Towards a global cyber institute – Part 1.

"Today is not yesterday;
we ourselves change;
how can our Works and Thoughts,
if they are always to be the fittest,
continue always the same?
Change, indeed, is painful; yet ever needful;
and if Memory have its force and worth,
so also has Hope."

Carlyle, *Essays: Characteristics*.

Every important profession, and a lot of wannabees, eventually finds it has its own institute or society purporting to be the official "professional body" representing it, committed to its promotion, furtherance and so forth.

The truly great institutes, such as Britain's Institute of Civil Engineers, formed in 1822, were efforts of prominent and acknowledged experts in that field for creating a forum in which fellow practitioners could meet and discuss issues of the day affecting their profession. Those institutes became fraternities, to a large degree, led by eminent people who had contributed to the body of knowledge of their profession.

They were forums for communicating – networking, in today's parlance. The latest ideas, innovations, developments, projects and undertakings would be presented to the members. Theory and practice were readily available to them from their peers. Face-to-face meetings involving presentations, questions, debate (some of it fearsome, as was the case in the so-called "gauge wars") were a primary method of communications for the members. Open discussion about contentious issues was encouraged and uncensored. And, though members might be diametrically opposed to each other on technical points of issue, they would put aside their differences and help each other.

> A famous example is that in which Isambaard Kingdom Brunel sprang to the aid of Stephenson (his bitter opponent in the gauge war) when the Britannia Bridge over the Menai Strait had construction problems, and the equally swift assistance of Stephenson for Brunel when the latter was struggling to launch the *Great Eastern*, on the Thames River.

Communications evolve. In those olden days, the principle means were face-to-face assemblies, postal communications, periodic meetings, periodic publications. The speed at which members of those august bodies communicated was state-of-the-art. As the 19th century progressed, the telephone and the telecommunications age were born, enabling better and quicker exchange of knowledge and news.

For this, the world owes Scottish talent much: Alexander Graham Bell, an emigré Scot, for the 'phone. The concept of the fax invented in Scotland's highlands by a farmer and (a somewhat crude) television by John Logie Baird in Glasgow.

As commerce and business found, those developments enabled the institutes to expand their reach, to some extent but the core methods were periodic face-to-face meetings in local areas (branches or section meetings) and a periodic magazine containing articles and learned papers contributed by members and invited persons of note.

Towards a new model

The past business model for professional societies may have served well but its structure, organization and services received by members rested on available means of communications which are being supplanted by the internet and mobile computing and telecoms, which are radically different from those of bygone days.

In the past, the old societies resembled telephone exchanges. The movement's body of knowledge, BOK, created by its practitioners and professionals, passed *through* them and was distributed to the members using newsprint and occasional conferences. Hard copy was the dominant means of disseminating the knowledge created by members. Headquarters people could determine what was and was not passed through, the timing of distribution, and so forth. They could also decide what would appear in print in the house magazines and "learned" journals. And, a sound HQ library was *de rigeur* for any such institution.

Regardless of communications' developments, in "Quality" our BOK remains intact. Its repository is now digitally based. Though excellent hard copy texts from long-standing publishers, notably McGraw-Hill, still exist, these, too, are being superseded and, if the recent developments involving Google hold sway and copyright law is flouted, will become digitized in libraries.

America's DARPA is generally credited for creating the internet, and Britain's Tim Berners-Lee with conceiving the world wide web. Their net result (no pun intended) is a set of these effects: a dramatic increase in the number of people exercising their right to free speech and being heard; disintermediation; almost immediate dissemination and interchange of knowledge. Those are changing the business models of commerce and enterprise and they will change that of the quality movement. This article focuses on their possible effects on quality's professional institutions.

Challenges of time

It is widely recognized that the world's business is speeding up. Time being money is no longer merely a saying, its magnitude is being measured, and its use is being managed to a greater extent than was ever the case. Time is a competitive weapon. In train, the demands on business and professionals are growing. But not only because of the need to improve one's use of time.

