

Margaret Rooney describes the work of the CQI Professional Policy Board in defining the role of the quality professional

Issue number: April 2010

Date: 05 April 2010

Author: Margaret Rooney

When the Professional Policy Board first started to consider the role of the quality professional, a range of different views and opinions were mooted. The profession has evolved over the years and is now very different to that held by the first members of the institute back in 1919.

For instance, the title The Institute of Engineering Inspectors – a former name of the CQI that some members may remember – is particularly intriguing and conjures up a clear vision of the likely membership. They were professionals at various stages of their careers who were all involved in ensuring that engineering structures met their specifications and were fit for purpose. Tools at their disposal were visual checking, destructive and non-destructive testing equipment and techniques. Their competence as engineers was used to judge on the basis of these tests whether structures were fit and safe for use. The role of the mid- to late-20th century institute member was very clear.

Fast forward to the early years of the 21st century and it can be a struggle to envisage precisely what type of professional should have membership of the CQI. Everyone has bought into and experienced the truth that quality is everyone's responsibility, that top management commitment is essential, that everyone needs some awareness of quality, that simple compliance and assurance – the bedrock on which we were formed and perhaps still rely – is no longer sufficient. Things have certainly changed and the quality profession is now extremely different to its traditional roots.

The certification industry serves a very wide range of sectors, from construction and manufacturing to supply chain logistics and education. Quality and certification industry professionals who work within those industries should be joining the CQI. However, while quality may be relevant in every corner of industry, commerce and the public sector – as testified by numerous articles and papers over the years – that does not make everyone eligible or competent to join the CQI as a Chartered Quality Professional. The skillset required to be a CQP does not belong to everyone and not everyone will be carrying out the role of the CQP in his or her job. So, irrespective of sector, size, complexity or the culture in which a quality professional may find him or herself working, what would or should we find this person doing?

The role of the Chartered Quality Professional

Nine months ago, the CQI Professional Policy Board set itself the task of defining the role of the quality professional. After taking several months to arrive at a consensus, the conclusion reached by the PPB was that the role breaks down into two main areas of activity:

Changing face

- To be the conscience of the organisation
- To act as mentor and coach.

The role is defined under two main headings:

- The activities of the quality professional
- The areas of activity influenced by the quality professional.

Quality may be at the heart of every organisation, but not everyone in the organisation can be a quality expert, just as health and health awareness may be at the heart of a community, but not everyone can be a health expert. The activities of one influence the other. The PPB also defined six activities as being core to the role of the quality professional:

1. Identification of concerns regarding achievement of required standards. This means ensuring that top management intent is very clear and unambiguous, which is no mean feat. In his or her role as the conscience of the organisation, the CQP needs to ensure that stakeholders have been identified, that requirements, roles and responsibilities are clear and that processes and their owners are defined.
2. Provision of recommendations to relevant leaders within the organisation. This may be advising the management team on what needs to be done and how requirements may be met, for example using a defined management system or plan, reporting routes, process definition and monitoring, legal requirements and compliance.
3. Facilitating implementation of these recommendations. This is where the CQP can support process owners in designing their processes and producing plans. This includes: internal auditing to ensure recommendations have been effectively implemented, making recommendations for improvement as an outcome of audits, identifying external standards and certifications as appropriate.
4. Escalation of areas of concern. This is where the CQP can ensure a culture of continuous evaluation and improvement by carrying out risk identification and management, problem solving and coaching of managers and their teams. It is also important for the CQP to ensure the review and surveillance of processes, product and service takes place.
5. Mentoring colleagues with enthusiasm, patience and leadership in the tools and techniques of business improvement. This includes process design, quality planning, customer management and problem solving which are all vital to the success and profitability of an organisation. The CQP can draw upon the range of quality tools at his or her disposal, as appropriate. The selection of the most appropriate tools will be key to this. Knowing when and where to use tools such as capability maturity model integration, the excellence model, quality function deployment or control charts is extremely important. The CQI Body of Knowledge can provide guidance here and CQI training is available to help CQPs become competent in the use of tools, and enable communication to managers and their teams.
6. Drawing on the personal qualities of enthusiasm, determination, patience and leadership. These are required to influence the outcomes that are anticipated by the CQP's stakeholders such as senior management, customer, colleagues and society. The CQP needs to ask: "What outcomes might need to be influenced?" Success criteria need to be defined and there needs to be clear articulation of management intent and its communication, as well as the mitigation of project risk. Examples

Changing face

might include reject rate reduction, cost per tonne of product reduced, reduced design iterations and repeat business.

Areas of activity

A CQP can contribute much to the management team whether working in or with a non-quality-based, a compliance or conformance-based organisation. However, senior managers benefit from awareness and clarity around what the quality professional can offer. In a large, world-class organisation, a senior CQP may be supporting and managing a team of quality professionals, as well as supporting and influencing the wider management team. In a smaller organisation, still perhaps on the quality learning curve, the CQP will be guiding, supporting and influencing the management team, which may be a team of one owner.

Whatever the scenario, the CQP's sphere of influence needs to be understood. Within that sphere of influence, the PPB has identified five key activities in the five areas or spheres of influence that he or she can carry out. Properly and fully deployed, the CQP adds value to all organisations whether in the public, private or third sector. The five areas where the quality professional can be influential and where management needs to be aware of what support CQP can give are:

Development and deployment of comprehensive organisational purpose, policy and strategy. Quality professionals are not responsible for defining these issues, but at its most basic level, the quality professional can ask the questions. "Have we got one?" "What is it?" and "What should it be?"

Adequacy of organisational management system. This includes policies and strategies and is typically achieved through internal audit and independent reviews, which can help identify gaps, inconsistencies and risks all the while ensuring that standards and requirements are met.

Effectiveness of implementation of the organisational management system. This also includes policies and strategies but takes the work above a stage further, identifying opportunities for improvement, such as process improvements, and good practice worth sharing. The CQP must also identify quality tools and techniques that a management team may benefit from deploying.

Delivery of required outcomes from the organisational management system. Again, this includes policies and strategies. Given all the work the CQP has done, does he or she deliver it? Did the client receive the product or service expected on time and within budget, using efficient processes, minimal costs, minimal iterations, rework or reject and any other requirements placed by the client or the internal management team? Is this how we should monitor the effectiveness of the CQP?

Support and promote an effective culture of continual improvement and innovation. The CQP's skills in recognising the most appropriate improvement and measurement tools, as well as enthusing management and teams to deploy them, will be an important part of this task.

Changing face

The role of the CQP can be summed up in comments recently made by a quality professional working in the engineering sector. He had worked closely with procurement, fellow engineering colleagues and the client, to develop prequalification questionnaires and a subsequent tender process and assessment tool. He was very clear that it was his role to make sure that whatever was needed was complete and clearly specified and he needed to work closely with colleagues to achieve this. The process needed to be appropriate, clear and unambiguous. The assessment needed to be relevant, easily-understood, objective and fully recorded. Likewise, he worked closely with all the process stakeholders to ensure their needs were met and views considered.

He played no part in the actual assessment and selection process. His work was done. He had ensured that an effective process was in place, deployed by the relevant, competent people – the process owners. A contractor was selected and after several months, the contract is operating to everyone's satisfaction. On completion of the project, everything will be reviewed under the guidance and support of the quality manager.

The acid test for the CQI, as well as the PPB, will be: "Does our definition of the role of the quality professional stand up to the needs of current and future quality professionals in all sectors of life, especially those where the CQI does not historically have a sphere of influence?".

Dr Margaret Rooney, MCQI CQP, is chair of the CQI Professional Policy Board and a member of the CQI Board of Trustees.