

Advances in Project Management Series¹

Not by Accident: Revisiting quality management

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Quality management is devoid of the glamour, glitz and prestige associated with innovation, entrepreneurship and execution; yet it plays an unquestionable key part in delivering desired and sustainable results that are meaningful to clients and stakeholders.

The ideas underpinning the quality movement can be traced back to medieval Europe, where craftsmen proudly indicated that products and artefacts originated from a known and recognised master, serving as a seal of recognition and approval. Elevation to master status inevitably followed an extended apprenticeship process used to acquire the skills and capabilities that will enable the craftsman to develop their own unique practice. Esteem and recognition followed, providing an implied assurance related to deliverables produced by particular craftsmen.

The formation of guilds, dating back to the end of the 13th century, enabled craftsmen to organise into communities of excellent practitioners, referred to as unions. Guilds established professional expectations, through the development of standards and rules for product and service quality, and systems for enforcing the rules and confirming the levels of attainment in the resulting artefacts. Many guilds established inspection mechanisms and committees whose role was to evaluate artefacts and mark flawless products with pre-agreed marks or symbols.

The marks, acting as a seal of approval, indicated that the product was deemed to be satisfactory by the trade's own body of experts. Many craftsmen also placed their own unique mark, indicating the provenance of an artefact as an implied guarantee of its quality through the name or mark. Over time, these marks were treated as further symbol confirming the reputation and hence offering further assurance. Inspection marks, recognised craftsmen trademarks' and the inspection committees that confirmed conformance with typical expectations served as a proof of quality for buyers and tradesmen.

The craftsmanship model remained the main hallmark of quality for about 550 years. By the early 19th century industrialisation provided fundamentally new approaches to

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 current 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>.

design and mass delivery of artefacts. The factory system, initiated in Great Britain in the mid-1750s, and the industrial revolution enabled new players to mass design, develop and deliver new products. Factories became reliant on their own internal product inspection regimes intended to confirm that only fit specimens would be released. In time these evolved into sophisticated sampling approaches and statistical process control methods.

However, quality cannot be reduced to inspection regimes, marks, seals of approval, reviews or samples. US quality guru, W. Edwards Deming characterised quality as 'pride of workmanship'. The implication is that quality embeds further significance, assurance and value beyond the simple tests devised to confirm its existence or absence. Industrialist Henry Ford summed it up saying that quality means 'doing it right when no one is looking'.

Quality guru Philip Crosby is noted for his best-selling text 'Quality is Free' which has sold over 2.5 million copies and offered many concepts and principles for improving quality. His subsequent work endeavoured to remind organisations that quality does not belong in the quality department, but is an organisation-wide endeavour.

In his 1984 book, 'Quality Without Tears', Crosby addressed issues concerned with integrity, education of employees and suppliers, establishing improvement and feedback as routine, communicating problems, visibility, progress measurement, continuous examination of procedures and systems and clear policies. His wider approach aims to make quality relevant, and indeed, central, to the entire business.

Quality is not simply an exit activity concerned with conformance. It is a deeper and more significant way of doing, inventing, creating, establishing and manufacturing. The continuing prevalence of failures in projects, products and services points to a more fundamental need to consider the broader dimensions of quality, as well as the implications of failure. Indeed, as we begin to consider projects from a longer term perspective and increasingly endeavour to account for sustainability, decommissioning, extended life cycles, environmental and social implications, and an ever expanding range of societal concerns, it is incumbent upon us to re-visit the ideas, concepts and methods that underpin quality thinking.

This month's article by Dr. Ron Basu attempts to re-focus attention around the idea of the cost of quality. The cost of quality is linked to the cost of control and the cost of failure and the balance and interactions between them. The work draws on the ideas covered in his book *Managing Quality in Projects*, published by Gower as part of the Advances in Project Management book series. The article makes a powerful plea for defining and measuring the dimensions of the cost of quality.

As we re-evaluate the role of project control, it is important that we link quality and its impact to that unfolding conversation. The article reminds us of the need to consider an assessment of external failure costs, in addition to the measurement of internal failures costs. With project failures dominating headlines in the popular and the professional press, the work offers a potential way forward in analysing and considering projects.

Ultimately, quality has many facets and interpretations; some have the potential to revitalise the conversation around project success, control, performance and failure. Quality gurus have offered many mechanisms and approaches for embracing and applying quality thinking and re-visiting some of the sources can refresh and reinvigorate some of our long held concepts.

Aristotle opined that quality is 'not an act, but a habit'. The repositioning of quality would need to acknowledge the enterprise-wide role of quality as central to improvement. Conversations about quality and success would benefit from such a better-informed starting point.

British thinker, artist, art critic and philanthropist John Ruskin observed that quality 'is never an accident, but the result of intelligent effort'. To re-focus the conversation around quality, we would do well to revisit our sources and assumptions and creatively re-consider the role of quality in guiding and sustaining successful delivery.

Winston Churchill wryly observed that however beautiful the strategy, one should occasionally look at the results. Improving the delivery track record of the project management profession may require more intimate, and more intelligent, scrutiny of what we seek, what we measure, and the assurances, and hallmarks of quality that we ascribe to that process.

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 by Gower author Dr. Ron Basu. You can find previously published articles by Prof Dalcher and Gower authors at www.peworldlibrary.net.

About the Author



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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 editorial advisor for the *PM World Journal*. He can be contacted at d.dalcher2@herts.ac.uk.

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