An accessible global knowledge base

Knowledge is expanding as ever more countries industrialize and enter the global economy. Education systems are increasing the capabilities and demands of their citizens who develop not only a thirst for more knowledge but the ability to create it, find innovative solutions to problems and make a contribution to its global storehouse. The internet is enabling those nations to acquire it from anywhere in the world, accelerating their development, sharpening their competitiveness and improving their economies.

Using these modern means of communication, coupled with airfreight and fast sea freight, resulting from the containerization revolution of the late 1960s, supply chains are spread around the world as never before. People in quality need to contribute to the assessment and management of the entire chains and individual suppliers within them. Whatever one might think of the merits of ISO 9000, to date, its appearance and that of globally organized registrars are the quality movement's only response to that need. Quality's "professional" bodies are behind the curve, remaining somewhat parochial in nature and outlook. For individuals working in the quality world, this will not do. And those individuals are those bodies' paymasters.

They need something far better, and yet they need the same thing they always did. Members want pertinent news and information, tools they can use in their daily business, others' solutions to problems: knowledge. And it is global not national knowledge that is required.

What service must a professional institute provide?

At their inception, professional institutes were facilitators of knowledge development and exchange. At their heart, they must remain so.

In that role, they must serve members from all parts of the spectrum of experience and ability: from newcomers to seasoned practitioner; and from those with academic qualifications to those without working in that same field. Crucially, they must facilitate those knowledge processes regardless of origin or point of consumption. And, in a global economy that means they must be international in outlook, membership and communication. Reflecting today's realities, their facilitation must be timely: geographic limitations immaterial. When one considers today's business model of quality's existing institutions, it seems lacking in various key aspects.

Quality's practitioners and professionals need a new business model to serve their requirements for knowledge creation, dissemination and acquisition.

The telephone exchange model is inappropriate. And with today's means of communication it is impossible if not foolhardy to maintain. That is to say a professional body's HQ can no longer decide what is transmitted, when it is transmitted, to whom and with what emphasis (or bias). Anybody who has a basic knowledge of military history

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will recognize Maginot line barriers are not impregnable: they are follies. Knowledge flows freely around them. Censorship impossible. Free speech and discussion, dissemination of best/ better practice and knowledge guaranteed. Britain may have been regarded as the workshop of the world, some even say that mantle has passed to China, but the internet is now the knowledge shop of the world. Rather it is a knowledge mall.

If in bygone years conventional institutions housed in bricks and mortar were major repositories for knowledge, best practice, experience and lists of practicing professionals. I shall call them BAMs, (bricks and mortars.) Now it is the internet.

The availability of knowledge and assistance

The (literally, world wide) web of interconnected computers at whose terminals and mice sit quality practitioners and professionals is now the repository for "the knowledge". Got a problem, want an effective solution, some advice, tips or pointer towards what to do and where to find what you need? Post a question on such sites as Elsmar Cove or Saferpak. How to deal with some aspect of a code or standard? Do likewise. The existing institutions with their old business model and HQs cannot hope to keep up or respond in time. They cannot deliver the service demanded either by breadth and depth of knowledge or in time.

Through those sites, we now have a cyber institute in embryo. An informed body can be created in seconds, not months or years. It must be good for clients, employers and customers. Party lines and establishment views cannot prevail or suppress the passing of experience or knowledge. Very healthy, very democratic. Freedom reigns, indeed.

In order to understand how a new cyber institute will be better for members, one must consider and compare the service and performance of the existing ones.

Disquiet with the existing bodies.

The ASQ and IQA are probably the largest national quality bodies. Certainly they are the most prominent. Like others, both have hemorrhaged members over the last few years. As I understand it, the old New Zealand Organization for Quality (NZOQA) disappeared. My professional friends in Norway are striving to resurrect their own national body. It seems others are also struggling. All such institutions survive on the charitable donations of the members providing part of their discretionary expenditure. And yet, though the number of people patronizing the present quality institutions may be falling, the number of quality practitioners and professionals is probably increasing. Something is wrong and one suspects it is rooted in the performance of the HQs.

