

Neg 34455



Photo: Petra Granholm

BE-2

MAN ON A MISSION

On 16 June, the European Organization for Quality (EOQ), welcomed its new Secretary General, Ulf Gustavsson, on board. Tracy Tyley speaks to Gustavsson to find out more about his new role, ambitions for the EOQ, and what he foresees to be the key challenges for quality over the next decade

Established in 1956 as the European Organization for Quality Control (EOQC), before being renamed the European Organization for Quality (EOQ) in 1987, the EOQ is an autonomous, non-profit association under Belgian Law, which strives for effective improvement in the sphere of quality, and acts as the coordinating body and catalyst of its 28 National Representative Organisations.

The EOQ's vision is to be Europe's leading promoter of quality by extending its influence through Europe and beyond and states its mission is to "Improve European society through the promotion of quality in its broadest sense". It supports management/quality professionals by developing and publishing international research documents, registering certified quality professionals, and organising training and other activities to support career development. In addition to these activities and courses, the EOQ also hosts its own congress each year. ►

On 16 June, Ulf Gustavsson joined the EOQ as their new Secretary General. Appointed by the EOQ's General Assembly and the Executive Board, Gustavsson joins the EOQ with more than 25 years of management experience behind him. His specialist areas include business transformation, supply chain management, management consulting, strategic planning, investments, leadership, international business, generating growth, and performance and development – including successful implementation of short- and long-term operational process developments and improvements.

As well his new Secretary General position at the EOQ, Gustavsson is CEO and Founder of Gustavum AB – a company that provides business consultancy and advice, interim management, investments for start-up companies, and business transformation services – and Chairman of the Board at Qvalify AB – one of Sweden's largest independent certification bodies for management systems, and subsidiary of the Swedish Association for Quality, a member of the EOQ.

Prior to these roles, Gustavsson spent 12 years at home furnishing company IKEA, working in various global management positions, and also sat on the boards of organisations operating in the field of quality. With his understanding of quality, experience of SMEs and international global companies and supply chains, Gustavsson is well-poised to support the EOQ's vision and mission.

A week into his new role, Gustavsson sat down to chat with *Quality World* (QW) about his new role, his views on quality, hopes for the EOQ, and to share his advice to quality professionals.

QW: You've recently joined the EOQ as their Secretary General. What attracted you to the role?

UG: One driver in my life is to learn. I do this best when I challenge myself and put myself in a new situation. I first came across the EOQ in 2003 when I was the National Representative from Sweden, and I have been a keynote speaker a couple of times at EOQ congresses, so I know the organisation well. When I saw they were looking for a new secretary general, I applied because I saw it to be a great opportunity for learning and where I could contribute my background and experience of international businesses and not-for-

profit organisations.

Around 300 people applied for the role and a committee consisting of three people from the Executive Board did the screening. From a set of criteria, based on the competence profile, a shortlist of three people were interviewed, and following this, I was appointed as EOQ's Secretary General.

QW: What will be your main responsibilities in this role?

UG: Besides coordinating and leading the internal work, I will be focusing on business and organisational development, mainly by developing products and services that our members, partners and associates can benefit from.

“The main challenge and opportunity [for EOQ] is to continue to be relevant, and to increase our benefits for our members, partners and customers”

QW: What do you think will be the key challenges and opportunities for the EOQ in the coming months and years?

UG: The main challenge and opportunity is to continue to be relevant, and to increase our benefits for our members, partners and customers. Today there is so many options and you really need to be relevant to be considered. We are currently exploring some new products, which we hope to launch – more information will be shared with our stakeholders very soon.

QW: What are your goals for the EOQ?

UG: We haven't set these yet, but they will be confirmed in autumn. The strategic focus and our goals will cover areas such as digitalisation, development of a clear and attractive offer, marketing and internal efficiency. Based on those aforementioned areas, we will create specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) goals for the future.

I am working closely with the Executive Board and I also hope that I will be able to work closely together with our national

representatives as well, so we can work on those SMART targets for the EOQ together.

QW: How has the EOQ been supporting its members and partners during Covid-19?

UG: The circumstances for our member organisations vary from country to country. Some member organisations are doing well and seeing a growth in membership and an increase in their turnover, while other organisations have experienced big challenges during this time. The main questions we have received are regarding the EOQ membership fee. We will support members and choose how to proceed on a case by case basis. I don't believe that the EOQ is the first organisation our members turn to – I think they would ask for support from their country government first. But if in the future we are asked for more support, then we will help in the best way we can.

