Has Quality Management run its course? - Views from the field

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Preferred Stream:
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ABSTRACT
The aim of this paper is to assess and reflect on, through the perspectives of Australian Quality practitioners, the current status of quality management; whether there had been any significant and recent shift in their roles and responsibilities; and if there had been any improvement in the extent to which their development and training needs were being fulfilled. This paper sets out to identify the roles, responsibilities, and training and development needs of Australian quality managers and what impact these may be having on the current ‘quality agenda’ of organisations in Australia. In light of these findings this paper focuses on the HR people aspects of QM implementation (e.g. development of a quality culture; learning, training and development; leadership and management commitment and support) and the significance of these aspects for sustainable QM implementation. Recent literature on QM implementation and the findings of three previously conducted surveys (Waddell 1998; Waddell and Mallen 2001; and Stewart and Waddell 2003) have been integrated with the findings of this research.

Key Words: Quality education and training, Quality Management, Quality Managers., TQM

INTRODUCTION
Quality Management has been a significant and ubiquitous management invention and practice in modern industry. In the 1990s various quality systems, tools, processes and methodologies were being developed which required the simultaneous development of the quality professional (Dedhia 1997), a role which has been under constant development and change ever since.

There have been numerous research reports on the ongoing difficulty of successful and sustainable Quality Management over time (Dale et al 1997; Edwards and Sohal 2003; Haupt and Whiteman 2004; and Prajogo 2006). Poor implementation methodologies and processes of quality initiatives have been identified as key factors, (Samson 1997; Rahman & Sohal 2002; and Prajogo 2006).

According to Dale (2002) Sila and Ebrahmpour (2002) van der Wiele and Brown (2002), Rahman and Sohal (2002) and Mele and Colurcio (2005) while quality management still is under regular development today it is no longer the main priority of managers or their organisations. But as Shenawy, Baker and Lemak (2007) argue, while the debate over QM in both the practitioner and academic audiences has declined, decisions about quality management are still very important.

Ingredients for QM Success
There is now a degree of recognition in research and practice that QM is multi-faceted, cross-disciplinary and impacts all organisation areas and levels. For example, Lakhal, Pasin and Liman (2006) coin QM as a multidimensional construct. A variety of factors are beginning to be identified as being crucial for successful and sustainable quality management. For example, Hoogervorst, Koopman and van der Flier (2005) argue that QM entails a human-centred approach with attention to organisational culture, management practices, and organisational structures and systems, seen as macro variables determining behaviour and that QM failures results from the absence of coherence and consistency among these variables when attempting to change behaviour. Other related and important factors include leadership and top management commitment and support (Read et al 2000 in Shenawy, Baker and Lemak 2007; Bayo-Moriones and Merino-Diaz de Cerio 2003); and Vousas and Psychogios (2007), employee commitment (Armstrong-Stassen, Reavley and Ghanam 2005; Mele Colurcia 2005; Tari 2005; Joiner 2007; and Da Silva et al 2005), communication, learning, training and education (Shenawy, Baker and Lemak 2007), organisation culture (Shenawy, Baker and Lemak 2007), participative team environment (Lagrosen 2003; Goldman 2005; Shenawy, Baker and Lemak 2007), customer focus, and concern for the social and environmental context.

RESEARCH AIM
The aim of this particular research study is to assess and reflect on, through the perspectives of the Quality practitioners themselves, the current status of Quality in organisations today. This study also questions if there has been any significant shift in the roles and responsibilities of Quality managers and if there had been any improvement in the extent to which their management development and training needs were being fulfilled. This research in light of these findings focuses on the HR people aspects of QM implementation (e.g. development of an appropriate quality culture; learning, training and development; leadership and management commitment and support) and the significance of these organisation aspects for sustainable and successful QM implementation. Recent literature on QM implementation and the findings of three previously conducted surveys (Waddell 1998; Waddell and Mallen 2001; and Stewart and Waddell 2003) have been integrated with the findings of this current research.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample
There were six sections in the survey, which addressed current opinions on various aspects of quality management. The survey was mailed out to randomly selected members on the JAS-ANZ register and included prepaid reply envelopes. Reminder notices were sent 6 weeks after the initial survey was forwarded to organisations. Trends in the responses for the questions have been identified as a result of analysis via SPSS. It was very rewarding to see the respondents taking the open-ended questions seriously and writing detailed answers: this has lead to a wealth of information about their perspectives, and their responses are discussed in detail below. 1000 Quality Managers from Australian organisations were surveyed, of which there was a 12% response rate. There may be several explanations for this disappointing result, e.g. respondents suffering ‘survey overload’, but there is still an opportunity to analyse the balance of the surveys.

