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THE LIFE OF A QUALITY MANAGER

AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH PAPER
QUALITY MANAGERS AND COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT

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We are excited to introduce to you a groundbreaking research paper titled "The Effective Quality Manager: Exploratory Research" by Alaa Garad. The paper delves into the importance of effective quality management in today's business world and explores the skills and competencies that are necessary for quality managers to be successful in their roles.

Garad's research is particularly relevant in today's business landscape, where organizations are faced with increasing pressure to deliver high-quality products and services while remaining competitive in a global market. The paper highlights the need for quality managers to possess a unique combination of technical knowledge, leadership skills, and the ability to build strong relationships with stakeholders. By analyzing the findings of this research, organizations can gain valuable insights into the characteristics of effective quality managers and how they can improve their own quality management practices.

We believe that "The Effective Quality Manager: Exploratory Research " is a must-read for any organization that values quality and is committed to continuous improvement. We encourage you to take a closer look at this research and learn more about how it can help your organization achieve its goals.

The Effective Quality Manager: *Exploratory research paper*

Alaa Garad*

In today's fast-changing world, we can realise the emerging focus on quality in all aspects of business, ultimately, this should lead to better quality of life. Quality is a race without a finish line. We are on a mission of continuous quality improvement (Kearns, 1991). Quality professionals and managers are acting like the train driver who directs the train to its destination provided that the executive leadership has set up and established the infrastructure and railway for that train to move towards its target. The researcher believes that the quality of 'quality manager' plays a major role in the effective implementation of the quality initiatives. This exploratory, descriptive paper aims to find out what are the skills, competencies, perceptions and challenges related to quality managers and quality 'function'; the purpose of this paper is to highlight the key issues that need to be considered in preparing quality managers to excel in their targets.

1. Importance of the study:

The researcher tried to find out similar studies, especially on United Arab Emirates, however he could not find any study. He found little research through the *Emerald* Journal Database and *Proquest* Database, however none of them tackled this perspective; this study highlights an important critical success factor in the quality quest i.e. Quality Managers. The management of quality is critical components in the design and production of products which are superior to those of a competitor (Flynn et al, 1994, cited in Chen et al, 1997). "…….. However, for better understanding the management of the quality function, a larger scale of research is clearly needed" (Chen et al, 1993)

2. Introduction:

Nowadays, the drive for quality and excellence has become a key focus for several governments which gets cascaded to organisations across all sectors. The journey started in Japan in the early fifties, moved in the United Stated in the early eighties and then passed Europe in the nineties. In 1994 the journey started in the United Arab Emirates by launching Dubai Quality Award and Dubai Quality Group. According to Deming, we are in revolution; he called it "Third Industrial

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Revolution" (Deming, 1986). Quality is not a mere program, panacea or quick fix that can resolve problems immediately; It must be totally integrated, continuous, professional system based on the commitment of employees and top management, working together with customers, so that the needs of all are met (Harrington & Williams, 2004).

