Chapter 3
Other Methodological Approaches

3.1 Quality Approach

3.1.1 Customer Satisfaction and TQM

Over the years, several definitions of quality have been proposed and the concept of quality has been radically evolved (Reeves and Bednar, 1994). Most of the early studies were developed in the context of manufacturing firms and quality was essentially defined as conformance to specifications (Muffatto and Panizzolo, 1995). The early efforts for measuring and analyzing quality in a business environment were focused on the inspection of tangible attributes and characteristics of the product, using statistical/process quality control techniques. The study of employee attitude, the development of motivation theories and techniques, and the research of human behavior (employees or customers) were developed in parallel, but independently from the product control process. In addition, marketing research, new product development methodologies, and customer service approaches were developed without any direct relation with the quality processes within business organizations.

However the increased importance of the service sector has led to a major shift in the way researchers and practitioners have defined and approached quality. The modern approach provides an externally focused definition of quality by embodying the customer dimension: quality is delighting the customers by fully meeting their needs and expectations.

The change of orientations has been reinforced by the development of Total Quality Management (TQM), which is a management approach for an organization, centered on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long-term success through customer satisfaction, and benefits to all members of the organization and to society (ISO 8402:1994).
Although different management philosophies have been developed in the context of TQM, customer satisfaction is the core concept in all of them. For example, Deming (1986) emphasizes that the consumer is by necessity the most important part of the production system, since without a consumer, there is no reason to produce (the consumer is the end-user of whatever product and service is being supplied). As Deming points out, the only meaningful definition of quality is that which the consumer specifies, and for this reason, several researchers suggest that Deming’s definition of quality is based on the user’s perspective. Juran (1988) also sees quality as a concept that can only be usefully defined by the consumer. He introduced a widely adopted definition of quality, “fitness for use”, which describes the extent to which a product successfully serves the purpose of the user. Furthermore, his “spiral progress in quality” demonstrates his quality improvement process in a TQM environment, where customer input and feedback is necessary to direct product design and improvement (Figure 3.1).

Other definitions of quality in the TQM area are presented in Table 3.1, where it should be emphasized that although quality leaders may have their own ideas on how quality should be defined, it is clear that all point in the same direction: quality should be judged by customers.

Fig. 3.1 Juran’s spiral of progress in quality (Juran, 1988)