QW: Tell me about your professional experience prior to this role.

UG: I have been a leader and manager since 1991, and so leadership and management has been one common thread throughout my career. The other one is quality, which I came across when I was a military officer in the army, between 1993 and 2000. The highest chief in command said everyone in the armed forces has to go through quality training to improve our ways of working, processes, and to become even more efficient within the area of total quality management (TQM).

Since then, I have worked in different professions within the area of quality. I worked as a consultant on improvement and TQM-related work, and I was the President and Chairman of the Board at the Swedish Association for Quality. I have also worked at IKEA in different global manager roles, and at a telecom company called Millicom. Prior to joining EOQ, I had my own company. As a result of these jobs and the military, my family and I have travelled and lived in many different countries around the world.

QW: What does quality mean to you?

UG: From my perspective, quality is where everything comes together. Quality is the customers' perception of all the effort combined that an organisation is doing before, during, and after their interaction with a customer. The value of that effort

is the measure of quality. In other words, where everything comes together in the eyes of the customers.

QW: You have quite an extensive professional background. Given your experience, what are the biggest things you have learnt in your career so far?

UG: There are two main things I have learnt. The first is my leadership philosophy, which is to better understand people and organisations in terms of where they are and to start a journey together from there. This philosophy was inspired by a poem written by Søren Kierkegaard. It means that I ask questions to learn more about your background, who you are, where you are and where we have connections and so on. And I do this whenever I enter a new managerial position, like I do now with the EOQ. I have set up meetings with the Executive Board and some partners and members to be able to understand where the EOQ are.

The second is “Be careful what you wish for, because it might come true” – something I heard Tomas Di Leva, a Swedish artist, say in an interview years ago. I have for

“Businesses should not be conducting themselves in the same way they did ten years ago. They need to understand the current climate in order to be up to date and to remain relevant as a business. All this comes down to the competence of quality management”

many years now been able to formulate clear goals on what I wish to achieve in life; SMART goals. I'm not rigid; I can change and develop, but this approach has also brought me to fantastic places, companies, and experiences. It also goes hand-in-hand with my driver in learning and challenging myself – I can set challenges and realistic goals for myself and for the organisations I work for. In the case of the EOQ, we have

the vision, we will soon have the strategies in place, and then we will formulate some goals that will help us to achieve those strategies in the future.

QW: What do you see as the main challenge for European businesses in the next decade?

UG: The main challenge for European businesses is to be able to transform their

businesses to fit the current economy. It's also important to understand and exceed customers' expectations. For instance, what does it really mean to reach out to customers in a better way than before? It might not be face-to-face; it might be in another way, such as digitally, for example. It's not enough to just be aware of the current business trends. If you want to create and keep up with changes, you ▶

EOQ FACTS AND FIGURES

- **28** National Representative (member) organisations in 28 European countries
- Through its member organisations, it has the following infrastructure:
 - **28** administrations in the national markets
 - **28** national marketing units
 - **28** national Boards, Presidents and CEOs
 - **300** staff members
- **14** EOQ Competence Centre Agents (organisations) in **14** countries
- **100,000** EOQ Competence Certificates issued by autumn 2019
- **70,000** members (through its member organisations)
- **500,000** companies linked
- Over **1,000** events during the annual European Quality Week
- Held **63** annual EOQ congresses. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the next EOQ Congress is scheduled to take place in 2021 in Belgrade, Serbia.



Ulf Gustavsson speaking at the EOQ Congress in Lisbon, October 2019.

have to take action because nothing happens by itself.

QW: What do you see as the major challenges and opportunities for quality management as we enter the third decade?

UG: To be up-to-date with the changes (eg, digital) and have the right competence required in order to deal with those changes and the demands. Businesses and organisations should not be conducting their operations in the same way that they did ten years ago. Instead, they need to have a good understanding of the current climate in order to be up to date and to remain relevant as a business. All of this comes down to the competence of quality management.

QW: How well positioned is the European quality infrastructure (EA, IEC, EOQ, EFQM etc) to support global competitiveness of European sectors and organisations, and to improve 'quality of life' in Europe?

UG: I can't talk for all of them but I can say from an EOQ point of view that we have to keep up to date with the current circumstances of companies. For example, the challenges or changes they are facing in regards to digitalisation, buying behaviours, information and data gathering. And we have work to do, no question about it.

