

TYPES OF SPECIFICATIONS OF QUALITY

On the basis of form I think it would be generally agreed that we may distinguish at least three types of specifications of quality:

1. Demonstrative.
2. Specification by a sample.
3. Specification of properties.

Simple examples of the first form are: "Give me that", "Give me one of those", with the appropriate gesture, in the sense that a consumer uses such specifications as indicating what he wants. A simple example of the second type is: "Give me one like that", with the appropriate gesture. Most engineering specifications for the quality of both raw materials and finished products are of the third type. Let us now examine these three types, distinguishable on the basis of form, and see if they are distinguishable on the basis of meaning, for, after all, it is what they mean that is of greatest interest in quality engineering work.

It is of fundamental significance to note that what the consumer is trying to do in any one of these cases is to describe or define the quality of the thing which he wants. Furthermore, the quality of the thing which he wants is that which the thing will be found to have after it has been obtained by him. We must not confuse the thing which the consumer wants with the thing pointed to in the first and second

of the three types of specification given above. In other words, each of the three types of specification considered above is used simply to symbolize or stand for the quality of the thing wanted.

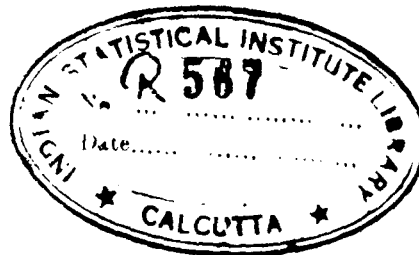
In the case of the specification in the form: "Give me that", or its equivalent, what is really meant is: "Give me a thing which will have certain properties which the consumer and producer have found to be customarily associated with anything having the observable aspects of the thing indicated". In the case of the specification in the form: "Give me one like that", it is perhaps more obvious that the thing indicated by "that" stands as a symbol for the quality of the thing wanted. In the case of specifications of quality characteristics or properties of a thing it is quite obvious that these are supposed to symbolize what is wanted. Thus it is that the three forms of specification are but different ways of expressing symbolically the meaning of the quality of the thing wanted - from the viewpoint of meaning there is but one type of specification.

The specification is but a means of communication of an idea or picture in the mind. In each instance the degree of ambiguity of the specification varies inversely with the degree to which there is a common understanding between consumer and producer. This fact is mighty significant from the viewpoint of quality engineering in that the progress which it is feasible to make in fitting the quality of product

to the wants of the consumer must necessarily depend to a large extent upon the commonness of the pictures in the minds of producer and consumer. More specifically, it must depend upon the growth of the ability of the consumer and the producer to communicate one with another in a way that will continue to decrease the occasion for ambiguity and vagueness of meaning of the specifications considered as symbols.

W. A. SHEWHART

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W. A. SHEWHART'S COLLECTION