Total Quality Management
[By Akbar Ali]

Defining quality is a delicate (and sometimes dangerous) task, but for those familiar with the concept of “Total Quality Management,” the process is decidedly feasible. Strictly defined, Total Quality Management is a strategy designed to raise awareness about quality in all aspects of an organization or business. The idea behind Total Quality is to ultimately raise the quality of the product or service offered by the company, while simultaneously implementing higher standards of customer service and uplifting sales and profitability. The pervasiveness of the concept can be witnessed in any number of professional fields and industries, including government, hospitality, manufacturing, operations, and even the space programs of NASA.

There are three key aspects to a successful TQM program:

1. **T**: Total, meaning comprehensive. The program must include and involve all aspects of the organization at all levels.

2. **Q**: Quality — how does the company/industry/consumer define or identify a quality product or service? “Quality” must be specifically defined, and all standards must be identified, idealized, and mastered.

3. **M**: Management, meaning not only individuals but the systems in place which oversee how well and efficiently (in terms of both time and cost) the quality standards are being met. These include system-specific processes like Plan, Organize, and Control, and making sure staffing and leadership positions are always sufficient.

The International Organization for Standardization defines TQM as the following:

“TQM is a management approach for an organization, centered on quality, based on the participation of all its members, and aiming at long-term success through customer satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organization and to society.”

Clearly, the focus is not only on the company’s bottom line, but on a larger sense of serving the customer and community at large. These concepts are also found in the quality management systems of other nations and cultures, most notably manufacturing giant Japan, which identifies four key concepts as part of its approach:

1. **Kaizen** — Continuous Process Improvement, making sure that the process can be measured and improved upon throughout its utilization.

2. **Atarimae Hinshitsu** — do things work as they are supposed to? For example, does a phone ring?

3. **Kansei** — understand how consumers use the product and then use that information to make needed improvements or innovations.

4. **Miryokuteki Hinshitsu** — aesthetics. The best products are those which are pleasing to the eye in Japanese culture; ergo, does the product in question invite you to use it?

The American Society for Quality, made up of quality control experts from around the world, credits the Japanese for providing a model for the U.S. Naval Command which led to widespread use of a quality control system.

The concept of Total Quality Management can be traced back to 1951, when it first appeared in a book called Quality Control: Principles, Practice, and Administration written by Armand Vallin Feigenbaum, an American quality control expert and businessman. After receiving his doctorate from MIT, he went on to become General Electric’s director of manufacturing operations, where he first established the idea of quality control. His revolutionary book was reissued in 1961 with a new title: Total Quality Control.