

# Continental quality

Patrick Mongillon was elected President of the European Organization for Quality (EOQ) this summer, and also serves as Vice-President of France's professional body for quality professionals, France Qualité. Here, he shares his thoughts on some of the challenges and opportunities facing the quality profession in Europe, and looks ahead to next year's EOQ Congress in Reims

**QW: How did you first become involved in quality as a career?**

**PM:** My career in quality began with me having not worked in quality at all! I was in charge of information systems at a company, and one day, my boss came into my office and said: 'Patrick, we need more quality in our projects – do you want to be in charge of this?'. I didn't know anything about quality, but immediately answered – 'yes!'.

My first experience of quality with these projects was focused on organisational processes and procedures. We had no such rules in place, so we needed to focus on these procedural rules. For this, my first experience of quality, I was the expert, but my second experience was very different.

I was hired by the president of a large company who wanted to implement a quality approach to improve products and services and, ultimately, the efficiency of the organisation. As part of a steering committee, I defined the improvement approach to be taken and then we trained the steering committee, and then the rest of the company, little by little. While it was important to involve employees in resolving

problems, it was also important that the people on the steering committee understood exactly what difficulties were being faced and what methodology and tools could be used to resolve them. During this work, we identified 300 problems at the company and then prioritised the top 10 issues that were the most urgent and important to be tackled.

During this role, I was not the quality expert as I was in my first experience; instead, I was an improvement champion. I was not there to write the rules but to motivate people to work on improving the company.

My third quality role was different again. This time, the organisation I was working with had no vision and no roadmap of where it was going. Using high-level quality tools, I helped the board to define the vision and a three-to-five-year strategy, for the first time. It was then cascaded down throughout the organisation using an action plan that was aligned with the strategy. My role was strategy alignment.

I then moved on to an organisation that needed a total transformation, both technically and in terms of culture. It was a very long and difficult job, because transformation



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is never easy and can evoke a lot of emotions in people, particularly fear – for their job, or of the unknown. I was a catalyst for transformation.

So, in my first four experiences of quality, I found myself being a quality expert, an improvement champion, working on strategy alignment, and being a catalyst of transformation. Those are four different roles within the quality function, and I think that shows what a lot of people don't understand – that quality is not just about rules and data. The quality function needs to be more strategic and less operational, more focused on people and processes.

**QW: The European Organization for Quality (EOQ) states on its website that it is moving more towards an adhocracy, rather than a bureaucracy. Does that reflect an increasing need to focus on a culture of quality?**

**PM:** I have worked a lot on strategy for the EOQ and we have a lot of rules that are needed. But processes and procedures can become too long and too complex, which is the reason why we have changed. We are not throwing out the rules, but we want to be more strategy-driven.

My message in France and for the EOQ is that it is now 2023, not 1950. We are not at the beginning of the quality journey and so, to add value now, we need to move away from some of the more traditional thinking that we may have had in the past.

It was a big transformation for the EOQ, but it is very important. We want to be the world's leading promotor of quality in Europe, and efficiency, performance and competitiveness are vital in that.

**QW: How did you become involved with France Qualité and with the EOQ?**

**PM:** I created my consultancy company, AQM Performance, 20 years ago, and for me, my roles with France Qualité and the EOQ are an opportunity for me to contribute to the quality community in France. I have been a member of France Qualité for a long time and have served as Vice-President for six years now. I am in charge of the international aspect, which is how I became involved with EOQ.

In France, we think it is important to not only focus on our own small country, but to share knowledge and experience with other countries as well. If we know what is going on in, say, Norway, or Belgium, or the UK, we can then benchmark where France is at.

I am in charge of France's quality thinktank, which, at the moment, has nine working groups, exploring different themes. Each year, we write a white paper on the findings of the different groups. The objective of the thinktank is to change the vision of quality, to innovate and add new tools.



One of the new tools we have developed is Quali'Bord, which is a quality scorecard. I created it in 2018, inspired by the balance scorecard methodology. This gives us a benchmark of quality in France, with 10 indicators, which we can use to compare quality in France with other countries worldwide. It is based on gradable figures and gradable reports – on the facts.

I have also been involved in the EOQ's current strategy and its five Strategic Focus Areas. I've run several workshops with our members to better understand their expectations and gather their ideas. Recently, I also helped to review our Membership and Partnership structure to make it clearer and simpler.

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**QW: In 2022, France Qualité issued 10 recommendations to the government to raise awareness and increase competitiveness. Did those recommendations come from France Qualite's thinktank research, and how were the recommendations received?**

**PM:** We had the idea about formulating those recommendations because we thought it was necessary to put in place some objectives in France.

The research began with myself and the president of France Qualité writing a draft, which was then given to the executive board. We took on board their feedback, and the amended draft was then sent to all France Qualité members for their input. We then showed it to key stakeholders as well. There

was a lot of consultation because it was important to have the agreement of internal and external people.

It is important to note that the quality community has reacted very well to these recommendations.

**QW: From your perspective, what are the key challenges and opportunities facing the French quality profession?**

**PM:** For me, I see four challenges and opportunities for private industry and one for the public sector, and these probably do not apply only to France.

