

High Impact Questions For Quality Improvement

By William W. Scherkenbach

William Scherkenbach is internationally recognized as one of the world's foremost authorities on the subject of quality and its implementation. Theory without action is useless. Action without theory is costly. Bill has the rare combination of both state-of-the-art theory and the experience of applying it in the real world.

He was in the very privileged position of learning from and working with Dr. W. Edwards Deming in the last 25 years of his life. He was with him on over 1000 meetings, including at least 50 four-day seminars, with leaders of industry and government all over the world.

"He was my student, and there's none better in the world... It takes a little ingredient called profound knowledge, and he's got it."

W. Edwards Deming

Address for this paper:

ccmii.org/files/ws/high-impact-questions-for-quality-improvement.pdf

William Scherkenbach and the Curious Cat Management Improvement Institute have made available a large number of additional files.

Find all the files:

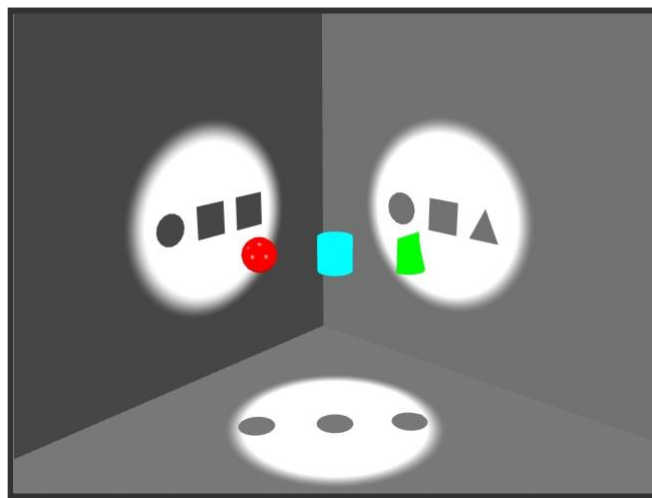
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High Impact Questions For Quality Improvement

I have been involved with the improvement of organizations and individuals long enough to have seen many battles. Not battles with improvement, but battles on which tool to bring to the fight. Quality Circles, SPC, TQM, Reengineering, BPR, 6-Sigma, TPM...you name it, people have fought over it. There have been battles over Deming's version, Juran's version, Crosby's version, Feigenbaum's version, Shainin's version, Ishikawa's version, Hammer's version, Harry's version...you pick 'em, people have fought over them. AT&T's version, Ford's version, Motorola's version, General Electric's version...you pick 'em, people have fought over them. What do you think they all have in common?

- They all want to improve processes or systems.
- They all have worked spectacularly ... somewhere and sometime.
- They all trash the other viewpoints...tastes great; less filling.
- They all have faded with the next set of executives.

I have used this graphic for a number of years now, to convey that you need all of the viewpoints to really improve this world. Which perspective are you going to trash?



Get over what Quality is or isn't. Get over the right column vs. the left column. Get over that is the wrong way...this is the right way. Get over this will stay while the others didn't. Every Quality approach has been better than Bop-a-Mole.

Dr. Deming told me about the public arguments around the various statistical tools in the 1930's and 40's that confused and caused hesitation in management to use any of them. He advocated duking it out in private because how could they know.

Throughout history some things stay the same and some things improve. The continually successful executives know which is which. One of the things that has stayed

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pretty much constant for quite a while now is the set of questions that great leaders ask of others to get stuff done.

High Impact Questions

The following questions are not superordinate, but they are close. These are some of the questions that I have found useful over many years and billions of dollars of savings in improvement projects.

- Who should be on the Improvement Team? Even if the process boundaries are within your organization, you should consider including some customers and suppliers on the team.
- Do you have experts outside of the subject area on the team? If you want a better chance for a Breakthrough improvement, make sure that an outsider is on the team.
- Who will be the senior sponsor or champion for the team? This is very important for getting resources and synergy as well as avoiding interference with other projects.
- What will get delayed so that the team may meet? Its' a zero sum game with time. If the team is meeting, other things are not going to get done. Make it visible.
- What is the budget in financial terms? Do you consider the people cost sunk? Not necessarily. The important thing here is for consistent operational definitions of all criteria to avoid the hiding the pea.
- What are the projected savings? In time, money, people, or whatever measures your Constancy of Purpose Statement considers superordinate.
- Will the team make the decision or a recommendation or what? This is very important for future improvement. Many teams do not try again if there is a Gap between what they expected the rules to be and what they got.
- Is there a no-fault policy in effect? Numerous teams have not made all of the improvement that they could because they did not want to be blamed for the current state.
- Is there a sense of urgency? If not, create one.
- What arrangements must be made to keep the team together for the duration? Nothing slows the team down or adversely impacts the quality of the improvement as losing a team member and having to bring another up to speed. Make the arrangement up front.
- What is your prediction of how much the Gap will be reduced? This sets the stage for comparing how many resources are needed and how many will be saved.
- What are the boundaries in space and time? You don't want to have a project team answering the question "Why is there air?" too many times. Who do you include? What is the timeframe?

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- What are the short-term countermeasures that protect the customer but don't interfere with the long-term improvement efforts? You must be careful here because many countermeasures do interfere with the data that you collect to determine long-term improvements.

If you ask these 13 questions, you will dramatically increase the chances that your Quality improvement efforts will actually result in more improvement than Bop-a-Mole.