Quality concepts are evolving as part of a larger trend toward integrated risk management. We are entering the fourth era of organization management.

Background

First came the control era, where the focus was on defining and controlling characteristics, conditions, and pollutants. Then came the assurance era, where the focus was on defining and following processes. Recently, we entered the management era, where separate systems were established and often certified. Some of these systems promoted good, while other systems minimized evil. We are now entering the integration era, where quality, safety, environment, etc. are providing a holistic approach. Of course, we do not reject our past tools and technologies. We will continue to use the proven quality control, quality assurance, and quality management methods, but in our new journey to identify and manage risk – in all its many forms.

With a little imagination, we can see how the classic plan-do-check-act model can apply to all management systems. First, we define the desirable state and how to get there. Then, we implement these plans. Next, we need to assess our progress. Finally, we need to close the gap and try to do things better, safer, and cleaner.

Management Systems

The quality profession is quite mature in applying these PDCA concepts. The ISO 9000 family of standards started with the MIL-Q-9858 foundation of the 1950s. Aviation, food, medical device, and pharmaceutical regulations also built from this early foundation. We see a great deal of harmonization in these quality methods around the globe.

Environmental management approaches were defined in the 1980s, as it became obvious to citizens and government that pollution was harmful and unacceptable. The ISO 14000 family of standards took the quality base and added risk management concepts. We must define the sources of air, water, and ground pollution. Then we must assess the effects of these identified pollutants. Unacceptable pollutants must be avoided, transferred, or mitigated. Next, we see how well we are doing and close the gap.

Whilst occupational safety and health management has classically been implemented through control (inspection) and assurance (procedures) methodologies, recent events and international trade have demonstrated a need to apply systems principles. The publication of OHSAS 18001 by ISO/ILO in 2007 has not warmly received in the international trade community. In the USA, government regulation in process safety management has had some influence in the oil, gas, and chemical industries. In general, occupational safety is lagging the other professions.

Security management has become very important recently. Information security, homeland security, cyber-warfare, bio-terrorism, and business continuity are all discussed in the boardrooms and legislative halls. Despite – or perhaps because of – its relative newness, the security profession has applied PDCA concepts and systems principles from the beginning. This is a growth industry.

Integration and Need for Change

All of these management systems are beginning to overlap and share common principles. This coalescence is often called “sustainability” or “social responsibility.” People, planet, and profit all matter. Cultural attitudes also matter. Is quality at the center of this coalescence (big Q) or being driven by changes as part of something else (little Q)? What role should the EQ, ASQ, IAQ, APQO and other professional societies serve?
Government initiatives and international standards activities have suggested that quality professionals will play an increasingly important and rather different role in these integrated management systems. Around the world, companies and regulatory bodies are examining the evolving role of audit, security, safety, transparency, environment and green. The quality profession and quality professionals are expected to widen their scope of activities as corporate, government, and community stakeholders demand more for less.