

The coordinates of quality and satisfying the consumers' needs

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Abstract

Quality is a dynamic concept, because the demands of the technical progress impose to production the creation and permanent realization of new modern products with superior characteristics and performances. Quality is, in the long run, defined by the client, while the management ensures the overfulfilment of the client's demands and expectations. At the managerial level, it is essential to have a product that responds to the clients' needs and the conformity with certain standards is just one of the multiple ways that lead towards this purpose. The conformity of products and services is connected through their nature with static standards and specifications, while quality represents a mobile target.

Keywords: quality; the management of quality; consumer satisfaction

JEL Classification: M00; M30

Introduction

The origin of quality objectives has its roots in the clients' (consumers') needs. Hence, one can state that the scientific substantiation of the management of quality should be oriented towards the market and new technologies for the implementation of the quality goals. The quality strategic objectives have a deep effect on the production process, ensuring the performances of the products and of the important processes of multifunctional nature.

The goal of the management of quality is, firstly, the understanding of the client's expectations regarding quality and, secondly, the establishment of a plan and of a pro-active process which would achieve this goal. Quality is, in the long run, defined by the client, while the management ensures the overfulfilment of the client's demands and expectations.

Nowadays, we go through a period in which the evolution of social life leaves a deeper and deeper mark on quality, seen as a result of different processes, at the level of different domains of economic and social development. In the context of the increase and diversification of product demand, of the development of industrial production but also of the higher and higher consumer exigencies, the notion of product quality has continuously evolved and today we use terms such as "the management of quality", "quality audit", "total quality".

Quality – an abstract or a concrete notion?

Quality represents the expression of the degree of social utility of the product, degree in which, through all of its characteristics (technical, functional, psycho-sensory and economic parameters), it satisfies the need for which it has been created and respects the restrictions imposed by the general interests of the society regarding the social and economic efficiency, as well as the protection of the natural and social environment.

According to the standard ISO 8402, **quality** represents all of the characteristics of an entity – product, activity, process, organization, person – which give it the ability to satisfy the implicit or expressed demands. Three conclusions come out of this definition.

- According to some partial aspects of the quality of a product or service, the notion of quality signifies:
 - The ability to be used;
 - Satisfying the client's demands;
 - The conformity with a certain documentation or with the beneficiary's exigencies.
- The ensemble of the activities which have as a goal the attainment of quality form the *step of quality*.
- *The product* regarded in conformity with the same standard can be any material or immaterial good and/or service which appears as a result of certain activities and/or processes.

Quality is a dynamic concept, because the demands of the technical progress impose to production the creation and permanent realization of new modern products with superior characteristics and performances. The diversity and improvement of the product quality involves the promotion of certain unitary activities, starting from analyzing the market and continuing with a complete industrial cycle in which the products are created. This cycle, according to some dynamic evolutions of quality, can be realized in the production process through a **spiral of quality** which contains: the marketing study, scientific research, economic and commercial planning, projecting and creating the prototype, approving the prototype, planning the fabrication process (with the establishment

of the technical documentation and of the typo-dimensions), material supply with equipments (machinery, measurement items, trial stands), technological process, the control of the technological process, the final control, the verification of the reliability, sale, technical assistance and “service” activity for the beneficiary and the cycle repeats itself.

In correspondence with the process of production, therefore the producer, the quality of the product can be:

- Potential – projected;
- Realized – created at the end of the production line;
- Delivered – ensured by the delivered products;
- Total – which incorporates the degree of utility, economy, but also the aesthetic, ergonomic, functional, social degree, etc.

The correlation between the quality spiral, the production process and the activities which are specific to the management of quality are highlighted in the following figure:

