

Contagious “How” Question

This “How” focus of regulated business fields tends to be contagious when innovation units and established quality units come into contact. In the discussions that will eventually lead to an innovation quality system, the representatives of the innovation unit frequently participate with low enthusiasm, being ill prepared for the upcoming quality show-down. The representatives of the existing quality unit on the other hand, bring along their extensive experience in regulated quality, being conditioned by this background never to ask “Why” or “What” when quality is concerned..

HOW	WHY	WHAT
... many forms to fill?	... fill a form at all? ... not use an alternative?	... is achieved by filling the form? ... is the forms use once filled?
... many signatures?	... is a signature necessary? ... not use an e-signature?	... is the signatures meaning? ... is changed by the signature?
... many copies to archive?	... archive at all? ... not archive electronically?	... is the archives purpose? ... use of the archive is expected?
... many revisions per year?	... run a routine revision? ... not switch to cause driven?	... exactly is revised? ... is the revisions impact?

The final result is frequently a “How” focused innovation quality system, coming into being after weeks of heated “How often” or “How many” discussions. Given the way it was created, the total lack of economic value should not come as a surprise. Even worse, a huge opportunity is missed, since “Why” and “What” questions are not only allowed when dealing with innovation quality, it makes a lot of sense to ask them right from the beginning.

Management Failure

Innovation Unit’s lack of preparation and Quality Unit’s single minded “How” focus are not alone to blame, company management is guilty as well. Asking “Why” (“Why invest in innovation quality at all?”) defines to a certain degree the risk level associated with innovation processes. Asking “What” (“What kind of innovation quality is our objective?”) on the other hand defines to a large degree the amount of resources to be invested in quality.

In most companies, decisions on risks to take and resources to invest are the strictly guarded domain of upper management, far beyond the decision competence of the average project team dealing with innovation quality. As long as clear and reliable risk and investment decisions from management are missing, teams will have to focus on “How”, the only question within their decision competence. Missing management guidance turns innovation quality into a “How” focused exercise that wastes resources, impedes innovation and lacks economic value.

Of course, management is not supposed to address any details which would be quite often beyond their technical competence. However, a clear management commitment and a rational for innovation quality is required as a rule set for those working on the details later on.

„Conditioning.“

„Missed opportunity.“

„Risk and investment - Management decisions.“

A “Why” Definition

Innovation requires periodic management decisions like resources to invest, projects to pursue, projects to terminate and so on. Management demands a reliable and resilient decision basis to avoid low performance and waste of resources due to wrong decisions taken on account of unreliable data.

A “What” Definition

Innovation investments are triggered and guided by ranking all available innovation candidates. Innovation results needs to be precise enough and reliable enough to allow a consistent ranking. All innovation quality activities aiming at precision and reliability have therefore the highest priority.

The Benefit of “Why” and “What”

Most important, asking “Why” and “What” reduces the resource demand of innovation quality systems, since the number of conceivable quality topics can be significantly reduced by smart application of why- and what-filters. Only topics that are important for the innovation process in question will be installed, ideally in a quick and cheap manner.

Quick and cheap is best done by avoiding Tool Mania. More to that in one of the next issues.

*„Focus with “Why”
and “What”.“*