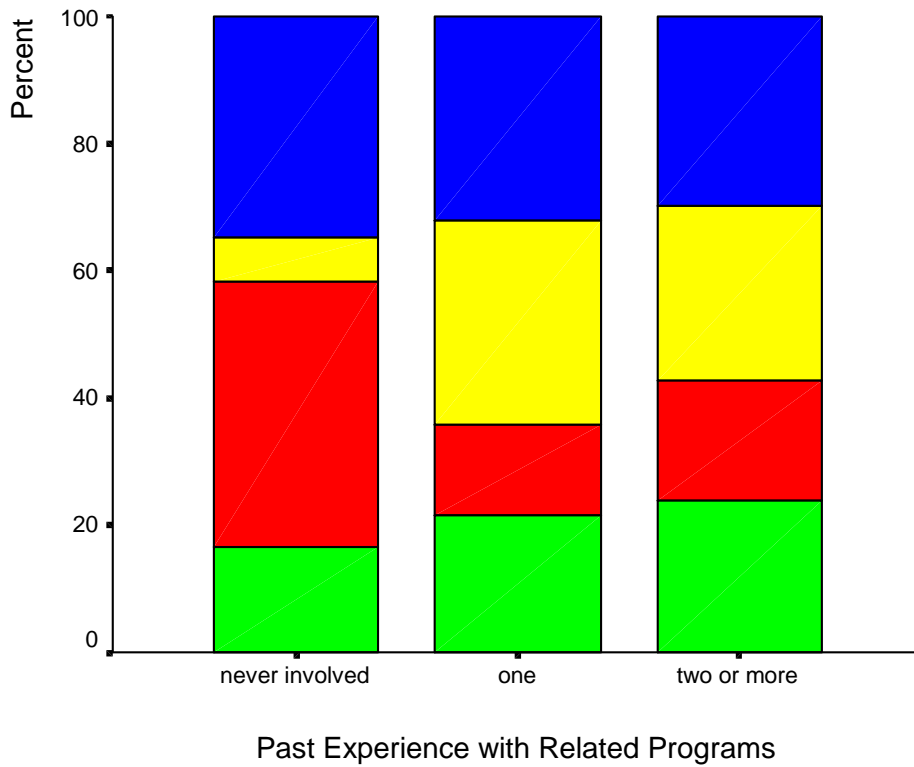


Figure 4. Past Program Experience and Combinations of Attitudes towards the Quality Initiative



Combinations of Local Endorsement and Frustration

- endorses and is not frustrated by the Quality Initiative
- endorses but is frustrated by the Quality Initiative
- neither endorses nor is frustrated by the Quality Initiative
- does not endorse and is frustrated by the Quality Initiative

Figure 5. Expected Program Trajectory and Attitudes towards the Quality Initiative