Quality management, and organisations like the EOQ, have to understand the business environment of today. I've seen examples where people express themselves and behave as they did in the 90s or even

10-15 years ago. So much has happened over the past decade and you need to evolve at the same pace as the business environment you are working in.

This is one reason why I think the personnel certification that the EOQ offers has an important role to play. EOQ holds more than 40 different competence certificates based on the EOQ personnel certification schemes and are an objective proof of competence due to the worldwide accepted processes of assessment, examination, certification and re-certification used in accordance with the ISO/IEC 17024 Standard's requirements. Quality professionals can be certified within their role by one of our 14 competence centre agents around Europe. EOQ competence certification is the formal recognition by the EOQ that an individual has proficiency within, and a comprehension of, a specified body of knowledge. Competences covered by the schemes include those required of quality managers, information security managers, as well as the environmental management personnel.

To be relevant today, you need to have up-to-date competence and understanding of the business needs and environment.

QW: How can quality teams ensure they are valued and heard by top management?

UG: It has to be very clear what quality teams can bring to the table from a business point of view. You have to be relevant for the business. I also think that you have to have the confidence to stand up and say this is what we offer and this is what we can contribute to the business.

Quality teams can be the ones that challenge the ways of working and improve them. They can drive the development and facilitate the development of the processes. Additionally, they can be the ones who bring the insight about customers and their needs. And when you put all those things together, quality teams can play a significant role, but it has to be clear what they bring to the table.

QW: What do you think the future of quality will look like?

UG: In the future, we may collect data and information in a more efficient way than we do now due to digitalisation. For example, implementing new digital options available to us, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and

machine learning, could help us to make better decisions and become more efficient.

Digitalisation is something that people working in quality have to understand and be able to utilise as an integral part of their business going forward. It can help them to understand the business better, to collect big data efficiently and effectively so that conclusions can be made that will help the business to develop and improve.

“Digitalisation is something that people working in quality have to understand and be able to utilise as an integral part of their business going forward”

QW: This year's World Quality Day theme is 'Creating customer value'. What role can quality professionals play in supporting their businesses in improving and creating customer value?

UG: I think it's a really good theme. What does it really mean to create customer value from your organisation's point of view? That is unique to every business, but it's important to understand this.

Quality professionals can play a key role in challenging the status quo and coming up with better and more efficient ways of working. They can also be the ones who instigate developments and improvements, which, in turn, will lower the costs, while increasing turnover and customer value for their respective businesses.

QW: Given your varied experience from IKEA to certification, what are the top three ingredients required for organisations to deliver superior customer value?

UG: The first is to really understand customer needs. It might even be before your customer knows they have a need. I think Apple is a good example of this – they developed things that their customers didn't even know they needed, such as the iPad and the iPhone, for example.

The second is the internal work to be able to deliver the superior customer value. That

is to be able to adapt to the ever-changing market needs and keep up and develop at the same pace as the environment does. That's a critical success factor.

And then, last but not least, there's one thing that I've learnt from the telecom business which they are really good at, and that is to have a sense of urgency – eg, we have to do things now, we can't let everything wait, and have long procedures for everything. So make decisions, see how it goes and then adapt your decisions accordingly with the changes – be agile but have a sense of urgency.

QW: If you could share any advice to those working in quality, what would it be?

UG: Never stop learning. Always make sure that you are developing yourself and your competence. The one thing that stuck with me from my quality training as a military officer is the need for constant improvements, and to always find time to develop, in order to do things better and more efficiently.

Competence for me consists of three things. The first is knowledge. In the case of a quality manager, they should ask themselves: what kind of knowledge do I need to have and how do I keep that knowledge up to date? The second is capability – having the skills, methods or tools required to bring your plan/goals from theory to reality. And the third is motivation, because when you add motivation with up-to-date knowledge and capability, then you are competent.

That is my advice, and it goes with my driver too. I took my second degree, a Bachelor degree in Business Administration in 2018 at the Lund University, School of Economics and Management, Sweden. I'm now 48 years old, so it's never too late for anyone.

QW: What do you hope to have achieved in five years' time?

UG: I hope the EOQ is the go-to organisation for other quality organisations and individuals living and working in Europe, and that we have created good value for our customers and citizens in Europe. I also hope that the EOQ, together with our partners and customers, will have raised awareness of quality so it is made a top priority in businesses. As I said before, “be careful what you wish for”. ■