Introduction

This book is about the meanings, implementation and consequences of quality. The concept of quality has been contemplated through history and continues to be of much interest today. On a superficial level, quality means making useful things or behaving in a way that contributes to achieving a desirable set of relationships between individuals. On a more philosophical level, quality is intrinsic to the very notion of human existence. There is, however, no universally agreed definition of quality: different definitions highlight different aspects of quality. Quality has been defined as, among others, value for money, fitness for use, consistency, excellence and product integrity. To gain a sound understanding of the meanings of quality, we have to familiarize ourselves with the theoretical perspectives from which quality has been defined in the literature.

Most of these perspectives (the product-based approach, the manufacturing-based approach, the value-based approach and the user-based approach) view quality as a technical, operational achievement: we call these perspectives, managerial perspectives. In contrast, other perspectives (the transcendental approach, the social constructivist approach, the discursive approach and the slogan approach) regard quality as a complex and contested social and political phenomenon, which acquires its meanings via processes of intersubjective communication in which organizational and societal power configurations play a substantial role: we call these critical perspectives. The book draws on both managerial and critical perspectives in an attempt to provide a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive analysis of quality.

More specifically, the book aims to:

1 Introduce readers to key concepts and issues in quality management.
2 Provide an overview of both managerial and critical perspectives on quality management.
3 Present the 'wisdom' of quality management gurus.
4 Document the way quality is pursued in manufacturing, service and public sector organizations.

5   Compare and contrast existing 'hard and soft' technologies of quality management.
6   Critically review the rhetoric and practice of total quality management (TQM) and business process re-engineering (BPR).
7   Examine the consequences of quality on a wide number of stakeholders in order to assess whether quality is an ethical project.
8   Subject the language of quality management to scrutiny.
9   Document the mundane nature of quality management practices that take place in organizations via the presentation of real-life case studies.

The book is aimed at undergraduate and postgraduate students studying quality and operations management. It may also appeal to quality management practitioners and consultants interested in challenging the managerial perspective that dominates much of the rhetoric and current practice of quality management.

The book has four parts: Part 1, Theoretical Perspectives on Quality, introduces the reader to a number of theoretical debates and controversies in the field of quality. Four managerial perspectives and four critical perspectives on quality are introduced in Chapter 1. An assessment is also provided of the consequences of these quality perspectives on the experiences of various organizational stakeholders, in particular, managers, employees, customers and shareholders. Chapter 2 provides a short history of the principles underlying the concept of quality (i.e., measurement, standardization, inspection, interchangeable parts, precision and feedback) and examines the contribution of a number of American and Japanese quality management gurus (e.g., Deming, Juran, Ishikawa, Taguchi and so on) to the development of quality management as a scientific discipline. These gurus tend to view quality from a managerial perspective, as a process or outcome that can be planned, managed and controlled with the help of technical and/or managerial knowledge. Throughout the book such managerial perspectives are subjected to criticism for failing to grasp the elusive, complex and political nature of quality. While traditionally quality has belonged to the field of operations management, more recently it started to be recognized as important for the efficient functioning of other organizational functions such as strategy, marketing, human resource management (HRM), design and accounting (a position which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3).

In Part 2, Practical Approaches to Quality, the book moves on to discuss ways in which quality is implemented and managed in manufacturing, service and public sector organizations via a number of 'hard and soft technologies' of quality management (Chapter 4). Hard technologies (e.g., quality standards, quality costs and quality assurance), discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, are typically associated with direct and technical control. Direct control refers to coercive mechanisms by which individuals are made to do things they would not do otherwise. Technical control is a form of indirect control which relies on the use of technology to get people to conform. Soft

technologies (e.g., employee involvement, teamwork, leadership and culture) tend to be aligned with notions of bureaucratic and disciplinary control. Bureaucratic control refers to the internalization of rational rules and routines by organizational selves. Disciplinary control is a form of post-bureaucratic control which appears not to control but to offer a high degree of individual autonomy at work; it works through the internalization of a complex set of norms and standard practices which provide common sense and self-evident experience to individuals (Chapters 8, 9 and 10).

Part 3, Consequences of Quality, ponders the consequences and morality of quality. Proponents of soft technologies to managing quality suggest that none of the hard technologies work unless individuals are persuaded by the relevance and legitimacy of quality. Persuasion is however a social and political process in which some interests are elevated and others are pushed down. If we view quality as constituted at the intersection of opposing interests and agendas, it is important that such interests are reconciled prior to any actual engagement in quality programmes. Chapter 11 asks whether it is indeed possible to pursue quality in an ethical manner, that is, in a way that accounts for the interests of all organizational stakeholders, not only for the interests of the customer. Chapter 12 subjects the language of quality management to close scrutiny in an attempt to shed light on the consequences of the language in use on the experiences and identities of both managers and employees. These two chapters draw on critical perspectives to quality.

The book ends with Part 4: Case Studies on Quality Management. Here the author of the book and her collaborators present real-life examples which attempt to weave in some of the conceptual matters presented in the book. For example, Joan Durose's sensitive analysis of the NHS asks whether the political focus in the NHS changes the relationship between the user, the health professional and the manager. Duthika Perera's case study continues this strand of inquiry by posing the question of the extent to which the standardization of health care provision and empowerment programmes can go hand in hand in the NHS. Mihaela Kelemen's case shifts away from issues in the public sector to concerns faced by the private sector, discussing the role of teamleaders in managing quality in a logistics organization. Duthika Perera's analysis of the relationship between new technology and customer satisfaction is critical of the uses to which new technology is put: to discriminate between various types of customers and treat consumers as commodities. Ioanna Papasolomou-Doukakis's case of the UK retail banking sector throws light on the rhetoric of internal marketing and the extent to which it helps to improve quality. Finally, I look at the ways in which quality standards have been implemented in a UK insurance company and the responses this process has triggered from the various organizational stakeholders. These cases document the complex and multi-faceted nature of quality and the consequences it has upon a number of organizational stakeholders.