Though I confess not to having actual numbers of quality folk to hand, my view is based on these four things. Firstly, a couple of years ago, when performing an assignment for an international client, I vetted several hundred applications for quality jobs for my client. Only about 15% were involved with the likes of the ASQ: many others had experience

and skills but either had left their national institute or had no desire to become members. And in a May 2005 assignment involving a class of over twenty quality managers of different American suppliers to a major Japanese company, only 4 delegates were current members of the ASQ: another three had quit membership perceiving it had no value. Secondly, global expansion is causing more firms to appear and quality is a prime battleground for business: one can reasonably assume these organizations will need quality people and the knowledge etc. a professional institute can offer. Thirdly, many organizations are adopting six sigma and training considerable numbers of staff: those people are not joining quality institutes in complementary numbers. And, fourthly, membership of web sites such as the Elsmar Cove is accelerating, proving there is a desire for involvement in the international exchange of knowledge inconsistent with falling numbers of traditional institutes' members.

In the case of the ASQ in particular, the chat rooms present a constant stream of gripes, complaints and concerns about the service delivered, value for money, relevance to needs etc. Not every one can be unjustified. "Customers" are unhappy. Collectively this suggests the old model no longer works as well as it should. The market is expressing its preferences.

Members do not owe the institutions a living. If the latter want to regard and refer to members as "customers" – so be it – but, they must then understand what are market dynamics and be prepared to lose out to competitors. And it is time a new competitor is created.

House magazines

The problems of timely distribution

The distribution of house magazines by the likes of the ASQ and the IQA is as it was almost two centuries ago: the postal service. The postal service has, of course, adopted technological developments to speed its delivery service. We have moved beyond coach and four, Kit Carson and mighty Cunarder to an age of airmail and high-speed train, where available. That is fine but still ineffective. As an example, the IQA monthly magazine, *Quality World*, reaches me weeks late. And that situation is not new.

> The tardy delivery of that magazine is a matter I raised in the IQA's Council nearly 20 years ago on behalf of its Australian Branch. The delivery service I experience as at May 2005 shows there is still no progress. In that particular institute, some are more equal than others, it would appear for it is my understanding domestic UK members receive their copies weeks earlier though all pay the same dues. Not the happiest example of applying sound quality principles, one might argue. But, as I understand it, the HQ and Council are more absorbed with obtaining a Royal Charter – a goal stretching back a quarter of a century at least – than addressing such profane matters as service to members.

Postal delivery, though important, is not the prime problem with such publications. It is the slow dissemination of knowledge caused by the editorial processes. All too often it takes the best part of a year for an article to appear in a house magazine following its submission. By then, the topical nature can be lost and sharp relevance of the content blunted. But, tardiness pales in comparison to the problem of content.

Free speech

One must be concerned when the editor of the IQA's house magazine informs an author that an article submitted is not acceptable because:

> *"...your article which puts the shareholder as the most important aspect of business is too Americanized. The nature of UK business is less focused on shareholder value – many of our readers work in the public sector so this angle will exclude them completely. I think a wider argument is… surely business has to itself add value to society or else it would cease to exist? How else is a company judged on its success – the way it treats its staff, the profits it makes, the quality of the goods and services it provides?"*

In these days of international trade, members must know the views and values of as many nations and peoples as possible. Enforcing an insular outlook and skewing publications' content to suit only a proportion of the membership is ridiculous – especially when the preferred audience is civil servants (i.e. the "public sector", in UK terms).

The internet allows free speech. And, it allows for swift dissent, for healthy debate. It is a great leveler for no matter how experienced or important one might believe oneself to be, the cyber participants collectively know more, are wiser and can force sobering reflection on personal views. To win a debate, one must have solid facts, strong arguments and the ability to really defend one's views against all comers. The debate is sharper on the Elsmar Cove and Saferpak than in the traditional house magazines. And it is faster!