Survey Instrument
The survey was directed to quality managers and focused on: their current roles and responsibilities; their career development, including what management and training development they have experienced in the past, current programs if any; what they perceived to be their needs for future development; what training programs they had organised or were organising for employees in their companies; how did they measure the effectiveness or impact of the new skills they had acquired as quality managers; and how they perceived the future of quality management.

The survey instrument consisted of 43 items. The first 8 items addressed the respondents’ profiles in terms of age, sex, educational qualifications, professional affiliations, length of service in their organisation, length of duration in current role. Questions 9 -13 focused on the profile of their organisation in terms of type of industry, industry certifications and implementation of recent major change initiatives and the forces behind these. Items 14 – 25 related to their roles and responsibilities i.e. coverage of quality management responsibility in their organisation, whether they had a job description, the importance of their various roles and responsibilities, which aspects of their job they found most and least satisfactory, where they regarded themselves as part of the senior management team and the use of employee surveys, quality tools and processes. For items 26 - 39, respondents were asked to reflect on their training experiences in relation to QM and the final questions referred to the respondents’ perception as to where they saw the future of quality management; and how they envisaged their future in light of this.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile
Before analysis and identification of response themes, it is important to identify the profile of the respondents. Nearly 73% of the respondents were male, with 41% of the respondents aged between forty-six and fifty-five years of age (similar to the profile of respondents to the 2001 survey Stewart and Waddell 2003). Despite the survey being addressed to the “Quality Manager”, only 23% stated that they held the title of Quality Manager, the rest of the respondents titles were very diverse ranging from Business Manager (11%), Technical Manager (7%), Director (3%), HR Manager (3%) and Project Manager (3%). In contrast to earlier surveys (Waddell 1998 and Stewart and Waddell 2003), very few respondents had responsibility in the human resources area. Their tenure in the current position ranged from 9.5% being in the position for less that one year; 33.5% being in this position for between one and three years; 20% having the title for three to five years 30% for five to ten years and only 14% having the position for more than ten years. Before their current position, 22% had evolved from different quality related position but most had held a production-orientated (54%) or general management (24%) background.

With regard to educational background, 53.5% had secondary level as their highest level. If one compares this to the 2001 survey, only 32% of respondents had secondary level as their highest (Stewart & Waddell 2003). The difference here is quite alarming. The respondents’ tertiary qualifications were very widely spread with an undergraduate degree in Engineering (7%) and MBA (7%) the specific particular qualification.

Fifty-two percent did not belong to any professional association which equates to a similar number of 50% in the earlier survey (Stewart & Waddell 2003). If they did, it was engineering (46%) or business/accounting (45.7%) with only (8.3%) being quality related.

Organisation Profile
Sixty-one percent of companies were in manufacturing with 14.1% stating that they had ISO1400 as well as the ISO9000. The major change initiatives over the past two years revolve around the implementation of software systems (14%) and strategic realignment (12.8%). These changes appear to be a result of customer demands (40.3%), industry expectations, legislative changes, market forces, growth and profit, and strategic direction. Very few respondents had a negative response to the changes (10%).

