Transformational Leadership Style for Improving Public Telecommunication Operators' Operational Excellence

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ABSTRACT: As the global telecommunication sector undergoes a series of technological and operational changes and transformations, outcomes of this study revealed the use of transformational leadership becomes quite essential for smoothing seamless change, transition and transformation of telecommunication operators from the undesired old system to the new desired state. Due to the advancement of telecommunication technologies, the global telecommunication sector is undergoing significant radical changes. These changes require new approach to business operations as well as linkage with the market. Combined with a shift and transition of the mobile telecommunication technologies through the chronological generations of mobile telecommunication technologies like 1G(First Generation) to 5G(Fifth Generation) mobile technologies, this implies of all the leadership styles, transformation leadership is quite essential for leveraging the capabilities of the telecommunication businesses to adopt new technologies, practices, culture, approach to managing customer service quality and customer relationship management. Unfortunately, as telecommunication companies experience a series of disruptive changes that are aimed at creating and delivering the best products, services and processes for the customers, lack of transformational leadership has often created chaos and confusion that affect seamless change and transition to new ways that can bolster the operational excellence of the telecommunication companies. Telecommunication companies make a lot of technological and technical changes to their operations in order to respond to the changes in customer needs as well as the changing nature of market competition. However, challenges tend to arise from lack of the accompanying organisational culture change. New technologies are introduced, but the employees ignore them and continue to use the same old approaches. This undermines change in behaviours, practices and policies that are essential for enabling the use of new technologies to create and deliver the desired outcomes for the customers and the business. To respond to such challenges, this study concludes with the recommendation of the transformational leadership framework analogous to Anderson et al.,'s (1994) Quality Management Theory to argue that to attain operational excellence, transformational leadership tends to take center stage during the implementation of any changes aimed at bolstering a firm's operational excellence.

KEYWORDS: Challenges Of Public Telecommunication Operators, Public Telecommunication Operators, Leadership Challenges, Operational Challenges, Poor Customer Relationship Management, Technical Challenges, Transformational Leadership Challenges

INTRODUCTION

As multitudes of telecommunication companies are undergoing significant organisational change and transformation to support the introduction of new technologies and practices that aid effective response to the changes in market trends (Meena & Geng, 2022), transformational leadership becomes essential for influencing seamless transition from the old undesired system into the new preferred state of operation. It aids seamless change and transition to eliminate chaos, confusion and sabotage that often arise to undermine the telecommunication companies' operational excellence during the transition stage or even for a long period after the completion of the change implementation process. In the process of improving operational excellence, transformational leadership inspires, motivates, empowers and influences employees to adopt new practices and behaviours that can ensure the successful utilisation of the newly introduced technologies, structures, processes, resources, procedures and systems to bolster the creation and delivery of the best quality products/services to the designated target market.

Using individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, idealized influence and intellectual stimulation, transformational leadership provokes employees to evaluate, think and see for themselves whether or not the existing situation is suitable for the

organisation to undertake self-regeneration and survive into the future. It is through such initiatives that transformational leadership motivates ordinary employees to explore and adopt the most efficient and cost-effective ways of creating and delivering the best quality products/services to the customers.

With time, such a practice fosters the emergence and evolution of the culture of constant analysis and elimination of waste and costs to bolster the telecommunication company's overall improved operational excellence.

But even if that is the case, Bahamas Telecommunication Corporation (BTC) has not been able to realise such improved operational excellence from the implementation of a series of changes undertaken since its establishment in 1879 to improve its overall operational excellence (BTC, 2014). Though in some of the changes, the leadership style has been transformational, from its inception in 1879, BTC has adopted a more directive or even autocratic leadership style for the implementation of a series of changes that it has undertaken since 1879.