Excessive advertisements

Members want their house magazine for the contributions made in articles and papers written by fellow professionals and practitioners and notable people. That is the key knowledge the magazines are supposed to disseminate. Sadly, peruse any of the magazines and one cannot but suspect the bodies' executives regard them as being primarily for the purpose of raising revenue through advertisements. To coin an old Wendy's advertising slogan, *"Where's the beef?"*

> The advertisements pad out the magazines and cause me to waste time turning pages to sift out the information in which I may be interested. Time that in my busy daily world is at a premium. Cyber-based publications strip away the adverts and present one with a more concise product. (Good examples are to be found perusing *The Economist*, *Business Week* or *Financial Times* web sites, among many others.) If I am interested in any particular product or service, in all

likelihood the same house magazine advertisers have a web site and I can soon find what I want using a search engine. I do not need all that wasted, but well printed, paper. Those seeking jobs have Monster and similar: those interested in new books can search for titles and subjects and visit Amazon, Borders or B&N.

Worse than advertisements, though, is the problem of editorial judgment.

Excesses of editorial freedom

Today's editors wield too much power over their paymasters – the members. I have yet to encounter an editor of the major professional bodies who is or was a quality practitioner or professional. While one does not mind some polishing of grammar and syntax to make content read more smoothly, altering the very title of one's article, editing the content such that bias is introduced, striking out what is perceived as a contentious issue or something at variance with establishment thought is inconsistent with the ideal of free speech and professional debate. And, in my experience, it is not uncommon.

Censorship is contrary to the aims of any body wishing to be considered the voice of the profession it purports to represent. For the associated house magazine then to disclaim responsibility for the views expressed or content of the articles it contains is disingenuous. Slanting or altering the content of an article can damage the writer's reputation and lead to unnecessary efforts to correct readers' misconceptions: those efforts can easily be regarded by the innocent reader as "back-tracking" when they are not.

Misrepresenting a writer's views, especially when the editing effort has been done without communication with the writer is most certainly inconsistent with common courtesy let alone professional procedure. And then comes another problem: which "letters to the editor" are actually published in subsequent editions of the house magazine is also at the discretion, mercy, prejudices and priorities of the editorial staff, perhaps "guided" by HQ executive management. And it is certainly not unknown for such letters that are printed, to have been edited and their arguments or context changed, as some of my professional colleagues can attest.

Constraints on debate

Even when selective editing does not occur, the paper magazines are naturally constrained for space because of the associated costs of production and distribution. Thus, if one wants a full discussion on some matter or other, only a few views can be presented and one must hope the editor selects a fair and balanced sample. A HQ response might be to appoint a committee or working group to consider the matter but those processes are tardy by virtue of the difficulty in composing a fair set of representatives of different views, the difficulties of assembly, the time required to solicit, receive, consider and respond to contributions. And so forth.

Worst of all, only members of the BAM will generally be aware a subject is being discussed. Cyber panels can work more swiftly and effectively. People can contribute rapidly, easily and economically to the matter at hand. As more of the world's citizens surf the web for knowledge and answers to questions, the likelihood grows they will become aware of a debate and may wish to join the cyber-institute to participate. That is a good thing.

At present, if one wants to debate an issue with a substantial proportion of a BAM's membership, it generally requires extensive use of personal correspondence and emails. The professional blog is more effective. And the blog or chat room (forum) will be a main structural feature of a cyber-based institute.

Are editors needed?

Disintermediation, (removal of middlemen), has affected countless firms as customers and suppliers find each other through the internet, shortening supply chains. That same process removes the need for intermediary editors in the global dissemination and exchange of knowledge. Observing what is happening in cyberspace and in the reading rooms of Saferpak and Elsmar Cove it is soon apparent the quality profession does not need editors. It does not need a HQ to coordinate a panel of experts: they can coordinate themselves and be drawn from around the world. If companies can design complex products coordinating the contributions of people on all continents through the internet, the quality movement can do likewise.

What then can the old BAMs offer the cyber age quality practitioner or professional (there *is* a difference between the two)! How about certification?