There is a constant positive trend in number of graduates of postgraduate education in quality management (See Fig. 3.1)
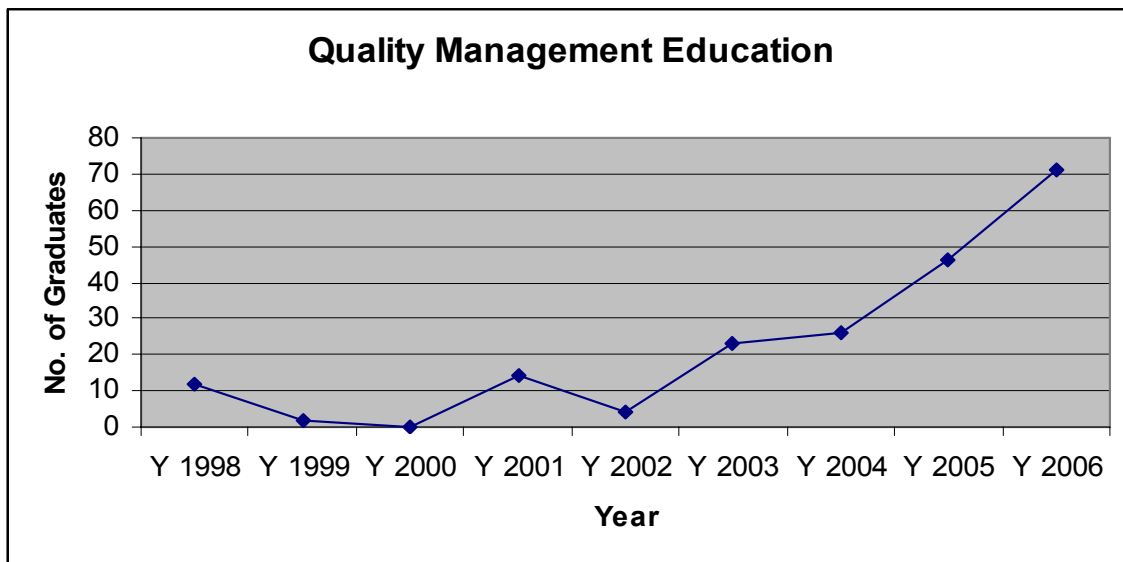

Quality Management Education

Fig. 3.1 Source: Student Services, University of Wollongong in Dubai (March 2007)

As illustrated in the above figure (Fig. 3.1) since 2002 there is a steady positive increasing trend in number of graduates and it is expected to continue with the launch of the second intake in January 2007.

3.1 - Current and Future Challenges:

The real challenge today is to ensure that managers do not lose sight of the basic principles on which quality management and performance excellence are based (Evans & Lindsay, 2005). The following table (Table 3.1) illustrates the number of key quality / excellence awards and programmes, accordingly the demand on quality assessors and quality managers has been increased and it seems that it will continue in that direction.

Note: Although there is no empirical evidence to support the high demand on quality professionals, however the researcher experience repeated requests to recommend quality professionals. This issue may warrant further investigation.

Table 3.1 - The key quality and excellence awards / programs in UAE

Sr.	Award / Programme	Started in	Sector
1	Sharjah Economic Excellence Award	1993	Private
2	Dubai Quality Award	1994	Private
3	Dubai Govt. Excellence Programme	1998	Government
4	Dubai Human Dev. Award	2001	All Sectors
5	Sheikh Hamdan Educational Excellence Award	1996	Education
6	Sheikh Khalifa Industrial Award	1997	Industry
7	Sheikh Khalifa Excellence Award	1999	Private
8	Sheikh Saqre Govt. Excellence Programme	2004	Government
9	Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashid Business Award	2005	Private
10	Sheikh Khalifa Govt. Excellence Programme	2007	Government
11	Abu-Dhabi Govt. Excellence Award	2007	Government

Source: consolidated by the researcher.

4.0 - Methodology / Research Design:

The researcher prepared a structured questionnaire consists of six parts to capture the respondents perceptions on selected aspects. Likert scale from 1 "Strongly Agree" to 6 "Strongly Disagree" was used in the questionnaire. Before designing the questionnaire, the researcher arranged a brainstorming session with 16 working professionals who are enrolled in Master of Quality Management in order to brainstorm on the key skills, qualifications, and challenges related to managing the quality function, the output from that brainstorming session contributed to the design of the research instrument.

Note: the last part of the questionnaire which included open-ended questions, for future research and investigation.

4.1- Validity:

The questionnaire was reviewed by several quality professionals before distributing to the respondents. The researcher was a practitioner three month back and worked as quality assurance manager in a service organisations and helped several organisation in their journey towards excellence, which also gives face value to the questionnaire (i.e. from practitioner point of view).

4.2 - Distribution of the questionnaire:

The questionnaire was distributed in the university campus to 161 students enrolled in the Master of Quality Management programme, 88 respondents returned the filled-in questionnaire, one questionnaire was excluded as it was not complete, and 87 were considered. Response rate is 54 per cent. The respondents represent various sectors of business, private and government sectors.

