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Investigating the current status and role of Quality Managers in Greece

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Introduction
In recent years quality is becoming the most common used word in the world business environment. Quality is the major concern and a strategic goal in the overall corporate strategy covering all functions within the organization. Research shows that quality is positively related to increased productivity, production efficiency and lower overall costs, market share optimization, etc. According to all quality experts' quality is everybody's job and the overall responsibility lies on the top-level management. However, the extensive adaptation and implementation of the ISO 9000 and the increasing customer-orientation focus of organizations brought quality managers at the scene. Quality Managers are usually the people responsible for the implementation and optimization of organization's quality system and are the link between the company and the certification body.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the current status and the role of the Quality Managers in selected ISO 9000:2000 certified Greek Industrial organizations. The purpose is to examine their professional skills and knowledge, their roles and responsibilities, their future and their fit within the organization. In recent years quality managers were faced with a series of new challenges stemming from the prerequisites of the ISO 9000 certification. The transition from quality control to quality assurance and then to total quality management gave the quality managers new responsibilities and new set of roles demanding more and better skills and knowledge. However, the QC department status and the role of the Quality manager in many organizations is still underestimated and not well appreciated.

Literature Review
There are only few articles addressing the issue of the role and the responsibilities of quality managers (van der Wiele T &Brown, A, 2002; Gershon, 1996; Addey, 2004;

Keogh, 1994; Bayo-Moriones, Merino-Díaz de Cerio, 2003; Chen, Paetsch and Paulraj, 1997; Waddel & Mallen, 2001; Dew, 1998; Annad, 1999).

Keogh (1994 describe quality managers as "..quality assurance professionals dealing, not only with British Standards and Certification, but also with people, quality assurance management techniques and strategic corporate issues such as quality costs. Furthermore states that the "quality assurance professional is usually part of the management team and, as such, can have a very wide range of duties and responsibilities which are associated with the quality of goods or services provided by the organization, internally as well as externally." Addey (2004) states that the traditional Chief Inspector is being replaced by a Quality Manager whose job requires quite different abilities and that "the impact on the traditional Quality Manager job will be twofold. First, he or she must understand the consequences and pressures these changes create for his or her customers (i.e. these new style managers) so that s/he can provide appropriate help and advice. Secondly the Quality Manager's job is likely to include a wider mix of roles. Addey, suggest a number of quality managers roles necessary to perform their duties in a changing and demanding business environment (salesman, teacher, policemen, statistician, customer, lawyer, strategist, designer, researcher, social worker, detective, consultant, doctor, psychoanalyst). In a very innovative article in *Quality Progress* Dew (1998) tried to investigate which were the common sources of stress in the workplace for today's quality professional and identified five sources named: crises, conflict, communication, control, and fads.

In one of the few articles trying to investigate and predict the role and the responsibilities of the quality managers, "Quality Managers beyond 2000?" Waddel & Mallen (2001) state that although there was an increase in popularity of the quality manager in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the expansion of their job function today according also to other researchers, quality departments tend to be smaller or non existed and many quality professionals are likely to be the first victims facing redundancy (Hoerl, 1998; Larson, 1998; Silverman & Propst, 1996 in Waddel & Mallen,2001).

There is a lot of rhetoric in describing the role and responsibilities of quality managers over the years especially in the United States. Many adapt a pessimistic view which is in line with the work of quality Gurus (Deming, Juran and Crosby) arguing that quality managers will be endangered species and probably quality will not longer depend on quality experts. On the other hand, there are many that prophesise that new and more challenging new responsibilities and roles will emerge such as "change agents focusing on leadership, teambuilding and interpersonal skills (Waddel & Mallen, 2001) Furthermore, Gershon (1996) states that dependence on technology and changes in production systems will lead to integration of quality improvement efforts into all departments of the organization and because of that quality managers will not finally disappear.

Research-based studies as mentioned earlier are few but provide a basis for understanding the context and content of the role, responsibilities and future of quality managers. In a study in Taiwan (Chang& Lu, 1995) concerning the current status of total quality management implementation in Taiwanese companies, the authors found that the role of the quality department "focuses on inspection and training/education which occupies about 58 per cent of total working time. In addition, the quality department has to participate in the development and design of new products during the preliminary, intermediate and final stages."

van der Wiele T &Brown, A (2002) in a case study of five Australian organizations state that "..Quality managers, quality co-ordinators and other specific quality related

functions have been removed, and greater responsibility given to line managers, leaving behind some corporate quality activities for which there is no longer a specific quality department.