In 1879, BTC was created by just installing Marconi telephones in the Bahamas of which the Bahamas House of Assembly validated using an Act of Parliament to create Telephone System in the New Providence (Sowerby, 2021). Though using the old telephone system, Bahamas Government further formalized the operation of the Telephone System by creating the Bahamas Telecommunication Corporation (BTC) that still operates upto today. Through the Act, BTC was vested with the assets, powers and functions of the Bahamas Telecommunication Board. Though these changes were smooth, problems started to arise from the changes that were introduced from 2001(Sowerby, 2021).

From 2001, the global telecommunication industry had started to experience rapid technological advancement giving rise to the emergence of the mobile telephone technologies, internet, wireless and microwave technologies and fibre optics. These instigated the need for enormous changes to not only align BTC technologies with the technological advancement in the global telecommunication industry, but also to respond to a surge in the growth of BTC's clients.

To respond to the demands of clients that include clients for telephone services and internet, BTC was privatized for Cable and Wireless Communications (CWC) PLC to acquire 51% stake. In 2014, it was agreed that CWC would continue to have control and management of BTC (The Bahamas Guide, 2019). Hence to respond to the changes in the technological advancement and market needs, BTC and CWC embarked on changing landline copper cables to fibre optics, upgrade of network technologies and speed.

Besides introducing 4G Long-Term Evolution (LTE) Service for New Providence, Grand Bahma, Abaco and Eleuthera, it also launched the Pay-TV services and a range of various internet services. Despite the introduction of such significant changes, a lot of complaints have still arisen from BTC's failure to inspire and motivate its employees to complete the implementation of its technological change and transformation(Simon, 2023). Due to the failure of the completion of the required changes, complaints about service disruption as well as sudden blackout of the internet services have been an increasing trend

Most Bahamians widely complain about slow internet connectivity, sudden blackouts that disrupt their normal business operations and irresponsive Customer Contact Centre staff who take long or even never respond to customer queries (Simon, 2023). Combined with the overworked 35 BTC Contact Centre Staff that respond to 43,000 calls a month, the poor upgrade of the network technologies to support the exponential growth of BTC clients and less motivated staff, these have created a mess, confusion and disruption that affect BTC's overall operational excellence (Hartnell, 2023; Mckenzie, 2022).

The effect is that BTC has not only changed its leadership (Chief Executive Officer-CEOs) five times in five years, but also experienced a decline in its profitability in the financial year 2022/23(Smidts, 2024; Hartnell, 2023).

To therefore turn around the situation, the new leadership promises to accelerate the changes, but it seems without the adoption of the appropriate transformational leadership style, BTC will fail to achieve any enormous positive outcomes that can bolster its overall operational excellence (Marlon, 2012; Hartnell, 2023). As reflected in the research aim, objectives and questions below, it is such dynamics of transformational leadership and operational excellence-related changes that motivate this study to explore how transformational leadership would spur successful change implementation to bolster BTC's overall operational excellence.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research approach was used as the research philosophy and method for the study. Qualitative research approach refers to the epistemological process that focuses on eliciting and gathering detailed insights and narratives as the basis for improving the understanding of the concept being investigated (Quintela et al., 2024). This contrasts with the quantitative approach that uses certain scientific parameters, assumptions and reasoning as the prerequisite for gathering the required information that improves the understanding of the concept being examined (Whittemore & Gray, 2024).

However, this study used the quantitative approach because the nature of the facts which is required for understanding the transformational leadership approaches that public telecommunication operators use as well as the challenges that they face would require the utilisation of the qualitative research approach that focuses on eliciting detailed underlying facts and narratives about the concept being investigated.

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Usage of a qualitative approach would therefore enable the study to elicit detailed insights that can improve the decision on the precise improvement measures that public telecommunication operators must adopt. To accomplish that, the use of exploratory research design was integrated with the use of the qualitative research method that uses integrative review as one of the methods for qualitative critical content analysis (Welma et al., 2024). Integrative review is one of the methods for qualitative critical content analysis that focuses on gathering and analysing even the non-peer-reviewed articles in order to find detailed answers to the phenomenon being investigated(Welma et al., 2024).