5.0 - Literature Review:

5.1 - Defining quality:

Quality can be a confusing concept, partially because people view quality in relation to differing criteria based on their individual roles in the production-marketing value chain. Evans & Lindsay (2005), the authors continues to clarify that the meaning of quality continues to evolve as the quality profession grows and mature. According to Deming (1986) quality is a predictable degree of uniformity and dependability at a low cost suited to the market. While Juran (1989) defines quality as fitness for use, as judged by the user; Crosby (1979) defined it as "conformance to requirements", finally Feigenbaum (1956) defined it as "Full customer satisfaction". The researcher considers the absence of clear definition for quality has created a heavy burden on the organisation's shoulder and ultimately on the quality manager shoulders as they need first to find out what quality means to their customer and to ensure that the achieved quality is equal or higher to the expected quality in the customer's mind.

Not only that, but also the abundant number of tools and approaches that could be used to implement quality has become enormous. So, which approach is the effective and efficient one? In other language, which is the right vehicle that can take the organisation to its target? A question that quality manager needs to answer it, today there are large number of tools available e.g. *the basic statistical control tools, inspection, auditing, re-engineering, benchmarking, balanced score card, suggestion systems, TQM principles, ISO certification, excellence models, six sigma ...etc.*

Yet there is no "one-size-fits-all" framework that can answer the question. There is a pre-assumption that quality manager needs to have clear understanding of each of those tools.

5.2 - Role of Quality Manager:

There is abundance of researches and literatures that draw the border and identify the role of middle management, top management and nature of their jobs. However, there is obvious shortage of such researches regarding the role of quality manager, the researcher searched the main two databases (Emerald and Proquest) using key words like "Quality Manager", Role of "Quality Manager" and "Quality and Managers". Quality Manager must be seen to support directly the primary aims of the business. This means that they can no longer impose change plans on the business, but they have to persuade and facilitate change (Hind, 1995). Considering the quality evolution in the United States, we find out that realisation of the TQM importance led the US industries to focus on the quality management and also initiated the recognition of the importance of quality managers (Chen et al, 1997). According to Chen et al, from theoretical perspective, quality manager is responsible for the routine and recurring functions of the quality programme. Nowadays the quality function shifts from the narrow perspective of quality assurance towards organisational excellence. According to Dale & Cooper (1994), it is conceivable that quality manager needs expertise in areas other than those only related to quality to function successfully. According to Evans & Lindsay (2005, PP. 11), new approaches such as Six Sigma, require increased levels of training and education for managers and front line employees alike. Homes (2001) highlighted the role of the today's manager (not specifically the

quality manager); Homes believes that the manager has a very important role to play in the beginning of implementing new quality initiatives, managers should understand what quality really means to a company, what quality initiatives the industry is taking and, finally, how to ensure quality of the work they are responsible for. And if we agree that this is part of 'any' manager role then it is more applicable to quality manager.

"It is not sufficient to wait until a product has been developed and ask: "is it a quality product?" The manager should ensure throughout the development process that quality is built in to the end product. (Homes, 2001)

5.3 – Skills of quality manager:

Hodgkinson and Kelly (2007) found that:" Quality management is dependent upon understanding of how people learn, how they interact, and how they sustain, develop, or even destroy, a culture". Shortly we can say, to do this one needs to be a good communicator, educator and culture oriented.

Stewart and Waddell (2003) stated the most astonishing results, as they found that quality managers require general managerial capabilities but the skills might vary according to their specific responsibilities, there are no two-quality managers would have the same demands! Unfortunately, researchers have not addressed the difficulty in determining the training needs for such diverse group of managers.

