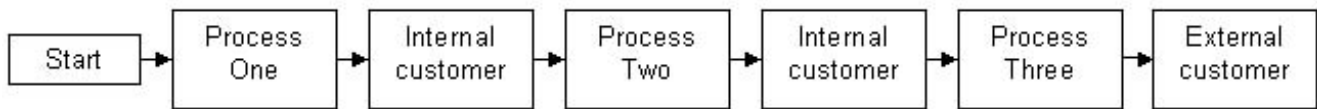


Quality



Quality is often defined as 'fitness for purpose'. In other words a quality product is one that meets the needs and requirements of its consumer. In his widely acclaimed book, *Thriving on Chaos*, Tom Peters argued that consumers' perception of the quality of a product or service is the most important factor in determining its success.

Quality as defined by the consumer, he argued, is more important than price in determining demand for most goods and services. Consumers will be prepared to pay for the best quality. Value is thus added by creating those quality standards required by consumers.

We can therefore illustrate quality in the following way:

Consumer quality standards involve:

- * Creating consumer satisfaction
- * Exceeding consumer expectations
- * Delighting the consumer

The process which is described as Total Quality Management (TQM) involves taking quality to new heights. Peters identified three stages in the development of quality:

1. Quality control
2. Quality assurance
3. Total Quality Management.

1. Quality control is an old idea. It is concerned with detecting and cutting out components or final products which fall below set standards. This process takes place after these products have been produced. It may involve considerable waste as defect products are scrapped. Quality control is carried out by Quality Control Inspectors. Inspection and testing are the most common methods of carrying out quality control.

2. Quality assurance occurs both during and after the event, and is concerned with trying to stop faults from happening in the first place. Quality assurance is concerned to ensure that products are produced to predetermined standards. The aim is to produce with 'zero defects'.

Quality assurance is the responsibility of the workforce, working in cells or teams, rather than an inspector (although inspection will take place). Quality standards should be maintained by following steps set out in a QA system.

3. Total Quality Management goes beyond quality assurance. It is concerned with creating a quality culture, so that every employee will seek to delight customers. The customer is at the centre of the production process. Companies like BIC and Audi have been following this policy for a long time. It involves providing customers with what they want, when they want it and how they want it. It involves moving with changing customer requirements and fashions to design products and services which meet and exceed their requirements. Delighted customers will pass the message on to

their friends.

The British Standards Institution (BSI) lies at the heart of the UK's quality management process. BSI creates standards and makes them available for a range of products and processes. One of the most widely respected standards is ISO 9001 which is an international standard for quality management systems. When a firm is certified to International Standard ISO 9001, the certificate indicates to potential customers that the organisation has continual improvement processes in place for the specific purpose of enhancing customer satisfactions. From this, consumers can reasonably infer that such businesses are able to deliver the promised quality product or service consistently.

Standardisation: Establishing and applying an agreed set of solutions intended for repeated application directed at benefits for stakeholders and balancing their diverse interests.