

THE FUTURE FOR QUALITY MANAGERS

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Working Paper 12/00
March 2000

Abstract

A review on current quality management literature discloses a conglomeration of sentiments amongst quality managers with regards to the future of their quality profession. These sentiments can primarily be grouped into two major categories: 1) that quality managers will no longer play a role in functional management, as quality will become an integral part of the organisations; alternatively 2) they will play a significantly different role, leading to a specialised job design.

Despite the fact that many voiced their concerns regarding the future of the quality profession, little formal research has been conducted to address this issue. Thus, the significance of undertaking this research aims to verify and substantiate their sentiments. Findings of the research may also contribute as a signal to quality managers with regards to their future roles and may inspire them to better prepare themselves to meet future quality related endeavours.

It is important not to prophesise the precise future role of the quality managers, as no one outside the psychic industry will claim capable of it. Rather, the research endeavours to prognosticate the role of quality manager in the next decade by conducting interviews with various professionals in the quality related fields, testing the significance of research questions generated from these interviews through surveys and reviewing current employment advertisements. Thus synthesising the results from the above mentioned means to predict the role of quality managers in the years beyond 2000.

THE FUTURE FOR QUALITY MANAGERS

INTRODUCTION

Despite the increase in popularity of the quality manager and the expansion of its job function, an interesting yet ironic phenomenon has surfaced - quality departments in some organisations are becoming smaller or disbanding; and many quality professionals are likely to be the first victims of redundancy (Larson, 1998; Silverman & Propst, 1996; Hoerl, 1998). According to some articles, such a phenomenon appears to stem from an emergence of a new quality paradigm - "Quality, A Way of Life" (Silverman & Propst, 1996; Sutter, 1996; Wilson, 1996). This paradigm purports that quality shall neither be the responsibility of a department nor the function of the quality manager, rather, it shall be a value shared amongst everyone in the organisation - a value no different from integrity or honesty (Sutter, 1996). Several prominent organisations such as Motorola, Solectron and Hewlett-Packard have embraced such a notion and had successfully integrated quality into all areas of the organisations (Suzik, 1999; Hoerl, 1998; McCabe, 1997). If all organisations begin to emulate the success of these organisations by integrating quality into all job functions, question is, where will the quality managers fit the structure?

It is no wonder that *Quality Progress* devoted its July 1996 issue to the discussion of the question as pessimism appears to permeate amongst the quality professionals regarding their future. The subsequent December issue of *Quality Progress* presented the readers' responses to those noted perceptions about their future. In summary, one particular school of thought was distinctively apparent: readers believed that the traditional role of the quality manager will fade and new roles and responsibilities will emerge. If so, quality managers in the future will be change agents focusing on leadership, teambuilding and interpersonal skills. Such attributes are expected to enable quality managers to assist organisations to survive the increasingly competitive global market in the future (Stratton, 1996).

How do we marry this pessimism with Juran's view (1994) who warned that competitive strategies based on quality might not be possible in the future. He believes that, in the future, extraordinary levels of quality will be met across the board and will be regarded as a given. He also concluded that such a future business environment would result in a decline in the need for quality managers. A question surfaces as a result of Juran's article: Will the changes in the future business environment lead to the eventual extinction of quality managers?

Alternatively according to Gershon (1996), the elimination of quality managers will not occur in the future. In his article "A look at the past to predict the future", Gershon adopted an optimistic view on the future of quality managers. He agrees with the other writers that quality will be integrated into all departments of the organisation in the future, however, the total elimination of the quality managers will not occur. Such belief stems from the increasing dependence on technology and complexity of product and services. As society becomes increasingly dependent on technological support systems to maintain their daily activities, there will be an increasing need for the services of quality managers to match the increasing dependence on the quality of products and services.

