



ESSAY

SURESH LULLA, CEO, QIMPRO

A REVOLUTION AWAITED

MAN has striven for quality since the dawn of history. Early societies were dependent on the quality of food and the environment. In response to these needs, two basic strategies for managing for quality emerged: human sensing—judging quality by sight, smell, or feel—and lessons learnt—using past experience as a quality guide.

Primitive nomads eventually settled into the sociological structure of towns and villages. With this arrangement came the division of labour: individuals being responsible for specific tasks within the community. There evolved craftsmanship, where the customer relied on the skill and the reputation of experienced craftsmen. With the growth of early technology, additional strategies were adopted for quality: specifying needs by providing a sample; control of quality through inspection; warranties that products were fit for use.

In large towns, the craftsmen organised themselves into monopolistic guilds which were strict in their enforcement of product quality. Their strategies included: mandated specifications for raw materials, processes followed, and finished goods; audits of guild members' performance; and export controls on finished goods.

The Industrial Revolution created the factory system. Power was harnessed and machines did the jobs

once performed by craftsmen. Small craft-shops became obsolete, craftsmen became factory workers, masters became factory foremen. Quality was managed as before through the skills of the workers, supplemented by departmental inspection, or supervisory audits. It also brought additional strategies for quality: written specifications for materials, processes, finished goods, and tests; measurement and test laboratories; and standardisation in many forms.

Late in the 19th Century, the US adopted Taylor's system of Scientific Management. Central to the Taylor system was the separation of planning from execution. This made possible a rise in productivity, but dealt a crippling blow to craftsmanship and had a negative effect on quality. To compensate, factory managers set up central inspection departments headed by chief inspectors. Still, the priority given to quality declined and the leadership of the quality function became vague.

Following World War II, the Japanese embarked on a course of reaching national goals by trade rather than by military means. Prior to the War, the export of poor quality goods had earned Japan a national reputation for shoddy products. To solve these quality problems, the Japanese devised unprecedented strategies for creating a revolution in quality. Upper managers personally took



charge of leading the revolution. All levels and all functions underwent training in managing for quality.

Quality improvement was undertaken as a continuing, revolutionary pace. Through quality circles, the workforce was enlisted in quality improvement. As a result, the Japanese became the world's quality leaders. Worldwide, industry after industry has had to struggle with the onslaught of high-quality but reasonably-priced products from Japan, South Korea, Southeast Asia, and now, China. On the other hand, Indian companies are consumed in implementing ISO-9000 quality assurance systems.

As we near the 21st Century, India needs a Quality Revolution. Already, there are some signs that a movement may be gathering force, but we need to hasten the process manifold. The Quality Revolution will be characterised by a stronger focus on the customer to the point of being a passion.

Quality will become integral to strategic business plans. Quality goals and objectives will be set at the corporate level and deployed throughout the organisation.

Companies will develop and implement new means of identifying customer needs and expectations, and for translating these into high-quality goods and services.

Companies will develop better methods for identifying poor quality and eliminating the associated costs of poor quality. In fact, companies

will more than double their profits without capital investment. Cycle-time reduction will be an obsession.

Companies will benchmark their quality performances against those of their competitors and leading organisations in other industries. The desire to be the best-in-class will be paramount.

In the Quality Revolution, managing for quality will become a way of life in every function and at every level. Consequently, performance appraisal systems will focus on quality management. Ownership of cross-functional business processes will fortify ownership of functions.

Organisations will invest heavily in educating their most valuable resource. This will become their competitive edge. Self-directing teams of employees, professionals and managers will continuously improve their own performance and drive cross-functional quality improvement throughout the organisation.

Companies will use training as a strategic weapon. They will train all their people in the basic concepts of quality management, tied closely to job functions and individual needs.

By 2000, many firms will have achieved levels of efficiency and quality unimagined now. Others will be scrambling for survival.

India's National Quality Award will drive quality in the Afro-Asian region. The Prime Minister's Office will have a Quality Council. And the Quality Revolution will never end.