

Quality, not quantity

Quality consulting firm Qimpro celebrates 25 years



Lulla (fifth from left) with this year's awardees

“When I started in 1987, quality was not even on the agenda for anybody,” says Suresh Lulla, founder and managing director, Qimpro Consultants. “What was rejected in factories went into the open market for spare parts. There was no concept of quality management.”

Qimpro is the first firm dedicated to quality consulting, and celebrated its 25th anniversary in November 2012.

Lulla explains that companies, in producing rejects, incur not only the cost of production, but also the cost of rejection. However, “it was not until we brought it into business language which is money, and spoke of what we called the cost of poor quality (COPQ) that people understood that this is a huge opportunity for reducing cost without capital investment,” says Lulla. Qimpro has worked with clients in manufacturing – mainly commodity companies such as cement, copper, aluminium, and steel – as well as companies in the field of automotives and related ancillaries, and some consumer durables. Its first client was Tata Steel, in 1988. In 1989, Qimpro held its first convention, to showcase good practices in quality improvement.

“A typical organisation would have one third of its cost which are absolutely budgeted wasteful activities, reworks, scraps etc.,” states Lulla. “If one were to halve it for a company in two years, you can double the profit. This is what captured the imagination of businesses in the early years.”

Post-liberalisation, from the year 1992 onwards, Lulla describes how the opening up of India led to a different landscape, with the introduction of service industries, and many sectors such as healthcare embracing quality. Qimpro has worked with several hospitals to institute quality in their practices, including the Aga Khan Hospital in Karachi as well as multiple hospitals in India that are now NABH accredited by the Quality Council of India. Other clients include major companies like Mahindra, Crompton Greaves, Voltas, Onida, and Marico.

Lulla comments that while multiple aspects of production, including materials and method, can be

Qimpro Platinum Standard 2012

National Statesman for Excellence in Quality

BUSINESS: B. H. Jain, chairman, Jain Irrigation Systems

EDUCATION: Bunker Roy, founder and director, Barefoot College

HEALTHCARE: Dr. Mahesh R. Desai, medical director and managing trustee, Muljibhai Patel Urological Hospital

Qimpro Gold Standard 2012

Role Model Leader for World-Class Quality

BUSINESS: Rajiv Bajaj, managing director, Bajaj Auto

EDUCATION: Dr. Madhav Chavan, founder, president and CEO, Pratham Mumbai Education Initiative

HEALTHCARE: Nihal and Shyama Kaviratne, founders, St. Jude India Childcare Centres

improved, “there still remains variability in the process,” because of the people who are involved in it. “To address this, one has to start building skills and training people on how to think of perfection in the work they do,” observes Lulla. In light of this, Qimpro aims to address the issue of quality in education in the next few years. “We are working with people and educating them to make sure that this doesn’t have to wait until they join industry,” says Lulla. “We have actually gone into colleges, and are trying to bring subjects into schools’ curricula.” Qimpro’s vision for the year 2020 is to “leave deep footprints in the field of education,” especially in pre-primary education, with two main goals in mind – “running schools with quality practices, and teaching teachers to impart quality practices to students.”

Paradigm shift

Qimpro also recognises leaders and visionaries in the fields of education, healthcare, and business through the Qimpro Awards for quality, held by the Qimpro Foundation. Awardees are recognised within two categories – the platinum standard which is for ‘statesmen who can have a national impact and who can influence many people to adopt quality practices’, and the gold standard which recognises a ‘leader who has actually converted a singular organisation and delivered results that are quantifiable’. 2012 marks the 23rd year of the Qimpro Awards, which were held on 26 November. “In the 90s we spoke about managing for quality. Now we’re talking about quality of management,” affirms Lulla. Clarifying this paradigm shift he describes how, earlier the only aspects that were addressed were output and process, whereas “now you look at performance excellence – customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, community satisfaction, leadership governance, operations performance, financial and market share”. He highlights the need for strong and effective leadership in organisations. “They have to live their values, their vision, their mission,” declares Lulla.

♦ MANSI MEHTA