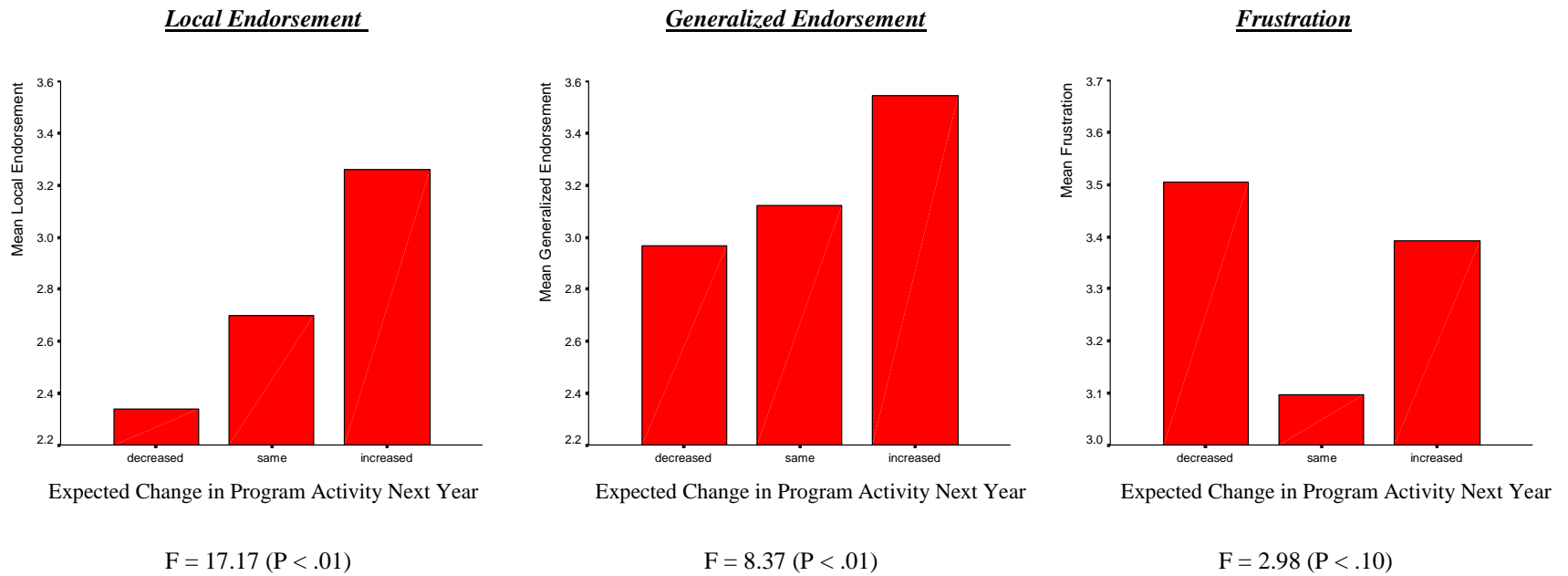


Table 1. Correlation Coefficients between the Views of Co-Workers and Attitudes toward the Quality Initiative

Views of Co-Workers	Local Endorsement	Generalized Endorsement	Frustration
Direct Reports	.59 ***	.45 ***	-.03
Peers	.67 ***	.52 ***	-.06
Supervisor	.61 ***	.46 ***	-.05

*** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Figure 6. Occupational Positions and Attitudes towards the Quality Initiative