Undoubtedly, the surfacing of such a phenomenon appears to suggest the beginning of a new 'quality era'. However, more importantly such a 'quality evolution' has significant impact on a group of professionals - the quality managers, and how their roles will change in the future business environment, is the question.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

In her recent study, Waddell (1998b) undertook a detailed investigation on the role and responsibilities of quality managers in Australia. In her study, one thousand randomly selected quality managers were chosen and surveyed. Results from her study showed that a 'typical' quality manager has a complex role with diverse responsibilities. Amongst these quality managers, only seventeen per cent of them have a

background of Productions/Operations Management and fifty-seven per cent had a tertiary education. Such a result was a surprise as the literature suggested otherwise (Muhlemann et al, 1992). The study also revealed that seventy-nine per cent of respondents with the title of Quality Manager have more responsibilities other than quality – with Human Resource orientated functions being the majority (24%).

Management Responsibilities Other Than Quality

<i>Functional Areas</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Functional Areas</i>	<i>%</i>
HRM/OH&S/Training/IR	24	Sales/Marketing	8
IT/Systems/Technical/Production	20	Customer Service	5
CEO/Senior Management	16	Other (unspecified)	18
Accountant/Financial Controller	9		

Apart from the above, the study also attempted to investigate into their perceptions of the future. Thirty-two per cent of these managers could not see further development of the role of quality manager within the company whereas in the future they would remain with the company but in another capacity. The study also identified quality manager's future concerns being concentrated on the increasing complexity of products and services and the rapid growth in technological support. In addition, these managers revealed that they are inadequately prepared for the future changes in the business environment.

Quality Managers' Perceptions of their Future

<i>'Position' Future</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>'Personal' Future</i>	<i>%</i>
No Change	32	Another role in the firm	17
Smaller/changing to internal consultant/subcontract	19	Remain at the same level/same position	5
Larger job in the future	9	Move to another company	1
Tied to ISO9000/other quality certification	6	Other (various responses)	3
Tied to market perception of Quality Management	4		
Unknown (unspecified)	6		

In their research, Kaye and Dyason (1995) attempted to investigate the reasons why many organisations remain in the early quality eras and what are the factors that prevented them from making the transition to the era of strategic quality management. In addition, they tried to identify the characteristic of those organisations which has successfully integrated their quality initiatives.

The study examined the characteristics of 13 organisations at various stages of their quality initiatives. Face-to-face interviews were carried out to obtain in-depth understanding of each organisation. Findings of the research revealed that leadership, strategic quality orientation, continuous improvement, people management and business results were critical to the achievement of the quality initiative being undertaken. Factors that prevented some organisation from making the transition were lack of communication, failure to build a continuous improvement foundation and a lack of focus on the customer, both internal and external. Finally the research identified that companies which have successfully integrated quality into the organisation demonstrated horizontal and vertical integration of continuous improvement activities into the whole organisation and possessed the mechanisms for continuous improvement.

David Mallen (1997) considers the role of quality manager in today's world where "Quality is everybody's business". He has noted that:

- some still have the traditional role of looking after teams of inspectors where the organisation believes that quality must be inspected-in;
- some have handed over their inspectors role to Production or Operations to become data collectors and performance monitors;

- some have expanded their role into the human resource and training areas; and
- others no longer have a job.

Evidence of the this uncertainty in the future of quality management can be identified in job advertisements where positions with a 'quality' role have been steadily declining over the past three years, the separate quality department is becoming no longer relevant. He considers two options facing today's Quality Manager:

1. Hand over the 'quality' responsibilities and duties to other employees and departments making them accountable for their actions and processes and thereby training them how to measure their performance outcomes. This would integrate the philosophy into all aspects of the organisation and 'quality' per se would become indistinguishable - "Quality is everybody's business".
2. Expand the role to include more company-wide responsibilities such as training, improvement projects, customer service, business policy formulation etc. This would increase the scope of the existing quality manager and ultimately have a more proactive role and contribution to developing Business Excellence - "Quality is business".

A survey of one month's employment advertisements in a major Australian newspaper produced some interesting results which lend support to the above options. Thirty-three advertisement were found in February 1996 compared to twenty-eight in February 1999. Only positions with the word 'quality' in the heading were considered.

The results were then divided into three areas.

Position Title

In 1996, Quality Officer, Quality Manager and Quality Engineer were the main position titles, although some others were more innovative such as QAQC Manager, QA Administrator, QA Expert and Quality Professional - one did not even give a title. In 1999, Quality Engineer and Quality Technician were more prominent.

