QUALITY CIRCLE — THE PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

It is essential that one appreciates clearly the philosophy behind the QC concept. This is of special importance because many organisations do not yet have the experience of launching and operating QCs. In organisations, lacking the culture of participative management, it would be difficult for the employees to understand the role of QCs. Incidentally, one of the long-term objectives of QCs is to bring about a change in the style of management.

When QCs were first organised in Japan, there were three basic aims (discussed below) which determined their activities.

(a) To contribute to the improvement and development of the organisation

The modern concept of quality control came to Japan after 1945 from the USA. However, the systematic management of company-wide quality control, which evolved in Japan after 1955, envisaged that people at the bottom of the organisation could also share in the quality control
functions at the workshop level. The QCs provided the employees at the grassroot level with the opportunity to perform effectively, meshing well with the activities of the other levels and functions of the organisation. As a result of such sharing of the functions by the employees at the lower levels, the performance in the respective work areas naturally improved and consequently the development of the organisation as a whole was facilitated. Corporate quality also improved.

(b) **To respect humanity and build a happy workplace which is conducive to work in**

(i) One important aspect that is generally neglected is that people working anywhere should be treated as human beings. As more and more mechanisation takes place in industrial organisation, consideration of human beings gets reduced by varying degrees. Through voluntary activities at the lower levels, QC pay respect to humanity and make people feel that their work has real meaning. As much of one's life time is spent at the workplace, it is desirable to make it pleasant and meaningful. In the QC philosophy, employees are not treated as a part of the machinery or equipment but are given opportunities to
explore their full potential and display their true capability.

For historical reasons, most of the organisations in India have imbibed Western management thinking and practices. One of these is Taylor's Scientific Management approach from which most of the Industrial Engineering techniques have evolved. Taylor advocated that it is the management alone which has the capability and authority to take decisions and issue directives that should be carried out by the other categories of employees without any question. As a result of blind following of Taylor's teachings that advocate such a difference between the management and the employees, a barrier, due to mistrust and non-involvement, is created between these two important sections of the organisation. Moreover, as a result, the immense hidden potential of the workforce, for innovation, creativity and positive contribution to the betterment of performance in different work areas, is neglected and not realised. The philosophy of QC respects human dignity and, by humanising activities, motivate employees at the grass-root level to use their mind instead of only their muscles.
Through QCs, concern for people is established. It was once observed by the top-most public administrator in one of the advanced countries in the South-east Asia: "In order to improve productivity or quality, one has to touch the 'heart of the man' in the organisations". That is exactly what sincere operation of QCs can achieve.

(ii) The QC concept enables employees to utilise their wisdom and creativity in the work that they are engaged in.

One-third of a person's life is spent at the place of his work. If he, therefore, finds the workplace drab and dry and works only for money, he, naturally, will not get involved and give his best to the work he is doing. On the other hand, if he can work in an environment which gives a "meaning to life", his sense of belonging to the organisation would be enhanced and the feeling of just fulfilling one's duty under the direction of the management would not be there. QCs help create a climate in work areas where employees voluntarily work together and happily contribute to improving the standard of performance for their individual development as well as the organisation's betterment.
(iii) People, if given an opportunity to use their mind, develop their personal capabilities.

(iv) Employees in the same work areas, in course of time, develop a group which creates harmonious human relations and a sense of brotherhood among them.

(v) Sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience enables employees to mutually educate themselves. The philosophy of QC is people-building and not just a people-using one.

(vi) The operation of QCs provides an opportunity for the employees to be recognised by their superiors, other departments and the outsiders.

(c) To satisfy the higher-level human needs of recognition and self development

Most of the natural needs of every human being, such as the desire for achievement and recognition; the longing for affiliation, personal development, and the opportunity to display one's abilities, etc., tend to be satisfied where well-designed QCs function effectively.

In other words, all the techniques that have been
used so far, such as Management by Objectives, Zero
Defect programme, etc., are management-directed and
have a "top-down" approach with instructions flowing
from the top downwards, whereas QCs have a "bottom-up"
approach with suggestions and recommendations for
improvement emanating from the lower levels and
flowing upwards. Being a voluntary and participative
movement with unique inherent strengths and not just
a gimmick or fad, QCs may not be as short-lived as many
other management-directed techniques or tools which were
once the slogans of many organisations but are now quite
unheard of.

QC is an idea whose time has come. The growing
expectations of the enlightened people in the workplace
must be dealt with by a co-operative approach which helps
develop mutual respect and understanding between the
lower-level employees and the managerial personnel in an
organisation. This co-operative approach, which is at
the root of all QCs, requires that both the sections
start thinking in terms of 'us' in place of 'us' versus
'them'.
QCs enable people to participate in improving their jobs. This builds in them a pride and a sense of belonging vis-a-vis their organisations. The concept of QC does recognise its functioning helps tap the potential of the employees. QCs provides training and structured opportunities for employees to become an active component of the an inter-personal process of joint problem-solving. The QCs are employee-owned and not management-owned. They are people-building and not just cost-reducing mechanisms. They provide employees with the opportunities for satisfying the higher-level needs for affiliation, belongingness, self-esteem, recognition, achievement and development.

QCs help promote a people-oriented management style that respects employees' intelligence, encourages creativity, assumes that employees have the capacity to absorb training and can be motivated to function constructively, seriously considers employees' recommendations and recognises their achievements.

Precisely, the major objectives of QCs are as follows:

- to enhance quality of goods and services
produced, productivity, safety and cost-effectiveness
- to enrich quality of work-life of employees
- to respect humanity and build a happy bright workplace meaningful to work in
- to usher in participative management in the real sense
- to give opportunity to employees to use their wisdom and creativity
- to encourage team spirit, cohesive culture, create harmonious human relations and strengthen bonds of brotherhood among different sections and levels of employees
- to promote self development and mutual development
- to develop leadership qualities
- to satisfy the social, esteem and self-actualisation needs of employees
- to develop a Total Quality Management (TQM) culture throughout the organisation by actively involving, and help realising the potential of, the people down the level.