It is an easy matter to state quality goals. But actually taking action to achieve those goals requires strong commitment: a compelling vision, companywide shared values and complementary performance metrics and incentives. So what are the most vital components—and how can executives ensure theirs is a “culture of quality” in practice, as well as theory?

These and related key questions are explored in the soon-to-be-released ASQ-sponsored Forbes Insights report, “Culture of Quality: Accelerating Growth and Performance in the Enterprise.” Analyzing responses from more than 2,000 executives and quality professionals and incorporating interviews with leading corporations and experts, the report will deliver insights that are global, relevant and actionable to a wide range of organization sizes and industries.

What follows is a preview of the key findings thus far.

**Vision, Values and Leadership: Cracks in the Foundation**

Two-thirds of executives say their organizations exhibit a culture of quality. But a closer look at the key elements of such a culture (vision, values, leadership) reveals significant opportunities for improvement.

- **Quality vision** A quality “vision” is a clearly articulated business case—a strategy—mandating how the pursuit of quality advances an organization’s objectives and elicits buy-in from all executive leadership.
  - Only 61% say their quality vision is clearly stated, though this figure reaches 82% among those who also describe their quality programs as “world class” (a self-assessment)
  - Only 33% view their quality statement as compelling
  - Only half, 51%, say the quality vision is understood throughout the organization

- **Quality values** An organization’s “values” can help individuals at all levels make better and more responsible decisions relating to issues of quality.
  - Only 61% describe their quality values as clearly stated, rising to 76% among world-class organizations
  - Only half, 51%, say such values are clearly understood throughout the organization

- **Leadership**
  - Sixty-two percent say their management supports the quality vision and values unequivocally—rising to 80% among those describing themselves as world-class organizations
  - Only 50% say their leaders lead by example or otherwise “live” the values
  - Only 50% say support for the company’s quality vision is apparent among middle management

Surprisingly, even those with self-described world-class organizations often exhibit significant deficiencies—in many cases comparable to the overall results.

**Quality executives themselves may be overlooking the bigger competitive picture.**

Customer demands for quality are the most frequently cited drivers of quality programs. Executives believe that customers demand quality both in “core” products and services (the “primary offering”) and in all related aspects of the relationship (e.g., logistics, customer services, financing, etc.). But executives say quality initiatives are also driven by additional factors and benefits (Fig. 1).

**FIGURE 1. PURSUIT OF QUALITY**

What drives your company’s pursuit of quality?

- Customer demands for quality 90%
- Quality drives effectiveness and profitability 82%
- Product/service quality is a key competitive differentiator 79%
- Quality is a core leadership value 77%
- High quality serves as a barrier to entry to competitors 60%
- Address social responsibility 52%
- Competitors consistently “raising the bar” 51%
Executives also appear divided on the challenges faced by their organizations in adopting quality programs to meet the needs of an international workforce—with cultural issues appearing as key stumbling blocks (Fig. 2).

**Figure 2. Key Global Challenges**

*What are the challenges faced by your organization in adapting quality programs (training, metrics, supervision) to meet the needs of a global workforce? (Top 6)*

- Use of technology to ensure quality on a global basis: 33%
- Lack of uniform quality standards: 33%
- Lack of specialized training: 31%
- Workers vary by region in their ability to take initiative: 31%
- Use of technology for metrics: 27%
- Importance attached to quality by various cultures/regions: 25%

Nearly two-thirds of executives, 64%, say they are making investments in technology to improve performance against quality objectives, with customers’ needs at the forefront (Fig. 4):

**Figure 4. Investing in Technology to Meet Customers’ Needs**

*End customers*

- World class: 96%
- Overall: 91%

Positive Change Is on the Horizon—Particularly Among Leaders

The foundation may be imperfect. But the good news is that companies are planning substantial improvements in their quality programs over the next 18 months. Those already describing their quality programs as world class are leading the investment charge (Fig. 3).

**Figure 3. Renovations and Upgrades: Pending**

Percentage planning to increase investment in quality programs:

- World class: 66%
- Overall: 54%

More to come

The above is a mere overview of the key findings. The full report will provide deeper details, for example, providing breakdowns by company size, by industry, and by headquarters or respondent location. In addition, the research will discuss technology within quality initiatives (including “big data” and social media) as well the use and effectiveness of various metrics and incentives for promoting quality goals. *Publish date: July 2014.*

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