ASQ AND ISPI: MUTUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFLUENCING GLOBAL PERFORMANCE

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To help organizations get closer to their value objectives, a number of approaches and fields of practice have been developed. Two fields common in today's business environment are human performance technology (HPT) and quality. The recent publication of the *Global State of Quality Research: Discoveries 2013* by the American Society for Quality provides customer- and practitioner-related data and offers an opportunity to link the purposes, philosophies, research, and practices of quality and HPT.

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A recent publication, the *Global State of Quality Research: Discoveries 2013* by the American Society for Quality in conjunction with the American Productivity and Quality Center, offers an opportunity to link, or maybe, relink, the purposes, philosophies, research, and practices of quality and HPT.

In both the private and public sectors, the purpose of organizations is to deliver products and services that are perceived as *valuable* to stakeholders and clients. In whatever capacity organizations operate, their products and services are designed, developed, and delivered to envisioned standards. The goal of organizational leaders is to achieve those standards at the lowest possible investment and with the highest possible return.

The reality for nearly all organizations is that they often fall short of the value vision they strive to achieve. Stakeholders, shareholders, and clients are not always as happy as hoped; there are flaws in design, production, and delivery; costs are not as low as they could be and returns on investment are not as high. In sum, the standards of production, outputs, and outcomes are rarely achieved as fully intended. As performance nears the established level of expectation, the bar is raised either by organizational leaders, clients, or competitors.

Discoveries provides customer- and practitioner-related data for developing a mutually supportive way ahead for the professional societies that represent HPT and quality: the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) and the American Society for Quality.

THE COMMON GROUND OF QUALITY AND HPT

About 10 years ago, my colleague at the time, Pat McMahon, developed a comparison of HPT and quality models (McMahon, 2004). Pat was, and remains, a well-recognized quality and performance expert. He is a long-time member of the American Society for Quality, a certified ISO 9000 Quality Systems Auditor, a Six Sigma Black Belt, a Certified Performance Technologist, and a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Senior Examiner. He knows what he is talking about.

Table 1 provides an updated version of McMahon's "goodness of fit" comparison of the ISO 9000 (ANSI/ISO/ASQ, 2008) and Baldrige (2013) with the critical attributes of HPT (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1999).

As Table 1 shows, there is considerable alignment between the various approaches, yet our professional and intersociety interactions are rare and a matter of chance.

About the Global State of Quality Research

The purpose of the research presented in *Discoveries* is to better understand how organizations of different sizes in different market segments and different parts of the world instill quality processes. It is a report on the current use of core quality practices, or what the authors call the "what." To that end, *Discoveries*:

- Serves as a benchmark for the quality discipline to help guide further research and activities that advance the field
- Advances the world's understanding of what quality is
- Provides an appreciation of what quality can mean for countries and communities tomorrow
- Sets the stage for future research relating to the "why"

10 Selected Data Highlights From *Discoveries 2013:* The Good, the Meh, and the Ugly

There is a lot going on in the 30-plus pages of *Discoveries.* The report covers quality governance and management, outcomes and measures, competencies and training, and culture. Table 2 highlights some key data points.

Discoveries provides the data for the American Society for Quality and ISPI to develop a mutually supportive way ahead.

HPT AND QUALITY: COMPARING (OUR LACK OF) DEFINITIONS

Here is the good news for everyone in the quality and HPT arenas—at least, according to various publications and the recent *Discoveries* research: The other guys don't know how to fully define their fields either!