Roles & Responsibilities, Training & Development of Individual Quality Managers
The quality movement has been prominent in Australia for a considerable period, yet there has been insufficient research on the roles and responsibilities, training and management development of individual Quality Managers except for research carried out by Waddell (1998), Stewart and Waddell (2003) and Waddell and Mallan (2001).
Fifty-five percent of respondents in this research were responsible for quality management for the whole of the organisation with 55.5% of organisations having less than 100 employees. 66.3% of respondents shared their responsibilities with others. The majority (86%) of Quality Managers also had responsibility for other functional areas (e.g. business operations) and 83.7% had formal job descriptions. In the 2001 survey (Stewart & Waddell 2003) only 33% of respondents were dedicated quality managers. Organisations still seem to grapple with the attainment of quality in a co-ordinated and integrated systemic approach and we can conclude that the role of Quality Manager remains an ambivalent and tentative one. It is evident that Quality managers assume a variety of different titles which alludes to the continual misunderstanding about their roles and responsibilities.

In comparing with managers in other functional areas (see Table 1), these respondents rated their position in terms of greater work variety and similar benefits including security in their jobs. Quality Managers considered ‘compliance and keeping key accreditation’ as to being the most important role with managing customers being the second most important. Occupational Health and Safety was third. Other roles mentioned as being very important included management of quality systems, change managers, internal consultants, staff management, education, training and induction, and keeping ‘everyone happy’.

Having variety in the job, as well as seeing improvements, gave the most job satisfaction to respondents whereas paperwork and employee management were least satisfying (or ‘frustrating’ i.e. educating staff or ‘school children’). Also, 73.3% were formally a member of the senior management team.

Fifty percent of respondents run employee surveys and most on a yearly basis (24.4%). Customers surveys, on the other hand, were run by 69.8% of the respondents and 30.2% were run half yearly.

The quality tools and processes used by the respondents were very diverse and more like a smorgasbord selection. ‘5 Why’s’ had 9.3% of respondents utilising this tool, brainstorming (8.6%), control charts (17.2%) and Six Sigma (6%). One respondent commented ‘As company grows it is inevitable that increased specialisation would be required to deal with the various quality processes’.

Bayo-Moriones and Merino-Diaz de Cerio (2003) profess that in order for quality to become a strategic part of the business planning and management, a new role must be created for the quality function and the traditional notion of a ‘quality department’ and its specialist quality managers needs to be revised to meet the challenges of sustainable quality. Bayo-Moriones and Merino-Diaz de Cerio (2003) argue that this requires the elevation of the quality function and hence the quality department in the vertical stratification of the organisation, though the presence of the Quality managers in the senior management group in this research does not necessarily equate with an elevated hierarchical position in their organisations. The substantial development that QM has undergone over the last two decades, argues Bayo-Moriones and Merino-Diaz de Cerio (2003), in theory should have ‘been accompanied by a change in the conception, goals and functions of the quality department’ (p 569) which should also have meant a change in the role of quality managers. This is slowly beginning to materialise. Yet despite this quality managers assume a fairly isolated position. Comments from different respondents support this:

This is a job which attracts the animosity of others’.

‘It’s the only management job that I know of that can be very lonely’.

‘This job is not for everyone. If you like being frustrated, bitched at by everyone and ignored when presenting options for change then this is the job for you.’

Emerging roles and responsibilities both varied and complex for quality managers have been mooted by various authors and are evident in our research. These include acting as internal consultants, change agents, and being involved in critical decision making. These roles and responsibilities will require skills and knowledge including: systems thinking, a strategic understanding of the organisation, teamwork, understanding of human behaviour and software and statistical applications etc. ‘It will not be an easy fight path for quality professionals. There will be a constant fight for survival… A flexible approach based on sound judgement and ethical principles will be accepted wholeheartedly’ (Dedhia 1997, p 393). Our research supports the view that quality managers need to become masters of all trades and have a holistic understanding of their organisation.

When we asked how respondents how they would describe their position in their organisation in one word, it was obvious that they thought them selves to be ‘pivotal’ but also ‘overworked’ and more akin to ‘Rambo’. Other notable descriptors included: ‘executor’, ‘god’, ‘police’, ‘dynamic’, ‘sheepdog’, ‘Jack of all trades’ and ‘troglodyte’.

