Exploration of the key evolutionary operational improvement activities

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore crucial evolutionary operational improvement initiatives related to quality management, and the emphasis is on the lessons learned from operational improvement practices in Taiwan.
Design/methodology/approach – To understand a firm’s evolutionary operational improvement activities holistically and deeply, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with executives from four firms in Taiwan. The grounded theory method is adopted in this study to depict the profile of the key evolutionary operational improvement activities.
Findings – Based on the results of the qualitative empirical study, six major dimensions of operational improvement are identified. Further, eight empirical propositions are proposed with detailed descriptions.
Research limitations/implications – The results are based on international manufacturing companies in Taiwan, and thus cannot be generalized to situations in other emerging countries and industries without further research.
Practical implications – By referring to the results of this work, managers can better understand the relationships among operational improvement activities, and thus increase the chances to benefit from operational improvement initiatives.
Originality/value – This paper adds to the literature by providing new empirical insights into the relationships among operational improvement activities.

Keywords Taiwan, Manufacturing industries, Operations management, Quality management, Supply chain management, Supply chain quality management, Operational improvement, Case studies

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Operational effectiveness and efficiency are essential to superior performance, which is the primary goal of any enterprise (Porter, 1996). One of the most important ways to enhance operational effectiveness and efficiency is to pursue quality management, which has received significant attention from both manufacturing and service sectors. The ISO 9000 (International Organization for Standardization) standards, for example, aim to assist companies in establishing a solid quality system to maintain the quality level. Many organizations have chosen to go further with total quality management...