The HPT Perspective

HPT, defined by ISPI as a systematic approach to improving productivity and competence, uses a set of methods and procedures for solving problems and realizing

TABLE 1 COMPARISON OF THE CRITICAL ATTRIBUTES OF HPT, ISO 9000, AND BALDRIGE		
HPT ATTRIBUTES	ISO 9000	BALDRIGE CRITERIA
Systematic	High	Very High
Systemic	Medium Evaluates most aspects of a business from a process point of view Tolerant of a "siloed" view, if that is how the organization defines its quality system	Very High Criteria cover all elements of a business system Heavy emphasis on the alignment between these elements
Grounded in scientifically derived theories and best available empirical evidence	Medium Standard is developed by a technical committee and approved by vote of member bodies	High Criteria are developed by very experienced performance improvement professionals
Open to all means, methods, and media	Medium Standard is quite prescriptive, and updates are released every 6 to 7 years	Very High Criteria are comprehensive and are updated annually to reflect the latest business practices
Focused on achievements that human performers and the system value	Low Standard only requires a well-documented quality system, supported by evidence that it is being followed Very little focus on actual valuable performance	Very High Nearly half of the weighted criteria involve measured results Clearly aligned with the most important aspects of the business

TABLE 2	SELECTED DATA POINTS FROM ASQ'S DISCOVERIES 2013 REPORT	
The Good	81% of all respondents indicate that quality goals exist for business/functional units	
	89% of all respondents indicate that standardized quality management processes are in place	
	81% of respondents seek to understand product performance through their customers' eyes	
	74% of respondents collect quality data from tier-one suppliers	
The Meh	63% of respondents from health care indicate that quality goals exist for operational business/functional units	
	62% of companies with revenue over $5B indicate that quality goals exist in their overall strategy	
The Ugly	2% or less of all respondents rely on external representatives for quality management or governance	
	17% of respondents from services report quality measures on a daily basis	
	46% of respondents from manufacturing report quality measures on a daily basis	
	55% of respondents report that they have a leadership succession plan for their quality process	

Our profession lacks common definitions for quality and performance.

or a branch of knowledge dealing with engineering or applied science.

The Quality Perspective

Via *Discoveries*, the American Society for Quality attempts to advance the world's understanding and appreciation of what quality is and what continuous improvement can mean. However, we quickly learn that the nearly 2,000 survey respondents lack concurrence on a common definition for *quality*. The report provides a summary of the 10 most common definitions from the perspectives of the respondents' organizations, with the summary finding being that quality is a "cultural management philosophy." Although there is considerable variation in the definitions, two main themes emerge:

- Exceeding expectations (in 3 of 10 definitions)
- Adding value (3 of 10)

The focus on results related to the customer is very encouraging. However, these themes did not mesh well with a follow-on item, in which respondents were asked to complete the phrase "Quality is mainly a . . ."

The summary data from that item indicate the following:

- 4% of the respondents believe quality is mainly a "risk mitigation activity"
- 10% say it is a "tool" to fix issues after they have been discovered
- 22% say it's a "compliance activity"
- 24% believe it is a "method" for managing organization-wide performance
- 37% suggest that it is "continuous improvement activity"

Apparently, when considering what quality is, none of the respondents thought of it as a value-added outcome. Their focus was instead on activities, tools, and methods. The study's authors appropriately challenge these responses via the rhetorical question "Can we say that quality is about creating customer value when quality mainly focuses on compliance or simply fixing existing problems?" (American Society for Quality, 2013, p. 14).

As a past ISPI president, I know firsthand of the continual debate about the lack of a commonly accepted

opportunities related to the performance of people (Stolovitch and Keeps, 1999). A similar, but simpler definition is provided in the third edition of the *Handbook of Human Performance Technology*, which defines HPT as a systematic approach to improving individual and organizational performance (Pershing, 2006).

For those new to the term HPT, it is viewed by its advocates as a process of selection, analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of programs to achieve the most cost-effective influence on human behavior and accomplishment (ISPI, 2012). A common sticking point in the terminology is the use of the word *technology* to describe a field of practice. In most business environments, when people think of *technology*, their typical context is information technology. ISPI uses the term to refer to the specialized aspects of the human performance field. That is, technology is the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes,

definition for HPT. For the most part, the chatter is mostly unproductive and creates considerable organizational angst. More broadly, my experience over nearly 30 years in the field is that when the various professional societies are not engaged in self-flagellation, they find opportunities to thrash others. The result tends to be conversations about what we or they are not, rather than what we are or aspire to be. Besides confusing each other, this dialogue creates confusion among clients and new practitioners.

