

QUALITY PROFESSION MUST CONTINUE TO EVOLVE

QUALITY PROFESSIONALS MUST PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT.



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Over the past few years I've written several articles concerning the transformation of the quality profession. A transformation really is about a continuous evolution. It's a journey because there are always opportunities and challenges.

The quality professional's role initially revolved around the quality control concept. Quality control was predicated on a back-end test and inspection process that measured product performance to a minimum standard. Sadly, there are some organizations that haven't migrated much beyond this historical role.

Several quality giants have pointed out the inherent flaw in this concept. Dr. W. Edwards Deming said inspection can't guarantee quality because it's too late. The quality, good or bad, has already been built into the product. Thinking we can inspect quality into a product is irrational. (This doesn't imply there is no need to verify critical characteristics at any point prior to shipment.)

It is also quite disconcerting to think quality goals are based on meeting minimums as opposed to achieving maximums. Meeting minimum requirements is not in the best interest of the customer or the organization as demonstrated by Dr. Genichi Taguchi's quality loss function. It's also not in the best interest of the quality professional.

The quality professional's transformation must continue from ensuring minimum standards to the optimum extension as customer advocate. With this as their banner, quality professionals can become an instrumental player in building customer-focused quality into each interaction and process. The transformed quality professional becomes an internal quality management consultant involved in the organization's strategic business practices, operational goals, and customer-oriented market objectives. Additionally, they become involved in the integration of all quality processes, metrics, tools and accountability systems to optimize performance of all departments.

For some quality professionals, the transformation is being helped by the deployment of Six Sigma. For increasing numbers of organizations, Six Sigma initiatives have brought opportunities for the quality professional to play new roles.

As successful manufacturers rally their business strategies around customer information on the marketing side, and as those organizations pursue near zero defects on the production side, quality professionals have a unique opportunity to bring cohesion to the quality process by embracing both.

Quality professionals who work in organizations that have implemented Six Sigma or are in pursuit of Six

Sigma have an opportunity to contribute at a higher, more strategic level in their corporations. Because the quality professional typically has a unique point of reference, they are in position to offset any lack of cohesion in cross-departmental functions which can have an adverse impact on achieving desired Six Sigma goals.

Transforming the role of the quality professional from process and product control to an interpreter of business strategy starts with wearing the hat of a customer advocate. Becoming a customer advocate does two things for the quality professional and their organizations: (1) It aligns quality initiatives with customer input and customer feedback; and (2) It helps instill customer imperatives at every level of the organization.

The key to elevating the role of the quality professional in any organization is two-fold. The first critical element is getting high-level management buy-in. Achievements toward Six Sigma or any other significant initiative will ring hollow and be short-lived if the quality function has a limited sphere of influence.

The second major element is the criticality that quality managers have an equal standing among other department heads. Quality professionals with the good fortune to work for organizations with a strong quality commitment will often be granted this standing simply as a matter of good business practice—it's inherent to their DNA. Other quality professionals are faced with the task of trying to become an integral part of the corporate strategy and proving their value to each business unit.

Opportunities and challenges go hand-in-hand. Securing and maintaining a position at the management roundtable means quality professionals need to be multilingual. The job can no longer exist in the realm of data interpretation and reports, but in the ability to understand and translate quality concepts across departments. Only then will achievements toward performance excellence truly change an organization, its people, and its success.

The ability to add greater value to your organization, and ultimately for yourself, is to do this from the inside as part of the inner-circle rather from the outside. Which makes more sense? The answer is simple so develop a plan and start its execution because no one else is going to do it for you! But remember, there is no silver bullet and there is no final destination so remain fluid and flexible.

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