Advertised Titles

	1996	1999
QA Officer	7	
Quality Manager	5	3
Quality Engineer	5	7
QA Manager	4	2
Quality Professional	3	-
QA Expert	2	-
Quality Technician	-	5
QA Associate	-	2
Laboratory Technician	-	2

Responsibilities and Duties

The responsibilities and duties covered a range from the traditional to the more company-wide levels of responsibility. Some were highly amusing. Others supported the thinking that the role of Quality Manager is one of the least understood, not only by the organisations but also by recruitment consultants that place the advertisements.

Responsibilities and Duties

	1996	1999
Customer/Supplier Liaison	14	7
ISO9000	10	2
Develop tests and inspections	9	4
Quality assurance systems	8	7
Develop team culture	7	-
TQM/Continuous Improvement	6	4
Quality Planning	6	1
Documentation	4	11
Auditing	3	8
Off-tool samples	-	8
QA system improvement	-	7
Training	3	6

The advertisements appear support the prediction that the future role of Quality Managers is being more company-wide. This is illustrated by the following table where the left column is a list of the main responsibilities and duties advertised. The right column lists the other people in the organisation who should perform these duties.

Positions Advertised

<i>Main responsibilities and duties of 'quality' positions advertised</i>	<i>Possible alternative person or department who could perform the task</i>
Customer-supplier liaison	Sales/Purchasing/Customer Service
ISO 9000 management system	General Manager
Develop testing and inspection systems	R&D/Design/Production/Operations
Quality assurance systems	General Manager
Develop a high performance, team-based culture	General Manager
Continuous Improvement/TQM program	Personnel/Training
Quality and process planning	Production/Operations
Hands-on	Production/Operations
Pre-sales support and off-tool sample submissions	Production/Operations/Sales/Design
Statistical processes control and data analysis	Production/Operations
Co-ordination of corrective actions	General Manager
Quality Audits	Auditors (selected from various departments)
Operator training	Personnel/Training
Document control	Administration
Company performance reporting	General Manager
Be link between staff and management	General Manager
Maintenance of the calibration system	Technical Manager
Sell new ideas/Convert attitudes	General Manager
Work re-design	Production/Operations

Qualifications, Skills and Experience

In 1996, the major qualification required was a tertiary degree. Other main skills and experience could be categorised as ISO 9000 experience, communication skills, QA experience, computer skills and management ability. In 1999, 'computer skills' had replaced 'ISO9000 experience' as the main skill requirement and it no longer appears. So if Quality Managers move into general business management they are going to need formal qualifications in Management, Engineering, Psychology, Training, Sales and Customer Service if the above responsibilities are to be accepted. Inter-personal skills and people management abilities must be high on the list. The title "Quality Manager" no longer seems appropriate.

Qualifications/Skills/Experience/Competencies

	1996	1999
Tertiary Degree	15	14
ISO 9000 experience	14	3
Communication	14	6
QA experience	11	6
Computer skills	6	7
Team skills	6	5
Processing/Manufacturing	6	4
Auditing	5	4
Industry Standards & Systems experience	1	5

An example of the new expanded quality role is at a recent Australian Quality Award winning company in Melbourne Australia. They realised that quality involves everything a business does and has expanded the quality role as shown in the following duty statement.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Department: *Quality Management and Development*

Title: *Manager*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Leadership and management development</i> • <i>Quality management systems</i> • <i>Customer satisfaction management</i> • <i>Engineering and technical development</i> • <i>Performance appraisal management</i> • <i>Training course design and delivery</i> • <i>Training needs analysis</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Skills analysis and personal development</i> • <i>Team facilitation and development</i> • <i>Software applications and training</i> • <i>Reliability and quality engineering support</i> • <i>Business process improvement</i> • <i>Health and safety management systems</i> • <i>Environmental management systems</i>
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Quality Managers who have seen the change approaching are participating more and more in the broader issues of running a business, particularly as they demonstrate how teamwork and continuous process improvement contributes to the bottom line. As they increase their qualifications and experience they are then in a strong position for promotion. Quality Managers who have wider experience in the business are

providing a resource for future top management positions - one that was perhaps overlooked in the past. It used to be that candidates for senior management positions came from finance, engineering and marketing areas but ex-quality managers must now be added to the list.

