



# Should I Make Quality Management

## My Profession?

by Sunil Thawani

If your organization is beginning to explore formal approaches to improving efficiency and cost-effectiveness, you may be encountering quality improvement concepts and tools for the first time. After contributing to a few successful improvement projects and discovering what you can accomplish with your new knowledge of quality, you may find yourself contemplating quality management and organizational excellence as a profession.

Chances are good that you are seeking answers to the following questions:

- Is a career in quality improvement challenging and satisfying?
- Should I specialize in implementing a specific approach like Six Sigma, lean, or total quality management (TQM) just in service or just in manufacturing?
- Do I need a university degree or other qualification? Will a self-learning certification like the American Society for Quality (ASQ) Certified Manager of Quality/Organizational Excellence or Certified Quality Process Analyst suffice?
- How does training to be an assessor or examiner for a quality or business excellence award help me in my profession? For example, should I become involved with the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (United States), the European Foundation for Quality Management Award, or the

Dubai Quality Award (DQA)/Sheikh Khalifa Excellence Award (SKEA)?

- How do the employment prospects for quality professionals compare to opportunities in other fields? Will attending ISO 9001, lead auditor, or Six Sigma Green Belt training help me get a good job? How well are quality professionals paid in relation to other professions?

No single set of answers will apply to every situation. You must examine the scenario for yourself, first from the perspective of business needs, and then taking into account current business indicators that influence the need for a quality function or for dedicated quality professionals. Only then can you be certain of reaching an informed conclusion.

Below is an assessment of the current business environment in my country, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Following this example, you can begin your own decision-making process about whether the timing is right to begin a career in quality in your own country or region.

### **Business Indicators that Influence the Need for a Quality Function**

Because of UAE's growing economy, many new businesses are establishing operations here. Due to the realities of fierce competition, increasing costs, demanding customers, globalization, and the convergence of information, technology and

communication, businesses face tremendous pressure to innovate and improve. The focus is on radically improving performance in terms of quality, cost, service and delivery. Leaders are continually looking for people with the competencies to help them achieve their business goals, including improving business performance.

While this description cannot help but rely on subjective judgment, there are more objective indicators that I use to ground my assessment:

#### **Rise of regional awards, competitions, and other institutionalized programs:**

- The business excellence movement has spread from the Emirate of Dubai to the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Ras Al Khaimah. A chief indicator is the institutionalization of awards such as the following:

[Dubai Quality Award](#)  
[Sheikh Khalifa Excellence Award](#)  
[Sharjah Economic Excellence Award](#)

- The Dubai government has “diversified” and “expanded” the quality/business excellence movement by introducing several other related initiatives, like the [Dubai Government Excellence Program](#) and the [Dubai Service Excellence Scheme](#).

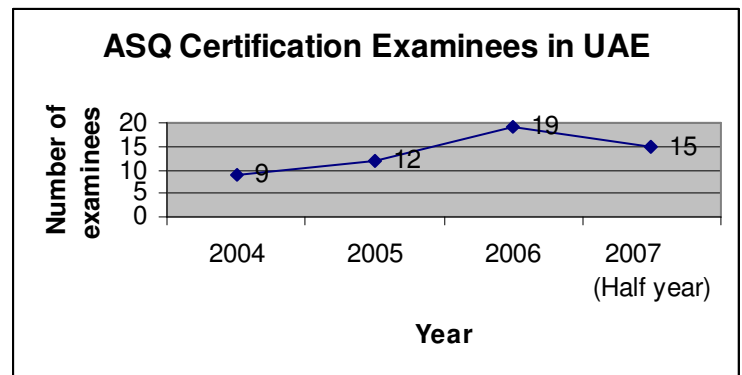
#### **More education and training opportunities:**

- The number of students enrolled in the TQM program at the University of Wollongong in Dubai has increased significantly since its inception. In 2001, the University reports, the program had only 15 students. In 2007 the program has about 350 enrolled. Each year has seen consistent growth in demand for the TQM program from students of various nationalities.
- An [e-TQM College](#) has been established.

- A number of organizations—including the International Quality and Productivity Center ([IQPC](#)), [Encreate](#), Lloyd’s Register Quality Assurance ([LRQA](#)), [AFOES](#), and [IIR](#)—hold regular conferences, workshops, and training programs in UAE focusing on topics like TQM, Six Sigma, and ISO 9000.

#### **Growing interest in professional certifications:**

- The number of people appearing for quality-related certifications from ASQ continues to increase every year. As the chart in figure 1 shows, the number of examinees for 2007, as reported by the ASQ Certification Offerings group, has already passed the number for 2005 and is well set to pass the number for 2006 by the end of the year.



**Figure 1**

- The Dubai Institute of Human Resources Development has signed an agreement with ASQ for [Quality Process Analyst, Manager of Quality/Organization Excellence](#), and other certifications.

#### **Increased attention to quality standards:**

- The number of ISO 9000 certificates issued in UAE has increased eight times from 2001 to 2005, as reported by the [International Organization for Standardization](#).

- A large organization has recently instituted the Dubai Quality Mark. The Dubai Industrial City has [announced that it will establish 'Maqayees' Dubai Centre for Industrial Standards](#), which will set the operational performance standards for industries and related institutions operating from the city.

#### **More resources applied to formal approaches to quality improvement:**

- Many organizations are employing full-time quality professionals. In contrast, during the 1990s, most organizations made the quality function one of the responsibilities of departments like finance, audit centers, human resources, and others.
- A few large diversified organizations, such as Dubai Holding and DP World, have started to establish organizational excellence centers and/or have “upgraded” their earlier TQM functions to business excellence functions.
- Organizations are moving, or “graduating,” from ISO 9001 compliance and registration to the next level of quality management through implementation of a business excellence award framework, Six Sigma, benchmarking, process improvement, mystery shopping.

#### **Increased awareness and use of quality outside large manufacturing companies:**

- Departments of the Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and other governments are continually focusing on automating or simplifying processes and enhancing speed and customer focus in their operations. Applying for visit visas through the Dubai Immigration Department, payment of utility bills to Abu Dhabi Water & Electricity Authority, and payment of traffic fines, for instance,

continue to become more automated and streamlined.

- Even small to medium organizations are showing greater interest in quality management. Some of the recent winners of the Dubai Quality Award and Sheikh Khalifa Excellence Award are small and medium enterprises, which provides good encouragement for similar organizations to apply.
- Some sectors of the UAE economy, such as education, community services, and charitable organizations, have yet to begin their quality journeys in earnest.

#### **Making an Informed Conclusion**

Based on the above indicators, and I'm sure there are many more, in my opinion, the need for highly competent quality professionals definitely exists and is increasing in UAE. Though indicators are encouraging for people who seriously desire to make a career move, let me sound a word of caution. The quality profession requires tremendous commitment, dedication, perseverance, and years of learning and hard work. There are no shortcuts. As one of my favorite quotations attests, “Achieving Quality is not an accident. It is always a result of an intelligent effort.”

#### **About the Author**

Sunil Thawani is American Society for Quality Country Councilor for United Arab Emirates. He has more than 15 years of experience in TQM, business excellence, and Six Sigma, and is the author of the book *Business Excellence Awards – Strategies for Winning*.

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