Certification

Certificates are of use more for the knowledge the recipient is supposed to acquire prior to their award than the actual remuneration the happy holder might or might not receive from her employer or client. What matters, of course, is the relevance of the knowledge for current business circumstances and how well the holder applies that knowledge.

Members contributing their time, experience and effort for their development determined the bodies of knowledge within such certificates as the ASQ's CQE, CQA and so forth. The members, not the institutes, "own" that knowledge and it is mobile. Any attempt to copyright would be laughable and unenforceable. Progress means change and a BOK can be changed with ease by a new cyber-based institute.

Of course, for many decades the members of professional bodies decided what should be the requirements for membership, for grades of membership, for technical studies and certificates issued and recognized by their particular institute. Nothing has changed. Nor need it change: the members will still decide. Until now, typically, the members hired a secretariat (HQ) to undertake the administration, none of which can be considered as

demanding a high level of cerebral capacity. However, too many anecdotal reports suggest applicants seem required to wait at the pleasure of HQ bureaucrats and finally receive their justly earned certificate long after their fees' check was cashed, after several reminders, polite pleading and ingratiating themselves for the service they paid for. If certificates could be issued at the speed of the invoice all would be well. One might be forgiven for sometimes thinking HQ staff people, especially an executive, consider they are regulators possessing power over one's future. If anything, the reverse is the case.

The need for certificates of accomplishment remains. The need for speedy and economic processing of applicants remains. The need for such HQ people does not. Member volunteers and IT can do all that is required, at a fraction of the present cost. In fact, it seems in the case of such qualifications as the ASQ's CQA, volunteer members screen the applications anyway. HQ people act as a post box and a substantial proportion of the certification fees is absorbed employing and housing them. It could all be done on line and the HQ people removed from the process, fees reduced: disintermediation again.

Foundations for certification

Certification comes as a result of an individual demonstrating to his appointed peers that he has acquired a particular set of knowledge to a level equal to or beyond a prescribed minimum. In some cases, the certificate may also mean the individual has demonstrated to his appointed peers an ability to actually apply it. That the latter truthfully attest they witnessed he or she actually competently accomplished some assigned set of tasks. Those peers are not persons or organizations appointed by the individual. Rather, they should be persons of known competence, in the particular field, approved by others regarded as eminent leaders. Respectable certificates are not things that can be bought or bartered for. Oh, boy!

The foundations of meaningful certification are thus:

- o   An up to date BOK accurately reflecting the skill set, the practical demands on the services expected of the practitioner and the minimum levels of accomplishment acceptable to the person's peers, such that employers, clients and the community will be protected and respect the associated profession.
- o   A scheme, for fully, honestly and accurately assessing the applicant's acquisition of and application of that BOK, administered by people of unimpeachable integrity, reputation and associated known experience and competence.

BOK underlying certificates

As mentioned, the BOK required for certificates of all guises never rested inside the BAMs. It is the property of the members. In bygone years (in the great institutes) a committee of acknowledged leaders (gurus, even!) noted for their contribution to the profession's BOK would determine what would be appropriate curricula, examination

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content and so forth. That can still happen, but the "committee" can be drawn from many nations.

Up to the present day, BOK committees may have met within BAM walls or used its secretarial services as a postal service or telephone exchange to communicate with each other, but the members were outside of those walls in their places of work. In some, but not all cases, they were gaining personal hands-on experience. Today, it is not necessary to use those traditional BAM facilities. A BOK can be kept current using the internet and direct communication between committee members and applicants. It resides on any number of computers and is easily downloaded from any one of them or from a central server. Suggestions for improvement can be emailed to known committee members without languishing in an HQ in tray. They can be made immediately public by posting them on a web site and the professional community can comment accordingly within seconds.

What does matter is that a carefully selected panel of acknowledged, trusted experts leads and coordinates the continuous improvement of the BOK. I will leave the selection, more detailed workings and authority of such a panel for later discussion and resolution by the new cyber institute. But, suffice to say, it is now practical for panels to contain people from all parts of the world, not just local nationals, as is the case for today's BAMs. That fact alone makes them far more credible and the eventual certificates more valuable for the successful applicants.

