

## The Future Of Quality: Beyond Customer Satisfaction

In this article we will show how quality can increase its impact both within organizations and on the quality of life and society as a whole. Quality management has the potential to play a major part in the quality of our future but changes in our approach will be needed.

Traditionally quality management has focused on improving customer satisfaction and increasing efficiency. As such it has contributed to the profitability of the organization. But to guarantee excellence for the future more will be needed. Quality will need to expand its impact on company ethics and sustainable operations. Having satisfied customers and good profitability through unethical behaviour or non-sustainable activities will be a threat to the existence of a company in the long run. Society will, and rightly so, no longer accept this kind of working.

Quality management, being indirectly present in every aspect of the business, is best placed to develop and maintain systems that focus on ethical behaviour and sustainability. It is also a logical next step in expanding a key component of the quality philosophy: care. Sustainability contains a financial, social and environmental component. The long term financial sustainability is directly linked to ethics and will require an impact at the highest level. The quality manager has to be part of the executive committee and has a role to play in defining strategy, targets and investments. Promoting a holistic view on the organization will be an important contribution of quality to the future of that organization. Our focus on doing things right (efficiency) will need to shift towards doing the right things (effectiveness).

Environmental sustainability has the closest link to the body of knowledge of quality and many of our tools and concepts can be applied to environmental care. Integrated management systems, focus on prevention of pollution, replacing products by services through functional thinking and optimizing material use through six sigma and lean are just some examples of how quality can contribute to environmental sustainability.

Creating a quality culture has a direct influence on the overall wellbeing of employees. This is by no means a simple task and will require the introduction of new knowledge within organizations. We know by now that this so called "soft side" of quality is extremely hard. But we will have to spread our quality knowledge outside the walls of our organizations, if we want quality to have an impact on social sustainability. We need to expand our reach and show how valuable our knowledge can be in improving quality of life for all. We will give a few examples of how we, as quality professionals can contribute more to the quality of our future.

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