In any event, I was surprised to learn that the quality field seems to have a similar definitional issue. Maybe I was subconsciously channeling the depressing axiom offered by my friend Toby Tetenbaum, who once reminded me that "misery doesn't love company; misery loves miserable company!"

At this point in the development of the quality and performance fields, general definitions should be well settled. The modern quality field is nearly 100 years old, and there are stacks of publications that have advanced both the science and the practice. HPT is younger, having been formed in the 1960s, but there is considerable research that also supports its foundational principles.

We often get wrapped up in the methods, for example, Baldrige, ISO 9000, Six Sigma, and Lean, when we should be focused on the outcomes (Pyzdek, 2003). So the problem with trying to tackle an official definition is that it turns into a quixotic search for one that serves all purposes. That is not going to happen, and it does not have to any more than there needs to be a core definition for the practice of medicine; which there isn't (American Medical Association, 1999). Still, as in medicine, there are core principles that the quality and HPT fields can agree to, such as:

- A field of applied science
- Uses diagnosis, treatment, and prevention
- Relates to the art of maintaining, restoring, and improving organizational performance
- Requires certain ethical obligations relating to the use of professional skills and knowledge
- Measures success based on outcomes and value created for customers and the recipients of outputs

Mutual Opportunity 1: Jointly Develop a Common Definition and Core Principles for Quality and HPT

The American Society for Quality and ISPI are striving for the same things: a focus on accomplishments, or outcomes, and *performance improvement* (PI). This is an opportunity for the two societies to collaborate, and it will help advance both fields in the eyes of practitioners, organizational leaders, and customers.

THE STATE OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The *Discoveries* research includes an assessment of the state of quality training across industries. The report provides a summary of five training-related considerations:

- The types of training provided by the respondent organizations
- The availability of training in various organizational segments
- Who gets trained
- The average cost of training per quality-related employee
- The structure of the training office

An over-focus on training is a slippery slope. First, it is the proverbial solution looking for a problem to solve. Second, it is activity- or behavior-oriented. Third, it is rarely integrated with other aspects of the total performance system. Training as a primary path to quality, performance improvement, or business process reengineering almost universally leads to expertise being based on number of courses attended and, sometimes, belt colors. The result is costly training initiatives that produce many certificates, but little in the way of measurable or sustainable business results.

The main, and unsurprising, data point in *Discoveries* seems to be that "a higher percentage of the largest organizations are able to allocate the necessary resources [for quality training]"(p. 25). What is missing is a correlation of these metrics with actual organizational performance, product quality, or customer perceptions. As often as our combined professions have advocated the return on investment on training over the past two decades, this is a missed opportunity.

Part of the problem stems from the previously noted lack of core definitions. Even in the introductory remarks of the American Society for Quality research, the terms quality and continuous improvement are used as synonyms. Perhaps this is an attempt to be inclusive, but they are not the same; one is an end, the other is a means.