Just like systematic review and meta-synthesis, integrative review is often used in situations where a lot has been published on a particular phenomenon, but without addressing a particular critical question. Given the enormous information that has been published on the leadership, change implementation and operational excellence challenges that public telecommunication operators are experiencing, it was found suitable to use integrative review to analyse academic studies as well as media reports on the challenges affecting public telecommunication operators. To accomplish that, the use of integrative review entailed the application of four main steps encompassing (Whittemore & Gray, 2024):

— **Formulation of the Integrative Review Questions:** In alignment with the research objectives and questions for the study, the integrative review questions were formulated to evaluate the kinds of changes being undertaken to bolster public telecommunication operators' operational excellence as well as the transformational leadership approach being used, the challenges being experienced and the transformational leadership improvement initiatives that public telecommunication operators must adopt. Once the integrative review questions are formulated, the literature search process was undertaken.

— **Literature Search:** Literature search was conducted to extract and evaluate only the information which is more responsive to the integrative review questions. It was guided by the keywords like "Challenges of public telecommunication operators", "public telecommunication operators' Leadership Challenges" "public telecommunication operators' Operational Challenges", public telecommunication operators' poor customer relationship management", "public telecommunication operators' Technical Challenges affecting Customer Satisfaction", public telecommunication operators' Change Implementation", public telecommunication operators' Transformational Leadership Challenges". When using these keywords, the search process will entail the use of search engines like Google and Web of Science.

— **Data Extraction:** In the process of literature search, it is only the articles and literature that respond to the critical questions raised about public telecommunication operators' transformational leadership challenges that were extracted and used in the study. Other inclusion/exclusion criteria entailed ensuring that only the articles and literature published in English in the period between 2015 and 2024 that were included in the study. Articles that only display the abstracts without full texts were excluded. Once all the required articles and literature were extracted, they were subjected to thematic and narrative analysis.

— **Data Analysis:** Thematic and narrative analysis was used to extract themes, subthemes and their accompanying portions of texts that explain the kinds of changes being undertaken to bolster public telecommunication operators' operational excellence as well as the transformational leadership approach being used, the challenges being experienced and the transformational leadership improvement initiatives that public telecommunication operators must adopt.

During the integrative review process, all these initiatives were integrated with the measures for enhancing credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Improving credibility and trustworthiness of the study entailed the improvement of the credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability of the study (Quintela et al., 2024). Since the study did not involve direct extraction of data from human subjects, it is only honesty, integrity and avoidance of the conflict of interest that were adhered to as part of the research ethical considerations.

FINDINGS

In line with the integrative review questions, the overall findings of the study are presented and discussed according to three sections encompassing:

— Transformational Leadership for Managing Change and Transformation in the Telecommunication Sector
— Transformational Leadership as a Driver of Telecommunication Companies' Operational Excellence
— Inhibitors of Operational Excellence during Telecommunication Companies' Change Implementation

Details of these are evaluated as follows.

Transformational Leadership for Managing Change and Transformation in the Telecommunication Sector

As the global telecommunication sector undergoes a series of technological and operational changes and transformations, the use of transformational leadership becomes quite essential for ensuring the seamless change, transition and transformation of

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telecommunication operators from the undesired old system to the new desired state (Saeed et al., 2020). Due to the advancement of telecommunication technologies, the global telecommunication sector is undergoing significant radical changes. These changes require new approach to business operations as well as linkage with the market. Commencing from the shift of the telegraph system to Alexander Bell's Telephone System, the global telecommunication segment has transitioned through the fixed copper transmitted telephone lines to usage of optic fibres and then subsequently the wireless, microwaves and mobile telecommunication technologies (Ramkumar & Johnson, 2018).

