

# Quality info

Volume 18, Issue 16

Fortnightly, Free soft copy

15<sup>th</sup> November 2016

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

**Please refer to the announcement in Vol. 18/no. 14 of Quality Info dated 15th October 2016 and kindly note that Last Date for nomination / submission of documents is on or before 30th November 2016 by email to: [pateljc2002@yahoo.com](mailto:pateljc2002@yahoo.com) and [ydudd@asse.org](mailto:ydudd@asse.org).**

## Quality vs Aesthetical Quality--Japanese way

Recently, I had conversation to another quality professional on the subject of quality management. The topic somehow drifted to the strict quality standards in Japan. The person talked about how his product is rejected by his Japanese counterparts for “defects” such as small blemishes and debris. The defects meet corporate standards, yet the product gets rejected at the Japanese warehouse. My response was that I felt the Japanese were looking at the product from the eyes of the customer—that the small blemishes and debris negatively impact the *perception* of quality even if the product is fine.

In Japanese, the term for quality is *hinshitsu* (*hin* = goods, and *shitsu* =quality). With the advent of total quality management, the idea of two “qualities” was made more visible by Noriaki Kano. He termed these “*miryokuteki hinshitsu*,” (attractive quality) and “*atarimae hinshitsu*,” (must-be quality).

These concepts were not exactly new, but Kano was able to put more focus on this. The attractive quality refers to something that fascinates or excites the customer, and the must-be quality refers to everything the customer expects from the item. For example, a new cell phone is expected to function out of the box. Its user should be able to make calls, send text messages, connect to the internet, take pictures, and play games. But if a stylish phone case was included in or the customer’s name was etched on the back... that would be exciting. It would be unexpected, and thus would bring “joy” to the customer. The interesting thing about the attractive quality is that today’s attractive quality becomes tomorrow’s must-be quality. Would you buy a phone today that couldn’t browse the internet or take pictures? These features were introduced as attractive quality features and have become must-be quality features today. Organizational theorist Kaoru Ishikawa called these “forward-looking qualities” and “backward-looking qualities.” He considered descriptive terms like “easy to use” or “feels good to use” as forward-looking qualities. In contrast, he considered “absence of defects” backward looking. Walter Shewhart, the statistician who developed statistical process control (SPC) during the 1930s called these objective and subjective qualities.

Sometimes *miryokuteki hinshitsu* also refers to the aesthetic quality of a product. Apple products are famous for this—the designers pay a lot of attention to aesthetic quality. The iPhone has to feel good and look good, down to the packaging. In the Japanese culture, the concept of

aesthetics is rooted in “*shibui*” and “*mononoaware*.” Per Ronnie Lessem in his book, *The Global Business* (Prentice Hall, 1987), *shibui* can be defined as a quality associated with physical beauty “that has a tranquil effect on the viewer.” *Mononoaware* translated as an empathy toward things, refers to the awareness of the impermanence of things and a sadness at their passing.

Total quality management—the usual Japanese term is companywide quality control—was taken quite seriously by Japanese manufacturers. The following concepts were identified as essential:

1. Customer orientation
2. The “quality first” approach
3. Quality is everyone’s responsibility—from top management down.
4. Continual improvement of quality
5. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the producer, not of the purchaser or the inspection department.
6. Quality should be extended from the hardware (i.e., the product) to the software (i.e., services, work, personnel, departments, management, corporations, groups, society, and the environment).

Rather than relying on inspection, the Japanese manufacturers, including Toyota and Nissan, focused on quality improvement and defect prevention: building in quality. Quality awareness was essential to the entire manufacturing process. Operators owned their part in the process and took pride in their work.

Kenichi Yamamoto, the previous chairman of Mazda, is quoted to have said: “Any manufacturer can produce according to statistics.” Yamamoto’s remark is about not focusing simply on quantities. Even when we are focusing on quality we should focus on both the objective and subjective quality. This reflects how our company culture views the ownership of quality.

One always wonders why the windows in an airplane aren’t aligned with the airplane’s seats. It appears that the plane’s body is built based on a standard, and the seats are added later based on what the airlines want. There doesn’t seem to be a focus on what the customer wants, which explains why the seats aren’t aligned with the windows. I refer to the idea of the quality of a product as “in-the-customer’s-shoes quality.” If you are the customer, how would you like the product?

Pride in one’s work- this reminds me of an incident that took place in the early 60s in a Mitsubishi shipyard in Nagasaki. As an Engineer Superintendent for an Indian ship-owner, I was supervising the construction of few bulk-carriers being built in this shipyard. One day while examining the radiographs of the critical areas of the ship, I noticed that some welds had heavy undercuts and slag. On enquiry, it turned out that all these weld had been done by a very experienced and skilled welder. He was dully summoned by the shipyard authorities and was shown the radiographs of the welds done by him. When confronted, he completely broke down and wept like a child. Few days later, we came to learn that he had committed ‘*hara-kiri*’.

I will finish off with a story I heard from one of the episodes of the delightful TV show, *Japanology Plus*. This story perfectly and literally captures the concept of in-the-customer’s-shoes quality.

The episode included an interview of a “Japanophile” who was living in Japan for quite a long time. He talked about one incident that truly changed his view on the country. He visited a small tea house and was asked to remove his shoes before entering the room. When it was time to go, he was pleasantly surprised to see that his shoes were now turned around to face away from the room. This way, he didn’t have to turn around and fumble to put his shoes on, he just stepped into them on his way out. He was delighted by the thoughtfulness of the host. Always keep on learning...

**Readers may please note that D. L. Shah Trust brings out two e-journals on a fortnightly basis. These are mailed to those persons or institutions who are desirous of receiving them: These two e-journals are:**

- 1. Safety Info**
- 2. Quality Info**

**If you or your friends or colleagues wish to receive these journals, you may send us an e-mail requesting for the same. There is no charge for these journals. Our e-mail address is:**

**[dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in](mailto:dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in)**

**or**

**[haritaneja@hotmail.com](mailto:haritaneja@hotmail.com)**

**or**

**[dlshahtrust@gmail.com](mailto:dlshahtrust@gmail.com)**

**You can also access these journals on our website: [www.dlshahtrust.org](http://www.dlshahtrust.org)**

Sponsored by: **D. L. Shah Trust**  
**For Applied Science, Technology, Arts & Philosophy**  
Mumbai. email: [dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in](mailto:dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in)  
Ph: 022-22838890

Edited by Hari Taneja, Mumbai and  
Published by R. Ramamurthy, Bangalore  
560084.  
email: [dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in](mailto:dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in)