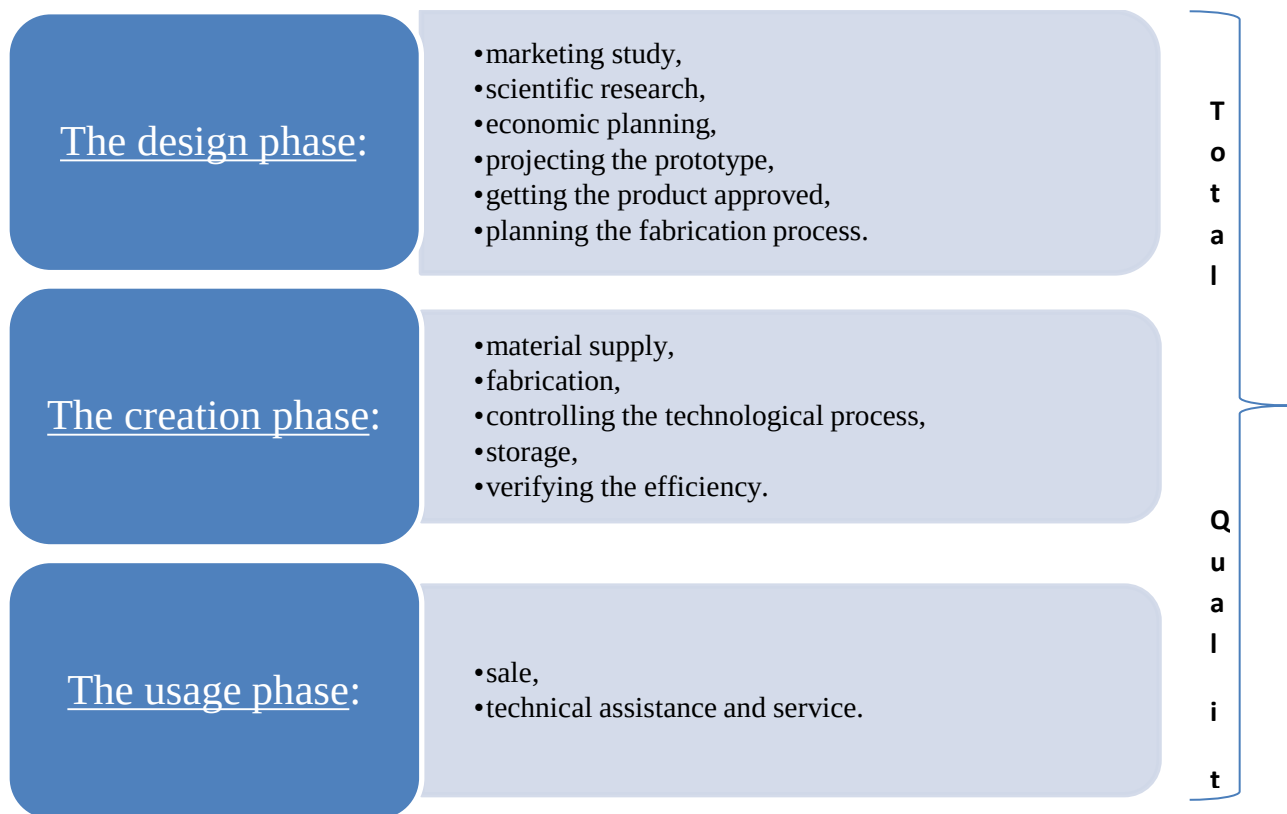


Fig. No. 1

The correlation between the quality spiral and the process of production

The fact that the quality characteristics of products are created in the production process allows us to highlight also the notion of **production quality** – together with the notion of **product quality** – that refers to the manner of development of the activity ensemble which forms this process – concept, organization, technology, etc. The quality of a product in the production process is obtained in three phases:

- in the research-projection phase through the quality of the concept and of the resulted documentation (usage technology);
- in the fabrication phase through the quality of the raw materials, of the equipments and of workforce;
- in the exploitation phase, in which it is ensured through the quality of the technical assistance and post-sale service.

Although it is an abstract notion, quality is reflected by a series of objective and subjective factors, which are grouped together in the following figure:

