How to Achieve Organizational Excellence (Part 1)

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Last fall, after practicing process and organizational improvement for more than twenty years, I passed my first certification exam from the American Society for Quality (ASQ). While I had been encouraged to get my Six Sigma Black Belt, I did not have the project affidavits. So, I perused the ASQ web site and chose the Certified Manager of Quality/Organizational Excellence (CMQ/OE). I did not choose it because it was the longest. I chose it because its body of knowledge appeared best aligned with mine.

Since that time, I have had the chance to reflect on the general concept of certification as well as the specifics of the certification that I have attained. This reflection has caused me to ask two fundamental questions:

- What does attaining a certification really mean?
- Is the CMQ/OE body of knowledge truly useful to someone in my (or any) profession?

These questions provoked me to write this blog. In this initial posting, I will begin to address the first of these questions, though I am certain that it will take me more than one posting to do it justice. Then, I will move on to the more vexing question; whether the body of knowledge is of value, and if not, what other subjects might we add to make it more valuable?

So, what does attaining a certification truly represent? My progression to getting the certification was:

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- Launch a career in quality, process and organizational improvement;
- Read hundreds of books and articles on these and related subjects;
- Work on many projects for many clients in numerous industries;
- Attend seminars provided by industry pundits and gurus;
- Review and study the body of knowledge; and,
- Sit for the certification exam.

I would guess that I was the lone person who sat for the exam that day that took this exact path. However, regardless of what may have preceded it, I am certain that we all had the last two steps in common. And, at this point, it would appear that these last two steps are all that are required (if done correctly) to gain a certification. So, is it safe to conclude that if you study hard and are a good test taker you can get a certification? If so, what is the relative worth of the awarded certifications? Are all certifications of a particular body of knowledge created equal?

Clearly, the answer is a resounding ***NO!***

It is now painfully apparent to me that a certification indicates a certain level of understanding of a body of knowledge. An understanding of what the tools in the toolbox are and what each tool does. However, it does not separate a quarry worker from Rodin. The certification process does not judge proficiency or competence. Having attained certification there still may be a significant knowing-doing gap.

While this is a potential caution to those of you hiring professionals with industry certifications, that is not my primary focus. Rather, I put this out there as a backdrop for this blog's primary goal, to help close the knowing-doing gap associated with the CMQ/OE certification. Over the coming issues of this blog, I intend to address this issue along two dimensions:

- How do you effectively use the tools presented in the CMQ/OE body of knowledge; and,
- What other tools should be added to the CMQ/OE professional's toolbox (and how to use them effectively as well).

I sincerely hope you join me as I explore these two dimensions in greater detail. As always, I encourage your feedback, as it will help me provide postings of value to you.

- Performance Management [2]
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