Through these changes, the global telecommunication system is undergoing significant de-regulations and liberalization to spur the greater involvement of the private sector in the previously government owned telecommunication operations. Combined with a shift and transition of the mobile telecommunication technologies through the chronological generations of mobile telecommunication technologies like 1G(First Generation), 2 (Second Generation, 3G (Third Generation), 4G (Fourth Generation) and then 5G(Fifth Generation) mobile technologies(Kishor et al., 2020), this implies of all the leadership styles, transformation leadership is quite essential for leveraging the capabilities of the telecommunication businesses to adopt new technologies, practices, culture, approach to managing customer service quality and customer relationship management.

Unfortunately even if that is the case, there have been practices in which the adopted leadership styles clash and conflict with the fundamental principles of transformational leadership style (Sartal & Vázquez, 2017). It is not only such a challenge that motivates this study, but also the epistemological gap arising from the limited studies that evaluate the usage of transformational leadership as a driver of change implementation in the constantly changing global telecommunication sector.

Yet as studies create such a gap, transformational leadership is proved across empirical studies in various sectors to significantly influence the successful organisational change and transformation. Derived from Burns' (2004) Seminal Paper on "Transformational Leadership", the concept of transformational leadership has evolved to connote the leadership style that requires thorough diagnosis of the organisation's internal and external situations to influence the setting of the required vision. Visualization is followed by inspiring every employee to work towards the attainment of the vision of moving the organisation from the undesired status quo to the new desired state of performance (Yang, 2022).

Transformational leadership is a leadership style as well as a strategic process of diagnosing, visualizing, inspiring and influencing the subordinates to strive to aid the seamless organisation's transition from the undesired state of operation and performance to the desired new situation and state that the business ought to be. It is a strategic problem-solving initiative that strives to move the organisation from the problematic situation to the new desired state of operation and performance. Transformational leadership is part of the change management strategy that focuses on aiding the organisation's seamless change and transition from one state of performance to another (Le & Lei, 2019).

Through their charisma, transformational leaders inspire subordinates to analyse and visualize where the organisation will be if the current practices, technology, products and values are abandoned in favour of the introduction of new ones. Using individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, idealized influence and intellectual stimulation, transformational leadership provokes employees to evaluate, think and see for themselves whether or not the existing situation is suitable for the organisation to undertake self-regeneration and survive into the future(Nogueira et al., 2018).

Through individualized consideration, transformational leaders use the empathetic approach in which they tend to evaluate and analyse the situation from the perspective of others. They tend to value consultation and engagement so as to understand not only how the present situation affects everyone, but also how the new solutions to be introduced will create value for everyone. Through such approach, transformational leaders often get everyone thinking, speaking and working towards getting the organisation out of the undesired situations(Sulistiyani & Rahardja, 2018). As this creates some form of a concerted effort, transformational leaders also inspire. By recognising the value and importance of everyone in the organisation, transformational leaders inspire and motivate everyone to voluntarily get involved in the implementation of the required change and transformational initiatives.

Through idealized influence, transformational leaders act with respect, integrity, honesty, empathy and practical examples to set the form of admirable behaviours that must be emulated and exhibited by everyone if the organisation is to attain the desired change and transformation outcomes(Saeed et al., 2020).

In that process, transformational leaders provoke subordinates to think and take risks to challenge the status quo. This form of intellectual stimulation motivates and inspires employees to think of the best course of action that the organisation must take to realise the desired change and transformational goals and objectives. Though transformational leadership uses elements of democratic and participative leadership approach, it still differs from democratic, participative, autocratic, transactional and deliberative leadership styles (Sartal & Vázquez, 2017). Unlike democratic leadership that focuses on using popular decisions, transformational leaders inspire employees to adopt even a position that seems not popular with everyone but with a lot of common fruitful future values.

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Just like transformational leadership, participative leadership focuses on consulting and engaging everyone to get involved in the accomplishment of the required activities. But transformational leadership goes the extra length to empower subordinates to think and come up with individual best options that can easily aid the organisation's seamless transition from the existing system to the new system (Sartal & Vázquez, 2017).

