Redesigning the Future

The "Total" in Total Quality Management (TQM)

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"Quality" as applied to products or services has come to be generally accepted as meaning "meeting or exceeding the expectations of the producer's/provider's customers." Those who so define quality often incorrectly assume that the customers and the consumers are the same persons or organizations. This is frequently not the case—for example, where the supplier sells a product to retailers who sells it to others who may purchase the product either for their own use or as gifts for others. In such cases, most would agree that where the consumers and customers are different, quality should be more concerned with the consumers' expectations than the customers'.

However, the expectations of customers who are not consumers are relevant. Therefore, total quality management should also take their expectations into account, but not theirs alone. Originally, it was only the users of the end products produced or services provided that were considered to be consumers. Increasingly, however, internal consumers of internally provided goods and services are also being taken into account. For example, the "miracle" produced by Jan Calzon at SAS is attributed to his making all employees of the airline aware of the fact that they had consumers of their outputs, and that they were responsible for meeting or exceeding their consumers' expectations. (Note that internal consumers are seldom customers.)

The concept "consumer" has been enlarged over time and, as it has, the field on which quality has focused has certainly become larger. It has become increasingly "total," but in most cases not total enough. Total quality should apply to all those who are affected by what an organization does, all its stakeholders. This means meeting the expectations of an organization's suppliers, employees, consultants, and advisers, wholesalers, retailers, stockholders, bondholders, bankers, debtors, and so on. Only when it meets all these requirements does it deserve to be called a quality organization, as distinct from a producer/provider of a quality product/service. The objective of Total Quality Manage-

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ment should be the creation of quality organizations, not merely quality products and services.

According to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1981), "expect" has two significantly different meanings: (1) "to consider reasonable or due," and (2) "to look forward to the probable occurrence of." It is in the first sense, not the second, that quality is defined with reference to stakeholders' expectations. Expectations, in this sense, have to do with desires, not forecasts.

Unfortunately, people are often unaware of their expectations—what they want—and, therefore, cannot reveal them in response to questions asking for their identification. One can often better infer the expectations of others from their behavior than from their verbal testimony. This is particularly true where the behavior consists of participation in the unconstrained (idealized) redesign (Ackoff, 1984) of the system, product, or service involved. For example, architects have long known that involvement of clients in the process of designing their homes is much more revealing of their desires than asking them what properties they want their yet-to-be-designed homes to have. If such participation is not possible, the consumers' reactions to designs already prepared may also reveal desires that answers to questions may not.

There are times when the users cannot articulate their expectations even when engaging in the redesign process. They must first experience directly the product or service that they thought would meet their expectations. When they do, they often discover that they don't. Du Pont Fibers Division, for example, often finds that when users of fibers, companies that produce carpeting or rugs, receive material that they have specified, they find them deficient in ways they had not previously considered. They and du Pont then often engage in a sequence of trials and errors before they reach a correct formulation of their expectations, let alone obtain a product that meets these expectations. Working with personnel at du Pont, INTERACT has developed a learning system, called the Simulearnet\(^2\), that enables both du Pont and their consumers to learn rapidly and efficiently what properties they want their materials to have and how to produce them.

Finally, there are those stakeholders to whom producers/providers or their representatives cannot obtain access—for example, future generations. When the expectations of inaccessible stakeholders can be reliably and accurately determined, advocates of these expectations should participate in an unconstrained redesign of the system, product, or service involved. When these expectations cannot be determined, they should not be second-guessed. The options available to unrepresented stakeholders should be kept open or increased (Ackoff, 1988). Since we do not know what their expectations will be, we should act now so

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