As 'Quality Management' becomes synonymous with 'Business Management' and Quality Management Systems become just part of an overall Integrated Management System, the 'quality industry' and 'wider quality movement' will disappear. The separate quality management role is evolving as businesses are evolving and senior management roles are overlapping. Quality Managers are being phased-out but they have at least one alternative to attain new skills and move into a wider business role with a new title, eg Business Improvement Facilitator, Management System Compliance Manager, General Manager etc. "Businesses need to change their understanding of quality; it is no longer a department, a discipline, or a measure of compliance or conformance. Quality is a value no different from integrity or honesty. It is not an objectively measured attribute as it is a way of business ... There is no acceptable level of quality - products and services either delight or they are doomed" (Sutter, 1996)

IS QUALITY JUST ONE STEP IN MANAGEMENT EVOLUTION?

Although there is still much debate about whether quality represents another example of Management By New Names, or MBNN (Connor, 1997), and therefore nothing more than 'old wine in a new bottle' (Hoff, 1995:202), no one can deny the widespread use of quality management principles. For example, by 1997 91% of the Fortune 500 companies were operating under a formal quality 'program' (Lackritz, 1997).

The same survey also showed that even though many of the organisations had fallen short in implementing their quality programs, the majority of respondents genuinely believed that their organisations had benefited from the adoption of a Quality Management philosophy. In general quality programs are most often reported to lead to improvements in error rates and cost reductions (De Cock & Hipkin, 1997) which in turn generate increased market share, profitability and growth levels (Omachonu & Ross, 1994).

Unfortunately however the promise of a unified set of principles that would enable managers to more easily make decisions, caused not only the rapid dispersion of the Quality Management concept but also, in some cases, misunderstandings as to which tools and techniques could be used in certain circumstances. This was perhaps the first formally recognised in the International Quality Study (IQS) which referred specifically to the danger of using TQM techniques in a universalistic manner. The report stated that "practices that are beneficial at one level of organisational performance show no association - or even negative association - with performance at other levels. As a result a number of organisations are expending a tremendous amount of resources and energy on practices that have little or no impact for them" (Schaaf, 1993:9).

According to Sitkin, Sutcliffe & Schroeder (1994) the marketing of quality Management has led increasingly toward highly rational techniques and pre packaged approaches and away from selectively incorporating quality management as it fits the specific situational requirements of the organisation. Indeed this may explain the large number of articles and books focussing on the 'failure of quality management' (see for example Cole, 1995; Holoviak, 1995; Connor, 1997 and Feinberg, 1998) and the view that Quality "programs died a quiet death, never fulfilling their initial promise" (De Cock & Hipkin, 1997:663).

WHAT IS CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICE?

The perceived failure of quality management approaches resulted in the emergence of another 'new' management technique that became known as Business Process Reengineering (BPR). This management technique replaced quality management as the hottest topic in the business press from early 1993 onwards (De Cock & Hipkin, 1997:161), and was seen as "one of the most popular management interventions of the 1990s" (Cole, 1996:77).

Initiated by a couple of landmark publications (Hammer, 1990; Davenport & Short, 1990; and later Hammer & Champy, 1993), BPR was promoted as the radical alternative to the desire 'not to change too much' that plagued organisations. A fundamental aim of BPR was therefore to achieve business results in less than three to four years, the typical time usually required to achieve results in quality management programs (Born, 1994).

In an era where organisations were forced to reduce expenses and increase productivity, BPR was seen as the key to radical business transformation. By emphasising the use of modern information technology interest shifted from 'how can we do this better' to 'how can we do it differently' (Burdett, 1994:8).

By 1996 58% of Australia's top 500 companies has already implemented BPR (O'Neil & Sohal in Griffin, 1996) but to the dismay of many proponents as much as 70% of reengineering efforts failed to achieve the goals set for them (Higginson & Waxler, 1994:5).

