

Introduction to Production Quality

What is Quality?

What do we mean by the “quality” of a product or service? A simple definition is:

“A quality product needs to be ‘fit for purpose’. This means the product must meet or exceed the customer requirements.”

It should be noted that a good quality product does not therefore have to be an expensive product; it merely has to fulfill its purpose within the eyes of the customer.

For example, a cheap biro or cheap pair of trainers can be good quality as long as they do at least what the customer expects them to do.

It is important to remember that it is the customer who sets the “quality standards” in terms of their overall expectations of quality. There are several ways that a customer may define quality:

- ▶ Reliability
- ▶ Fit for purpose
- ▶ Design
- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Long-lasting

In some cases, government act to encourage minimum standards for certain products. For example, the British Standards Institute in the UK operates a well-known “Kitemark” scheme.

The Kitemark is a certification mark that offers proof that a product or service complies with the relevant publicly available specification. It symbolises quality and safety and is recognized by over 80% of the UK population.

Why is Quality Important?

Quality is important for two main reasons: reputation and costs.

Reputation

For virtually all purchasing decisions, customers choose which product to buy based on price and/or quality, and occasionally on other factors such as the delivery time. The reputation of a business therefore depends on these factors and it is often quality which can have the longest lasting impression (think of the long-standing jokes about the quality of the old Skoda cars).

Customers often complain about the poor quality of the products and services they buy. Conversely, a positive recommendation by a customer (for example by recommending a product or service to a friend) helps to develop a positive reputation for quality.

There are many situations in which quality can prove to be less than expected: for example:

- Poor service at a restaurant
- A flight that runs late or is cancelled
- A washing machine that breaks down
- Clothing that unexpectedly shrinks in the wash

A good quality product can therefore provide a competitive edge over rivals and can lead to significant

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marketing advantages. For example, a business will benefit from more repeat purchases and a longer life cycle for its product. It may also be able to charge a premium (higher) price and so boost revenue.

Costs

A poor quality product does not only harm reputation and therefore sales but also increases costs to businesses. There are many costs of poor quality, including:

- Cost of reworking or remaking the product
- Costs of replacements or refunds
- Wasted materials
- Costs of employing more staff to detect and solve quality problems

These extra costs will decrease the competitiveness of a business, as it may have to raise prices to cover them.

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