

The **Quality** Manifesto

Getting the Basics of Quality Right in a Knowledge World

Tanmay Vora



The Quality Manifesto

Quality is Human

When leaders rely too much on processes, metrics, facts and trends to measure project/organization's quality, they forget one thing: *that quality is about being human. Quality is human.*

That is because people drive quality. **People exercise their choice of delivering 'good' versus 'great' work.** Because work allows people to expand their capacity to deliver. People work for people (customers).

Knowledge world of work thrives on human judgement – our ability to see patterns, listen to our intuition, use our implicit understanding, learning about the context and attend to nuances of work – precisely what makes the 'human' aspect of quality so important.

Have processes, measure right things but don't forget being human.

Quality is Love

Part of being human about quality is also to realise that people only care for quality when they love what they are doing. ***Quality is about love. Quality is an expression of love for the subject.***

When we strive to understand/deliver what customers wants, try to improve our work, when we make mistakes and learn from them, it is essentially an act of love.

Why would we walk any mile extra for things that we don't deeply care about? For things that we don't believe are the right things to do?

Challenge is to find enough people who are passionate about what they do and then let them lead/self-organize. You won't have to worry too much about quality then.

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Quality is Happiness

Quality is not just “degree of excellence” or “conformance to requirements”. **Quality is Happiness.**

Happiness of people who work on product development. Happiness of clients who receive the product and are delighted to use it.

Only happy internal customers (peers, sub-ordinates, project team members, inspection department) ultimately lead to happy customers.

If people don't find the product they are developing to be useful, they would not be happy working on it. No one likes to produce anything that is useless.

When people believe in the vision/purpose of the product they are developing, they will happily “walk-that-extra-mile” to deliver Quality.

Happy people are more likely to produce better Quality. Great Quality delivered to clients makes them happy.

Unfortunately, most quality models focus heavily on “process” and less on “happiness”.

To comply with a rigid process is **Management**. To have happy, motivated people using process as a tool to ultimately deliver Quality is **Leadership**.

Quality is a Route to Excellence

Quality is generally extrinsic. It is driven by external demands. We implement best practices in line with industry standards. We write our processes in line with a certain standard. We develop our products and services according to the demands of our customers. When we continuously meet these demands, adhere to processes and improve upon them, we build repeatability in our success.

Excellence is always intrinsic. It is our innate desire to go out of our way to deliver a superior experience. Not because someone else demands it, but because

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‘you’ want it that way. It is for your own satisfaction of having done a great job. Excellence is a ‘people’ game, and the one that pushes quality one step forward. In either case, people are at the fulcrum.

People can do their best, walk that extra-mile and think of adding value once they are absolutely clear of how to do the basic things right. Processes given them a firm base on which they can build excellence. On the other hand, excellent people may fumble if they are not supported with right set of guidelines on delivering quality.

Excellence has a lot to do with people’s motivation to do a great job. It is their choice.

Getting people to exercise their choice of delivering excellence is #1 leadership challenge. It starts with getting the right people and building the right culture.

Finally, just like quality, **excellence is a moving target.** “Excellent” today may become “good enough” tomorrow and “mediocre” the day after.

Improvements Start With a Powerful “Why?”

Doing anything without knowing the purpose and meaning is a “waste” (in lean terms) – because *activity without clarity of purpose is a cost.*

Understanding the purpose, context and meaning requires something more than simple “explicit knowledge”. It requires curiosity, implicit insight, ability to connect the dots, question our work, think about system and understand the invisible currents.

Purpose is powerful tool to keep people aligned, establish a vision (for team and organization), inspire team members and guide large scale strategic changes.

“Know-why” is at the core of excellence and is a pillar on which improvements are (and should be) done.

Given business priorities and rate of change, it is very easy to get carried away by

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tactical tasks, speed and progress, and our corporate culture also rewards that. But if you are running fast in the wrong direction, you are prone to accidents.

Quality of Design and Quality of Execution

“**Quality of execution**” ensures that defects are prevented (assurance) and then eradicated (inspection) through systematically laid out processes. Quality of execution deals with “how” things should be done. A lot of companies differentiate themselves by how they do things. The goal of “**quality of design**” is to build a differentiating quality and experience in the design of your product or service. Steve Jobs ardently pursued quality of design. In his own words,

“The system is that there is no system. That doesn’t mean we don’t have process. Apple is a very disciplined company and we have great processes. But that’s not what it’s about. Process makes you more efficient.

But innovation comes from people meeting up in the hallways or calling each other at 10:30 at night with a new idea, or because they realized something that shoots holes in how we’ve been thinking about a problem. It’s ad hoc meetings of six people called by someone who thinks he has figured out the coolest new thing ever and who wants to know what other people think of his idea.

And it comes from saying no to 1,000 things to make sure we don’t get on the wrong track or try to do too much. We’re always thinking about new markets we could enter, but it’s only by saying no that you can concentrate on the things that are really important.”

It is only when your products and services have a differentiating DNA, a unique architecture and an innovative modelling, that quality of execution can really help. The art is in balancing these two qualities. Design precedes execution.

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Quality is an 'Attitude'

From selling shoes to writing software, every product has to have a strong “service” layer. People enable this layer. In a knowledge/service oriented world, quality of product, environment and infrastructure is just the beginning. Quality of interaction, quality of care, quality of being human, quality of walking that extra mile to delight the customer matters more. They need to complement each other.

The “attitude of quality” is about wanting to do the right things. Even if they are not prescribed that way. When no one is watching. When it takes a bit of extra effort. When you are not paid ‘extra’ to do it. In the current scenario (and the time to come), a professional’s ‘attitude of quality’ will be a key differentiator for his/her success.

I remember a project manager who would test everything before shipping it out of the door, even after the inspection team had signed off the deliverable. He toiled at the last moment to ensure things because he cared. Because he carried an ‘attitude of quality’. He wanted to delight the customer.

Quality is an attitude. The work we deliver, the products we ship and experiences we extend to customers reveals this attitude. Invest in quality of your product/service, but do not forget to invest in people who carry the right attitude. Because only excited, engaged and enthusiastic people can excite the customers and pass on the enthusiasm. People (and their attitude) are at the core of excellence.

We need more ‘attitude of quality’ in our businesses and service organizations.

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About the Author:



Tanmay Vora is a Blogger, Author and a Quality Management Consultant. He has 13+ years of diverse experience in software development methodologies, quality management, software testing and process improvement initiatives.

Tanmay is also an author of [#QUALITYtweet – 140 bite-sized ideas to deliver quality](#) in every project. '#QUALITYtweet' is a handy collection of bite sized ideas on practical aspects of Quality Management with a focus on people, processes, and leadership.

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