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Pharma Bio World- May - July 2003

UNDERSTANDING QUALITY DETERMINING INDIVIDUAL QUALITY

By Suresh Pareek

There are various parameters and standards that are defined and laid down for measuring the quality of a product or service. But there are also methods by which individual quality (quality of a person) can be determined and improved.



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A company's growth can be linked to its meeting the quality requirement of the outside world or customers. Without a high level of individual quality of employee, it is difficult to imagine an organization consistently meeting quality requirements.

For measurement of quality of a product or service, there are various parameters and standard that are defined and laid down. But are there any methods by which individual quality of a person can be determined and improved, if necessary? What are the benefits of such improvements to an individual or his company?

WHAT IS INDIVIDUAL QUALITY?

Individual quality is the performance level of an individual and the quality of work he delivers consistently.

JUDGEMENT OF INDIVIDUAL QUALITY :

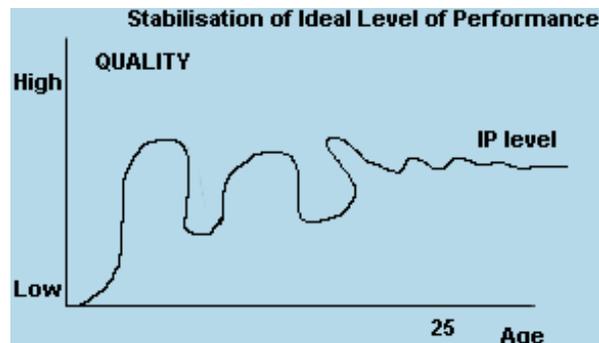
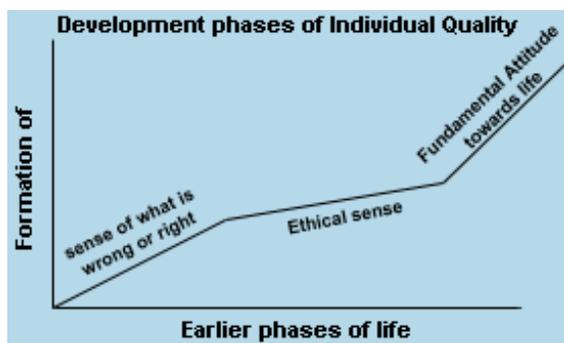
To pass judgment on individual quality, we have to understand that :

- There can be a vast difference between what an individual is capable of doing and what he actually does.
- There can be wide fluctuation in an individual's performance level in different situations.
- Different individuals perform differently when they are doing their best.

Two main standards can be set for individual quality.

- The present level of performance : The present level of performance means what an individual is actually doing in the present situation.
- The ideal level of performance : The ideal level of performance means an individual's innermost desires, aspirations and demands related to the performance.

Development of ideal level or maximum capacity can be illustrated and explained by Figures 1 & 2.



Both the figures indicate that during the development years of an individual (till a child turns eight), whatever perceived is emulated. From eight years upto 18, the individual learns to weigh the pros and cons but is still 100 percent decisive. At around 22, the individual forms firm ideas about all situations and does not adapt to change easily. At this stage, the ideal or maximum level of performance is more or less fixed.

CASE STUDY :

To understand the concept of individual quality, how to judge it and how to make improvements and the effect it can have, a case study was carried out in a medium sized pharmaceutical exeipients company on an experimental basis.

NEED FOR THE CASE STUDY :

The company in question was developing an ISO9001 system. During the development period, it encountered resistance from many members of the staff and could implement the system with great difficulty. The management wanted to understand the reason for such behaviour and decided to conduct a survey about the motivational status of its employees. The questions in the survey were limited to very few to understand whether employees are doing their best. Disclosure of the name was kept voluntary so as to get honest answers.

The summary of results is shown in Chart 1.

Sr. No.			Yes	No
1	Do you always do your best while performing your job ?		25 %	75 %
		100 %	75%	Enough to keep the job
2	How much effort do you put while performing your duties ?	12%	35 %	53 %
			Yes	No
3	Could you be more effective than what you are now ?		68 %	32 %

After studying the results, the company wanted to know the reasons of employees not doing their best. After discussing with employees, the company got the feeling that the reason for the employees unsatisfactory performance was that they did not feel motivated to make the effort they knew they were capable of making.

