

October 23, 2007

I recently read the following article which brings together the results of a recent survey of key business people on the subject of how to handle growth while maintaining high quality. Although quality over quantity is a significant shift for some company cultures, it can lead to significant competitive advantage and actually save you money in the long run – by doing it right the first time. I hope you find it insightful for your organization as well.

Quality Valued Over Quantity in Today's Business Environment

By Chuck Martin

Despite the constant push to derive more from less, business leaders say that quality is still top of mind.

When it comes to dealing with customers and what is expected and demanded of them, businesspeople say that quality overshadows quantity.

And the majority of senior executives and managers say that most organizations value quality over quantity when creating products and services, based on a global survey by NFI Research.

About a fourth said their organization significantly values more quality over quantity.

Concerning the demands of their bosses, the majority said that quality is valued more than quantity, with more than a quarter saying their superiors significantly value quality over quantity.

"Quantity has no or little value if the quality is not there," said one survey respondent.

"Quality will tend to decrease as the volume increase expected goes up," said another. "Yet most companies will demand the same quality as before. Paradoxical? Probably, unfortunately."

There often is conflict between quality and quantity, in the do-more-with-less environment of work today. No one really wants quality to suffer, but the biggest issue facing the majority of companies today is business growth.

And therein lies the challenge, which is to grow, increasing quantity, without letting quality suffer.

"I think customers always value quality, but supervisors always want the business to grow," said one manager.

Sometimes the customers themselves unwittingly drive down the quality in favor of volume or speed.

"The quantity vs. quality debate keeps me up at night," said one survey respondent. "I am far more in favor of quality, but it seems in today's 'more is more' society, I am in the minority. Cheaper, faster, more seems to win deals. Clients do not appear to want to pay for top-quality products, and senior managers have no choice but to follow the market."

"The challenge is to balance available resources with quality of delivery," said another. "Frequently, the demands are such that quality suffers in order to check everything off the list."

Of course, true quality can mean different things to different people. As one survey respondent noted, "Too often the definition of quality is anything that you won't have to step in later. Out of sight, out of mind equals acceptable quality."

Said another: "We all value quality. My difficulties come from not having well-defined quality measures and standards to compare."

And quality is not necessarily about getting only the big things right.

"While people claim that quality is above all else, when I look at the trade-offs that organizations make and see the expectations that are transmitted to the individual contributors, it is apparent to me that people do not understand what quality means," said one respondent. "It is not a single big initiative that will result in quality. It is the little things done consistently and persistently."

The reality is quality involves getting it right the first time around, which can take more time than anticipated. However, fixing a quality problem later can take a whole lot more time and resources. Quality needs to be from the beginning, not an afterthought.

Chuck Martin is a best-selling business book author, his latest being , [Tough Management](#) (McGraw-Hill, 2005), the business fable "[Coffee at Luna's](#)" and the soon-to-be published "[Smarts](#)." He lectures around the world and can be reached at chuck@nfiresearch.com