

QualityProgress

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Quality Progress

21 voices for the 21st Century Quality. E-quality. Equality.

That progression of words says a lot about how quality will be practiced in the 21st century. At least that is one of the conclusions that can be drawn from the observations of the 21 voices of quality that the editors of this magazine have selected to mark the beginning of the 21st century.

When we began this project, our goal was to identify 21 new voices of quality. But we quickly recognized that our approach was leading us into a trap. For one thing, many of the established voices of quality continue to say new and valuable things, and so it seemed unfair to exclude someone from the list just on the basis of longevity. We also ran into trouble when we started to probe into international and nontraditional sectors of the quality profession. The voices that we heard in those areas may have been new to many in the American Society for Quality, but they were hardly new in their home countries or specialized fields.

As a result we set ourselves a slightly different charge-to identify and amplify 21 voices whose individual and collective statements could serve to stimulate thinking about how quality will be applied in the 21st century. Clearly there are many more than 21 quality practitioners who could serve in this role, and no slight is intended to anyone not included on this list. Our hope is simply that readers will find value in considering the interplay of ideas from a selection of original thinkers who are grappling with the evolution of quality from the Industrial Age into the Information Age.

One such interplay can be found in the terms e-quality and equality.

In one sense the word e-quality implies the development of new forms of quality that can be applied in the emerging world of electronic commerce, a rough and tumble place where the rewards are great but where the rules are still being written.

In this environment quality faces a quandary, because to a large degree some of its traditional strengths can start to look like liabilities. Quality in the 20th century proved its worth by showing the value of conformance to specifications, of standardization and of taking the time to do things right the first time around. In the 21st century many business leaders have come to believe that the true keys to success will be innovation; flexibility and speed. Thus turning quality into e-quality is one of the major challenges facing the profession.

Another challenge is represented by the idea of equality. This concept has been at the core of many powerful social, political and economic movements, as men and women and indeed entire nations have fought for a more equal distribution of wealth and more equal access to the fruits of progress, such as higher education and advanced health care. In the 21st century, quality will surely play a vital role in such efforts, whether they be primarily social or primarily economic.

Quality's applications will range from improving schools and hospitals to bringing entire national economies into stronger positions in the global system of trade and commerce. Just as quality was an important factor in raising Japan's standard of living after World War II, it will play a similar role in other nations whose economies are poised to expand in the coming decades. As part of this process, quality will help to increase opportunities for groups that have historically been disenfranchised, and particularly at the local level it will be used in creative ways to attack social ills and promote continuous improvement in the delivery of community services.

Considerations of e-quality and equality are explicit in the writings of scholars such as M.S. Krishnan and Eileen Drew, both of whom have been included in this list of 21 Voices for the 21st Century. But to one degree or another these issues are matters of concern to everyone who makes a profession of quality.

As some of the others on this list have demonstrated, quality is poised to better our lives in the 21st century in many different respects. We invite you to consider their comments about the role of quality in such areas as improving the design and production of goods and services, cleaning up the environment and restructuring the way government relates to citizen-clients.

To assemble this list, the editors of Quality Progress attempted to gather input from as many sources as possible. In addition to interviewing individual authors, news sources and thought leaders, we posted a notice on the ASQ Web site and asked the Society's divisions for ideas. We also sent an e-mail request to members of the magazine's Editorial Review Board and to reviewers for Quality Press. Tagged at the end of this e-mail was a suggestion that it be forwarded on to others who might have names for us to consider. In total, we received upwards of 100 suggestions.

A final note: As we put together our selection of the 21 voices of quality that need to be heard in the 21st century, we realized that there was yet another voice, perhaps the most important of all, to which the quality profession must pay heed. This voice is depicted on pages 40-41.



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While focusing his energy on the theory of management and leadership and the ideas of young entrepreneurs, he founded two ASQ student chapters, won a handful of awards and wrote three books. Some of those awards include the Automotive Hall of Fame's Young Leadership and Excellence Award (1996) and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers' Ralph E. Cross Young Manufacturing Engineer Award (1997). He is the youngest person ever to serve as ASQ's Automotive Division chair. His latest book, *Management 21C: Someday We'll All Manage This*

Way (London: Financial Times Prentice Hall) was voted the Best European Business Book of 1999 by www.amazon.co.uk.

QUALITY QUOTE: "The major challenge the quality profession is facing is to make the transformation from total quality management to people quality management. Quality professionals are very knowledgeable in quality tools, but we need to develop the humanistic side of quality."