

LEARNING CURVE

Quality takes centre stage at NAIT

Refreshed quality management certificate comes as employers look to raise the bar

Rob Fisher is no stranger to quality management. While his career has taken him from Edmonton to Qatar, and his titles have ranged from fluid analyst to operations supervisor, the common denominator has always been about raising the bar.

The bar could have been about creating stringent quality objectives that are then factored into the design of a new product or improving service delivery to end consumers.

Today, it's also a bar that more of today's employers are putting renewed emphasis on to establish a competitive advantage in a crowded market place and create brand loyalty.

"Just about every employer is looking for some understanding of quality," says Fisher. "Almost every job posting will have a line under responsibilities that speaks to a commitment to quality."

"To be a successful organization now, you must have that commitment to quality. Quality has become a strategic partner within today's organizations."

Recognizing a growing need across industries for quality assurance training, NAIT has recently refreshed its quality management certificate. The six-course program — which is available throughout the year with the next intake in January — focuses on traditional components of quality management such as quality system documentation, auditing and product sampling, as well as enhanced offerings such as product and service quality.

Some of the course materials will focus, for example, on differentiating quality from grade, or establishing measurement tools and determining baselines — even how to build a quality manual.

"The idea is that participants will be able to take what they learn and start applying it in their existing jobs on Monday," says Fisher, who helped re-develop the NAIT certificate.

The refresh will also benefit quality management professionals outside of manu-

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Examples and average annual earnings of career opportunities in Alberta associated with NAIT's Quality Management Certificate.

- Information Systems Quality Assurance Analyst: \$87,074
- Environmental Engineer: \$99,194
- Operations Manager: \$94,698
- Environmental Auditor: \$80,949

*Source: Government of Alberta

facturing and into more service delivery verticals.

"Most people think of quality as a product, but that's just a small part of it. Quality exists throughout the value chain — from suppliers to post-sales," says Mark Morpurgo, principal consultant with Edmonton-based Strategema who also specializes in teaching quality management, including the certificate at NAIT.

"We need to start talking more about quality in services, especially because we live within such a highly service-based economy."

Some of the initial sessions have seen participants from the logistics, food service and processing, electrical and manufacturing industries. Morpurgo estimates about half of the classes so far have come from the service industry.

Morpurgo notes quality management principals first took hold in the manufacturing industry to maximize efficiencies around product development and minimize defect rates. Images of automated assembly lines likely come to mind.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATE

Start: Registration is now open for January 2020

Details: NAIT's quality management certificate is comprised of six two-day modules. Courses run Saturdays and Sunday.

To register: Visit nait.ca/continuing-education and search "quality management," call (780) 378-6990 or email continuingeducation@nait.ca.

For corporate training options or to bring this training to your organization, email CITtraining@nait.ca or call (780) 378-5044.

*Source: NAIT



ISTOCK

Yet today, quality management extends far beyond the development of products, and into service delivery — specifically, the way a customer might interact with the company selling that product.

From restaurants to movie theatres, today's businesses are increasingly looking for ways to improve those customer experiences to stay relevant, says Morpurgo.

While Fisher notes many of the basic quality tools can be used in both product and service applications, the difference is that service quality is not about specifying the size of a product. It's about perceiving a customer's expectations and minimizing the

gaps that might exist.

"Service often refers to those intangible experiences customers will have with a business," he says. "It's not something you can hold. It's the customers' experiences that you have to try to live up to."

"If you can determine your customer's expectations, then you can put metrics into the process of your service delivery to meet that expectation. And if you can establish yourself through service delivery, you can be an industry leader."

"Yet if you can't deliver on your customer's expectations or don't know the gap, then you are going to eventually suffer. Someone who is practising quality is eventually going to overtake you."

As for those who will benefit from NAIT's refreshed certificate, both Fisher and Morpurgo point to operations supervisors and managers, quality specialists and inspectors, project managers, environmental engineers and IT developers.

"Many of these individuals are likely in some sort of quality assurance role, but have never been formally trained," says Morpurgo. "This is their opportunity to get trained into the role they've already been hired into."