Annad(1999) in his article "Changing phases of quality department: An Indian experience" argues that "..QC department has to take a lead in promoting and facilitating prevention among the employees and that one of the reasons for today's' limping status of quality improvement programmes in many companies is a weak QC department. Furthermore, suggest a number of new role and duties for the quality manager such as: keeping an update on the latest developments in the field of QC, increasing quality awareness among employees through training on quality, using policy deployment as a vehicle for implementing total quality control (TQC) in the organization, implementing a quality system as per international standards, deciding on and promoting a general quality improvement programme in the organization, such as waste elimination, dispersion control, continuous process improvement, 5S (Seiri, Seiton, Seiketsu, Seiso, Shitsuke), total productive maintenance, technology upgradation and small group activities in consultation with other heads of departments, liaising with other heads of department on QC implementation in their respective areas, etc.

In a study in Spanish manufacturing organizations Bayo-Moriones & Merino-Díaz de Cerio, 1994 found that placing the quality department at the top of the hierarchy and subsequently involve quality managers more to quality strategy is closely related to the degree of implementation of different aspects of QM practices such as quality assurance systems, improvement tools and relationships with suppliers and customers.

Chen, Paetsch and Paulraj,1997 in their study in US manufacturing organizations tried to test a series of hypothesis having to do with the quality managers involvment to quality field and the increase in performance , reduction of rework et. They found that " …the quality managers felt that their involvement in quality techniques will contribute to the plant's distinctive competence, along with the increase in the percentage of items shipped without rework. Furthermore, state that whether the managers have developmental assignments in other fields or not, their in-depth knowledge of the quality function itself is crucial and will significantly improve the quality level of the plant, as well as contribute significantly to the plant's distinctive competence. Additionally, these findings support the concept that the quality manager's position should not be just a figurehead type position. Finally, the technical skill level of the quality manager seemed to have a direct impact on the performance of the organization.

Rondeau K. V & Birdi N (2005) in a study of Quality assurance officer in a Canadian hospital found that "hospital quality assurance professionals are involved in a variety of roles and functions. For the most part, their job duties remain historical and traditional (i.e. hospital accreditation, risk management assessment, incidence and performance reporting), yet there is some evidence that a number of new roles and duties are beginning to emerge (i.e. planning and leading the quality improvement initiative, and staff development activities).

Research Methodology

The study sample consists of 98 selected industrial organizations that were judged as normal, ordinary, and representative covering a wide range of industrial sectors as food/drinks, metallurgy, chemicals, wood, and electronics. They were all operating quality assurance systems and been certified with the ISO 9000:2000. The ISO 9000

series certificate has been the basic prerequisite for organizations selected for study, since it is considered as the starting point for all TQM efforts (Dale&Plunkett, 1990; Wilkinson et al., 1994) and provides a basis for analyzing in detail the roles and responsibilities of quality managers. The data gathering was through a structured questionnaire using a 5 point likert scale consisting of three parts. The first part consisted of demographic data of the respondents and professional experience, the second part consists of questions regarding quality managers knowledge and skills and the third part is focused on their duties, responsibilities and roles.

Findings

The average age of respondents was 36, 8 years of which the majority was males (64, 8%) supporting the general image of a dominant male professional body. It is worth mentioned that 84% of the total population of the sample was at the present company between 5-10 years and that their overall working experience is with the present organization, showing that the majority of Greek industrial organizations just started to organized their quality departments and appoint quality managers. The educational level is exceptionally high with 27, 2% having a Ph.D degree in quality related subject and 35% holding an Undergraduate degree mostly in Engineering.

The authors wanted to examine the quality manager's degree of knowledge of various quality-related subjects such as statistics, ISO 9000, TQM, production, finance, marketing, human resources and management and logistics. The results were quite expectable with knowledge of statistics and ISO 9000 to be to a very high degree, 62, 9% and 77, 8% respectively. On the other hand, knowledge of logistics (32,6%), TQM (33,9%) and finance (28,7%) to be at very low degree. The highest level of expertise was on the production (83%). The above result shows us the preoccupation of quality managers on technical-oriented knowledge and the avoidance or exclusion of managerial or administrative knowledge.

