



## '3 DIMENSIONAL QUALITY' IS THE SMARTEST WAY TO DO BUSINESS

**Memo: Quality at Work**

**Edition: Final**

Quality - it is one of the most frequent claims in advertising. Comb the ads of any newspaper or magazine, or spend some time perusing radio and television spots, and it will amaze you how often the word is used.

Why this emphasis? Because advertisers know that quality is one of the things consumers prize most. It is as lofty and endearing a commodity as motherhood and apple pie. Quality, therefore, makes a warm and fuzzy buzzword, like "free."

But if quality is so important, why are so many consumers unhappy with the products and services they purchase? And if companies are as committed to quality as their ads would have us believe, why are so many of them having trouble competing and delivering quality at low prices?

There are a couple of reasons. First, not every product that touts quality actually delivers it. Second, even among the companies that try to deliver quality, many focus on quality with a little q. MCS is introducing to Nigeria quality with a Big Q. There is a huge difference.

Companies that embrace the Big Q consistently keep their customers in the cross hairs. Their goal is to satisfy customers, not just for the moment, but to anticipate their future needs and prepare to satisfy them. Big Q companies relentlessly pursue continuous improvement in their operations by reducing mistakes, breakdowns, delays and defects. They drive for efficiency and effectiveness.

When quality is so passionately pursued, an explosion of good things occur. Quality guru W. Edwards Deming calls it the chain reaction: "Focus on quality, productivity goes up, cost goes down, customers are more satisfied, and more jobs are provided."

Many companies can brag of accomplishing these aims from time to time. Far fewer companies can claim truthfully to strike these targets and meet these objectives with any degree of consistency. And with the Big Q, consistency is the key.

The Big Q really is a nickname for the concept of Three Dimensional Total Quality Management [Please see last week's edition for details on these 3 dimensions]. It is that concept that this column will explore. It's a way of life that global competition is forcing more and more companies to examine and adopt simply in order to survive.

Total Quality is not a brand new idea, having evolved over the past four decades. This management philosophy can be traced to elders like Deming, J. M. Juran and Carou Ishakawa. But the Big Q is often mistaken for its younger sister, little q. It is rare nowadays to find a company that does not have some kind of quality component. But in Three Dimensional Total Quality companies (3DQ for short), quality is not assigned to a few self-important product investigators, nor is it one department's special franchise. In 3DQ companies, quality is the business of every single employee.



**Here is an example of the difference:**

Company A manufactures table lamps. It uses a quality control method to ensure that shoddy lamps do not reach its customers. At the end of the production process, just before the lamps are prepared for shipping, quality inspectors sort out the inferior products from the lot.

The good lamps head for the marketplace. The defective lamps are diverted to a rework department, where they are broken down. The salvageable components of the defective lamps are used to make other lamps. Let us say that of the 100 lamps that are made, 87 are good and 13 do not make the grade.

Company B also manufactures table lamps. It is a 3DQ company. Its approach to quality is to focus **not** on the end product -the lamps - but to monitor the system, or process, by which the lamps are made. Company B keeps data that allow it to track the manufacturing process and to pinpoint where, along the way, problems are developing. This kind of tracking also enables the company to determine what causes problems more quickly and accurately.

Workers at Company B are empowered to speak up when they spot things that compromise quality. In fact, workers have the power to stop the production line. Indeed, they may be rewarded for doing so to make improvements in the process. For every 100 lamps that are made by Company B, 98 make the grade. Company B does not have quality control inspectors, nor a rework department, nor is it burdened with the costs associated with each. Production downtime is practically unheard of.

You can imagine that breaking with the past and committing to 3 Dimensional Total Quality (3DQ) is a radical change for many companies. The transition can be tough, frightening and imperiled by internal company politics. Some of the basic tenets of Total Quality - empowering the workers, for example - are absolutely sacrilegious to the established cultures of many companies.

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