Learning, Education, Training and Management Development

Recent literature alludes to the necessity for training employees in the tools, systems and processes of quality management. Oakland (1993) and Dale (1999), Bambord and Greatbanks (2005), Ahmed and Hassan (2003) and Vouzas and Psychogios (2007) argue that training is the most important ingredient in developing quality systems, particularly in the development of a common quality language throughout the organisation. There still is little researched on what training and professional development is therefore required of the Quality manager or professional (Stewart and Waddell 2003).

Sixty-one percent of respondents in our research identified themselves as being responsible for the training needs of their employees. In these instances, only 16.8% were directly related to quality procedures or issues. Even though, the respondents were responsible for a vast array of training needs only 57% had any formal training qualifications.

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Respondents considered training as very important (52.3%) in improving quality but only 36% felt that the organisation thought training very important in improving quality. Most respondents (59.3%) did not consider their training needs to be any different to other managers which equates to a similar percentage (54.7%) in the Stewart & Waddell 2001 survey.

Respondents past and present personal training is mostly academic, e.g. MBA, or OH&S whereas in their organisation, they have been, and are currently, training employees in quality tools/systems predominantly auditing. The means by which training needs have been identified is by an annual evaluation (20.9%) as well as feedback from employees (10.5%). In the 2001 survey (Stewart & Waddell 2003) training needs were identified by performance review processes (37%), self perception (28%) and training needs analyses (28%).

With regard to their intentions for future training programs, for other employees in the short term ‘internal auditing’ is considered important and for the long term ‘leadership’ is of significance. For their personal training intentions, in the short term they are interested in legislation ramifications on quality systems as well as Six Sigma but for the long term the favourite is obtaining an MBA. The largest constraint to plan for training programs is the lack of budget (16.3%), time (14.0%) or both (12.8%).

**External Training Providers**

Only 50.0% of the respondents felt that an external training provider was of any value to them personally but 53.5% thought that external providers added value for the organisation. From the personal perspective, TAFE, AIM and SAI Global had the most favourable response whereas from the organisation’s perspective TAFE was favoured. This supports our previous research conclusion that the Quality Manager still had a leadership role in the facilitation of Quality Management, a role that required ‘both professional and personal skills in the management of Quality Management processes and the facilitation of change and people management’ (Waddell and Stewart 2004, p 1128). Neither internal nor external training programs seem to provide the necessary guidance and direction and for the learning, training and development required by QM practitioners.

The importance of training, education and learning is highly evident in our research and is strongly supported in the literature. In the Stewart and Waddell (2003) study it was found that many managers appeared unaware of their own training needs or held the belief that they did not require any future training. Also the lack of organisational support for training and development was clearly apparent. In a broad sense, Mele and Colurcio (2005) argue that individual and organisational processes of learning are highly important in quality management and continuous improvement. The firms of their investigative research all reported that QM was a fundamental driver for the learning processes at the individual and organisational levels. Similarly, Armstrong-Stassen, Raveley and Ghanam (2005) recommend that attention to communication and training needs to be reiterated continually through effective feedback systems and that on-going training is crucial in quality focused organisations. ‘Quality related training underscores the strategic significance of quality and the organisation’s commitment to its employees’ (Stassen, Raveley and Ghanam, 2005, p 963). Further, Edward and Sohal (2003) argue that the most significant issues regarding QM implementation are: the need for appropriate education and training of employees with the recognition that the production scheduling should not get in the way of training benefits.

Comments from two respondents sum up the importance of education, training and learning: ‘Training: better alignment with individual need, current learning, learning style . . . is required’.

**Leadership and Support**

Current research reinforces the vital role that senior management and leaders play in sustainable quality management, in terms of ongoing commitment and support. For example, Van der Wiele and Brown (2002), Bayo-Moriones and Merino-Diaz de Cerio (2003), Vouzas and Psychogios (2007) question to what degree do organisation leaders and senior management inspire the organisation to the embracing the values of QM. Further, Mele and Colurcio (2005) in their analysis of 21 large firms found that top management was responsible for quality commitment and coordination of resources to achieve quality objectives. As Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2006) state it is vital that managers become excellent role models exhibiting quality in their thoughts, behaviour and speech behaviour: ‘Different kinds of successful quality leaders can excel if only their hearts are into their quality journey and the have a determination to carry it through’ (p 86).

