DIGITAL SUSTAINABILITY: A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Bob Purchase, PCQI, explains why he believes quality professionals are ideally placed to assist in the roll-out of environmental and corporate social responsibility agendas within their organisations

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Digital transformation (DX) and sustainability can be notoriously ambiguous. However, each discipline contains potential salves for the threats faced by our planet, our societies and global business. The multiple facets of DX, including the industrial Internet of Things (IoT), machine learning and digital twins, can be understood as concepts or tools to facilitate a system evolution; just as net zero, circularity and regenerative ecology are for sustainable development. When attempting to understand the complexity of these topics and how they relate to business functions, I would suggest that quality professionals are equipped to both demystify and desegregate these vital environmental, social and corporate agendas.

Success in leveraging these disciplines requires a thorough knowledge of the organisation, society or system in question. Both digitalisation and sustainability consist of individual elements – each with a specific purpose – which make up the fundamental components of an interconnected system. Unlike pockets of a traditional business hierarchy, these elements must reach across the entire system in order to evolve. Unfortunately, as the pressure builds for autonomous and resilient transformation of our occupations, cities and industries, so too does the creation of mysterious teams formed to future-proof our institutions and to ensure this is accomplished in an ethical and eco-friendly way. It is no coincidence then that these misunderstood philosophies often appear in the quality team's in-tray.

It is a common for human beings to find change uncomfortable, which could explain why in organisations using a quarterly cycle for budgeting, change or innovation tends to be swift and, in some cases, brutal.

However, the Japanese phrases 'kai' and 'zen', coined by Masaaki Imai and mentioned in his 1975 book *Kaizen: The Key to Japan's Competitive* Success, promoted input across all levels to incrementally change culture and in turn reap the benefits of continuous improvement. 'Kai' and 'zen' roughly translate to 'change' and 'for the better'. This Kaizen method and philosophy is a long-term strategy rooted in regular action. The similarities between this methodology and the crucial need to extend the growth horizon and stimulate individual positive sustainability impact is clear. Even energy poverty could be addressed by embracing all when realising renewable, circular resources. But what about DX? Surely Imai's work could not support our progression from infinite to discrete signals. Just research the consultative approach to initiating a digital transformation and you may reveal four extremely familiar letters: PDCA.

If we could imagine digitalisation and sustainability as a combined discipline, fundamentally in the context of the business, there is a huge opportunity for process improvement. Quality professionals are ideally placed to leverage their experience and expertise to help eliminate both physical (ie, materials and environmental) and abstract (ie, time and potential) operational waste. While specialisms in edge computing, cybersecurity, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) disclosure may not be second nature to our membership, as the essential enablers of governance, assurance and improvement, we are certainly in a position to make change for the better.