Current speculation as to whether BPR has replaced Quality Management suggests that the two approaches are complementary (Burdett, 1994). In particular it has been found that the existence of a standard documented system of continuous improvement such as ISO 9000 can actually reduce the risk of BPR failure (Collins & Hill, 1998:5). This is obviously because the concept of change is already embedded in the culture of organisations and standard operating procedures provide the "necessary discipline and control" (Collins & Hill, 1998:6) required to maintain order in times of organisational uncertainty.

Thus, although BPR has not been entirely successful, variations of the original 'extreme view' adopted by Hammer (1990) now referred to as Process Improvement, Process Redesign (Recardo & Jones, 1997) or more generally Business Process Management (De Toro & McCabe, 1997), have established a firm foothold in current management thought. Rather than been seen as a competing technique, BPR/M is viewed as the newest addition to the Quality framework.

As Allender (1994) explains this is because if a company only progresses through a slow rate of improvements, it risks its ability to develop a competitive product for market contest. On the other hand if the company only reengineers (ie BPR or BPM) it will be changing the same process every couple of months and thereby incurring an enormous cost.

Thus current practice appears to dictate the simultaneous use of both management techniques so that when a new process has been implemented a sometimes painful process of continuous improvement is required before radical change is again needed (See for example Miller & Freison, 1980; Born, 1994; Bricknell, 1996; and Leach, 1996).

FUTURE MANAGEMENT THEORY AND FATE OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT

While it appears the Quality Management has been "remarkably durable, sinking deep roots in many companies" (Cole, 1997:63), it was previously noted that management is a continually changing field. Thus it is of no surprise to find that other management movements such as Business Process Management (BPM), Business Performance Facilitation (BPF), Business Improvement Management (BIM), Risk Management (RM), Knowledge Management (KM) and Organisation Learning (OL) are already gaining popularity.

With these other 'newer' management theories gaining increasing momentum, the legitimacy of Quality Management is immediately called into question. Is 'Quality' just another passing management fad or does it represent a fundamental development in the field of management?

Quality Management as a Fad?

The future of Quality Management is discussed by Coulson-Thomas (1997:305) who suggests that "the harsh reality of the contemporary business environment represents a profound challenge for movements

whose origins are rooted in predicability and the reduction of variation. It is therefore conceivable that quality practices will be unable to cope and as a result much of what has previously been associated with quality may pass into history".

However despite our natural tendency to automatically dismiss quality management as a mere fad the fact that it has endured for so long does indeed suggest that, as an management philosophy, quality has passed the 'fad test' (Hammon & Morrison, 1996 in Dervitsiotis, 1998). One reason for this may be due to the evolving nature of quality management itself. As a technique, quality focuses on systemic matters and has defensive self-renewing process whereby new techniques, tools or approaches are adopted into the existing business framework. This means that quality management may survive for some time, if only "by mutation as its advocates adopt and place under the quality banner whatever enables organisations to cope" (Coulson-Thomas, 1997:306).

A fine example of this is the evolution of quality management from its highly rational and purely statistical origins to its more recent focus on 'soft' concepts such as employee empowerment and involvement. The apparent adoption of BPR/M as one of the 'quality tools' provides yet another example of the flexibility of quality management.

If quality management does prove to be another management fad, then like past management techniques interest in it will subside and eventually it will be cast aside in favour of a 'newer' and 'better' approach to management. The above discussion however suggests that this may not be the case.

Quality Management as part of a New Fad?

If the quality management model survives in the future then it is likely that it may at least change to resemble some other management form. At this point in time the nature of this form is impossible to determine however the *process* through which quality may adapt can already be seen.

One of the most recent trends in management thought is organisational learning. Like many of the management concepts that have gone before, emphasis on organisational learning promises to lead managers towards a 'better' way of organising in a world of interdependence and change (Kofman & Senge, 1993). Proponents of the organisational learning approach argue that there cannot be adequate adaptation in a rapidly changing environment without scope for individual employee learning (Dervitsiotis, 1998). By continually learning and gaining knowledge about a certain processes not only can organisational members more easily adapt to new ways of doing things but it should also become more efficient as costs reduce over time with experience (Arrow, 1962, in Dodgson, 1993).