To the company, it meant that there was a difference between the maximum capacity of a person to do a job and the present capacity which it is being done. It meant that there was a potential for improvement of an individual's quality.

Maximum Capacity to perform (Ideal Level)= Present Capacity of performance (Actual Level) + Potential for improvement.
Please refer to Figure 3.

The quality level of the employees' present level of performance in a given situation is influenced by both what employees expect from themselves and the demands others place on their performance.

Quality Level of Present Performance = Self Expectations + Expectations from others.

The company then requested selected employees from each department to undergo a further test for determining their present level of performance and the maximum capacity at which they can perform.

A set of questions (please refer to Questionnaire 1) were used for determining the present level of performance of an individual.

Sr. No.	Questions	Answers		
1	Do you perform your tasks as well as you possibly can?	Always	Mostly	Sometimes
2	Do you give yourself 100%? Are you committed?			
3	Do you make an extra effort when the situation calls for it?			
4	Do you try to make decision and act as if you were the owner of the company or the person in charge?			
5	When the boss is out, do you make the same effort as when he/she is around?			
6	Are you punctual?			

7	When you do a job-large or small- do you check it yourself to make sure it has been done properly?			
8	Do you help you colleagues in work, including those from other departments?			
9	Do you feel responsible for the errors your company makes? Do you help to correct them, even if you personally did not make them?			
10	Do you feel respect other people's time? If your change your plans or discover that you are going to be late, do you let people know at once?			
11	Do you learn from your mistakes, correct them and avoid repeating them?			
12	Are you proud of your work? Will you be happy to put your name on it?			
13	Do you take initiative to avoid wasting time? When you have finished a job, do you find something meaningful to do or else ask for new assignments?			
14	When you promise to do a job and deliver a certain standard of quality on a specific date, do you do everything in your power to keep the promise?			
15	Do you praise your colleagues when they deliver quality work?			
16	When people deliver work to your which doesn't meet your expectations, do you bring it to their attentions?			
17	Do you ask for help when you cannot handle a job yourself?			
18	When you receive instructions from you superior, do you clarify with him/her, if you have not understood it properly?			
19	Do you try to avoid wasting resources ?			

There are various factors which can influence the present performance level of an individual, whereas the maximum or ideal level of performance generally cannot be so easily influenced and is relatively stable, around the age of 22 as explained in Figure 2.

The answers to Questionnaire 1 will be summarized in the next part of this article. The idea behind the questionnaire was to determine the present level of performance of an individual and the potential available for development . The present level of performance is not static. It changes constantly from situation to situation. Some of the factors which affect the present level of performance on an individual are clarity of the goad, success or failure, working/ surrounding environment around him, experience and skills, time available, present performance level of people working around him and nature of the task. These factors will be discussed in detail while analyzing the response received to the questionnaire.

Another set of questionnaire was used to determine the maximum level or ideal level of quality of an individual.

1. You are at the railway station to receiver a relatives who have also come to receive the same person. When the train arrives, you meet a friend who has arrived on the same train with baggage and seeks you help in reaching his destination. What do you do?

- a. Apologize to your friend saying that the place is not on your way.
- b. Arrange for your friend to be dropped by your relative who is going the same way.
- c. Drive your friend to a taxi stand close to his destination along your way.
- d. Drop him at a convenient place from where his destination is walking distance away.
- e. Go out of your way to drop him at his destination.

2. You are a member of a prestigious club renowned for its selfless services to society at large where your attendance and participation in welfare programmes is obligatory and is the basic requirement for membership. What do you do?

- a. You are a very busy person and attending meeting of social clubs is not your priority and the Jack of attendance does not bother you.
- b. Attend meetings on and off very casually without preparations or knowledge about the agenda.
- c. Keeping updated about the club activities by regular contacts with other members when you fail to attend due to extensive travelling.
- d. Make it a point to attend all meeting well prepared and participate in some club programmes.

e. Make it a point to attend all meetings well prepared with a firm commitment and involvement to achieve the objectives of the club to your best ability.

