

**Background:** Interview EFQM®

# Quality in action

OMICRON successfully combines constant change with high-quality standards.

Innovation, progress, and global expansion are what shape OMICRON's day to day business. Of course, exceptional customer service and products which excel through user-friendliness and durability also come as standard. Manfred Vith, Quality Manager at OMICRON, spoke to us about how OMICRON sets its quality management focus and what part the EFQM® model plays.

»Parts of our organization are constantly changing.«

## Shall we get right to the point? What does quality mean to OMICRON?

Our understanding of quality is based on the three pillars of our mission, which are centrally anchored in our company: "Extraordinary Customer Support", "Deep Application Know-how" and "Continuous Innovation". For us, quality means that customers receive professional, sound, and practical answers to their questions – and, of course, as quickly as possible. Our high product quality speaks for itself and means that customers can also rely on us to solve any future problems. From a different perspective, you could say that OMICRON also includes a high degree of readiness for constant change without having to accept any compromises in terms of quality. This is a particular strength of OMICRON.

## What exactly does this mean?

OMICRON always motivates and challenges itself to be at the cutting edge of innovation. We need a flexible approach to be able to achieve this which means that parts of our organization are

constantly changing. Combining this with a consistently high quality is a challenge and, therefore, organizational development, HR development, and quality management are all closely linked to one another within our company. This can perhaps be compared with mountain climbing, where you need the right kind of safeguards if you do not want to risk falling. However, if too many safeguards are in place, progress becomes slow or even impossible and the summit may never be reached. To achieve your goals, you need a good feel for the right mix of safeguards and risks. These are the skills and experience that our employees bring to the table.

**Can the quality of innovation also be managed?**

Innovation is always the result of trial and error. At OMICRON, we encourage our staff to try things which will not necessarily lead to the desired results. This is possible because our staff is highly motivated and willing to constantly try out new things. An approach like this also gives us a better idea of the risks we face, in the figurative sense, we keep attempting the difficult climb up

»EFQM® revolves around a fundamental, holistic approach.«

the mountain until we reach the peak. This results in unique solutions for our customers as well as high-quality innovation.

**In further developing the concept of quality, OMICRON works to the Excellence Model of EFQM®. Why did OMICRON choose this system?**

EFQM® revolves around a fundamental, holistic approach. It is not just about product quality, but also about business excellence or company quality. The focus is not on drafting a standardized catalogue of steps and measures, instead, it concentrates on the individually relevant fields. We were one of the first companies in Austria to become a member of EFQM® – a step we took so that we could measure ourselves against the best in the market. In 2010, we were honored with the Austrian Quality Award (AQA) for our unique corporate culture. We are particularly strong in this area and are

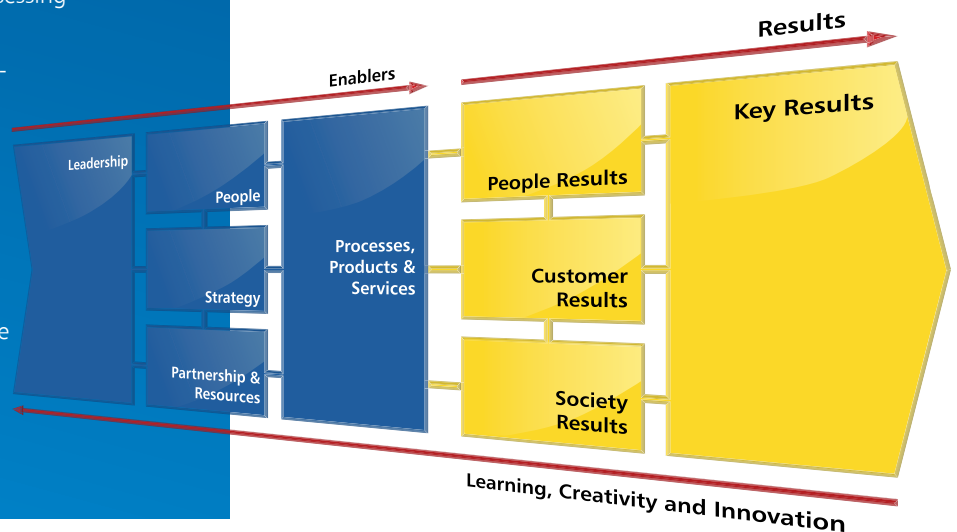
**What is EFQM®?**

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM®) is a global not-for-profit membership foundation located in Brussels, Belgium. With more than 500 members covering more than 55 countries and 50 industries, it provides a unique platform for organizations to learn from each other and improve performance.

