

THE 23rd ASIA PACIFIC QUALITY ORGANISATION CONFERENCE MANILA, PHILIPPINES, 23-24 OCTOBER 2017

The annual Asia Pacific Quality Organisation conference was held in Manila on 23 and 24 October 2017. It was preceded by the Core Council meeting on Sunday 22, attended by Jeff Ryall as President of AOQ.

CORE COUNCIL MEETING

The Core Council meeting is the main governance activity of the APQO, and Australia is one of only four sustaining members. We therefore have an influential seat at the table, and a position of respect throughout the Asia-Pacific region. APQO itself is comprised of Quality associations, as well as individual members, from across the region, extending from the middle east to South America. Fortunately, the language of APQO is English!

APQO, like many associations, is rethinking its role and purpose, and much of the time was spent debating a redrafted Constitution. As we learned with the recent reforms in AOQ, this is a very important process, and impacts members in many ways. I was able to draw on AOQ's experience to influence the debate significantly, resulting in a second round of review which will strengthen the governance of APQO.

Another important part of the meeting was the reporting from each member country. We are required to submit a report in advance. This is presented at the meeting and discussed. This leads to very worthwhile side conversations, and the opportunity to learn and adopt from others.

THE CONFERENCE

I have been attending Quality conferences for nearly 40 years. This was one of the best I've ever been part of. With around 500 registrants, there was no shortage of people to engage with, and there was a strong hunger amongst everybody to engage and share.

The Conference theme was "Quality Transformation in the Digital World". It unpacked a compelling picture of the future; one that presents a challenge to you and me as Quality practitioners. It will require a complete rethink by everyone in this field as disruptive change is upon us.

The conference was organised as a single stream of speakers. This worked very well, as each was exceptional. The theme was tightly managed through the stages of exploration that was designed. Delegates were able to ask questions throughout each presentation, via an App, so the questions were moderated and displayed on screen. This saved a lot of time and increased the value of questions for everyone.

Some of the key learnings for me were:

- The high importance that Quality has throughout Asia. It's central to most government policy. The Manila daily newspaper had a full-page feature on the conference.
- Research presented by American Society for Quality that points to a real problem with Quality practitioners. They are, by and large, not tuned in to what matters to management. This is a serious problem.
- The highly customised nature of physical products that's the current trend, is making proximity to markets important again. Examples were provided of scanning your feet using your mobile device and uploading the file to have shoes designed only for you manufactured. These require immediate delivery, not 6 weeks delivery via shipping containers. However, the complexity is resulting in the design of new value chains.
- The value chain will become increasingly digitised. This is described as Industry 4.0, in which customisation and automation combine. Quality managers will become data quality managers.
- China has released a national plan to increase manufacturing productivity by 25% through to 2025. (Is there even a discussion happening in Australia?)
- Customer satisfaction is being replaced by a concept of customer experience. This has profound implications for Quality professionals, because this shifts the focus to the marketing, sales and service design processes. If you're still focused primarily on execution, you're behind the game. (I explored this in the President's message in the October 2017 Quality Business.)
- A great final presentation explained how to develop and execute a digital strategy for any of the common social media platforms. This is an area of real need and brings Quality planning into a new field.

A couple of standout conversations for me were with Philippines Senator Bam Aquino, in which we discussed industry policy. I also spend some time over drinks with Dr Chuck Aubrey, who worked for Dr. Juran, and gave a great historical and personal perspective of the great man.

IN SUMMARY

Conferences offer a great way to hit the career 'reset' button at a very moderate cost considering the intensity of the experience (see the information on how to make a compelling business case at the AOQ website). This was one of the best. It more than gave me the experience I had hoped for.

Jeff Ryall
President