The first is the big transformation of production with Industry 4.0. It is a profound transformation, focusing mainly on digital technologies, and it is key for the survival of industry.

The second is agility. There is a big challenge to produce faster and to change faster, which requires organisations to be agile. Customers have higher expectations now which means designs of products change in order to make customers happy. These design changes can make producing goods more complex, meaning organisations have to be more agile.

The third is corporate responsibility, both social and, of course, the planet. People in industry around the world need to be much more accountable for this.

The fourth one is an opportunity for private industry, not a challenge. That is because all of the change that is required – transformation, agility, and social responsibility – will also change the quality profession to better meet these challenges.

In France, you can see the figures of exports are down compared with 20 years ago. Why? Because we have a lack of industry in France and we need to have more plans now, more companies in industry. So, there are some very big challenges and opportunities in France for industry.

**QW: How can France Qualité support with these challenges and opportunities?**

**PM:** France Qualité defined a three-year roadmap for 2022 to 2024 and some of the actions on that are how we can help with the challenges facing industry at present.

Using Quali'Bord, we can enlighten people and managers of the situation and we can say 'you have to act – don't hesitate, you have to begin your transformation now'.

Our thinktank has a group focusing on transformation, which includes quality leaders from some large companies in France. We have previously written a position paper on transformation that was issued in France, because it is such a key topic. Transformation is a little bit different from change – change is more about continuous improvement, whereas transformation is about breaking through and doing things differently.

We have also written position papers about other important issues such as quality and economy; the cost of quality, or non-quality; and the corporate social responsibilities of quality.

We also have our France Qualité awards each year, which help to raise the profile of quality. There are awards for companies, of course, but there are also awards given to students and young quality managers, and for books about quality in France. An award is only a little thing perhaps, ▶

but it is important to recognise companies that have been successful with the kind of transformation that is required.

**QW: Looking at the World Quality Week theme of using quality to unlock our competitive potential, what do you think is the role of quality in driving competitiveness?**

**PM:** For me there is no difference between the three words 'quality', 'performance' and 'competitiveness'. The end result of quality is the competitiveness of the company, or the competitiveness of a country.

Whether we are talking about companies or countries, achieving quality and competitiveness is the same battle. For me, quality is excellent products and services, and delighted customers, which means a high retention. Quality also means working towards the efficiency of the organisation, which leads to faster, better production. All of these things also contribute to competitiveness.

To assist with this, I think we need to focus on the 'new quality'. What is the new quality? I believe it has four characteristics.

First, it is global and holistic – the transformation in a company to quality in a broader sense. In surveys, we can see now that the expectations of quality and risk management are integrated aspects because they are achieving the same aim. So new quality is not only the procedural or technical aspects of quality, it is the nature of the company.

The second one is collective participation. A quality manager cannot work alone, sitting behind a computer in their office. New quality is participative, with people working together, which makes the company stronger.

The third characteristic is innovation, because quality can introduce you to new tools and new methodology, which can improve process management and really add value to the company.

The last one is pragmatic. A quality manager is not a researcher, away in the clouds. We have to produce concrete actions and results, and results mean competitiveness.

**QW: As the president of the EOQ, what are your aspirations for quality management in Europe?**

**PM:** It is my dream for Europe to be a promoter of quality and to have more countries realise that quality is very important.

I would like to see people in different countries discover a new vision for quality. It is difficult to change what people think quality is, but I think it is important. One of my aspirations is to promote the evolution of quality.

For me, there are six objectives that the quality managers of tomorrow should have. They have to improve the performance of the company; they have to be the voice of the customer internally; they have to be able to enlighten managers with new tools and techniques; they must be able to reassure management that is afraid of transformation; to motivate other people to achieve the company's vision; and to simplify – the world is more and more complex and a lot of companies get too caught up in this complication.



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**QW: France is hosting the EOQ Congress in 2024 – the same year as playing host to the Olympic Games. What might we expect from it?**

**PM:** The EOQ Congress will take place on 14-15 November 2024 in Reims – the city of kings and Champagne.

The motto of the event will be 'quality as a catalyst for an Olympic performance'. The motto of the Olympic Games is 'faster, higher, stronger, together'. That is clearly completely aligned with quality and the requirements of competitiveness.

So, the Congress will be split into four parts. 'Faster' will look at transformation, change, and agility. 'Higher' will be about the human touch, culture change and corporate social responsibility. 'Stronger' will focus on performance of the company, innovation and people engagement. 'Together' – well, that one is clear.

**QW: Finally, what advice would you pass on to the next generation of quality professionals?**

**PM:** Have a vision of quality that is global – like new quality, described above – and do not focus only on the technical aspects; developing your soft skills, such as communication, empathy, collective intelligence, and more, is very important.

Move away from a position of being the quality expert to being a coach and motivator. The quality function in the new generation needs to be coached and not only by experts in ISO 9000. You have to deliver and communicate a punchy message. And keep in mind that you are a big contributor to the competitiveness of the company. ■