



## QUALITY IMPROVEMENT STARTS WITH COMMITMENT FROM THE TOP DOWN: LEAD BY EXAMPLE

**Memo: Quality at Work**

**Edition: Final**

Quality is swiftly being recognized as a powerful strategy for any type of business or organization. Increasingly, it is playing a dominant role in the global economy. Newspapers, magazines and telecasts are peppered with evidence of the benefit of focusing on quality. One example: a US House Representative, Rep. Don Ritter (R-Pa.) pointed to a General Accounting Office study that says the U.S. government could save taxpayers \$350 billion a year by practicing total quality management.

Traditionally managed companies are no match for world-class businesses. Some U.S. firms have lost markets to global competitors that have embraced these concepts to a much greater degree than Americans have. Because of the high stakes, Nigerian companies and other organizations must shift into high gear quickly.

To remain globally competitive, and to survive, every company in Nigeria must promote quality processes, persistently and relentlessly until quality permeates their operations.

So where do we start?

Leadership is the backbone of quality, as it is for all planned cultural change. And that's what total quality management is, a total reorientation of the culture of organizations that have hitherto maintained traditional models of management.

Full commitment to exceptional quality in any organization starts in the boardroom and with executive management. Decisions made in the boardroom will send a clear signal to top management on the highest importance attached to quality. That means those setting policy for organizations - whether it's in corporate boardrooms or government councils and boards - must have profound knowledge of quality policies and goals.

A true leader has the vision to see what is really important and to transmit a sense of mission to others. He or she must explain how the organization will work after quality improvement is in place, and how it will get done. And he or she must be able to overcome the inevitable resistance to change that the new philosophy will trigger.

Management must lead by example. Leadership for such a change cannot be delegated. A top manager sets the tone for the organization. Truly committed leaders visibly demonstrate support and promote continuous improvement. They lead their organizations by "walking the talk."

*Submitted by **Afolabi Imoukhuede**, Managing Consultant, MCS Consulting Limited Ikoyi, Lagos  
[aimoukhuede@mcsworldgrp.com](mailto:aimoukhuede@mcsworldgrp.com)*

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