

## SOME SKETCHES ON QUALITY

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Recent problems of quality management have gained a diverse character. A number of organizations at different levels actively seek for implementing various quality management systems. A part of those are based on ISO standards, whereas the rest employs other measures. Despite these variations, the actions taken must be properly performed thus avoiding situations when the issued certificate only plays a crucial role. The key objective is to ensure continuous improvement and personal competitive advantage of activities stimulated by an organization. The writing does not focus on all above introduced questions. The only point is that frequently the implementation of quality management systems is really a rather formal and superficial process, i.e. certain call of fashion, discussing the fields of social affairs, education and culture in particular. It seems to be clear that the latest concept of quality is very chaotic as there are a number of different and often contradictory definitions. The abundance of quality investigations is really surprising. Quite a few researchers deal with the quality aspects of a certain area in one or another way regardless of the type of the sector, for example, manufacturing, services, etc. It should be noticed that discussing the issues of quality have sometimes become a modern occupation. A great number of recently developed models, theories and concepts have put forward an argument this is positive and allows for a better understanding of the phenomenon of quality. Though this position is fully acceptable, nevertheless, methodological chaos is not a popular idea as such an undefined state requires certain systemic perception. Still, investigation into quality phenomena is very complex and controversial, and therefore more attention should be paid to a more systemic understanding of quality management. Quality declaration means almost nothing. Different development strategies, plans, etc. designed by organizations cannot be proposed as focused documents. They must refer to the conducted empirical research, i.e. quality cannot be only a political commitment followed by an organization. Quality, first of all, must be treated as economic necessity. As mentioned above, the implementation of quality-based systems have become an integral part of business activities stimulated by organizations. However, if this way of implementation carries an imposed, unrealized and unsubstantiated character or has been determined by external pressure, such a system is not effective and significantly decreases the efficiency of activity the organization has been involved. Similarly, the enthusiasm only expressed by the staff members is not a sufficient component in maintaining and advancing productive management systems. Lithuania faces serious problems of quality management due to the fact that it was incorporated in the former Soviet Union and gained invaluable experience when low-quality products were awarded the so-called 'quality mark'. Meanwhile, the concept of quality and practical experience in western countries have developed in a different way, i.e. the standardization of products created the opportunities to control the quality of production (level of quality) manufactured by different companies. The approved level was accepted as the one matching to the established standard. Thus, the 8<sup>th</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mainly faced a fundamental turning point of the paradigm: from 'I can sell everything I can produce' to 'I produce everything I can sell'. Since then, the concept of the quality of products (services) has been given new content that corresponds to the needs of a customer. Requirements for a static form imposed in the standards gradually have become dynamic

constantly and rapidly changing requirements that depend on the existing situation in the market and the needs of a certain customer. However, the nature of the standards has been inevitably modified. Thus, some countries encountered difficulties in accepting the new paradigm.

The recent decade has also extensively explored the issues of quality conducting, as mentioned above, a large number of fundamental and applied researches in the field. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the occupied countries have restored or declared independence. The great majority of questions, including quality management, have been a new and serious challenge. Nonetheless, stormy debates still have been taking place, and the number of different organizations offering services of implementing and certifying quality systems is increasing. Quality management have become a serious business as some of the organizations have earned huge profits. What is more, the following tendency can be noticed: organizations usually take the easiest way – they prefer buying services rather than are themselves involved in the processes of implementing, maintaining and improving quality systems. A decreased or insufficient internal interest of an organization results in a situation when quality becomes only a declarative subject. We obviously start ‘getting tired’ of using an excessive and frequently unjustified concept of quality. A decrease in engagement and a lack of interest in quality has become a problem across Europe. At the moment, no clear answer has been provided. Thus, what are the reasons for such a tendency? Again, the question remains unanswered. The only point should be considered – the amount of information on quality management is sharply increasing. On the other hand, one can notice an unreasonably growing number of people involved in quality management activities. As for Lithuania, it is worth putting emphasis on the fact that all institutions providing university education services, in one or another way, prepare the specialists of quality management. The curricula of such a profile have tuned into a sign of a good manner. As discussed earlier, the business of certification and giving advice has been rapidly developing. What is the degree of the efficiency of similar activities? We can hardly expect a full answer to the provided question. A growth in pessimism and disbelief in the quality management system as the one providing real benefits to the organization have evolved into a matter of concern. Understanding a quality management system as a bureaucratic arrangement the real output of which is only a requirement for an issuing a certificate has emerged as risk to quality management systems in general. Contradictions at a methodological level have been also increasing. For instance, though plenty of quality management systems have been implemented, however, the experts in the field of quality fail to agree on the aims of quality and the way they should be applied to one or another organization. The explained situation requires in-depth discussions at all levels and investigations into the questions about the quality of rapidly increasing information on the basis of which management practises have been created and developed. After all, according to Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754–1838), ‘those who own information – rule the world’.

Received: *November 25, 2012*

Accepted: *December 10, 2012*