



Managing Quality: The Strategic and Competitive Edge

David A. Garvin

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David A. Garvin rocked the foundations of U.S. manufacturing when his devastating indictment of American product quality first appeared in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1983 and subsequently in newspapers around the world. Garvin had analyzed a representative global industry -- room air conditioners, a product with basic, unchanging technological requirements -- and irrefutably documented American failure rates which were 500 to 1,000 times greater than those of Japanese competitors. Now, building on that shocking study, Garvin's new work combines theory and practice to show how a more sophisticated understanding of quality can lead U.S. companies to a strategic approach to quality management, which is necessary to compete in today's world marketplace.

This seminal work is essential reading for managers, particularly since widely held assumptions and a growing mythology about quality *have not* produced the expected revolution in U.S. quality performance -- with few products able to match the quality and reliability levels of their overseas competitors. Garvin begins with a superb review of quality history in this country and an incisive analysis of what Japan has done with the same concepts and ideas -- and done demonstratively better -- revealing the hard facts that prove quality is the best competitive weapon to dramatically increase profits and cut losses.

Here is the actual evidence relating quality to such variables as price, market share, advertising, cost, productivity, and profitability as hammered out by Garvin in a point-by-point comparison of quality management in U.S. and Japanese plants. His focused study of seven Japanese companies and eleven U.S. factories makes extraordinarily clear what the Japanese have done to better even the best U.S. companies. He looks to the underlying sources of superior quality and identifies both the practices long associated with excellence, such as reliability engineering and precise information systems, and those that have rarely appeared in the literature, such as limited bumping, order of assembly operations, and narrow product lines. Finally, he demonstrates with unmistakable bottom-line figures the all-important need for top managers to become involved in quality activities.

Garvin's credo throughout is, "If quality is to be managed, it must first be understood." In this landmark work, he provides that comprehensive and lucid understanding of quality in a way that can readily be transferred to a wide variety of industry environments. The result is a damning, yet enlightening analysis that specifically illustrates how America must improve product quality to win back lost markets and gain long-term competitive advantage.

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