

To
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'You can be imperfect, but be the first'

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MUMBAI

Madhav Mehra, president, World Environment Foundation and chairman, World Quality Council, was in Mumbai last week to attend the World Congress on Total Quality.

"Quality is dead," he pronounces, in an obvious effort to paraphrase Nietzsche. Mehra believes that the world has changed and quality is not enough to compete. "You need to innovate," he says. "Internet has increased the pace of competition. It is not enough to be perfect each time. It is more important to be imperfect, and be the first," says Mehra.

"The need to be the first in the market is a clear departure from the way companies have done busi-

ness till now. Companies have competed on scale till now. They have succeeded through mass production of goods. That is out. People want variety all the time, so they need to get the product quickly and try to get the product correct on all dimensions," says Mehra.

This is a change. It threatens to reduce quality to a mere statistical concept. If it confirms, it is quality. If it doesn't, then it cannot be of good quality. "That is a one-dimensional definition. Quality can be what confirms to certain parameters and it can also be something that is exceptional. And companies need to decide which market they are making their goods for," says Mehra.

So a product intended for a large

number of people will include affordability as one of the parameters of quality.

On the other hand, there is always the BMW car or a Rolex watch. "In India, larger part of the market is in numbers, so affordability is a key issue," says Mehra.

He thinks Indian companies

have not done enough in their quality initiative.

The US killed the Quality Congress later than India, but has 14,000 colleges

following the quality initiatives. In India, only 5,000 companies have taken these initiatives," says Mehra. Mehra is also quick to agree that even the quality certification of some of the Indian companies is of uncertain origin.

"There should be a national ac-

creditation body which can be the monitoring agency. In India, the problem is also that there has been an explosion of companies claiming that they have ISO 9000 or some such thing and it is difficult for any monitoring agency to keep pace while verifying the claim," says Mehra.

The presence of such a problem itself points out to a larger malaise. "The quality movement did not go to the grass roots. It became a piece of paper and not a tool to change the way companies manufactured and distributed products," says Mehra.

There is some evidence to indicate that even the top management has been found wanting. "That is why we are trying to move from TQM to innovation. Because that is where the competition will shift to," says Mehra.



PASSING THROUGH

Madhav Mehra