



TQA: Thailand's strategy to enhance competitiveness

On 12 February this year, at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center in Bangkok, Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra presented the Thailand Quality Award (TQA) to the first-ever winner, Thai Acrylic Fibre Co., Ltd. This glittering ceremony, attended by several cabinet ministers, signaled to the world Thailand's resolve to enable its industries to reach world-class standards in quality and productivity to compete effectively in the global marketplace. The TQA, as a national strategy, is enshrined in the Thai 9th Social and Economic Development Plan.

The TQA was launched early last year to recognize organizations that have attained world-class quality standards and performance excellence. Prime Minister Thaksin sees it as a strong incentive for Thai industries in all sectors to improve, "ready for competition from outside, and ready to compete in the outside world." In his address at the award presentation ceremony, he urged Thai industries to build a corporate culture that will inspire employees to produce quality work and products. People are at the heart of quality, the Prime Minister pointed out. Next in importance to people is technology. However, the bottom line is to be customer-centered. As customers form part of society, to care for customers is to care for people in the society, declared Prime Minister Thaksin.

Any organization in either the public or private sector can apply for consideration for the TQA, and it can be from manufacturing, commerce, service industry, or an institution or governmental agency. Twenty organizations applied in 2002. Although there was only one winner in the TQA debut year, in actuality there is no cap on the number of possible winners.

The TQA framework—criteria, management system, process, and practices—is based on the US Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, widely recognized as the standard for quality awards. The TQA has 11 core values that are grouped into seven categories. The core values include visionary leadership, customer-driven excellence, organizational and personal learning, valuing employees and partners, agility, focus on the future, managing for innovation, management by fact, public responsibility and citizenship, focus on results and creating value, and system perspective. The seven categories are Leadership, Strategic planning, Customer and market focus, Information and analysis, Human resource focus, Process management, and Business results.

Participating organizations are evaluated against these criteria in three respects: the methodology used; its deployment in terms of breadth and depth of application; and the results achieved. The applicants who achieve 700 points or more will receive the TQA. Those who score less than 700 points but more



Prime Minister Thaksin (fourth from left) with TQA and TQC winners

than 400 points are eligible for the Thailand Quality Class (TQC) commendation. The TQC was conferred on six organizations: Dana Spicer, Thai Carbon Black, Siam Cement, Thai Paper, Chulalongkorn University Continuing Education Center, and Thai Containers.

TQA winners have exclusive use of the TQA logo in their corporate materials to reflect their attainment of world-class excellence. To serve as a model for others, they are obliged to share their experience in preparing for winning the TQA at a winners' conference. The first such conference was held a fortnight after the award presentation on 26 February. More than 300 executives attended the day-long affair.

It has been said that once an organization applies to be considered for the TQA, it is already a winner. This is because in vying for the award, it must examine critically its operational processes against the TQA criteria and make plans for improvement. In addition, it will receive a written report on the organization's strengths, level of competitiveness, and opportunities for improvement. This is compiled by a team of experts from within and outside the applicant's industry who will visit the organization to conduct assessments. The participation is worthwhile just for this report alone. Of course, the right to display the TQA logo means much more. 