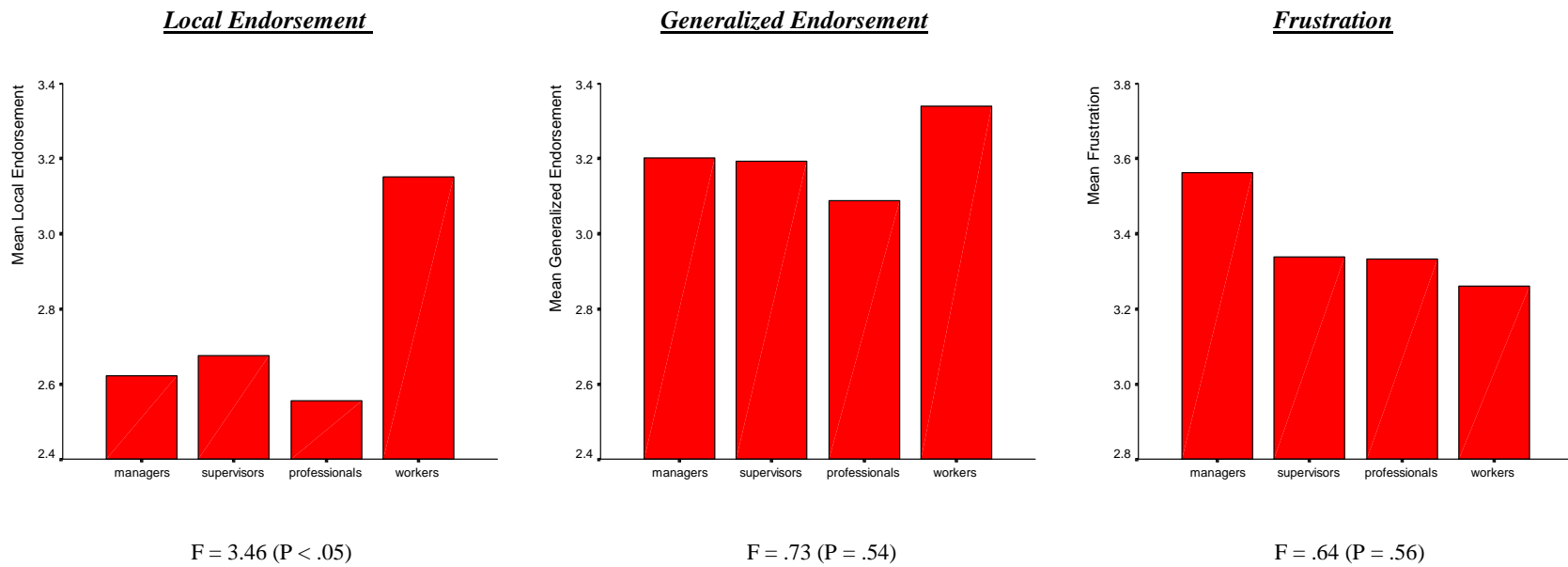


Table 2. Unstandardized Coefficients from OLS Regressions of Attitudes towards the Quality Initiative

Variable	Local Endorsement		Generalized Endorsement		Frustration	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Constant	1.87 *** (.30)	.50 * (.29)	1.89 *** (.29)	.92 *** (.31)	2.39 *** (.32)	2.66 *** (.37)
<i>Endorsement of Quality</i>	.15 ** (.70)	.05 (.06)	.28 *** (.07)	.23 *** (.07)	.15 ** (.07)	.21 *** (.08)
<i>Quality Program Experience</i>						
Received quality training	.38 ** (.18)	.33 ** (.14)	.06 (.17)	.00 (.16)	-.12 (.19)	-.05 (.19)
Participated in quality team	.68 *** (.16)	.44 *** (.13)	.25 * (.15)	.10 (.14)	-.24 (.17)	-.22 (.17)
Involved in other quality programs	.20 (.14)	.12 (.12)	.18 (.14)	.11 (.13)	.10 (.15)	.09 (.15)
<i>Related Program Experience</i>						
Past involvement in related programs	.35 ** (.16)	.26 * (.13)	.44 *** (.15)	.38 *** (.15)	.47 *** (.17)	.46 ** (.18)
Current involvement in related programs	-.30 * (.16)	-.37 *** (.13)	.01 (.15)	-.06 (.14)	.16 (.16)	.20 (.17)
<i>Expected Activity</i>						
Increase	.50 *** (.18)	.13 (.15)	.27 (.17)	.09 (.17)	.13 (.19)	.15 (.20)
Decrease	-.66 *** (.16)	-.16 (.14)	-.36 ** (.15)	.04 (.15)	.45 *** (.16)	.34 * (.18)
<i>Occupational Groups</i>						
Managers	-.42 (.26)	-.16 (.22)	-.09 (.25)	.20 (.24)	.07 (.27)	-.10 (.29)
Supervisors	-.35 * (.20)	-.17 (.17)	-.22 (.19)	-.04 (.18)	-.02 (.21)	-.08 (.22)
Professionals	-.39 ** (.19)	-.20 (.16)	-.23 (.18)	-.01 (.18)	-.03 (.20)	-.14 (.22)
Network Influences						
Supervisor's view		.24 *** (.07)		.19 ** (.08)		-.06 (.09)
Peers' view		.37 *** (.07)		.21 *** (.08)		-.08 (.09)
N	197	185	196	184	195	183
R ²	.36	.60	.25	.39	.12	.15

* p < .10 (two-tailed)

** P < .05 (two-tailed)

*** P < .01 (two-tailed)

Table 3. Importance of the Quality Initiative across Occupational Positions as Seen by Different Occupational Positions

Occupational Positions	View from Above	View from Peers	View from Below
Managers	–	2.33	2.98
Supervisors	2.35	2.63	3.64
Professionals	2.39	2.50	–
Front-line Workers	2.50	2.89	–