Assessment schemes

The value of these things rests on the integrity of those appointed to undertake the assessments, regardless of their personal competence and experience. Nobody respects certificates that do not have to be earned through real effort, or which do not stretch the applicant. One cannot but feel discomforted by fairly common remarks that *"what matters most is the application fee."* Even though that type of remark might be regarded as somewhat cynical or unrepresentative of the majority of cases, there is no smoke without fire.

Schemes must serve the applicant and his/ her paymasters and the community first and foremost. They must not be cash cows for the institute in whose name the certificate is issued. Nor for whoever is appointed to undertake the assessment. Fair compensation, if necessary, is perfectly acceptable and proper.

But any scheme must have teeth. People or organizations that would impugn the integrity of the scheme must face public punishment and dismissal – and not just in theory. Cheats and those who would put personal gain and expedients before diligent performance can have no place in a professional institute. Once again, an overseeing panel of international experts can be charged with the authority to take whatever disciplinary action is necessary. Judgment and justice can be meted out rapidly in a cyber institute: the next meeting of the panel can be as soon as the evidence can be emailed to the members. And an incompetent panel can itself be swiftly replaced.

One of the key methods of disseminating a BOK is, of course, through training courses and these, too, can be controlled and run effectively by a cyber institute.

Training courses

In the current quality world, few institutes' HQ staff actually runs training courses the institute badges as being their own. They are outsourced, sold on with an appropriate (or egregious) mark-up to pay for the secretarial work and advertising in the BAMs (advertisement subsidized) monthly journal or through conventional mailshots. The staff book people onto the courses, create a delegates list, collect the money and eventually pay the course presenter whose product/ service is being peddled. In reality, the BAMs are an agent for the course providers. At the end of it all, the BAM issues a certificate bearing its own logo as if the service is its own, not the course presenter's. The course presenter would be expected to sign the blank forms.

Like most other things, the BAMs do a real Tom Sawyer job! The fence needs painting, get others to do the work and if you can get those who do the work to pay for the privilege! Capitalism at its finest. Nice work if you can get it: and they got it. And small wonder the members are called "customers" – after all, they are paying for the painted fence.

Why can the cyber community not do the same and save the cost of the HQ agency and middlemen? In fact, there is no reason at all.

Memberships.

How were the BAMs built, why did membership grow?

Their profession's practitioners founded the BAMs. The rise in membership of such bodies as the ASQ and IQA came not as a result of the efforts of HQ staff but as a consequence of the efforts and achievements of ordinary members, leaders of the profession and through business circumstances.

Global challenges, which involved the successful use of "quality" as a key business strategy by Japanese and German firms, raised the profession's profile in the last four decades. It was the accomplishments of firms' dedicated employees that demonstrated what was possible. Their achievements got management attention and support. They are the people who created and contributed to quality's body of knowledge. They contributed their time, knowledge and materials to others needing help. In fact, far more material was disseminated using conventional post, telephone calls and telexes (remember them?) than by the house magazines. And, major publications written by Joseph Juran and Armand Feigenbaum, among others, produced outside of the BAMs provided a wealth of good advice and tools. But, the practitioners also lent their time to build the quality institutes etc. by writing articles, delivering speeches at division, branch and section meetings and,

in some cases, attending committee meetings. They also paid the dues that paid the salaries of the servants – headquarters staff. They delivered training courses for those bodies, in some cases for little if any remuneration. They raise the funds to try to enhance the facilitation of knowledge, mentioned above. Much of those funds went to paying for increasingly expensive HQ staff and facilities.

Those people also wrote the quality standards. They took time to review submissions and drafts. HQ people were more like publicity agents, printers and distributors of those peoples' activities and achievements. Very few HQ people actually contributed to the content of those standards: some merely sat on the committees enjoying the kudos and expenses paid trips to the meetings.