6.0 - Data Analysis:

Part 1: Demographic Analysis:

Age and Gender:
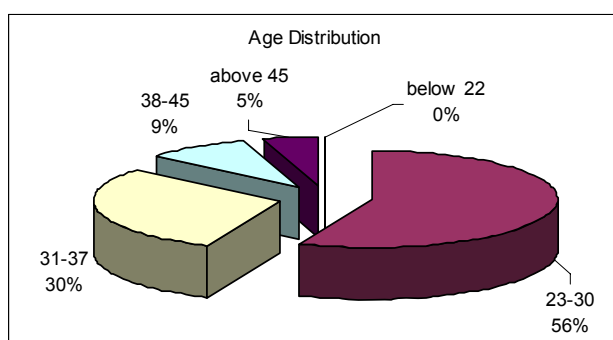86 per cent of the respondents' age is below 37 year old, while 54 per cent are males comparing to 46 females.

Fig. 6.1 – Age Distribution

Nationality:
57 per cent are UAE nationals which can give some indicator about the interest of UAE nationals towards work and studying as well.
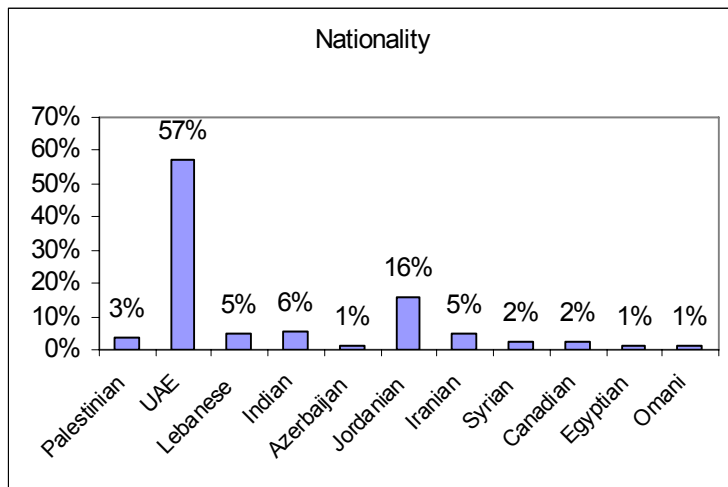
Fig. 6.2 – Nationality Distribution

Work Experience:
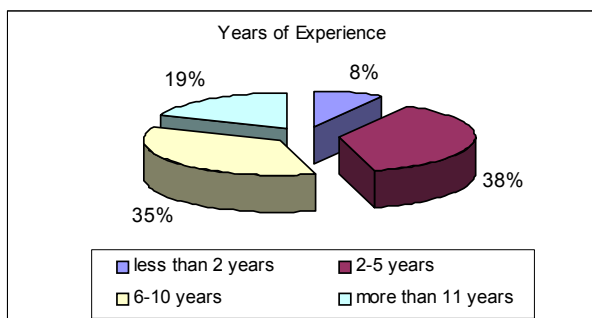73 per cent have less than 10 years of experience,

Fig. 6.3 – Distribution of work experience

If not working currently in quality, if you have the chance, would you shift to quality management position?
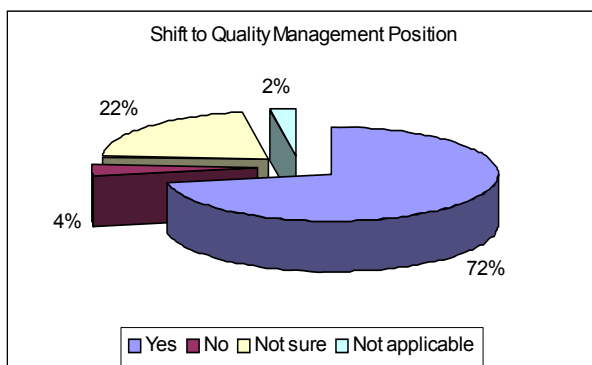

Fig. 6.4 – Willingness to move to 'quality' job

74 per cent are working in semi or governmental sector.

Part 2: Skills of a Quality Manager:

The frequency distribution clearly is concentrated mostly on levels "strongly agree" and "agree" which reflect that most respondents have a strong agreement about most of the suggested skills and all these skills are important for an effective quality manager.

Generally, around 53% of all respondents strongly agree with the all 24 suggested skills as presented in the Pi – chart next page, which indicates that all these skills are desirable   for any quality manager but with different level of importance.