While much of the literature on learning appears to be very abstract (see for example Kofman & Senge, 1993), there is no doubt that learning processes will assume an increasingly prominent position in the management literature of the future. As Coulson-Thomas (1997:303) suggests "in an uncertain and insecure world the best guarantee of survival are loyalty, trust and commitment to learning and change".

Having described the basic justification for organisational learning it is possible to see that many of the underlying principles of learning 'fit' into the quality management philosophy. For example a number of authors have found significant correlations between learning and quality (Larsen & Norgaard, 1996 in Dervitsiotis, 1998). This is also revealed by Coulson-Thomas (1997:304) who states that "the importance Quality Management places on continuous improvement can be supportive of organisational learning ... and the most valuable quality tools are those that encourage learning and development".

This demonstrates the fact that "management thought is both a process in and a product of its cultural environment" (Wren, 1994:11). Interest in learning is not a new phenomenon however it appears that the prevailing quality management mindset has led to the rebirth of interest in related fields, in this case the learning organisation. Thus it does appear likely that the next step in management philosophy will contain many of the underlying assumptions of Quality Management.

ISSUES FOR 'BEYOND 2000'

Management theory is a complex and dynamic process. Quality Management has indeed played an important role in the development of management philosophy as we know it today. It has clearly grown out of its early statistical origins and evolved into a more general and all encompassing notion of organisational effectiveness. But whereto from here?

It appears from the diverse viewpoints that there are four possibilities. It will:

- *Remain the same*

While the individual principles of quality management, such as employee empowerment and teamwork, have been recognised for decades, the value of the quality movement comes from its ability to combine all these factors in a way that generates positive results for organisations that use the available quality 'tools' appropriately. While quality supervision, documentation and certification are required to maintain industry competitiveness, many would claim that quality management is here to stay.

- *Be outsourced/subcontracted*

Another concern raised by this paper is that current and future organisations (and their members) should always be aware of the 'trap of success'. In the case of quality management, which appears to be a firm foundation on which to build a business (Bemowski, 1995), many organisations have made the mistake of seeing the approach as a panacea that can be used without regard to wider environmental factors (Sitkin, Sutcliffe & Schroeder, 1994). A short term 'fix'. Not only does this jeopardise the survival of the organisation itself but if many cases of failure are reported then the business community in general will lose faith in the approach and begin to seek alternative management methods. The instinctive reaction is usually to appoint consultants for a short-term contract to either implement Quality Certification or prepare for Quality Audits. Thus creating a new 'mobile' profession.

- *Evolve into an 'Integrated Management System'*

As 'Quality Management' becomes synonymous with 'Business Management' and 'Quality Management Systems' become just part of an overall 'Integrated Management System', the quality industry and wider quality movement will disappear. The separate quality management role will evolve as businesses are evolving and senior management roles will overlap. Quality Managers will be phased out but will have alternative options to attain new skills and move into a wider business role - perhaps with a new title. In fact some suggest that it will become a general management position with a vast range of differing duties. Organisations will give the role a title that is more closely related to the responsibilities and duties, or more correctly, divide the role across existing staff where the duties belong. Then quality will be accepted as the norm and not something special or separate.

- *No longer exist*

Is 'Quality' just another fad? Specifically, is 'Quality' likely to form the basis of future management thought for many years to come? Indeed the emergence of contemporary movements such as Organisational Learning, Risk Management and Knowledge Management suggests that quality management is just "another chapter in the ongoing search for a formula for organisational excellence" (Dean & Bowen, 1994:395). If this is the case then quality management may well evolve either into a similar philosophy with a new name or something completely different. Will history repeat itself?

Organisations charting the way forward need to look beyond individual management approaches such as Quality Management, Business Process Management and the more recent concept of Organisational Learning in order to "position each as jewels in a wider setting" (Burdett, 1994:8). Having moved from an industrial to the new 'infotronics' (Ruthven, 1999) era it is probable that the scale and pace of change will continue to accelerate and managers may need to depend upon hybrid techniques that have been adapted to suit the unique environmental demands placed on the organisation. Where this leaves Quality Managers, only time will tell.

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