

## Discussion Forum

# The Quality Coffee Shop

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The current global Covid-19 pandemic has brought great challenges across the world. It has also opened up unique opportunities. These are being explored by a number of groups, such as Fresh Thinking Labs, working in association with the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN). We need to identify and disseminate examples of good practice.

“Virtual coffee drinkers” around the world, who are now all locked down in their homes for an indefinite period, have been able to visit “The Quality Coffee Shop”, operating online on each weekday. Our Host and Barista is David Hutchins, Principal of DHI Quality College (Hutchins, 2008, 2019). Over a long career with industry, Hutchins worked with the great Quality Gurus such as Dr Juran and Dr Ishikawa, and he has an unrivalled stock of anecdotes and videos. Each of our daily sessions, using Zoom video conferencing, is rapidly edited into a video, available free on Vimeo.

The Quality Coffee Shop is a twenty-first century version of a seventeenth century London coffee house, with a virtual backdrop of a shop front on screen. The free of charge cup of virtual coffee provides access to a potential new “Penny University”, a rich resource of practical knowledge, and provides a context for participation in active project work. Three break-out groups have concentrated on virtual companies: a company making Personal Protective Equipment, a School, and a Coffee Shop. Taking principles set out in presentations by Hutchins, participants have worked hard in daily sessions and in homework. Group leaders have been Stephen Coles, Winston Brown and Chukwudi Ononogbu.

Most of the virtual drinkers have not met physically. They have come together as a new ad hoc open access international Community of Practice, sharing experience and concerns, relating closely to Workplace Innovation. Typically, about 12-15 participants attend each day. There is a core of Quality professionals based in the UK, and a committed group from Nepal, who are largely associated with the NGO Quest-Nepal.

In Nepal there is a unique national movement of Students’ Quality Circles, founded by Professor Dinesh Chapagain (Chapagain, 2019), operating across the country, with training

and conventions organised at regional level. They have achieved official government recognition. On the other hand, the Nepali economy remains in need of development, and there should be potential for new Quality Circles in workplaces, and a comparable national movement. There has been active implementation and exploration of Students Quality Circle in Nepali schools since 2000, under the leadership of Chapagain. The main objective behind implementing SQCs was to contribute towards the development of each participating student into a “Total Quality Person” (TQP), who is “both smart as well as good in nature” and is ready to collaborate to work for the betterment of society. Quality Circles were introduced in the beginning of 1980’s (Hutchins, 2008, 2019) and have been linked with several positive organisational outcomes and success worldwide (Barrick & Alexander, 1987; Upadhyay, 2011; Aslam & Haroon, 2017). Similarly, the Quality Circle concept was initiated in one Nepali organisation, Surya Nepal, but could not survive (Dinesh Chapagain, personal communication, January 16th, 2019) leading towards the realisation that it is extremely difficult to change the behaviour of grown adults. Quality Circles were introduced in the educational sector, keeping in mind that the students’ behaviour can be changed when they are young, by using different behaviour modeling techniques. (Chapagain, 2019). The educational institutions were chosen to implement SQC as an innovative intervention for developing students’ personalities when they are young.

If we look into the present growth of SQC in Nepal, up to now approximately 70,000 students have received SQC training (Chapagain, 2019). Many Private and Public schools in Nepal have been actively involved in implementing SQC in their respective environments, creating a huge movement in Nepal through SQC by keeping in mind the important role of participation and empowerment. SQC’s have been adapted from the Quality Control Circle concept, exercised in an industrial setting (Chapagain, 2019). The implementation of the Quality Circle concept in an industrial setting still remains largely unexplored in Nepal, further highlighting the need to implement Quality Circles in Nepali organisational settings, in order to create an environment of continuous improvement and learning culture.

As Hutchins has reported at the Quality Coffee Shop, when he speaks at major Quality conferences in Japan, he is usually the only British European speaker, and North Americans have been conspicuous by their absence. He has outlined the different perspectives: the American emphasis is on Compliance, while the Japanese focus has been on Empowerment. In the UK, there can be a tendency to assume that because the debate on Quality tends to be conducted in English, it is merely a matter of common sense. “No Quality Please, We’re British” (Cox & Ennals, 1998). This is a dangerous mistake, as we see the UK struggling with declining productivity.

The Quality Coffee Shop should be seen as an Action Research intervention. It will continue at least as long as the international emergency and lockdown. The agenda is, and will continue to be, driven by the growing group of virtual drinkers. Even with social distancing, there is plenty of room inside! For a Zoom invitation, contact [david@hutchins.co.uk](mailto:david@hutchins.co.uk)