Palmberg and Garvare (2006) present a case study on a Swedish company Agria that received the Swedish Quality Award twice. The CEO of the company commented that the main reason for him to start the work on systematic quality improvement was ‘curiosity’. Palmberg and Garvare (2006) recognise that including the whole organisation in the work helps to sustain quality initiatives.

In our current research respondents alluded to the importance of leadership commitment and ‘walking the quality talk’. Training in ‘leadership’ and ‘succession management’ was both identified as being vitally important. A comment from on Quality Manager is poignant here: ‘Management: [needs to] move from industrial age to leadership . . . QA Practice: better sell the big picture or get left in the swamp of Quality Management.’

Some writers acknowledge that leadership rhetoric must be matched by appropriate resources, both in terms of financial and intrinsic support. Prajogo (2006) compared the level of adoption of QM practices in Australian firms from 1994 to 2001 and examined the sustainability of QM practices by identifying changes
that occurred in the adoption of these practices in this time period and concluded that (in concert with the work of Hendricks and Singhal 1996, Montes and Jover 2004 and Power 1995) that QM needs extensive long-term commitment and effort on the behalf of organisations particularly in terms of financial support for long-term benefits to be evident and sustainable. This was strongly supported in this research where ‘financial’ and other support were mentioned on a number of occasions as being necessary for sustainable QM success.

The People HR factors
The people HR factors identified above in (e.g., leadership, training and development, and roles and responsibilities of quality professionals, teamwork, participative management, customer feedback, creativity, effective communication, employee involvement, participation and empowerment, employee and management trust and support) appear to significantly impact on sustainable quality management but are not being adequately taken up or addressed in Australian organisations or globally. Vouzas and Psychogios (2007) purport that QM is a social system, i.e. a ‘human system’, not merely a technical system. This research together with the literature (e.g. Mele & Colucia 2005; Tari 2005; and Joiner 2007) acknowledge the crucial role HR (including participation of all members, training and communication and feedback systems, reward systems) plays in the adoption of successful quality processes and practices. Research by Da Silva, Tadashi and Kikuo (2005) investigated the best common management practices of world companies concluding that ‘senior managers’ respect for knowledgeable customers, as well as heightened commitment from top management. These literature examples as well as the findings from our research is recognition of their contributions are significant aspects for in the successful and sustainable implementation of QM (Montes et al 2003). Lagrosen (2005) vital roles in motivating employees to go beyond their companies’ QM initiatives’ (p 77). Joiner’s (2007) research, which focussed on the motor vehicles and accessibility industry in Australia where she surveyed 84 companies, examined two human/behavioural factors i.e. employee support and organisation support which is consistent with the review that the perception of employees towards tolerance, support and cohesion and the degree of intrinsic recognition of their contributions are significant aspects for in the successful and sustainable implementation of QM (Montes et al 2003). Lagrosen (2005) surveyed quality managers of industrial companies in Gotaland Sweden. Research focused on quality managers in 251 large internationally involved industrial manufacturing companies. The people HR factors identified above in (e.g., leadership, training and development, and roles and responsibilities of quality professionals, teamwork, participative management, customer feedback, creativity, effective communication, employee involvement, participation and empowerment, employee and management trust and support) appear to significantly impact on sustainable quality management but are not being adequately taken up or addressed in Australian organisations or globally. Vouzas and Psychogios (2007) purport that QM is a social system, i.e. a ‘human system’, not merely a technical system. This research together with the literature (e.g. Mele & Colucia 2005; Tari 2005; and Joiner 2007) acknowledge the crucial role HR (including participation of all members, training and communication and feedback systems, reward systems) plays in the adoption of successful quality processes and practices. Research by Da Silva, Tadashi and Kikuo (2005) investigated the best common management practices of world companies concluding that ‘senior managers’ respect for knowledgeable customers, as well as heightened commitment from top management. These literature examples as well as the findings form our research is indicative of the value of human ‘People’ factors for achieving high quality.