The key 10 skills are:
Communication, Team Work, Time Management, Assessment and Analysis, Leadership, Problem Solving, Role Modeling, Decision Making, Learning, Managing People
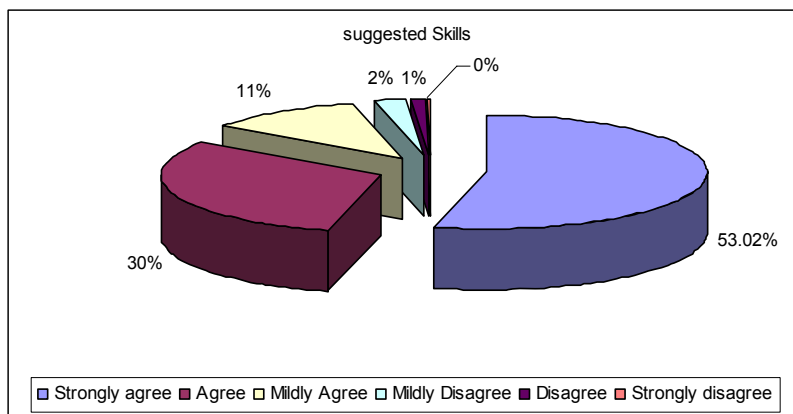

*Fig. 6.5 Percent of responses regarding all skills classified by agreement level*

What are the most important (favorable) skills among all the 24 suggested skills? This question was answered by the data in table 6.1

Table 6.1 – The set of skills for quality manager

Sr	Category	Favorable[1] Responses	Percent
1	Communication	87	100%
2	Team Work	85	98%
3	Time Management	84	97%
4	Assessment and Analysis	83	95%
5	Leadership	83	95%
6	Problem Solving	81	93%
7	Role Modeling	80	92%
8	Decision Making	79	91%
9	Learning	78	90%
10	Managing People	78	90%
11	Negotiation	77	89%
12	System Thinking	77	89%
13	Diplomacy	76	87%
14	Change Management	75	86%
15	Analytical Skills	75	86%
16	Teaching, Training and Presentation	71	82%
17	Basic Computer Skills	70	80%
18	Research	70	80%
19	Networking/Socialization	69	79%
20	Consultancy	66	76%
21	Advanced Statistics	60	69%
22	Financial Management	46	53%
23	Story Telling	44	51%
24	Marketing	44	51%

Interestingly, 100% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that "communication skills" is the most important skill that any quality manager should acquire. The second important skill is the team work skill. The first 10 skills are presented graphically in the following figure.

Fig. 6.6 –
skills
the key 10

The First 10 skills for an effective quality manager
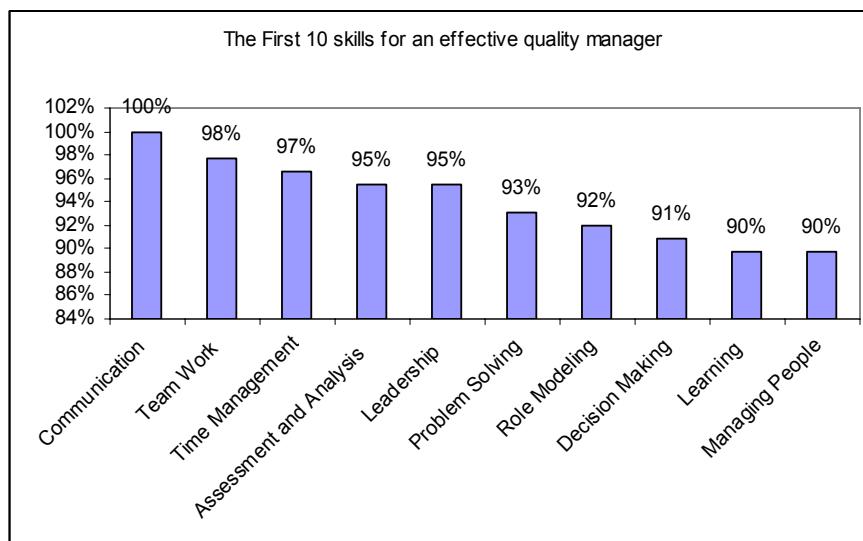
Table 6.2 shows that the responses distributed equally among the first three levels; "strongly agree", "Agree" and "Mildly Agree" with slight variations from one level to another. This result indicates that, all these qualifications are required for an effective quality manager with different degrees of importance.

