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Team-based strategy at Varian Australia: a case study

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Abstract

This article discusses the use of work teams at Varian Australia, a manufacturing organisation based in Melbourne, Australia. The company manufactures high-technology instruments that are largely exported to the USA and Europe. The paper describes the experiences of the company with continuous improvement process teams (CIP) and corrective action team (CATs) over a decade, from 1990 to 2000. The article discusses the reasons for the slow down of the process improvement program and the appropriate changes that were made to relaunch the continuous improvement strategy at Varian Australia. Based on the qualitative analysis in this article, a number of interesting lessons can be learned. The main lesson is that voluntary, cross-functional teams are more effective than compulsory membership, as team members are motivated to work towards their goals and better understand the processes. Team members found that by working together the result of their combined effort was much greater than the combined results of their individual efforts. This approach reduced the product development cycle on Varian projects by up to 50%



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Keywords

Continuous improvement process; Continuous improvement process teams; Corrective action teams; Australia

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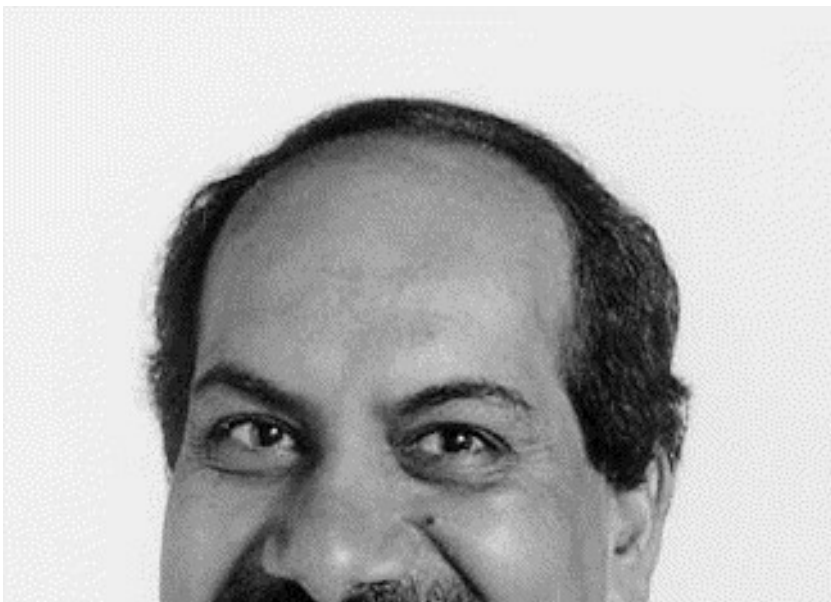
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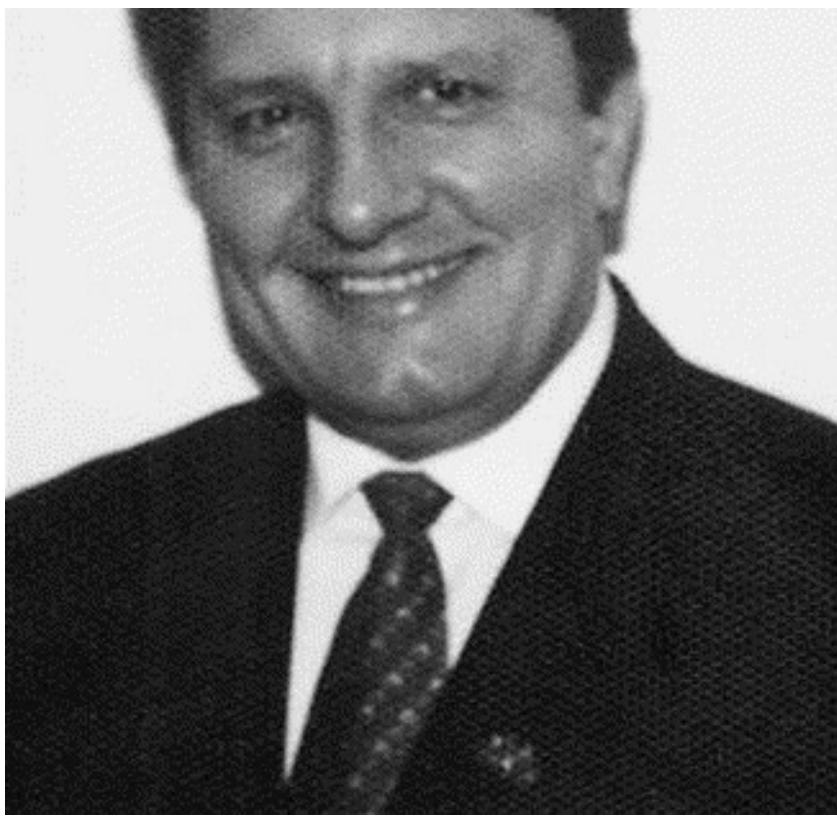




Dr Amrik S. Sohal is a Professor in the Department of Management and Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Business and Economics at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. He is also Co-Director of the newly formed Australian Consortium for Effective Organisations (ACEO). From 1991 to 2000, Professor Sohal was Director of the Quality Management Research Unit and from 1993 to 1997 served as an Associate Dean (Research Development) and Associate Dean (Graduate Teaching) for the Faculty of Business and Economics at Monash University. He holds a PhD in Manufacturing/Operations Management from the University of Bradford Management Centre in the UK, as well as a BEng (Hons) and an MBA, also from the University of Bradford.

