

A Book Review: “From Quality to Business Excellence – A Systems Approach to Management” – by Charles G. Cobb, ASQ Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 2003, 248 pages.

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Step out of your typical “Quality” box and read a state-of-the-art book that will get you thinking differently! In this book Cobb pushes the envelope about quality systems thinking and argues that it’s time quality professionals coalesce the many programs and international specifications offered in industry. By doing so, Cobb suggests that this integrated systems approach will be more effective and produce business results that are long lasting.

Indeed, today’s quality industry has reached a quagmire of program-du-jours – Six Sigma, ISO 9001:2000, maturity tables, to name just a few - that may leave some people wondering how they all fit together to drive results. Cobb’s vision, in adopting “systems thinking”, says that it’s ok – YES! IT’S OK!! – to *not* limit your company to one approach; but to pick and choose the best management tool for each situation and integrate them! His book has a number of helpful visuals such as systems roadmaps, process models, alignment of business metrics, and a lifecycle model for complex improvement initiatives. His fourth chapter “Designing Integrated Management Systems,” drives home the point through examples and that our changing industry “...requires greater alignment among technology, systems, people, and organizational units.”

Cobb thoroughly and efficiently describes typical programs and their linkages, and surprises the reader by addressing other enablers such as cultural and behavioral factors, knowledge management, and the strong use of cross-functional integration of metrics to drive customer value. His book does fall short, however, in citing a process for translating ever-changing incoming customer requirements into the company’s integrated quality systems.

Overall, this is an excellent book to drive innovative thinking and paradigm shifts about quality and implementing change. This definitely is not your “daddy’s quality system” anymore! You can purchase this book on www.asq.org, the American Society of Quality website, or read more at <http://www.breakthroughsolns.com/be/index.htm>.

The Role of Systems Thinking in Business Performance

- Know exactly what your customers require
- Have well-defined processes for translating those requirements into internal actions
- Align all of your tasks and processes along common goals and objectives
- Use key measures to manage by fact
- Involve everyone in continuous improvement
- Understand and improve all your critical processes
- Satisfy your customers