There is an evidence support that the following qualities are critical for a quality manager,

Qualifications and qualities of quality manager

Table 6.3 – Qualifications & Qualities

	Category	Favorable Responses	Percent
Q1	Expert in cross-culture management	72	83%
Q2	Needs to understand the evolution of TQM	71	82%
Q3	Understands psychology	68	78%
Q4	Should have acceptable understanding of various aspects of quality systems,	67	77%
Q5	A postgraduate degree in Quality Management	66	76%
Q6	Has personal quality traits inherited in his/her personality	65	75%
Q7	Should be expert in applying the 7 planning and quality tools	62	71%
Q8	Understands politics and knows how to tackle conflict situations	59	68%
Q9	Certified in most of the professional certification e.g. ISO, Six Sigma…etc.	56	64%
Q10	A qualified auditor/assessor	49	56%
Q11	Should have minimum of 5 years of experience before becoming quality manager	47	54%
Q12	Any well-trained manager can become quality manager	39	45%
Q13	A technical expert in the industry (if working in a bank should be a banker)	37	43%

Fig. 6.7 –

Qualifications of an effective quality manager arranged in order of importance

Qualification and competencies

Interestingly when the 3 levels of response combined together, it was found out that Cross Culture qualities come to the top of required qualities of the effective quality manager.

Part 4: Perceptions about quality manager:

Perception	Category	Main Perception[2]	Percent
P1	Quality Manager should report to the highest position in the organization	75	86%
P2	It does not matter whom the quality manager reports to, what matter is his/her management skills and ability to resolve problems	34	39%
P3	Quality Manager does not need to do the job himself, he only needs to plan and follow up	26	30%
P4	The job of quality manager is easy as he can delegate everything to other functions and just coordinate and follow up	12	14%

Table 6.4

86 per cent of the respondents agree or strongly agree that quality manager should report to the highest position in the organisation. 61 per cent believes that reporting line of the quality manager makes difference; so it is not enough to have adequate skills and ability to resolve problems; which support the teachings and recommendations of all quality gurus e.g. Deming, Juran, Crosby and Feigenbaum about the importance of top management direct involvement and commitment to quality. Not only the quality management theorists but also the key quality and

excellence framework assigns a considerable weight to the leadership or the executive management role, e.g. EFQM Excellence Model, Malcolm Baldrige Framework, Australian Excellence Model, and ISO 9001: 2000.

70 per cent disagree with the notion that "quality manager does not need to do the job himself" which gives a picture on the importance of know-how and get involved in quality related work. The researcher highlights this point as he is aware of many practitioners in the field of quality management who believes that they can become effective quality managers based on their skills in coordination and delegating 'everything'; which negated clearly in the response for the following question where 86 per cent disagree with that perception (i.e. quality manager is a mere coordinator)

Part 5: Perception of quality implementation:

In the part related to perception of the respondents on the effectiveness of quality implementation, it was found that 63 per cent agree or strongly agree that *team work is practiced across their organisation*, 56 per cent perceive that their *organisation invest in training and education*, 55 per cent perceive that their *organisation act on the customer feedback*, 53 per cent perceive that *senior management at their organisations believe in the importance of quality awards and excellence frameworks*, and 53 per cent perceive that their organisation is *frequently measuring the customer feedback.*

On the other hand, only 22 per cent perceive that *managers are empowered to take the right decision without referral to their superiors*, 45 per cent perceive that *"Senior Management believes that quality management department is responsible to resolve all problems."*

Part 6: Open-ended questions:

This part was introduced in the questionnaire in order to capture detailed input and for consideration in further future research. Four questions were asked, the following are the key responses obtained on the four questions;

1) What are the key differences between Quality Manager and the other units' managers?

