

# Quality And Productivity Conference, Proceedings

## The evolution of strategic quality management

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In their book *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-run Companies*, Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr[1] found that the most consistent factor among companies they rated as most successful is an obsession with some form of quality, reliability and/or service. Indeed, quality can be an important part of competitive strategy. Research has shown that companies that furnish quality products can charge more for their products, with resulting higher profit margins[2]. Data show that improvement in product quality has a stronger relationship to increases in market share than does price. More recent experience shows that as quality increases, so does productivity.

Many prominent US companies have demonstrated that quality has an immense strategic value in today's competitive world market. David Garvin[3] cited Hewlett-Packard, Xerox and Corning Glass as organizations that have successfully established quality strategies. Success requires attention to quality-related implications in every strategic decision made by a company. These companies have concurrently achieved higher quality and greater productivity through investments in people, design of products and process improvements. The key to success is an understanding of quality and the ways in which it can be integrated into corporate strategy. The White House Conference on Productivity[4] noted in its final report that:

Managing the quality dimension of an organization is not generically different from any other aspect of management. It involves the formulation of strategies, setting goals and objectives, developing action plans, implementing plans, and using control systems for monitoring feedback and taking corrective action. If quality is viewed only as a control system, it will never be substantially improved. Quality is not just a control system; quality is a management function.

Garvin[3] reported recent shifts in thinking among top management teams in a growing number of companies. Chief executives are linking quality closely with profitability and are including quality in the strategic planning process. Many CEOs identify quality as an aggressive competitive weapon. This orientation towards quality has been brought about by increasing foreign competition, consumer demands, government pressures and increases in both the number and size of awards in product liability lawsuits. Making strategic quality a part of a company requires shifts in thinking. The definition of profit has to be

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