

The manager's getting a makeover

Quality managers are here to stay, argues Debashis Sarkar. They may have to play different roles, though

WHERE have all the quality managers gone? It's a question oft asked and very rarely answered satisfactorily. Is it because the dynamics of business have changed? After all, we live in the age of world-class organisations, where quality has become everyone's business. Has this made the quality manager redundant? The truth is quality managers are here to stay; they only have to get into new roles. Now what makes for a quality manager?

Leadership: He should demonstrate leadership in improving business processes. Every company has some large processes called key functions. The quality manager should ensure that these processes are carried out to perfection.

Expertise: He should have expertise in core technologies such as quality system implementation, process mapping, fail-

ure-mode effect analysis, gauge repeatability and reproducibility, design of experiments, hypothesis testing, capability analysis, document management, supply chain management, regression analysis etc. More importantly, he should have hands-on experience in how and when to apply these skills to solve problems.

Result-oriented: The quality manager must deliver quick results. His survival depends on this. He should be able to use tools as design of experiments to evaluate quickly many variables and improve process dramatically. He should have project management skills and should be able to demonstrate the costs of crash schedules and their benefits.

Creativity: Traditionally, the quality manager has focused on process control. While this has improved product quality and lowered costs, it has muzzled experimentation and innovation. Which means the qual-

ity manager must be creative. He should be able to introduce an idea that sparks constructive change.

Experience has shown that the veteran employee — the worker who has been doing the same job the same way for years — is often the one who embraces change readily. The quality manager should have the creativity and people skills to recognise this, and hence, stay abreast of new systems that can complement current programmes. Innovation and creativity are crucial to long-term survival. It would do companies good to set aside a stipulated time for creative activity, when employees spend time not on routine work, but identifying ways in which they can do things better.

Systems approach: Though the quality manager should have a systems focus, he must concentrate on creating systems that can adapt to

unanticipated conditions quickly. He should dismantle systems that make rapid change difficult. Towards this end he should eliminate unnecessary documentation, reduce procedures to the minimum and implement systems that support creativity.

Ideally, all quality managers should be Six Sigma Black Belts. Six Sigma implies a whole quality culture of strategies, statistics, and tools that can be used to improve corporate bottom line. Black Belts are experts in using these tools. Why should quality managers be Black Belts? Because Black Belts are adept at number-crunching and advanced problem-solving techniques; they can find solutions to dilemmas. Skilled in project management and team dynamics, they act as leaders, teachers and mentors.

Flexible: In a world where knowl-

edge is power, the quality manager should not confine himself to quality, but should soak up information about other disciplines. He should study marketing, finance and accounting because these subjects are the life-blood of organisations, and understanding them will give him an insight into the link between quality and business performance.

Not everyone is cut out to be a quality manager. Technical and statistical skills are only a part of what the job requires. More important is having the personality suited to that job. But as the premium on quality gets higher, quality managers are here to stay.

The author heads the corporate quality department of Marico Industries. The views expressed are his own and in no way connected to his employer.

way to achieve more

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