Contrasted with the use of force and threats in autocratic leadership style, transformational leadership inspires, influences and motivates the employees to think and act instead of using force, threats or coercion. Even in the situation of where the reward is insufficient as it can be in transactional leadership, transformational leadership can still inspire and motivate the employees to see the bigger picture and work for change and transformation(Saeed et al., 2020).

Though such an approach may require the use of the deliberative leadership style that places stringent attention on procedures, transformational leaders instead provoke subordinates to challenge the present assumptions, norms and rules in order to come up with the best approach that can create value for everyone in the organisation. It is through such unique leadership approach that transformational leadership can significantly drive the successful implementation of change aimed at improving operational excellence in the constantly changing contemporary telecommunication organisations (Sartal & Vázquez, 2017).

Transformational Leadership as a Driver of Telecommunication Companies' Operational Excellence

During the implementation of organisational changes, transformational leadership enhances the complete transition to the new system to eliminate glitches and incidents that undermine operational excellence (Van Assen, 2018). In that process, transformational leaders enhance thorough diagnosis to motivate top management to undertake the required structural, technological, process, and cultural changes to bolster the improved operational excellence of the telecommunication companies being changed. It motivates and inspires all the employees to become change agents as well as transformational leaders at the work team level, unit, departmental and the organisational levels (Nabhan et al., 2018).

Contrasted with resisting and sabotaging change, transformational leaders have the capabilities of inspiring employees even without monetary reward to put extra effort to aid the attainment of the best outcomes. It empowers employees to think and rethink to offer the best solution even without management intervention (Van Assen, 2018). It is such initiatives that bolster improved operational excellence. It bolsters the capabilities of the employees to abandon the old system and adopt the new processes, technology, structures, resources, culture and procedures to create the best results not just for the customers, but also for the telecommunication business(Zhang & Zhang, 2016).

Through such initiatives, transformational leaders tend to drive improvement of changes that bolster the improved operational efficiency of the technological companies. Deriving from Bilal et al.'s (2020) analogy, operational excellence connotes the strategic process of analysing, creating and delivering the best values to the customers using the relatively most efficient and lowest cost operational systems and processes. To attain the desired outcomes, operational excellence requires the adoption of a customer-centric business approach, total quality management, employee empowerment, effective leadership, employee motivation, technological improvement and usage of continuous improvement business philosophy(Hafeez & Wahab, 2016).

Through such initiatives, operational excellence strives to use the most efficient processes, technology and committed workforce to create and deliver the best quality to the customers. It requires the continuous analysis and elimination of areas of wastes and delays to bolster a business' overall operational efficiency.

Though the concept of operational excellence emerged from Talyor's (1919) "Scientific Management" that emphasised the scientific approach to management, it subsequently evolved through Fordism that introduced the assembly-line production system and then the Toyota Production System that emphasises the use of lean approach, cost minimisation and identification and elimination of wastes as the core initiatives for bolstering a firm's operational excellence.

As Motorola Corporation, a telecommunication company introduced six-sigma to minimise the rate of the product's variability from its specification as well as to reduce the rate of defects in the products produced and delivered to the customers, the nature of operational excellence took a statistical approach of diagnosing and improving the business nature of operations and processes to create and deliver products using the most efficient and cost-effective ways (Wahab et al., 2019). Such quests led to the evolution of the notion of operational excellence from just a once-in-a-while event to integrate Peter Drucker's concept of "Continuous Improvement". Continuous improvement requires continuous thinking and innovation to introduce the best processes that create and deliver the best products that respond or even exceed the unfolding changes in customer expectations and preferences (Hafeez et al., 2023).

Unfortunately, as telecommunication companies experience a series of disruptive changes that are aimed at creating and delivering the best products, services and processes for the customers, lack of transformational leadership has often created chaos and confusion that affect the seamless change and transition to the new ways that can bolster the operational excellence of the telecommunication companies(Mitchell, 2015).

