

QUALITY MANAGERS: ARE YOU READY FOR THE FUTURE?

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Reflect for a moment. What workplace challenges, over the next ten years, are on the horizon for today's organizations? In speaking engagements I often ask this question of quality and performance improvement professionals and business leaders. They quickly hone in on workforce issues—how to recruit and keep "good" employees, how to get employees to desire ongoing change, how to continually develop employee knowledge and skills. They readily acknowledge that future job security will be based on the ability to perform and add value for customers. Diversity becomes an even bigger challenge—not just gender, race, religion, and country of origin—but age—the need to employ aging baby boomers (who thought they were going to retire at age 65) in a workplace populated by younger leaders. Employees of the future are seen as demanding more than today's workforce because of their need to effectively integrate and balance home, personal, and work responsibilities.

Russell Wright, Director of Quality, Safety, and Training for Teknor Apex, echoes these comments and reflects on their implications to Quality Managers. "Quality systems are maturing—these systems are in place in many organizations. [The enterprise and] its people have good control over their raw material inputs and their processes, and these processes are documented. What's missing is the third ingredient: people. People institute the practices and procedures. The demand for labor is astounding. We cannot afford to lose employees due to turnover. Training is the answer and we need to evolve our work into this area more and more." Pause for a moment. How much of the Quality Manager's daily work is devoted to helping the organization address the people issues mentioned here? How familiar are they with human resource development processes? Do they know how to effectively develop, deliver, and evaluate effective classroom and technology-based training programs?

The question I ask in my presentations also spurs responses focused on broader issues. How will enterprises survive in a world with shrinking resources and an increasing population? How will organizations and society at large manage technology as an enabler of social and economic change, especially with the exponential increase anticipated in the use of E-commerce? How will

firms truly compete in a global economy where the cultures and the norms for conducting business are profoundly different? How will organizations become more agile in their response to everchanging customer requirements and the need for customization—even those of unknown future customers? Technology, strategy, and marketing efforts are beginning to inquire about what is needed to truly grow companies and, at the same time, simultaneously provide ongoing value to customers, employees, shareholders, and society at large. Are the efforts of Quality Managers focused on the same? What initiatives are Quality Managers engaging in relative to social responsibility and accountability, the use of technology and innovation to strategically grow the business, and how the organization can effectively do business in cultures that differ from itself? More importantly, how connected are Quality Managers to assisting the organization in creating and deploying its overall market strategy and long-and short-term business plans? It is through involvement in these arenas that Quality Managers can truly begin to assist the organization in providing ongoing value to all of its constituents.

These broader-based issues signal the successor to the Knowledge Economy, whose roots were planted over 50 years ago. Futurists refer to it as the Dream Society or the Existential Era. Key to this emerging economy, in which about ten percent of the U.S. labor force has been employed over this time period, are the beliefs that our inner experiences are more important than external stimuli and that wholeness and connectedness are at the core of wisdom. It recognizes that attending to spirituality and creating true community in the workplace both positively impact organizational performance. Moreover, to attract and retain employees, and ensure future profitability, it suggests that organizations will have to be mindful of their larger role in serving society. With this shift in economies, the "currency" is gravitating from knowledge workers with intellectual capital to storytellers whose magical prose renders dreams for public consumption. By 2150, about 50 percent of jobs in the U.S. will be centered in this new arena.

What do these trends and issues mean to Quality Managers? If it is true that the functions, tools, and methods of quality need to become a part of everyday management, then perhaps Quality Managers need to begin to view themselves as "professional managers" rather than as "Quality Managers." This is especially true, says John Oaks, Director of Quality Assurance for Telect, if "we think of leaders as those who provide vision and direction and managers as those who make it happen through other people." He goes on to say, "I don't think my [current] job as a Quality Manager will exist in the future. The pressure to provide quality products and services will be everyone's job because it is an absolute requirement to staying in business. Quality techniques and principles will become ingrained in the management process." He concurs with Wright that a future role of today's Quality Managers will be to provide both quality and management training and to function more broadly as internal consultants. John says this is necessary because "what

organizations really should be looking at is value creation... and changing the way the entire organization is managed in order to provide value."

Russell Wright goes a step further by proposing a new job title—that of Systems Director. "The job of the Systems Director is to support the infrastructure of the [entire] organization by helping it to function properly. To do this job effectively [the Systems Director] must have a working understanding of the whole infrastructure." He goes on to say that this even this new role eventually needs to be integrated into the strategic work of management.

In sum, these comments and remarks imply a move from "total quality management" to "total organizational management," thus shifting the attention of today's Quality Managers to enterprise-wide performance improvement and value creation. New and enhanced roles include human resource developer, trainer, change agent, market researcher, business planner and strategist, and the like. For many enterprises, job functions already exist in these areas. Therefore, the question becomes one of joining one of the existing areas within the organization to carry out specific activities or molding the Quality Manager role into one of systems integrator—linking all of these functions to each other and filling the gaps that may exist as a result of this linkage. In either case, these roles and responsibilities cannot ignore the influence of storytelling, spirituality, community, and social responsibility and accountability on organizational performance.

We all have choices about the work we do. These trends and their implications serve to increase the role and responsibility choices available to Quality Managers. To move forward in a proactive manner, consider these five steps.

1. Engage senior leadership in individual and group conversations that help them to discover the need for a shift in Quality Manager roles and responsibilities. Use this article and others from this newsletter as the impetus for these talks. At the same time, if you are a Quality Manager, begin to shift your daily behaviors toward those mentioned in this article. Do not wait for permission to do so.
2. As a Quality Manager, decide whether or not to move into an existing job in the organization that matches the work you believe needs to occur or work with others to create a new purpose/mission for the department in which the Quality Manager function resides.
3. If the latter choice is made, work with others to alter the roles and responsibilities of the department given its new purpose/mission.
4. Change the title, roles, and responsibilities of the Quality Manager function, as well as those of others within the group, to match the department's new purpose/mission, roles, and responsibilities.
5. Attach yourself and others to those issues that are most important to enterprise-wide improvement and value creation—such as those mentioned earlier. Continue the

conversations that began in step one—they are your foray into executive coaching and leadership development!

Above all—do not lose sight of the future. Accept its challenges and find ways to proactively prepare yourself to ensure your employability in the years to come.

For more information on total organizational management, read *Critical SHIFT: The Future of Quality in Organizational Performance* by Lori L. Silverman with Annabeth L. Propst, published by ASQ Quality Press. To order, call 800.248.1946. You can also purchase the book directly from the author (www.partnersforprogress.com) or through www.Amazon.com.

Article appeared in "The Future of Quality Managers" Quality Management Forum Special Report, Winter 2000 (Vol. 26, No. 1). All uses, including reprints, require advance permission from the author.