

Will the Quality Profession Survive the Digital Revolution?

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Throughout history we have seen professions come and go. Technical evolutions have been one of the key drivers making professions disappear. In the near future, with artificial intelligence, smart automation and an overall digital revolution, more professions than ever before are in danger. In this presentation we evaluate the risks for the quality profession and the actions to be taken.

The impact of quality functions on the overall economy has decreased over time. The quality world missed out on some important evolutions in business and society. As a major example: to a large extent we have failed to make the shift from a manufacturing economy to a service driven economy. We hung on to old tools not adopted to new situations or even not applicable in these situations and we did not see new areas of expertise needed in the changed environment. Several examples will be given. In view of the even bigger changes ahead, we must learn from these mistakes.

The future will bring highly automated and flexible production processes, services involving complex human interactions and an increased pressure on compliance to a myriad of standards and legislation. Consequences for the quality profession will be: a shift from manufacturing to design and development, a necessary increase in psychological knowledge entering the quality field and an increase in the required legal knowledge.

We evaluate what this will mean for the quality profession and how these changes will influence the way quality is embedded in an organization. In our view the knowledge of quality will need to be expanded but it will stay of high value to any organization. However, chances are that this will no longer be implemented by quality functions in a quality department. Our future success will lie in our ability to integrate our knowledge into operational functions.