Quality manager's preoccupation with old-fashioned practices and responsibilities is obvious by looking at the mean of the variables named "Keeping and monitoring quality archives (4, 7)", Solving quality problems (4, 1) and "Responsible for ISO 9000 (4, 2)" which are the highest. In the literature it is often mentioned that quality managers role is basically this of company's ISO 900 representative and the keeper of quality files (Annad, 1999). It is worth mentioning the low score on the variable "Implementing Best Practices -engaging in benchmarking", "Determining company vision for quality", "Introducing and monitoring IT based quality software" and the "Development and monitoring quality teams". All the above represent the new and the innovative duties and responsibilities of the modern quality manager mentioned in the quality "rhetoric" but are still in a very infant stage of implementation (Addey, 2004).

However, many variables on duties and responsibilities scored unexpectedly high and this is considering very promising and encouraging such as the quality manager's involvement in building quality awareness among employees, the focus on customer satisfaction and the emphasis on inter-departmental cooperation on quality improvement. The authors believe that this an indication of the changes on the quality manager's job in the future and a need from their side for further development and empowerment of these duties. A striking finding is the low score on the variable "Managing quality cost" and there are various explanation to that. The most obvious explanation is that Greek industrial organizations are not yet reached the stage in which fully realised the need to calculate and monitor quality costs.

The technical-based duties and responsibilities as expected scored high such as "monitoring quality indicators", "implementing statistical quality tools" and "solving quality problems".

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Implementing organization's quality strategy	3.7391	.90018
Determining company vision for quality	**3.5934**	.93069
Communicating company vision for quality	3.7473	.76874
Making employees sensitive over quality, building awareness	4.1398	.70080
Planning for quality	3.7363	.94086
Solving quality problems	4.0108	.81420
Solving crises and problems over quality issues	3.8791	.98697
Implementing Best Practices -engaging in benchmarking	**2.9551**	1.17657
Introducing and monitoring IT based quality software	**3.4831**	1.16884
Responsible for ISO	**4.2727**	.99108
Responsible for internal quality audits	4.0989	1.06515
Monitoring quality indicators	4.0870	.99064
Customer satisfaction	**4.2857**	4.33150
Managing quality cost	3.4944	1.23513
Implementing statistical quality tools	3.8681	1.01334
Inter-departmental cooperation	**4.2043**	.80162
Technical support in goods production issues	**3.5495**	1.20429
Quality culture development	3.8989	.85340
Providing education and training in quality issues	3.9670	.93631
Quality Training material development	3.8681	.96849
Keeping and monitoring quality archives	**4.7912**	4.36022
Inspection and testing	**4.2308**	.83102
Improving the organizations quality assurance system	4.1889	.85977
Development and monitoring quality teams	**3.4459**	1.11210

Table I. Quality Manager's Duties and Responsibilities

The authors also tried to investigate a series of work-related issues of the Greek quality managers. To serve this goal the authors created a category consisted of 15 variables named Quality Manager's work environment. There is a tendency quality manager to work more hours and give extra effort to manage everyday operations than use before and probably this is due to the burden of the ISO 9000 implementation and the bureaucracy involved as well as the extended use of quality indicators in various departments within the organization. The authors expected quality managers to feel more stress and anxiety but this was not the case. It seems that the routine work and the absence of innovative approached and practices make their work less demanding and stressful. Furthermore, there are no conflicts and arguments with other departments and their relations and communication with the top management is not problematic at all. One explanation is that in Greek industrial organizations are common quality issues to be also at the hands of the production manager and even the managing director of the company giving less authority and power to the hands of quality experts, which as we see are young people with not a substantial working experience.