A lack of core terms creates unnecessary friction and ambiguity. It also presents the opportunity for scores of marketing-based derivatives. Specific lingo often takes on a life of its own and makes cross organizational dialogue difficult. This leads to clumsiness in basic conversations and slows the advance of our profession. The good
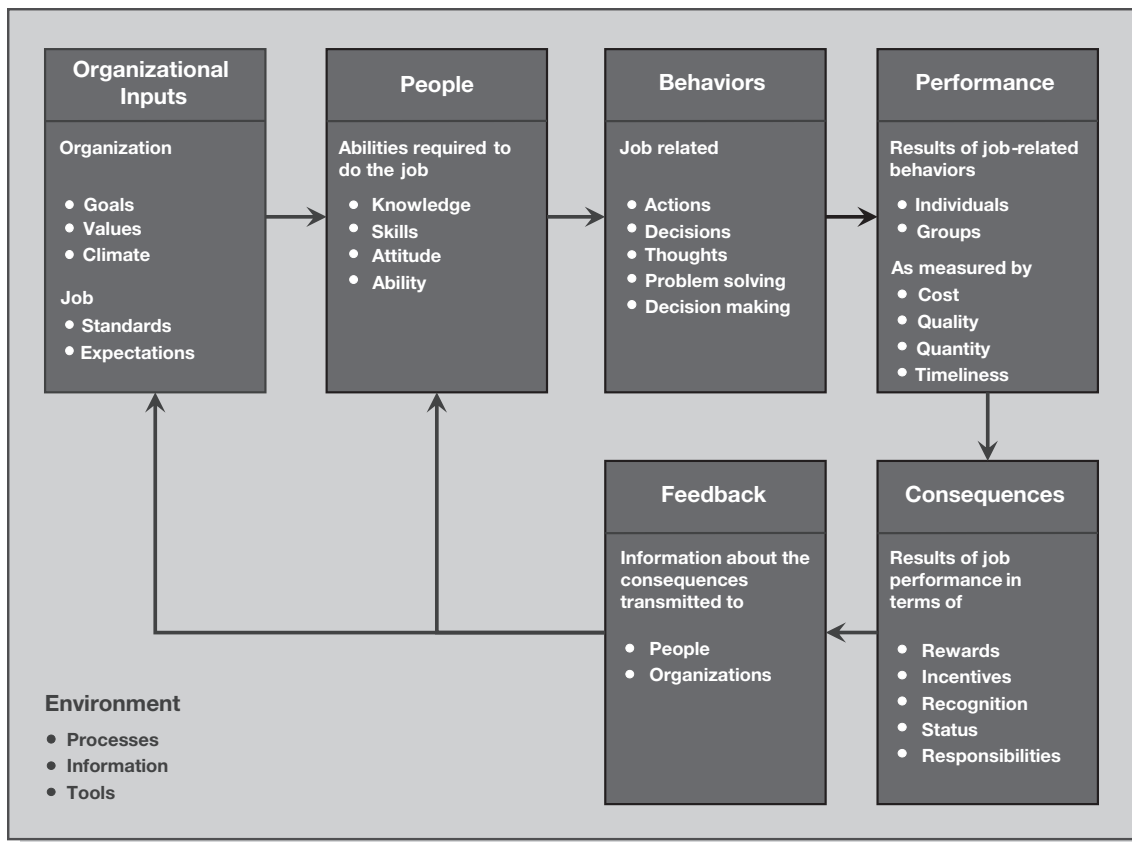
FIGURE 1. TOTAL PERFORMANCE SYSTEM

news is that it presents additional opportunities for the American Society for Quality and ISPI.

Mutual Opportunity 2: Establish a Common Lexicon for the Quality and Performance Fields

An example: In the world of software development where data must be shared between multiple applications, engineers commonly employ a data dictionary. These dictionaries are centralized repositories of information such as meanings, relationships to other data, and use. If a particular database wants to use another term, it is permitted as long as the data ultimately align with the core value or definition in the data dictionary. This allows applications to talk with each other and provide metadata valuable to users.

Our fields need the equivalent of a data dictionary. This comes through clearly in the *Discoveries* report. Multiple terms are used synonymously with quality: quality discipline, improvement process, continuous improvement, a practice, a cultural management philosophy, and a system for organizational excellence. There is room for improvement.

Generally accepted terminology advances the fields of quality and HPT. Furthermore, it serves as the structure to which new methods can align themselves.

Mutual Opportunity 3: Establish and Share a Common Model for Performance Architecture

In parallel with a common lexicon, the American Society for Quality and ISPI have an opportunity to develop a shared understanding of the operating environment, or the performance architecture (Addison, Haig, & Kearny, 2009) or the total performance system; maybe something similar to the total performance system shown in Figure 1.

The environment affects every aspect of our field, including the development of management systems, as well as subsequent research and application. It also makes our practices accessible and understandable to novices and potential clients. They can see where we operate, how we operate, and how they fit in.

Building on this base, we can also include external clients and societal impact (Addison, Haig, & Kearny, 2009; Kaufman, 2011). This dimension helps drive the need to ensure that measurable value is added inside and outside the organization.

