

Definition of quality



The concept and vocabulary of quality is elusive. Different people interpret quality differently. Few can define quality in measurable terms that can be operational. When asked what differentiates their product or service, a health care worker will answer " quality health care, " the banker will answer " service, " the manufacturer will simply answer " quality product, " and the hotel restaurant employee will answer " customer satisfaction. " When pressed to provide a specific definition and measurement, few can do so. There is an old maxim in management that says, " If you can't measure it, you can't manage it, " and so it is with quality. If strategic management systems and the competitive advantage are to be based on quality, every member of the organization should be clear about this concept, definition, and measurement as it applies to his or her job. Harvard professor David Garvin summarized five principal approaches to defining quality. First of them is the transcendental view of quality. Those who hold the transcendental view would say, " I can't define it, but I know when I see it. " Advertisers are fond of promoting products in these terms. " Where shopping is a pleasure" for a supermarket, " We love to fly and it shows" for an airline, and " It means beautiful eyes" for cosmetics are examples. Next is the product-based view. Product-based definitions are different. Quality is viewed as quantifiable and measurable characteristics or attributes. For example, durability or reliability can be measured, and the engineer can design to that benchmark. Quality is determined objectively. Although this approach has many benefits, it has limitations as well. Where quality is based on individual taste or preference, the benchmark for measurement may be misleading. Then, the next principal is the user-based view. User-based definitions are based on the idea that quality is an individual matter, and products that best satisfy their

preferences are those with the highest quality. This is a rational approach but leads to two problems. First, consumer preferences vary widely, and it is difficult to aggregate these preferences into products with wide appeal. This leads to the choice between a niche strategy and a market aggregation approach which tries to identify those product attributes that meet the needs of the largest number of consumers. Moreover, the next principal is manufacturing-based View. Manufacturing-based definitions are concerned primarily with engineering and manufacturing practices and use the universal definition of "conformance to requirements." Requirements, or specifications, are established design, and any deviation implies a reduction in quality. The concept applies to services as well as products. Excellence in quality is not necessarily in the eye of the beholder but rather in the standards set by the organization. This approach has serious weaknesses. The consumer's perception of quality is equated with conformance and hence is internally focused. Emphasis on reliability in design and manufacturing tends to address cost reduction as the objective, and cost reduction is perceived in a limited way—invest in design and manufacturing improvement until these incremental costs equal the costs of non-quality such as rework or scrap. The last principal is value-based view. Value-based quality is defined in terms of costs and prices as well as a number of other attributes. Thus, the consumer's purchase decision is based on quality (however it is defined) at the acceptable price.