- Has full understanding of the entire business;
- Ensures quality is implemented in the whole organization and ensure its integrity;
- Ensures the continuity of improvements in all facility departments;
- Should be more empowered and supported by the top management;
- Has the power for change management , normally more motivated than other managers;
- Any manager can be a quality manger, if he does quality work and promotes quality in his department.

2) What are the key challenges facing the quality managers nowadays?

- Cultural change
- Employees understanding the scope of quality development
- Top management commitment and support
- People resistance to change
- Lack of believe in quality and the investment towards it
- Financial problems
- Convincing people about the importance of quality and implementing it in their units
- Create a quality culture
- Different backgrounds makes quality managers in different levels and situations
- lack of communication
- Top management misunderstanding
- Quality awareness implementation of the quality systems
- Resistance from middle management

3) In your opinion-why some senior managers do not believe in TQM/ excellence philosophy?

- Not knowing TQM and how much it is important
- Because they think it is a waste of time and lots of work on proper work
- They fear of the change and losing their authority or positions
- Cost
- Have no background about the excellence
- Just doing the job and satisfy the top management is their targets.
- Stick with old management style thinking that they are the correct ones
- They are not sure of the changes that might happen after implementing the quality
- Quality is improvement, the existing system is so bad that management can't go through improvements, they are busy connecting things
- No motivation to improve in long term. Looks for short term benefits
- Not applicable and too much paper work
- Not getting enough evidence on benefits of quality
- Because they think the last people were successful without any quality philosophy. So they are not interested as quality managers

4) - What are the key responsibilities of the effective quality manager?

- Adopt and implement quality model in the organization
- Teach and spread a learning environment in the organization
- Follow up for what improvement is done over time
- Implement quality tools and maintain continuous improvement
- Decision making
- Ensure that quality is adopted in the different units of the organization. Staff implement quality in their daily work

- Make the whole organization understand the meaning of TQM and the importance of implementing it
- Updating the top management about quality principles
- Analyze and apply corrective action
- Attending to customer feedback and complaints to improve customer satisfaction
- Create quality culture
- Help others and facilitate their job during TQM implementation
- Plan, do, evaluate and plan again, a cycle that never end even in our life
- Problem solving
- Understanding the system how they think and the people in the system
- Achieve the vision and mission of the organization
- Align all the work process in different units toward goals and objectives.
- Audits to ensure that things go as planned
- Convince the internal customer of TQM benefits)
- Create motivation supported by leaders awards
- Keep an eye at the latest developments in quality to integrate them in process
- Satisfy the customers from different levels
- Supervision
- To ensure processes and procedures within the organization are systematic, that everyone is applying the system to encourage: learning, training and open communication
- To generate measurements for organizations' processes

7.0 - Conclusion:

This paper is an exploratory study covered – mainly - quality professionals; the discussed topic warrants further research at various levels of management layers in general and executive management in specific, covering larger community, in order to have a better generalized results. It is also recommended to investigate the relationship between the effective implementation of quality programmes and the qualities and profiles of quality managers at these organizations.

The concept of "Every manager can be a quality manager" is already working to a certain degree; however, yet there is a need for further studies to examine the perceptions on this concept and find out the level of awareness. There is unanswered question: which is better for the business: to have specialized quality managers or to have managers who can implement quality and replacing the quality managers?

At the end of this paper, it is worthwhile to reemphasis on the criticality and seriousness of the preparing and qualifying quality professionals and managers, there is anecdotal evidences - as a participant observer- supports that most of the quality managers in the UAE need further education and qualification in quality management and organisational excellence.

The drive which the country embarked on for implementing quality in all aspects of life, and business spawned a serious need for standardised job descriptions and best practices in managing quality function.

James Harrington (2000) states that: "if the quality movement is going to be successful, the quality professional must be the best person that the organisation has for that position"

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[1] Favorable responses calculated by combining strongly agree and agree responses
[2] Main perception calculated by combining strongly agree and agree responses

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