Professor Sohal is Associate Editor for the journal *Technovation* and Asia Pacific Editor of the *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*. He is a member of the Editorial Board of a number of journals in the area of quality management, technology management and operations management. Professor Sohal has authored or co-authored over 100 papers published in refereed journals, as well as three books and a number of chapters contributed to books. His current research interests are in manufacturing/operations strategy, technology/information management, quality management, supply chain management, lean/agile production systems and electronic business. He has received grants from the State and Federal Governments, the Australian Research Council and Monash University.

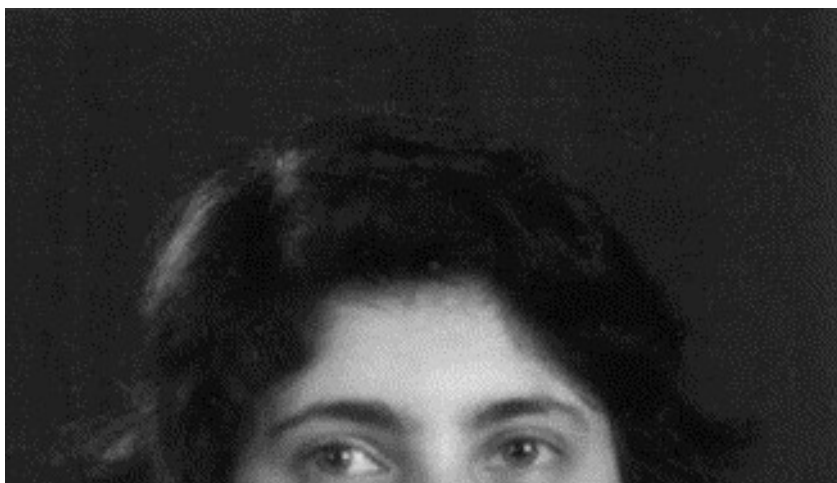


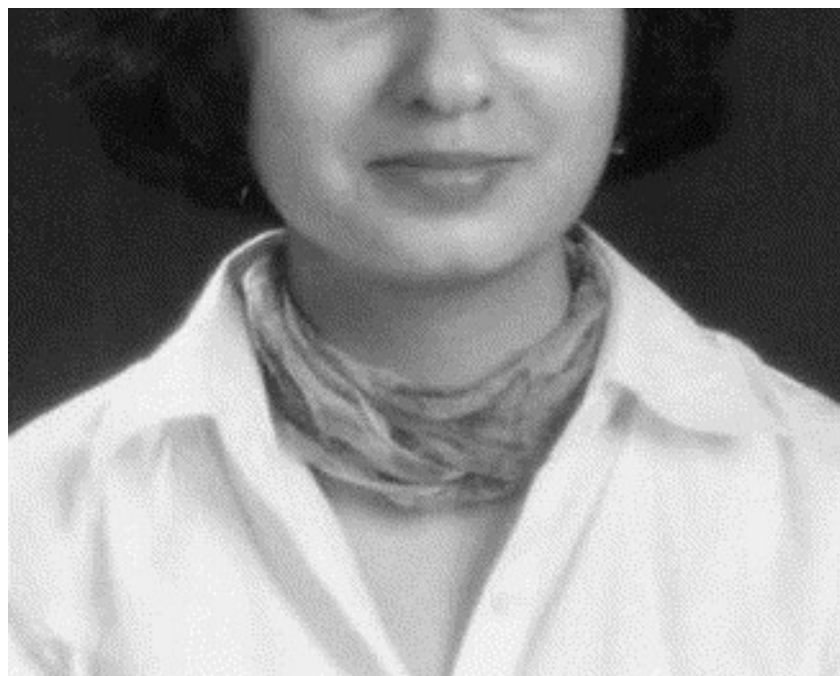


Dr Milica Terziovski commenced his career with CRA-RTZ Ltd. as a Trainee Mechanical Engineer. He has held various positions in production, maintenance, and project management over a period of 17 years. He obtained his PhD in Business Management from the Melbourne Business School, The University of Melbourne.

Dr Terziovski is the Director and Deputy Chair of the European Australian Co-operation Centre (EACC) at The University of Melbourne. He teaches Organisational Innovation and Quality Management at undergraduate level and Strategic Management at Masters level.

Dr Terziovski has presented papers in the Operations Management stream of the Academy of Management and had an all-Academy best paper nomination at the 2000 conference. Dr Terziovski was recently invited by the President of The Republic of Macedonia to participate on an e-Commerce Advisory Committee chaired by the President.





Ambika Zutshi is currently completing a PhD in the Department of Management at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Her previous qualifications include a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies and a Master's degree in Environmental Management. Her current research is focused on the examination of the role of various stakeholders in the planning and implementation of Environmental Management Systems. Ambika's professional training includes the completion of 'Implementing an Environmental Management System' course and is currently completing the practical training towards the 'Environmental Systems Auditors' course. She also works as a Research Associate and as a Lecturer/Tutor at various institutions in Melbourne and has articles forthcoming in the Business Process Management Journal and the International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development.

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