TABLE 3	EIGHT CROSS-INDUSTRY MEASURES PRESENTED IN *DISCOVERIES 2013*	
MOSTLY INTERNALLY FOCUSED	MOSTLY IN-PROCESS FOCUSED	MOSTLY EXTERNALLY FOCUSED
Measures of safety	Defects per million	Percent on-time delivery
Internal failures	First pass yield	Customer satisfaction
Percent compliant		
Employee satisfaction		

IMPROVING MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

Based on the results presented in *Discoveries*, plenty of opportunity exists to advance our methods in this area. The study notes that selection of the right quality measures can have a tremendous impact on overall performance outcomes and the culture of quality. It goes on to highlight the frequency of use of eight measures across the respondent organizations. The eight measures from the report (p. 25) are presented in Table 3 and categorized as internally or externally focused (based on this author's judgment). Regardless of the extent of their use, it is fair to ask if these measures lead to enhanced value for the customer and whether the mix between internal, in-process, and external is effective.

The Quality of Our Measures

Nearly every quality and performance practitioner has been introduced to the adage "what gets measured gets managed." They have certainly been reminded to "start with the end in mind."

Although *Discoveries* is introduced as a series of benchmarks, the main benchmarks are those of activities, not of results. The report presents scores of data points, but it is missing meaningful correlations with actual quality results of the respondent organizations or industries. This makes it difficult to find meaning in the data. Again, this lack of correlation is a missed opportunity to shape how the profession is perceived and what customers should expect from practitioners.

Frequency of Reporting

According to *Discoveries*, a key purpose of the research is to help people understand what continuous improvement can mean or do for their organizations, communities, and countries. That suggests a wide population of people who need access to meaningful data.

Beyond the "what" of the metrics, *Discoveries* focuses on the "when" in terms of frequency and in terms of reporting. For example, the excerpts in Table 4 indicate that on average, 32% of front-line managers in manufacturing-related respondent organizations receive measurement reports on a daily basis. Daily reporting in services-related organizations only occurs for 13% of front-line managers.

If this is truly the frequency of measurement reporting, there is considerable room for new methods of data collection, synthesis, and communication. If organizational

TABLE 4	FREQUENCY AND LEVELS OF REPORTING FOR MANUFACTURING AND SERVICES INDUSTRIES		
THIS STAFF LEVEL …	RECEIVES MEASUREMENT REPORTS AT THIS FREQUENCY …	MANUFACTURING (% OF RESPONDENTS)	SERVICES (% OF RESPONDENTS)
Senior executives	Quarterly	39	27
Division leaders	Monthly	60	48
Department leaders	Monthly	52	49
Front-line managers	Daily	32	13
Frontline staff	Daily	46	17

leaders want to improve quality and performance, they need to know *what* to fix—now!

From my company's experience in health care, I have learned that documented inpatient feedback typically occurs weeks after the patients are discharged. In response, we have developed cloud-based software applications for use at all organizational levels that capture customer, that is, patient and family member, feedback in near-real time (Hill, 2013a). In every case, performance results consistently skyrocket soon after implementation. This is not business intelligence—it is performance intelligence, and the approach is viable in every industry.

Mutual Opportunity 4: Provide Best Practices and Easy-to-Use Tools for Data Collection and Communication

Improvement requires timely and relevant feedback. Waiting a week, a month, or a quarter is a near-certain way to lose a customer (and maybe more than one). The faster that leaders can access critical information and make good decisions that are based on facts, the faster their organizations can achieve superiority relative to their competitors and operational challenges while ensuring far higher levels of client satisfaction (Hill, 2013b).

A library of proven metrics by industry, function, and organizational size would help leaders set up an effective measurement system. In addition, a guide for leaders at different organizational levels, maybe in the form of "the 5 questions I ought to be asking," would be invaluable. Finally, the use of cloud technologies for anywhere/anytime access to organizational performance information would be welcomed across all industries.

As highly trusted organizations, American Society for Quality and ISPI are the perfect advocates for these methods and tools. This opportunity expands the reach of both organizations and benefits their members, their client organizations, and downstream customers. The resulting metadata, with unique identifiers removed, would go a long way in advancing the quality and performance fields.