The assessment process is built on EFQM's defined Excellence Model, which is based on the fundamental concepts of excellence and is structured around nine criteria (see chart). This model is a basis for assessing any possible field of business activity and comparing the results with the most excellent companies.

In 2010 OMICRON achieved remarkable 401–499 points of a possible 1,000 points. An ordinary ISO 9001 certified company is assessed with about 250 points and European prize winners achieve up to 650–700 points.

[www.efqm.org](http://www.efqm.org)





**Manfred Vith:** Quality Manager at OMICRON

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happy to pass on our knowledge to other companies. In return, we gain valuable knowledge from companies that have achieved excellence in other fields.

**What part does EFQM® play in the company?**

We see EFQM® as a learning tool. I think it is important for any forward-thinking company to ask itself the kind of questions on corporate quality, which are answered within the scope of self-assessment, whether they are running EFQM® or not. We chose to use the EFQM® system as it allows us to converse with the best in the industry and learn from each other. An external rating by EFQM® assessors provides us with an outside perspective on corporate quality and the hints and tips, which come with it, such as: Where are we lacking consistency? Where is there still potential to be tapped?

The same applies to the staff survey, which is required for EFQM®. We combine this survey with participation in the "Great Place to Work®" scheme – a tool for recording employee satisfaction. Last year we were honored with an award as one of the best workplaces in Europe. I find it particularly encouraging that we have managed to maintain these positive values, despite the financial crisis and the fact that we have made major internal structural and organizational changes.

**Current certifications and awards**

- > ISO 9001:2008
- > ISO 14001:2004
- > OHSAS 18001:2007
- > KTA 1401 and IAEA 50-C-Q Standard
- > EFQM – Recognised for excellence 4 star
  
- > **2010 Austrian Quality Award (AQA)**  
Jury Prize for exceptional corporate culture.
  
- > **2010 Great Place to Work® Institute**  
Best employer in Austria in the large enterprises category.  
Special prize for the integration of people with disabilities.  
Ranked as one of the top 25 employers in Europe.

### How is quality management integrated into operational business?

We place great emphasis on ensuring the correct approach is followed, i.e., how a project is planned or how the process of innovation is applied. We employ various tools, such as the Stage-Gate™ model and "Scrum", and set particularly high quality standards at the start, which means that we rarely need to take any "end-of-pipe" steps. We also regularly check where we stand during the process in product networking meetings where staff from the various departments in contact with the product or with customers using the product come together to discuss how things are going. We are interested in getting feedback, knowing what the market wants and where we still have untapped potential and the results are then reintegrated into the process. Ultimately, the high level of quality at OMICRON is always closely linked to the people who work for us. We offer them plenty of space in which to operate and a great deal of trust in conjunction with a high degree of personal responsibility. In return, our staff rewards us with high-quality thinking and customer-focused actions.

### What would OMICRON like to achieve over the next few years in terms of corporate quality?

We are already at a very high level which we are, of course, keen to maintain. This also involves gaining various certifications, such as ISO 9001 and OHSAS 18001. These seals of approval provide important evidence for our customers as well as performing an internal monitoring role. We are also dedicated to building on and improving EFQM® in the long term. In addition, customer satisfaction is, and will remain, a key focus. We are continuously investing time and effort in this area to enable us to get even closer to our customers.

### When I meet OMICRON for the first time as a customer, how will I perceive quality?

You will get a sense of quality through all your contact with the people working at OMICRON. They will listen to you carefully and address your issues or requests in a solution-based manner.

»Quality is always closely linked to the people who work for you.«



### CT Analyzer – Too successful?

The CT Analyzer has exceeded all expectations with its amazing sales figures. Following the first production series the planned batch size had to be more than tripled. However, what we could not have predicted was the impact this had on production quality, rendering production times completely unacceptable.

Action was clearly needed, so a team of internal experts from various departments got together with representatives from the external suppliers to launch a comprehensive quality assurance project. Within a very short space of time impressive results were achieved through the implementation of several measures. As such, the CT Analyzer now has a production error rate of below 2% and the production time has been reduced by seven hours per unit.

"It is now much more enjoyable producing the CT Analyzer", sums up Dietmar Gehrman, Operations Manager. "And we prefer products that work perfectly over a long period right from the start".