

QUALITY IS A LINK BETWEEN ALL OF US

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When I started my career in Quality at L'Oréal, Quality was compliance: spec, norms, ISO 9000, processes ... and when non-conformities happened, where detected, correctives actions were put in place so that it never happens again.

And then step by step, we moved into what is called preventative actions were even without any issue, we detected risks and put in place actions to avoid that nonconformities even happen.

And then I got a click when I was plant manager in Montréal. For my introduction as a new plant manager, I was in an introductory meeting in front of all the workforce of the plant, the 3 shifts together.

And I got the following question:

- "Mister Wolff, what is the most important for you: quality, safety or production?"

... and I said without having really prepared my mind for such an answer:

- "Without quality, nobody will buy our products ; and we will close the plants ; without safety nobody will come to work in our plant and we will close ; and without production of course, no plant, but also no quality for our consumers and no safety for our employees "

And I deeply felt that there is a link!

After a few weeks as plant manager, you can immediately see that people working in a production plant do not make Quality on Monday, Safety on Tuesday, and Production on Wednesday. They do everything at each second of their work.

So there is a link!

But more than just these examples, a little too simplistic, but real examples, what it is, what is this link about? I made up my mind on this during my different positions in L'Oréal.

QUALITY IS A LINK BETWEEN ALL PERFORMANCE LEVERS

The first important link I would like to speak about is the link between Quality and all performance levers. A link firstly because all dimensions of performance are linked together with Quality.

When I moved to a Corporate function in charge of manufacturing at L'Oréal, we had a big company project which is to gain 1 billion new consumers. And we had to prepare the impact on our production value chain and specifically on our production capacity worldwide. We had about 40 manufacturing plants that time producing 5 billion products for roughly 1 billion consumers. Easy mathematics show that to get another billion consumers, producing another 5 billion products would lead to build another 40 plants which quickly was a dead-end road for technical and economic feasibility reasons.

We therefore looked on how to improve our uptime ratios and productivity in our plants, using all common continuous improvement methods (lean manufacturing, 6 sigma, TPM, WCOM ...) used in other industries but not so much at that time in the cosmetic industry. We saw that, through a bottom up approach involving all shop floor people, that all these methods can be applied similarly to all dimensions of performance: quality of course but also losses, safety, ergonomics, productivity, uptime ratios ...

On a production line using these tools to improve the uptime ratio, during the first 3 to 6 months, all mechanical issues, all technical recurrent problems are going to be solved. But after that period, it is where the magic of these tools appears. People, when their equipment runs with high uptime ratio, start to speak about product conception, quality issue, losses, ergonomics always to improve their equipment outcome but also their day to day well-being on their equipment.

People on the shopfloor demonstrated, to me at least, that all performance levers are linked together through continuous improvements methods used in the field of quality.

Another nice demonstration for me came when I was in charge of the Manufacturing area in a corporate function. We analyzed all our production unit worldwide on 6 main criteria. Quality product compliance KPI and its improvement over 3 years, Safety conventional frequency rate and its improvement over 3 years, and Uptime ratio and its improvement over 3 years. And the correlation we have between all of them was surprisingly almost perfect. Basically, in a production unit, when good and improving in one of these performance areas (Quality, Safety, Equipment performance), the unit was also good and improving on the other areas.

This is a key learning that demonstrates how much all people working in the field of the overall performance are linked through the continuous improvement methodologies used in the field of Quality and are also linked through the results obtained and their improvement.

QUALITY IS A LINK BETWEEN ALL PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE QUALITY CYCLE

In the recent years, all quality organization moved to a more end user consumer centric approach because of the importance of consumer satisfaction of course, but also because of the raising importance of social networks where everyone speaks up about quality of the products used and their experience.

Going into this field of quality as perceived by the end user and the consumer, compliance is no longer enough. When a product is 100% compliant to all quality specifications and nobody buys it, there is still a quality issue. 100% compliance does not mean 100% consumer satisfaction. This does not take anything away from the importance of quality control and the importance of all compliance aspects, but it is no longer enough.

And this new approach leads to a second link related to Quality, the link between all people working in an organization. Because everyone has a role to play in the final user satisfaction which is deeply linked to Quality. Quality leads to credibility that leads after a while to trust. And trust is a hot link between consumer and products and brands.

Quality has been centered for a long time on production, manufacturing plants (from procurement to reception, production and control). This is of course still very important because there are risks in these areas and it is finally these products that consumers will get. In L'Oréal, just as an example we do 100 quality checks in average on a product. This is important and will continue to be.

But to move on further and continue to improve Quality and consumer satisfaction, there is a need to include all steps in what I would call the Quality cycle of a product: definition of needs, conception, scale-up when you are in industrial activities, and then after production, all steps of supplying the products or services up to the consumer. And on the top, you need a close contact with consumers, end users, to get their insights, their feedbacks and also their complains sometimes.

Compliance is no longer enough. Social networks, the power of end users and consumers are paramount. Quality is therefore a responsibility shared inside a group, it becomes even what we call in L'Oréal a core responsibility, if not to say a value. And it needs most of the time also to be brought to external stakeholders, suppliers and distributors, to close to loop.

Quality creates a link between all of us and also between products / brands and consumers. Quality is the link between all of us.

QUALITY AND COLLABORATIVE MINDSET

Because of the link between all in an organization, quality is a game changer for the ones who are able to work in a collaborative way.

Because of the link between all performance dimensions, and because of the link between all actors in this quality cycle from conception to customer satisfaction, I like to say that among different important behaviors that have to be promoted in the field of quality, being able to work together is today a must. Simple problems that we could solve alone are behind us. At the level of performance we are, but also at the level of expectation in the field of quality, we need to work together, share expertise, visions and ideas to get to the solutions.

A collaborative mindset is key for the future. Only collaborative people and teams will succeed. Just to take an example: when you want to tackle the water consumption in our manufacturing plants. In a manufacturing plant, the most important consumption is related to the cleaning of equipment. If you give the problem to solve to a quality team, they would need even more water to clean; if you give it to an environmental function, they would like to move on one batch after the other without cleaning. It is only when you put all these expertise together, that you find new ways of working, new solution to move on with quality, environment, engineering, production plan organization ... and we were able in our plants to decrease by a great amount the water used.

Speaking about Quality being a link between all of us, there are 2 major links:

- Link between all performance levers and therefore all people dealing with performance one way or another
- Link between all players that have a role in the consumer satisfaction throughout the quality cycle

Our founder, Eugène Schueller, 100 years ago, already at that time said: “Entre la qualité et le prix, c'est toujours la qualité qui l'emportera” which means that between quality and price, it is always quality that will prevail.

What I wanted to share with you is my deep belief that Quality is a strong link, a vital link between all of us, between all of us in an organization or in a company, and even extended company when it comes to all stakeholders outside the company, suppliers, distributors.

I would like to finish with a special note to my teams, working in the field of quality everywhere in the world for the satisfaction of our consumers. They are an inspiration, an energy. They are an important link. I would like to thank them deeply from the deep of my heart.

