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OJT:

How small companies can upgrade
their workers' skills

QUALITY, THE UNDERLYING STRENGTH IN BRC WELDMESH

● BY KOK CHENG EE

As a steel reinforcing specialist, BRC Weldmesh (SEA) Pte Ltd is continually looking for ways to improve quality and site productivity. In Sep 93, BRC started a Total Quality Process (TQP) programme with the aim of making quality management a company-wide effort.

BRC Weldmesh (SEA) Pte Ltd, which employs about 300 workers, is no stranger to quality systems. It adheres to the Quality Management System Requirement (QMSR). In 1992, it was awarded the Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) certification by the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (SISIR). On 29 Dec 93, it received its ISO 9002 certification. BRC continues to embrace Total Quality.

An associate company of BHP Limited of Australia, BRC manufactures steel meshes or fabric, wire and wire-related products for the construction industry. Since its establishment in 1963, it has developed into the prime supplier of customised steel reinforcing products and services in Singapore and the neighbouring region.

Reinforcing Quality Through TQP

"Pro-quality management is a sound philosophy," said Mr Peter Hellwig, Managing Director of BRC. "BHP in Australia has supported the Total Quality concept in the last five years. In BRC, we had heard about it one way or another, and there has always been emphasis on safety and 'doing it right the first time.'

"Now we have decided to involve every one of our workers in this philosophy of proper business planning,



Mr Hellwig believes in pro-quality management.

and we are pushing it as a team."

It is BRC's vision to be the market leader in the Southeast Asian region and customers' preferred supplier, and TQP

every employee into the TQP way of thinking and getting them to understand their role in quality improvement.

With the help of NPB consultant, Mr Allan Ung, the TQP programme was integrated into BRC's activities. Said Mr Hellwig, "We have not encountered major problems in the implementation of TQP. In fact, the response from our workers has been very positive.

"From the start, we made it a point to assure our workers that the TQP courses would be conducted

BRC WELDMESH (SEA)'S BUSINESS DIRECTION

VISION: **To be the Market Leader as a Fabricated Reinforcing Manufacturer in the Southeast Asian Region and be Customers' Preferred Supplier.**

MISSION: **To Manage a Growing Business through the Successful Partnership of Shareholders, Customers and Employees.**

is a tool to propel BRC towards this objective.

The inauguration of BRC's TQP programme took place in Sep 93 in Turi Beach, Batam, where the Quality

in Mandarin and Malay, if necessary. We were helped by the fact that the courses were interesting, and offered our employees a change from their usual routine."

Concrete Steps Towards Quality Improvement

After the necessary training was completed, a Quality Management Team (QMT) comprising the senior managers was formed to drive, co-ordinate and support the total quality process in BRC. However, the QMT is more than a body of order or a management voice; it also functions as a feedback system that regularly reviews and discusses progress and problems with sub-committees during regular meetings.

Three sub-committees were formed under the QMT to focus on different aspects of quality management. For instance, the Cost of Quality Committee measures BRC's cost of quality and analyses the indicators of scrap and wastage. The CARE (Committee of Awareness, Recognition and Education) is responsible for generating awareness of TQP activities among employees, and the QAT (Quality Action Team) Committee oversees the various QAT activities.

The QATs carry out action plans to address areas that were targeted for improvement. For example, improving customer service by eliminating incidences of late deliveries; reducing cost of quality by reducing scrap and wastage and improving work methods by eliminating untimely updating of production status.

The TQP programme is at its initial stage of implementation in BRC, but the results so far have been favourable. The incidences of late delivery have been halved from 70% to 35% since Feb 94, whereas the incidences of untimely updating have been reduced by 60% between Mar 94 and Jun 94. There has also been a significant reduction in scrap, from an average of 1.74% in 1993 to 1.35% in 1994, which converts into some \$120,000 in savings.

But the benefits of the TQP programme go beyond mere dollars and cents. According to Mr Alexander Hall, Product Manager and Chairman of CARE, BRC staff have demonstrated a

heightened sense of awareness, especially with respect to teamwork and the importance of the internal customer. TQP has helped instil a quality culture in BRC.

Some departments and sections, which Mr Hall described as 'islands that operated on their own before' are now being brought together. "We haven't completely linked, but the gap is being bridged. There has been great response on the shopfloor; our workers are definitely taking an interest in TQP."

Mr Hellwig agreed, "We have found that the biggest single problem in



any organisation is communication, and that is one area that has seen a lot of improvement since we embarked on the TQP programme."



Mr Hall : "TQP has helped instil a quality culture in BRC."

According to Mr Hellwig, the most important factor contributing to the success of their TQP programme is commitment – from both top management and the floor. "Quality improvement is a long-term programme that requires commitment in terms of time, finances and management. There is no way such a programme can be carried through if only lip service was paid to quality improvement."

Pushing Ahead With New Plans

The foundation for TQP has been laid. Now there are plans to bolster the TQP programme in BRC. New quality action teams are formed to take on new "quality missions". For example, the newly established Corrective Action Team for Technical and Sales (CATTs) looks into training workers in product knowledge, and reducing incidence of goods

returned. Also, attention will be focused on improving customer service and communication (both internal and external), and injecting greater professionalism into BRC's sales team.



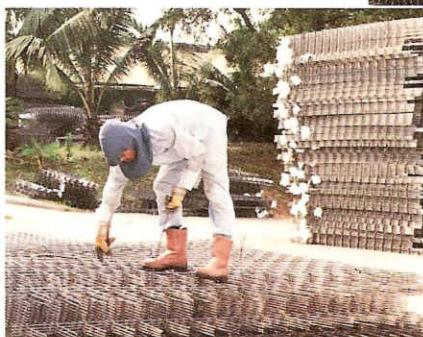
Quality control in BRC : The mesh goes through strict tests and inspection at the various stages of production : in its untreated form (see left), after being made into wire, and finally, when the finished product emerges.



The G8 machine welds wires together to form mesh, at the rate of more than 75 welds per minute, and produces up to more than 60 tonnes of tailored mesh a day.



The finished product is sorted according to the production logs (white tags attached) which bear details such as log number, model size, quantity, customer and site address.



Other plans include :

- establishing a recognition and reward system to encourage participation in TQP activities, eg, introducing a suggestion scheme with monetary and non-monetary rewards for staff's ideas on improvement.
- promoting a cleaner and safer work environment. A notice board will feature, on a monthly basis, photographs of the cleanest and safest sections.
- producing a BRC newsletter with a section devoted to quality matters, so as to sustain interest, and to keep staff updated on activities of the various

QATs. The first issue of the newsletter was published in Aug 94.

- continual review of the TQP programme. Besides discussion and feedback in the regular meetings, there will be a major review of the TQP during BRC's annual residential conference. This year's conference will be held in Phuket in August. □

What is TQP ?

The Total Quality Process (TQP) is a training-cum-consultancy programme that helps companies to initiate an integrated approach towards Total Quality. There is a series of courses to cater for all levels, starting with the managing director and his team to rank and file employees. These courses are aimed at giving them an understanding of the key quality principles and their role in quality improvement.

An organisation can use TQP either

- as a foundation on which to build other structured improvement programmes like QCC, 5S, suggestion schemes or even a programme to prepare the organisation for certification under International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9000 standards, or
- as a "cement" to integrate such programmes if they already exist in the organisation. □



The BRC management team at the launch of the TQP programme in Batam.

For more information on the TQP programme, please call Ms Chua Guat Leng at Tel. 279-3701