SHAPING THE CULTURE OF QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

A friend once defined culture as "the way we do things around here." *Discoveries* is a reminder that a combination of all of the elements in the study help shape organizational cultures of quality and performance. Still, the foundational principle of quality and performance is that value to the customer is the primary objective. This requires communication with the recipients of organizational outputs that are both external and internal to the organization. So how do the respondent organizations approach that communication?

- 81% seek to understand performance through their customers' eyes
- 86% communicate with customers to address their needs and complaints
- 68% share information on quality and performance with customers
- Many use a range of incentives to encourage achievement of quality goals

Without knowing how the customers actually assess the quality and performance of the respondents, it is difficult to determine the value of these data points. Maybe 68% of companies sharing quality information with clients leads to world-class quality, or maybe it's pathetic. And as for benchmarks, the data do not easily lend themselves to comparisons. For example, if a company offers nonfinancial awards, where does that put them in comparison with others in their industry? Based on the data provided, it is not possible to tell.

Mutual Opportunity 5: Develop Benchmarks for Easy Comparison Across Industry and Revenue Groups

While *Discoveries* establishes itself as laying a benchmark for quality programs, the report is not designed for easy comparisons. It would be a major step forward if the initial results of the research were to be put in a format and media that allow it to be easily accessible. This would encourage other organizations to participate in the surveys and add to the data ASQ has so valuably presented in the initial work.

PROTECTING PRACTITIONERS FROM STUFF THAT WILL NOT WORK

Organizational improvement initiatives often start with the best intentions, but often are derailed by the introduction of fads and miracle cures. Everyone loves a fad! If it is platform shoes, Tamagotchis, pogs, or a Lionel Ritchie chia pet (*hey*, don't judge me!), the cost is minimal and there is no significant impact on the family or community culture. For the most part, the result is just a drawer full of temporarily loved but now unnecessary junk.

Miracle cures are more dangerous. People can really buy into the idea, and in some cases they willingly change their lifestyles to adjust to a cure that is promised as just being around the next corner. The buy-in to business fads and miraculous promises can really hurt an organization. In the quality and performance arena, fads often arrive as clever

terminology and appealing marketing wrappers disguising watered-down versions of once-dependable science. We fall in love with the sexiness, but the results never materialize.

Mutual Opportunity 6: Stick to the Science

The American Society for Quality and ISPI can help their industry stakeholders by sticking to the science. This will lead to better and more consistent results in every organization that listens, and it will build industry-wide trust. If there is a need for terminology and processes that are catchy or unique, then they should be based on the terminology of the industry or organization, not that of marketers.

REVIEWING THE OPPORTUNITIES

In his book, *Human Competence* (1978), Thomas Gilbert noted that worthy performance is a function of valuable accomplishments and costly behavior (p. 17). As a practical matter, though, what is truly at stake is the maximizing of value to clients. That requires the optimization of capacity through efficient organizational performance. With value creation in mind, the American Society for Quality and ISPI will serve their customers well and add value to the global community by leading a refocus on the science of quality and performance, and addressing the opportunities summarized here:

1. Develop a common definition and core principles for quality and HPT
2. Establish a common lexicon for the quality and performance fields
3. Establish and share a common model for performance architecture
4. Provide best practices and easy-to-use tools for data collection and communication
5. Develop benchmarks for easy comparison across industry and revenue groups
6. Stick to the science

Finally, there is tremendous potential in ISPI and the American Society for Quality joining organizational forces more often and more deliberately. A good place to start would be the NextGen version of *Discoveries*, maybe along the lines of "the global state of organizational performance improvement." That is broad enough to encompass the objectives of both organizations, specific enough to generate a solid set of survey items, and compelling enough to get the attention of senior leaders and executives in respondent organizations. On the last point, leaders tend not to be overly focused on *quality* or *human performance*, but they are continually interested in organizational outcomes and the perceptions of clients. An overt, mutually supporting relationship between the American

Society for Quality and ISPI will result in a stronger professional community and the further advancement of quality and performance around the globe. ☀

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