Future of Quality Management
Waddell and Mallan (2001) argued that Quality Managers in Australia appeared to have a pessimistic view of the future of Quality Management in their organisations. They saw no change to the development of the QM Manager role and predicted that eventually QM would be integrated throughout the organisation and become a value shared amongst employees and stakeholders. Waddell and Mallan (2001) forecasted that a new paradigm would emerge i.e. ‘Quality as a way of life’. The Stewart and Waddell research (2003) was unsure about the future of quality management; there was no a clear indication as to whether Quality Management would continue as a specialist field or become integrated with other quality systems; and identified the divergent thinking about the future of quality management with views ranging from: the outsourcing of the quality function to consultants; to the continuation of QM as a functional responsibility in organisations; and the integration of QM into the management systems of the organisation. McAdam and Henderson (2004) in Vouzas and Psychogios (2007, p 63) contend that the future of QM as influenced by market changes is likely to result in less structured QM approaches and more devolved, empowered, customer facing QM activity. While QM exponents may argue that these elements have been in existence for some time, there is clearly a need for QM to become more mobile and agile to meet such challenges’.

In our research, by the year 2015, most respondents thought that Quality Management would no longer be ‘stand alone’ and would be integrated into the organisation (46.2%). Others still thought that it would stay the same (28.7%) while some thought that Quality was ‘on the way out’ (5%). The balance thought that quality would be reinvented into other programs or fads (12.5%). Interestingly by 2015, 39.5% of respondents stated that they would be ‘retired’ and 14.0% expected that they would be doing a similar job. The variety of comments from respondents exhibited their divergent views:

'Quality Management has run its course'
'QM is important but out of favour'
'QM is unfortunately omnipresent'
'QM is the responsibility of all'
'There will be a revival of best practice'
'QM will be much more developed'
'QM will Bridge the gap between current practice and continued sustainability'

The importance of a Quality Culture
The findings from our research, and our survey, point to the position that a ‘Quality System is only as strong as the people who believe in it’. This requires the development of a ‘quality culture’ to embrace put into practice this philosophy. Surprisingly, it appears that there has been limited research on the interrelation between quality management and culture, but there are a few who speculate on its importance. Recently Lagrosen 2005 & Vouzas and Psychogios 2007) argue that an open and democratic management style and supportive culture is crucial for quality sustainability and success to be able to provide the necessary leadership for cultural change to take place. In his review of quality initiatives in American business, Goldman (2005) argues that such cultural changes require a full reorientation of job descriptions, roles and responsibilities. ‘Quality programs cannot work where employees refuse to be ‘their brothers’ keepers…
This collaborative working system is difficult to implement, but not impossible to achieve... The individual employee must become a partner in the enterprise and be just as concerned about quality as the CEO... (Goldman 2005, p 220).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There is now a degree of recognition in research and practice that QM is multi-faceted, cross-disciplinary and impacts all organisation areas and levels. Organisations are still seen to grappling how to obtain sustainable and successful quality management in a co-ordinated and integrated systemic way. Svensson (2006) argues that ‘sustainable quality management stresses a holistic view of the components (i.e. actors, activities and resources) that goes beyond the initial and final values, tools and techniques’. It also addresses a holistic view of the interfaces (i.e. interactions, coordinations, cooperations and competitions) that goes beyond the initial and final ones’ (p 26).

The role of Quality Manager is both confusing and tentative and it is evident that Quality managers assume a variety of different titles which alludes to the continual misunderstanding about their roles and responsibilities. The people factors identified above in (including learning, training and development, leadership development, clarification of roles and responsibilities of quality professionals, teamwork, participative management, customer relationships, effective communication, employee involvement and participation) seem to play a significant part in QM development yet are not being adequately taken up or addressed in Australian organisations or globally. Quality managers still have a vital role to play in facilitating an organisation to develop a quality culture and required their professional training and development needs to be considered and met.


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