



Changing Requirements

Wow! Why didn't I ask for this?

Prior to the industrial revolution, quality was defined aesthetically. It was beauty, goodness, art. The requirements were those of the user or artist. They were as varied as the individuals for whom they were created. There were no quality professionals, only creators and consumers.

Quality 1.0, which began in the late 18th century, focused on consistently meeting the requirements of a target customer market. The emphasis was on reproducibility, accuracy, and consistency. Quality professionals came into existence. They were tasked with identifying the customer's requirements, translating them into an internal language called specifications, and assuring conformance to these specifications. The customer requirements that concerned these professionals were what Noriaki Kano, recipient of Japan's Deming Prize, termed "expected" and "must have" requirements. These were the requirements of which customers were consciously aware.

While these tasks were challenging, they pale by comparison to the new challenges imposed by Quality 2.0. We must now identify, translate, measure, and assure conformance to the requirements of all major stakeholders, not just those of the customers. We must determine not only those requirements that stakeholders expect or insist on, we must also assure that our offerings include new and exciting features that will differentiate us from our competitors for customers, employees, and investors. These are "requirements" that stakeholders aren't even aware they have. There have been many names for this type of requirement, but I'll use my favorite: Wow requirements. Wow requirements are features of products or services that stakeholders didn't ask for, but, once experienced, they think, "Wow! I really like this!"

So how do we go about identifying requirements that stakeholders don't know they have?

One way has been around as long as business itself: visionaries. Before Alexander Graham Bell, no one really knew that they wanted a telephone. Anyone can be a visionary. Anyone can identify Wow requirements simply by reflecting on the humanity that they share with everyone else. What would you love from your job? Your investments? Your purchases? What is there that you'd love that no one else provides? Answers to these questions may provide the germ of an idea for a Wow requirement.

Another way to identify these requirements is what Intuit Inc., creator of Quicken and TurboTax software, calls "follow me home." This involves spending time with customers (or groups that you would like to have as your customers) and carefully observing what they do. How can you help them do it faster, easier, cheaper, or more joyfully? What problems do they have that you can make disappear? What opportunities could they exploit with your help?

The changes Quality 2.0 brings to requirements has a major repercussion on the quality professional's role. In the past the quality professional could pretty much focus on two questions:

1. What are the customers' requirements?
2. Do our products and services conform to the requirements?

In other words, the quality professional's role was passive. Marketing would identify product requirements, engineering would translate the requirements into specifications, and manufacturing would create products. It was assumed that engineering made the proper translation. Quality assurance began when manufacturing received the engineering requirements. Quality

developed procedures to ensure that manufacturing met the requirements.

In the future, the quality professional's role will be much more proactive. In addition to being concerned with product requirements, we will be expected to guide the organization in obtaining stakeholder requirements and measuring them in concrete terms.

The organization pursues the leadership vision by helping stakeholders meet their various requirements. It does this by pursuing strategies that are put into operation via metrics for each stakeholder. These metrics are monitored on balanced scorecards. Metrics are divided into two categories: key requirements and differentiators. Key requirements are operational metrics that must be competitive. Differentiators are strategic metrics that must be world-class. A dashboard is used by the leadership to monitor differentiators and those key requirements that are dangerously noncompetitive. The dashboard is used to drive operational plans and to identify strategic change projects, including Six Sigma projects. Leadership monitors the dashboard carefully and uses feedback from the dashboard to help identify changes in strategies.

These activities are Quality 2.0 in a nutshell. It is an exciting, challenging new world for the quality professional.

About the author

Thomas Pyzdek, author of The Six Sigma Handbook (McGraw-Hill, 2003), provides consulting and training to clients worldwide. He holds more than 50 copyrights and has written hundreds of papers on process improvement. Visit him at www.pyzdek.com. **QD**

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