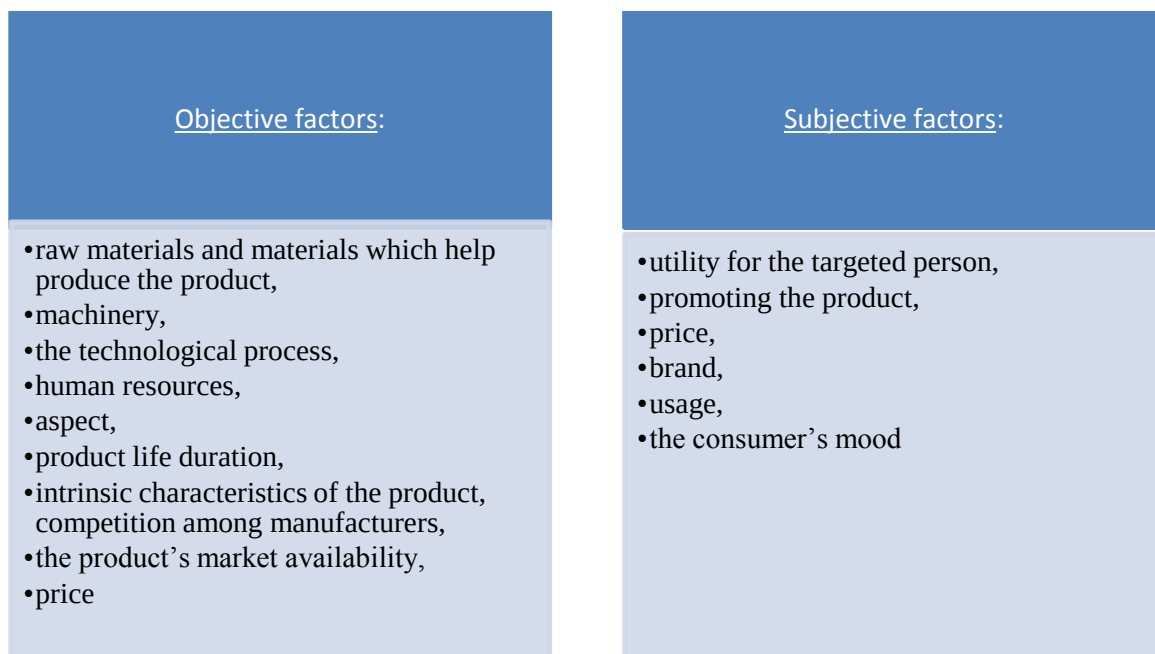


Fig. no. 2

Factors that influence the quality of a product

Approaching quality through its conformity with standards and specifications, although valid, it represents, however, a dangerous concept at a managerial level. At the managerial level, it is essential that the product responds to the needs of clients and the conformity with certain standards is just one of the multiple ways that lead towards this goal. The conformity of products and services is connected through their nature with static standards and specifications, while quality represents a mobile target. There are standards that contain provisions for chronic losses. This definition of quality, in conformity with such standards, favors continuous losses. There are situations in which 100 percent conformity means a flawless product, but the sale of the products and services is created by the characteristics that respond to the needs of clients, which are constantly changing.

In the practice of the suppliers and beneficiaries relations, the quality of merchandise can take the form of eight major aspects. (Saseanu, 2007)

- The projected quality or the quality of the concept represents the ensemble of the quality characteristics and their values, selected in the phase of the product design.
- The approved quality, as a standard (reference system) refers to the ensemble of the quality characteristics and their approved and accepted values.
- The prescribed quality refers to the ensemble of quality characteristics and their values which can be found in the product standard. On the basis of this type of quality, the quality reception of the merchandise is made between the manufacturer and the beneficiary.
- The contracted quality represents the ensemble of the quality characteristics and their values which are mentioned in the delivery contract.
- The delivered quality represents the level of quality of the products at the moment of delivery. This type of quality can be found in the *Quality certificate*, *Conformity declaration*, *Analysis bulletin*, documents which should come with the delivered batch of products.
- The real quality refers to the ensemble of quality characteristics and their values which are established after the delivery, by the beneficiary.
- The technical (industrial) quality expresses the degree of conformity of the individual values of technical and functional properties, in comparison with the provisions of standards and enforced norms. This type of quality expresses the manufacturer point of view.

- The commercial quality expresses the consumer point of view and it refers to the following aspects: psycho-sensory characteristics, the variety of assortments, warranty, after the sale service, display and packaging, maintenance and activity costs.

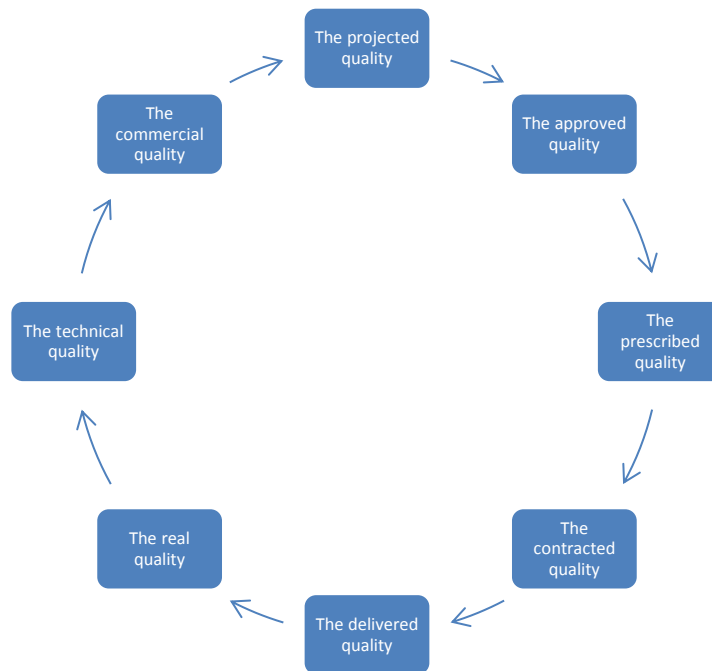


Fig. No. 3

The coordinates of quality as a result of the practice of relations between suppliers and beneficiaries

Conclusions

On the basis of the presented arguments, we can conclude that the entire activity of the enterprise should be oriented towards the consumer and it is always necessary to take into account the reaction of the consumer towards the product/service.

Recent studies have shown that most of the consumers change their preferences for certain products/services due to different reasons, the most important two being the price and the

poor quality. As a rule, the consumer is willing to pay extra money in order to have a better quality and the chances of a product to sell grow as the quality/price ratio is higher, which allows us to state that, nowadays, quality is more and more based on what is desired by the client.

In the clients' perception, the better the product characteristics, the higher the quality. The definition of quality through the absence of deficiencies refers to the fact that the fewer are the deficiencies of products and services, the better is the quality.

The success of an organization depends on the clients. The top management of the organization should ensure that the demands of the clients are analyzed and satisfied in order to continuously increase their level of satisfaction (element 5.2. of ISO 9001:2001).

In order to obtain competitive advantages in the long run, an organization should enhance the rate with which they maintain their clients. The organization should identify the current and future client needs, satisfy their needs and be constantly preoccupied with exceeding their expectations (SR EN ISO 9000:2001, the principles of the management of quality and SR EN ISO 9004:2001, element 4.3.point a).

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