HQ expenses

Quality practitioners built their employers quality departments, they encouraged (or coerced) their suppliers to improve quality and or adopt ISO 9000 (rightly or wrongly). The numbers of quality professionals and practitioners exploded as a result. All the HQ people had to do was sit back and collect the resulting revenues from dues, from conferences, sales of books and training materials created by those members. They were engaged in secretarial and bureaucratic tasks aimed at the same goals: facilitating the development and exchange of knowledge. Since an army of volunteers did the heavy lifting, it was Tom Sawyer work indeed. The money rolled in. But, where did it all go? That question is clearly disturbing a lot of people.

> A recent posting on the Elsmar Cove revealed the ASQ has been "running a deficit" – a silly euphemism for losing (or squandering?) money - members' money – for several years. A few weeks earlier another post revealed someone (no prizes) at ASQ HQ earns about $343000 p.a. and the top 5 aggregate over $1 million.

One cannot argue against paying for results and achievement. Considering, however, the squeeze being experienced by ordinary members who face downsizing, outsourcing and in most cases pay raises lower than inflation, the salaries paid are inappropriate given also the dissatisfaction so obvious from dwindling membership numbers and chat room comments about the service received. Ever more employers are refusing to reimburse members the dues that are typically in excess of $100. (In the case of Britain's IQA, at today's exchange rate annual fellowship dues exceed $200 and it only has about 12000 members.) Add to that the magnitude of levies for various cash cow certificates (certified auditor and so forth) the load on an employer's exchequer is clearly excessive, especially when the firm has perhaps many quality people within its ranks. So, ever more members must fork over an increasing part of their income, discretionary expenditure and probably wonder what are the benefits? Why should not such a person wonder if HQ is just a self-serving, self-absorbed bureaucracy? Why should they not wonder how they spend their time?

As I write this article, I have just received an email from Frank Steer, Director General of Britain's IQA, a man I have never met, with whom I never exchanged business cards, promoting a book he has written. The book is about military, not quality, matters and the email has been sent directly from the IQA. It seems Mr. Steer used IQA facilities, its email list and time to promote his own products. Considering the appalling loss of membership during his period of tenure and the fact that his remuneration, I understand, is in excess of $150000 p.a., one can reasonably wonder where lie his priorities and where also is the IQA's council (a.k.a. its "board of directors") in preventing this misuse of IQA resources and its supposedly confidential members details (i.e. email addresses).

While many of us in the quality movement strive to develop and support our profession, it does seem as if we are the ones out in all weathers and times of day and night, building the windmill in George Orwell's famous book. Except that those now seated at the farmer's table never were original residents of the farm while some committee members certainly were.

Until now, the various national quality institutions have enjoyed a virtual monopoly in their countries in that there is only one ASQ and one IQA etc. Competition is healthy and a cyber institute could provide precisely that. As all appreciate, competition tends to raise quality, lower prices. It is my belief the high level of fees deters many from joining our institutions. That is unhealthy.

What must be the new membership?

BAMs are national bodies. They lack the global view and constituency. As the world's economy expands and value chains encircle the world, so too should the membership of professional institutions. Present day "international chapters" and branches of BAMs cannot hope to be as effective as the internet-based professional community. The reach, the speed, the depth of knowledge is so much greater in the latter and far more easily tapped. International professional opinion can be gauged within a matter of minutes or hours. International norms and standards can be speedily discussed, agreed and harmonized. And, an agreed set of criteria for someone wishing a title, such as member, fellow, associate or companion can be used so that, rather as people understand what compliance with an ISO standard means (I will not cite 9000 or be drawn into that quagmire involving registration efficacy at this juncture): Member of the International Quality Society (or whatever title) infers the individual has met or exceeded prescribed requirements, an outline suggestion for which is offered in Part 2 of this article.

But, it would also be a place where establishment appointees, political drones and professional committee types could not prevail. Just because a person happens to have a title in a major or famous firm, or is the quality manager of a government organization or nationalized company that would be insufficient for acceding to the highest levels of a cyber institute.