Something that strikes the interest of the authors is the low score on the opportunities given to participate to quality strategic decisions. Very low are also the scores dealing with the quality manager's satisfaction with salary, recognition and promotion

opportunities. These elements are in line with the view of many academics stating that the new role and the increased responsibilities of quality managers make them vital for the efficiency and effectiveness of company's operations.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Working many hours	**3.5333**	.85064
Extra effort needed in project implementation	**3.6364**	.77581
Excessive stress and anxiety	3.3750	.93848
Anger and work conflicts	2.0449	.91590
Insufficient communication with upper management	2.0682	.93213
Insufficient communication with other departments	1.8539	.76203
Feeling rejection and alienation	**1.8876**	1.01621
Lack of motivation	2.0227	.98234
Lack of Job Enlargement and Enrichment	1.8636	.86012
Low job status	**1.6977**	.81269
Low and no challenging salary	2.1047	1.00621
Unable to take initiatives in work	**1.8851**	.88166
Lack of work recognition	1.9888	.94742
Unable to make strategic decisions	1.9885	.94616
Lack of promotion opportunities	**2.0115**	1.01723

Table II. Quality Manager's Working Environment

Examining the existing and the emerging roles of the quality managers poses a great challenge to the authors. The framework of Addey (2004) was used to determine the prevailing roles of Greek quality managers. Addey identifies 14 roles for the modern quality manager (salesman, teacher, policemen, statistician, customer, lawyer, strategist, designer, researcher, social worker, detective, consultant, doctor, and psychoanalyst). For our study we examined the degree to which Greek quality managers see themselves as salesman, teacher, psychoanalyst, consultant, doctor, policemen and researcher.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	% to high + very high extent feeling as
Salesman	3.3846	1.07258	51.6
Teacher	3.5556	1.09248	**62.2**
Psychologist	3.1124	1.13256	**39.3**
Consultant	3.7556	.98655	**66.7**
Doctor	3.2874	1.18034	44.8
Police	3.0353	1.13858	**37.6**
Researcher	3.3448	1.14960	48.3

Table III. Quality Managers' Roles

The results are very revealing of the roles Greek quality managers feel more associated with. The teacher role scored very high together with the consultant role followed by the salesman role. It seems that a new vocabulary and a new "culture" is developing among quality managers seeking a better status within their organizations. The only concern is if these roles are not the one used but rather the roles quality managers want to have in the future and this is always a problem asking respondents

these kinds of questions. Furthermore, they do not feel like doctors curing quality problems and not even as policemen but also not as psychologists leading the way for further enrichment and enlargement of their duties and responsibilities and keeping themselves open to the new challenges and changes in their jobs.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	% to high + very high extent feeling as
No major changes in duties and responsibilities	3.1098	1.12223	36.6
More responsibilities and duties in the future	3.4471	.96985	60
Less responsibilities and duties in the future	**1.8272**	1.03429	**8.6**
Greater focus on ISO 9000	3.7907	.92184	**68.6**
Greater focus on customers and market	3.9091	.90511	**71.6**
Moving to another job within the organization	3.0741	1.31128	44.4
Losing their job	**2.0253**	1.12061	12.7

Table IV. Quality Managers Future

Finally, the authors asked them how they see their future as quality managers. From the table 4 it is obvious that they see themselves more involved with the development and administration of the organizations' ISO 9000 quality assurance system and place a greater emphasis on external customers and be more market oriented which is one of the ISO 9000 prerequisites. Also believe that will have more responsibilities in the future and they do not believe that they job is at risk as mentioned by a number of academics (Gershon, 1996).

Conclusions

This study is a first attempt to investigate the role and the status of the Quality Managers in Greek industrial organizations. These are the preliminary results based only on descriptive statistics. Universally, the work of the so-called "quality-people" is not explored in details in the literature. This study is the base for the design of a large scale survey with a desire to cover a considerable large number of all certified organizations in Greece in order to have ground for generalizations. From the data analysis we see that quality managers status and role is still developing and is going throught major changes. These changes occur in their duties and responsibilties which becoming greater and more sophisticated and the adaptation of new roles.

Their strong educational skills and the apettite for innovation is contradictory with their present role which is very traditional and process-oriented. The environment in which Quality managers in Greece operate is a challenging one and there are many opportunities for further utilization of their skills and knowledge. Unfortunately, quality professionals are not often been seen as key members of the strategic management team, with energetic contribution and influence to strategic and operational issues affecting TQM implementation

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