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Even where an attempt is made to introduce a transformational leadership approach, there are still a combination of change-related challenges that emerge to undermine the telecommunication companies' operational excellence during the transition process.

Inhibitors of Operational Excellence during Telecommunication Companies' Change Implementation

As telecommunication companies make a lot of technological and technical changes in the way they operate in order to respond to the changes in customer needs as well as the changing nature of market competition, challenges tend to arise from lack of the accompanying organisational culture change. In effect, new technologies are introduced, but the employees ignore them and continue to use the same old approaches (Nair & Thomas, 2020). This undermines the change in behaviours, practices and policies that are essential for enabling the new technologies to create and deliver the desired outcomes for the customers and the business. Yet, as the technology and the organisational culture change, the structure of the organisation may also still remain the same to affect the quests to create and deliver the best services/products to customers using the most efficient and cost-effective processes (Ojha, 2015).

Combined with the resisting, de-motivated and less-cooperating employees, all these undermine the realisation of the good changes that can bolster the improvement of the telecommunication company's operational excellence. Though transformational leadership and management would be effective for dealing with such issues, in most of the cases, the telecommunication companies use an indirect autocratic leadership style or even directive leadership styles (Nabhan et al., 2018).

Because they deal with mainly technical issues, usage of indirect autocratic leadership style often entails the introduction of several operational guidelines and human resource management rules. Such rules may clearly dictate that if the employee finds it difficult to thrive, then the exit is quite wide (Zhang & Zhang, 2016).

In such cases, the leaders do not dictate but refer to the rules. The consequence is that when new complex changes are introduced, it becomes difficult for the leaders to engage and blend with the ordinary employees to get them inspired and motivated to help the organisation realise the desired changes. These challenges subsequently converge to create chaos, sabotage and confusion that affect the realisation of change aimed at bolstering the telecommunication company's operational excellence (Mitchell, 2015; Nair & Thomas, 2020). As reflected below, such challenges raise a lot of managerial implications for the contemporary managers.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Drawing from Deming's Quality Management Concept, Anderson et al.,'s (1994) theory argues that transformational leadership tends to take center stage during the initiatives for the implementation of quality management changes aimed at bolstering a firm's operational excellence. In effect, the use of quality management to enhance a firm's operational excellence requires the utilisation of seven main elements encompassing adoption of visionary leadership, internal and external cooperation, learning, change and transformation of the organisational systems, process management, evaluation of process outcomes and employee fulfillment, continuous improvement and customer satisfaction.

As reflected in Figure 1, visionary leadership measures whether business leaders have the capabilities to evaluate the situation, visualize and mobilise, inspire and influence the employees and other stakeholders to work towards the realisation of such a vision. Visionary leadership examines whether to achieve the desired outcomes, leaders engage in coaching, mentoring, empowering, inspiring and developing the employees to work and attain the best outcomes for the organisation.

