

Advances in Project Management Series¹

From Quality to the Pursuit of Excellence

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Introduction to the March 2013 Advances in PM Series Article

Quality is an elusive concept and topic. Much has been said and done in the name of quality, but the underlying features of quality are yet to generate universal agreement.

Philip Crosby, a major contributor to the quality management movement, asserted that 'quality is free'. His book with the same title published in 1979 made a strong case for doing it right first time. If you do things right in the first place, you will not need to pay to fix them, or be forced to re-do them later resulting in added costs and loss of reputation and hard earned trust. The case for getting things right from the outset is compelling, as recent recalls of cars and the grounding of new fleets of aeroplanes demonstrate.

Quality has proved to be a prolific pre-occupation for philosophers, as well as industrialists. Indeed, some of the ancient Greek philosophers long recognised that quality is not a single act, but a habit.

One of the best selling books dedicated to exploring the boundaries and meaning of quality is Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* published in 1974. The book has sold over five million copies worldwide. It also holds the distinction of having been originally rejected by 121 publishers, more than any other bestselling book according to the Guinness Book of Records.

Pirsig's book recounting a journey on a motorcycle across the US, can be read at many different levels. It can be viewed as a travel odyssey, a treatise on the philosophy of life, an exploration of familial relationships, or most crucially a deep philosophical discussion on the meaning of quality. The main character in the book is gradually introduced through a series of flashbacks as a former university professor who spent his life pursuing a quest for the true meaning of quality. The closer he got to a true definition of the term, the more unstable and chaotic his personal situation became. Finally, just as he was close to defining the meaning that he was seeking, he became mentally unstable. As the book begins, the hero tries to recover from the trauma and embarks on a physical journey of discovery. Pursuit of the true meaning of quality thus appears to have cost him his sanity.

¹The *Advances in Project Management* series includes articles by authors of program and project management books published by Gower in the UK. Each month an introduction to the currently monthly article is provided by series editor **Prof Darren Dalcher**, who is also the editor of the Gower *Advances in Project Management* series of books on new and emerging concepts in PM. For more on Gower project management, visit <http://www.gowerpublishing.com/default.aspx?page=2063>.

However maddening, the notion of quality is central to organisations, to projects and to management. It hinges on stakeholders and their perceptions, on design quality, fitness for use, conformance to requirements, and on meeting the expectations of customers.

Over the years, the original focus on quality, which featured a production-centric interest has been augmented by additional perspectives and viewpoints that increasingly feature individuals and their interests. Understanding quality requires the multidimensional and dynamic juxtaposing of ideas and concepts in search of value.

Indeed, any definition of quality would require an understanding of the importance of people, and their place within the organisation. The article by Dr. Ron Basu is extracted from his book *Managing Quality in Projects*, published by Gower as part of the *Advances in Project Management* books series. Far from maddening, Basu seeks to identify and highlight the underpinning principles of quality in projects. The book offers new perspectives on the definition of the dimensions of quality in project management, and makes a powerful case for utilising models of project excellence, whilst recognising the crucial role of project stakeholders.

Ron's book offers a rich contribution to the project management literature by offering an organisational take on the role of quality in projects. The focus on critical factors and organisational maturity encourage a deeper understanding of the roots and implications of quality. The ideas are further supported by detailed case examples that offer glimpses of good practice employed across major industrial projects.

US industrialist Henry Ford noted that: "quality means doing it right when no one is looking". Quality can clearly mean different things to different people. It can certainly be interpreted and implemented in different ways and hence is in the eye of the beholder. Nonetheless, quality relates to the degree of excellence that an item, product, system or organisation encompasses. This implies greater attention to the set of attributes that dynamically contribute to the development of quality as excellence. The English art critic John Ruskin observed that: "quality is never an accident. It is always the result of intelligent effort".

Striving for excellence can be part of our orchestrated and intelligent effort to make quality central to every endeavour and undertaking whilst 'doing it right from the start'. It can also play a key part in re-positioning the discourse on quality around the pursuit, and achievement of excellence.

*Editor's note: Darren Dalcher is the editor of the series of books on *Advances in Project Management* published by Gower in the UK. Information about the Gower series can be found at <http://www.gowerpublishing.com/advancesinprojectmanagement>. The above article is an introduction to the invited paper this month in the PMWJ by Gower author Michael Hatfield on the subject of "The Coming Sea-Change in Project Management Science." You can find previously published articles by Prof Dalcher and Gower authors at www.pmworldlibrary.net.*

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Darren Dalcher, Ph.D. HonFAPM, FRSA, FBCS, CITP, FCMI is Professor of Project Management at the University of Hertfordshire, and founder and Director of the National Centre for Project Management (NCPM) in the UK. He has been named by the Association for Project Management (APM) as one of the top 10 “movers and shapers” in project management in 2008 and was voted Project Magazine’s “Academic of the Year” for his contribution in “integrating and weaving academic work with practice”. Following industrial and consultancy experience in managing IT projects, Professor Dalcher gained his PhD in Software Engineering from King's College, University of London. Professor Dalcher has written over 150 papers and book chapters on project management and software engineering. He is Editor-in-Chief of *Software Process Improvement and Practice*, an international journal focusing on capability, maturity, growth and improvement. He is the editor of the book series, *Advances in Project Management*, published by Gower Publishing of a new companion series *Fundamentals of Project Management*. Heavily involved in a variety of research projects and subjects, Professor Dalcher has built a reputation as leader and innovator in the areas of practice-based education and reflection in project management. He works with many major industrial and commercial organisations and government bodies in the UK and beyond. He is an Honorary Fellow of the APM, a Chartered Fellow of the British Computer Society, a Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute, and the Royal Society of Arts, and a Member of the Project Management Institute (PMI), the Academy of Management, the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and the Association for Computing Machinery. He is a Chartered IT Practitioner. He is a Member of the PMI Advisory Board responsible for the prestigious David I. Cleland project management award and of the APM Professional Development Board. Prof Dalcher is an academic editorial advisor for the *PM World Journal*. He can be contacted at d.dalcher2@herts.ac.uk.