What are professional bodies for?

Professional institutes are primarily about two things: knowledge and recognized achievement. The two are closely related. The internet is unsurpassable in disseminating and storing the first making access to it readily available. Recognized achievement is about an agreed set of accomplishments certified by ones peers. As mentioned, that can all be done using the internet for submissions and approvals. A hard copy certificate can easily be sent by conventional post if desired. But, the internet can be used to create a database of "certified" individuals, just as lead auditor qualifications can now be found on the web. Training courses can be run using cyber space, as does the University of Phoenix and others. Approved providers working on an outsourced basis can deliver conventional training. A periodic magazine can be rapidly and cheaply distributed by email or made available through a secure password.

The notion that government is interested in the views of members and would only wish for face-to-face meetings by HQ staff is, of course, nonsense. The supposed advocacy role is a legacy of bygone days. All government needs to do is to post a question, perhaps include a multi-choice poll in order to obtain rapid feedback of the profession's views. And, in this global age, the idea that a nation needs its own quality body is somewhat ridiculous because knowledge is international and mobile as is trade, the real user and paymaster of the quality profession's efforts. It seems a curious inconsistency that individual institutions advocate a national quality body but an international standard for quality. Moreover, take away the revenues created by the industry attending that international standard and those national bodies would be financially crippled. The international reality is central to their survival but their HQs take a nationalistic view while their members work in an international arena. It is all rather bizarre. (The only major difference is one of language but, in the global environment, English is the business *lingua franca* and in virtually all nations not having it as a mother tongue, it is generally the chosen second language of their citizens.)

One's profession comes first

Of course, one can expect various national bodies to try to protect their "turf". One must especially expect their HQ staff to try to protect their jobs. All kinds of sophistry might be deployed. One can imagine elements of one's own national body using pejorative expressions behind the scenes. But, one's loyalty and efforts are first and foremost to furthering the effectiveness and BOK of one's profession. It will always be put first. After all, is that not what the BAMs claim in their articles of association, *"to further the standing, reputation of the quality profession"* and similar sentiments? Yes, indeed. Advocating a cyber-based institute is entirely consistent with that. One must constantly tear down the barriers to the advancement of the profession. Cyberspace facilitates that as no other tool has done before.

A cyber institute reflects the changing world of organizations. The days of command and control are gone. It is impossible to push an official institute line any more. We live in an

age of consensus where meritocracy increasingly reigns supreme. (Of course, there remain pockets of nepotism, favoritism, patronage and inheritance that determine one's position in some firm and nations). Reading the posts on the Cove and Saferpak soon reveals who are the respected contributors. One soon sees the spectrum of knowledge and ability. One finds a cornucopia of information for an encyclopedia of topics. Searchable, available, current and greater than that available from the BAMs. It is all rather energizing.

As we live in a global economy, as communications create a global village and as business maintains global supply chains we need a global profession. And that profession needs a global institute. Only a cyber based institute can effectively serve the needs of professionals and practitioners in "quality".

A cyber institute is at hand – if you want one

If done properly, setting up a global institute based in cyberspace will propel forward the quality profession and provide a superior service than the BAMs. Better value for money for members, employers and clients global reach and participation. It can offer truly international credentials and credibility for the members. Only a few key pieces remain to be put in place and it could be running in a matter of weeks.

It is the way to go. And the time has come to do it.

<div align="right">

Allan J. Sayle,
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20 May 2005

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Part 2

In Part 2 to this article, already written, I will address the following:

- o   A possible structure and membership requirements for a new cyber institute.
- o   Governing rules.
- o   Membership dues.
- o   National interests.
- o   Language.
- o   Business sector.
- o   How to get the cyber institute going.
- o   Headquarters.
- o   A house magazine, publications and materials.
- o   Training courses.

- o   Conferences.
- o   Professional certifications and qualifications issued by a cyber institute.
- o   Accreditation and registration schemes; the effects on registrars.
- o   Development of quality standards, the cyber institute's relationship with ISO and its TC 176 committee(s).