3. You are criticism by others for committing a mistake and you are aware that the criticism is valid? What do you do?

- Reject the criticism forth with and cite examples to remand the others of mistake committed by them in the past which did not find criticism.
- Accept the mistake reluctantly, providing elaborate justification about the circumstances and the people who led you to commit the mistake and trying to power that is was not your faith entirely.
- Admit the mistake openly and offer apologies.
- Admit the mistake and appreciate the criticism which would help rectify the situation.
- Accept the criticism positively and analyse the cause in order to prevent recurrence.

4. You are with a friend who is habituated to rumor mongering and talking ill about others. He talks to you about the loose character of a common friend. What do you do?

- Listen with great interest and extract more information by promising not to divulge the some of information. Still spread it around.
- Make an attempt to verify the facts before you talk about it.
- Listen to the rumor and bury it deep within yourself.
- Stop him politely and tell him that you are not interested in rumors.
- Stop him curtly and advise him to talk more with people rather than about people.

5. You have agreed to provide samples of a new product and promised timely delivery otherwise your colleagues are put in a difficult situation Unfortunately, you are unable to meet the deadline. What do you do?

- Give a lengthy explanation about how busy you are and why you failed to meet the deadline.
- Offer an excuse that you were expecting some and supporting data from a third person which did not come. Hence, the postponement of deadline.
- Put in extra effort and submit two days late with an apology for the delay.
- Inform the colleagues that the deadline period is too short and that in future you would not commit to deadlines.
- Like your willingness to assist other you seek assistance from other and ensure meeting the deadline with qualitative output.

6. You are working in a factory production area and day in and day out, you are performing the job of packing, labelling and despatching. Over a period of time, monotony sets in. What do you do?

- You consider the work boring and pointless without any scope for development and perform mechanically with occasional complaints to your family and friends about the ill feeling.
- Perform your duty just to keep your job.
- Continue to do your job well to the satisfaction of all and willing to put in extra effort when need arises.
- Take extra initiatives to enhance performance and avoid mistakes.
- Consider your job to be your responsibility 100%. Devise new ways to ensure customer satisfaction and create goodwill by enhancing the company's image thus helping to attract more customers.

7. You return home from work usually at the same time and your children are already at home. Your spouse is also working and arrives later than you. What do you do?

- You are tired therefore you relax with a newspaper in hand- not getting involved at all with the children and the housework. Your mood is generally grouchy and influenced by the newspaper headlines, the shows on television and the quality of food.
- You help with the domestic duties and inquire about how the day has been for other in general. However your thoughts are mainly on the office work.
- Relax a bit and try to introduce variety in the evening life by planning a few evening life by planning, a few evening outings with the children during the week, inquire about the education progress of children and help them solve difficulties. But and large, you try to convert the evening to a fun day for all.
- You do the major portion of the household work like cleaning, shopping, supervising the servants and the cook, controlling the expenses and keeping the house in a perfect running order.
- You enjoy socialising and invariably end up spending most of your evenings partying and moving around in the social circuit while the children are taken care of by the servants.

8. Your superiors have given you an assignment which you have not understood. What do you do?

- You do not do the job and when asked offer and excuse that you did not understand what was to be done in the first place.
- You ask your colleagues to understand the assignment and try to complete it.
- You ask you superior to explain the job once again and seek his guidance about the way to complete the assignment.

d. You repeat exactly what you have understood about the assignment to your superior and obtain his confirmation prior to starting the assignment so that there is no ambiguity in understanding.

e. You seek clarifications from your superior about the job and the method of doing it. You confirm your powers and the levels at which you can get assistance. You prepare a draft of the assignment and get it approved before the final submission.

Mentioning of the name was made optional to receive honest answers.

The results of the questionnaire to determine present level of performance and maximum level of performance were tabulated and a program to improve present level of performance was developed. In the next issue, we will go through the results and the effect of the individual quality development plan.