To achieve these outcomes, element of internal and external cooperation measures the extent to which business leaders initiate and foster partnerships and collaborations not only across work teams and the departments to eliminate silos that affect operational efficiency, but also with the external partners and stakeholders like suppliers, transporters and financiers.
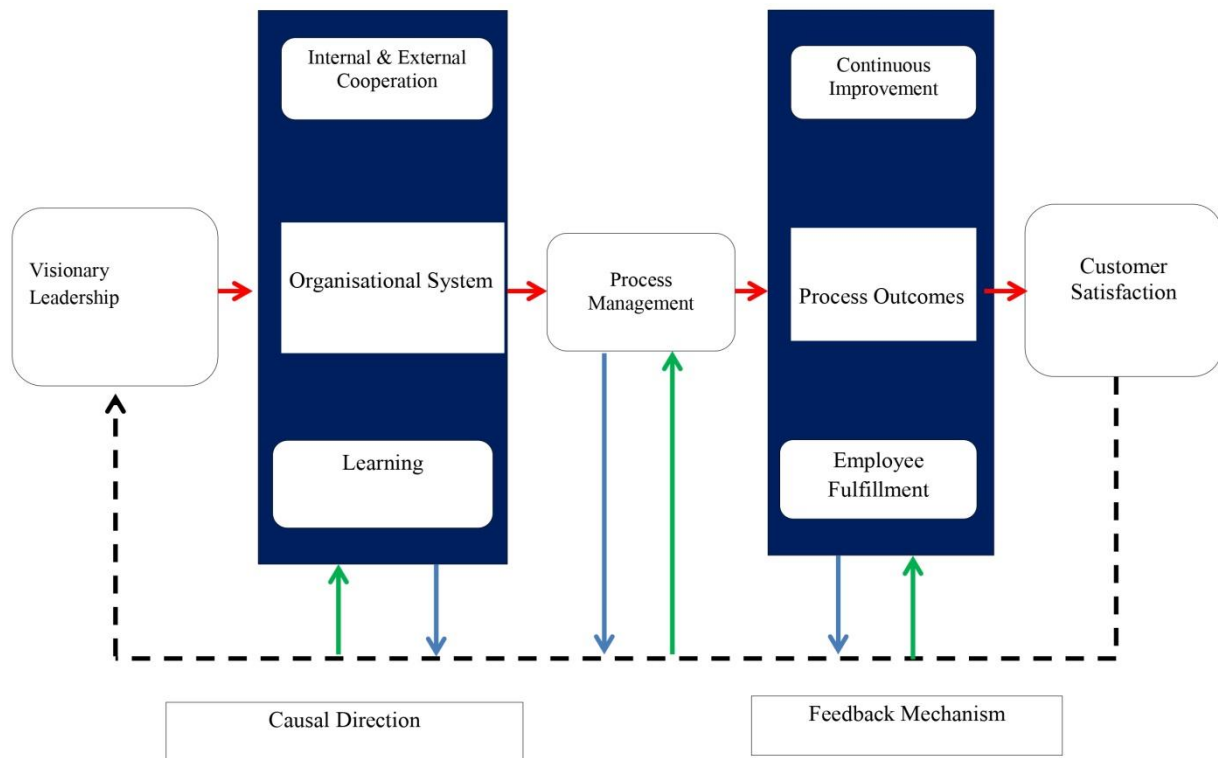
Figure 1: Conceptual/theoretical framework as Based on Anderson et al.,'s (1994) Theory of Quality Management for Enhancing Operational Excellence

It also measures how a business is able to cooperate with the competitors to acquire and share new capabilities that change and reshape the nature of industry game to its advantage. In that process, learning element measures the extent to which the business continuously engages in the evaluation, acquisition and application of new insights, skills, competencies and experiences to improve its overall operational excellence.

As this recognises learning as critical for enhancing operational excellence, process management requires continuous analysis, identification and elimination of costly processes as well as areas of waste. It requires the utilisation of the critical process management tools like six-sigma, statistical process analysis, benchmarking and management-by-objectives to enhance the attainment of the desired level of operational excellence. Continuous improvement measures and improves business capabilities to create and introduce more novel values using highly efficient and cost-effective processes.

Employee fulfillment discerns the extent to which the employees are satisfied, motivated and willing to put in extra effort to improve the business' operational excellence. These must improve customer satisfaction and if the customers are not satisfied, it implies the business leaders must still set new vision and insights to delight customers and bolster the business' overall operational excellence and effective performance.

Anderson et al.,'s (1994) argument placing visionary leadership at the center of the change and transformation initiatives aimed at bolstering a business' operational excellence not only responds to the operational excellence challenges which BTC is experiencing, but also echoes the general theories and literature on transformational leadership, change management and operational excellence.

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