

# **Quality beyond Borders: Dantotsu or How to Achieve Best in Business**

By David Hutchins

Routledge, London 2019, ISBN 978-1-138-56510-4

## **Reviewed for the European Journal of Workplace Innovation**

By Richard Ennals

## Review

This is the ninth book on Quality issues from David Hutchins. It is likely to have a major impact among different communities around the world. Remarkably, Hutchins has innovative arguments for the international communities concerned with Quality (and in particular Quality Circles), Education (and in particular Students' Quality Circles), and Workplace Innovation.

Hutchins knew and worked with the leading Quality Gurus from both the USA and Japan. He is the last one standing (or rather, riding his racing cycle). He opens and ends his book with fresh insights into the fundamental differences between their core messages. From the USA we are told about statistical control and compliance. From Japan, the focus was on empowering workers, respecting their experience and skill, and protecting them from the worst excesses of Taylorist top-down management. We learn new details about post-war relations between the USA and Japan, which have had long consequences. Hutchins brings the strands together, possibly for the first time.

The book is totally lacking in pomposity. There are very few academic references (thus leaving an intriguing challenge for the next generation of researchers), but in the one-page Bibliography we are referred to the Quality Gurus in the sequence in which they are cited in the text. Instead, we hear the consistent voice of a practitioner with long and rich experience, writing for an audience who are themselves engaged in practice. The book is also a handbook for distance learning students of David Hutchins International Quality College, which provides recognised qualifications on Quality Management. When Hutchins talks about "leaders", he does not simply mean "managers".

Different readers will find that "Quality beyond Borders" complements Hutchins' earlier well-regarded book "Hoshin Kanri: The Strategic Approach to Continuous Improvement" (Gower 2008), and the various editions of the book by Dinesh Chapagain "Guide to Students' Quality Circles" (Quest-Nepal 2006, 2013, 2019).

"Quality beyond Borders" is not a work of literature, to be read through once and then put on the shelf. It is intended to be a practical handbook, introducing a wealth of Quality tools and case studies.

For the Quality community, the focus is on workplace practice, rather than on a series of "fads". Hutchins can point to numerous cases where his work has brought dramatic results, but he presents a calm account in terms of common sense, and respect for the skill of workers.

For the Education community, Hutchins explains how he was impressed by seeing the first Students' Quality Circles, which were first presented at conventions 25 years ago, based on the innovative leadership of Jagdish Gandhi and Vineeta Kamran, at the world's largest school, City Montessori School in Lucknow, India. Hutchins and American Quality Guru Donald Dewar encouraged the development of an international movement, co-ordinated through the World Council for Total Quality and Excellence in Education, which has overseen national and international conventions. Students work together to solve practical problems, and present case study accounts.

For the Workplace Innovation community, there has been a growing realisation of the importance of Quality in the search for improved productivity and sustainability. Companies have recognised deficiencies in their procedures and, through organisations such as the European Workplace Innovation Network, have asked for advice on how to proceed. This book is now being recommended.

David Hutchins is a calm and distinctive voice from inside Quality, Education and Workplace Innovation. He does not make grandiose claims, but he "tells it as he sees it".

The implications of Hutchins' work are radical, knocking down the borders between what have been distinct discourses and communities. Quality is shown to be integral to work and the workplace. Education and Working Life are re-envisioned in terms of empowerment. Academic researchers and campaigners for Workplace Innovation may come to realise that their subject is not new after all.

For researchers in the tradition of Socio-Technical Systems Thinking, there may be the recognition that we can understand the differences between the American and Japanese approaches, and that we can learn from those differences. A Quality Circle in a Japanese company has a very different cultural context from one in an American company.

Similar points can be made about Students' Quality Circles. In Nepal, Quest-Nepal has built a formidable national movement, with an extraordinary system of concurrent conventions across the country. As attention turns to the need for Workplace Innovation in Nepal, it is argued that a lead can come from the experience of SQCs in Education. As for changing the workplace and the economy, Quest-Nepal declare "Together We Can".

The book should be widely read in industry, education and governments. As Hutchins intended, "Quality beyond Borders" should be used as a handbook for continuous improvement.

### **About the author**

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