



## FROM THE EDITORS

JOE and CATHERINE STENZEL

### **Productivity or quality?**

No discussion of the cost of growth would be complete without the insights of an economist. When contrasting biology and medicine or accounting and economics, the younger discipline pedomorphically<sup>1</sup> learns to encompass a larger, less specialized version of the world in which we live and work.

As an economist, Tor Dahl has learned to see the sweeping history of productivity, and he has learned some lessons that will disturb most conventional thinkers in terms of the relationship between quality and productivity.

Emerson once said, “The quality of imagination is to flow, and not to freeze.”<sup>2</sup> Dahl turns this around a bit as if to say, “The essence of productivity is to flow, and not to be frozen by obsessive quality.” He has researched and compared the profitability and productivity of some of the world’s most quality-focused and performance-oriented organizations. His findings will challenge business school curricula and conventional thinkers for some time to come, and we are pleased to present them in these pages.

*(JOE and CATHERINE STENZEL are the Editors-in-Chief of Cost Management. They can be reached at (218) 425-3106 and [genesis@visi.com](mailto:genesis@visi.com).)*

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<sup>1</sup> A term borrowed from evolutionary sciences in which a lineage retraces its developmental steps along the path that led to a dead end to make a fresh start in a new and more promising direction.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet,” *The Best of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays, Poems, Addresses* (Roslyn, NY: Walter J. Black, 1941), p. 144.