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Interview with Hitoshi Kume

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Hitoshi Kume

(Interviewed on 17 March 1992, Tokyo, Japan)

Video Roll # 11

Q: Dr. Kume, would you begin by spelling your name in English?

KUME: Kume. H-I- T-O-S-H-I K-U-M-E.

Q: And your title, please, your position here at the University.

KUME: Professor. Capacity of engineering. The University of Tokyo.

Q: Thank you. As you know, we would like to discuss three areas with you.

KUME: Okay.

Q: The first is the Japanese quality revolution. Why are Japan's quality efforts so very successful?

(OFF CAMERA DISCUSSION)

KUME: I think there are two points that I should mention. One is the fact that Japan is a resource poor nation. Therefore, Japan has always had to live by manufacturing

industrial products and export them. And that's the only way that Japan could survive by importing food and resources.

Therefore, Japan has always had to live by industry and industrial manufacturing was a must for Japan for survival of Japan. And I think that's the first reason I should mention.

And the second point is this: the quality control, in the post-war period, it is the quality control that Japan has learned from the United States. As for the United States, the quality control was initiated by the U.S. military, from the buyers' perspective. And Japan, on the other hand, started from the sellers' perspective in order to sell quality products, in order to sell more.

So I think the initiation point and incentive was quite different.

Q: What role, what part did Japanese leadership -- the senior managers of companies -- play in helping to launch, to take the first step in this quality revolution?

KUME: First of all, in those days, the Japanese management -- they would say still some Japanese management are like that. But I think that one characteristic is that they had a strong loyalty to the company. They want to do so much for their company. And that's one incentive.

And the other motivation is that they had a lot of motivation to self development, and self educate themselves. So they wanted to educate them, by all means.

Q: We are now 40 years into your quality revolution; 40 years later. Knowing what you have learned now, what things might Japan and Japanese managers have done differently than they did?

KUME: I'm not quite sure if I understand the intent of the question.

I've never even given thought to that. Therefore, I'm not sure if I can clarify in my response.

*Q: Let me ask in a different way: we're now looking for many things. But now that you look back, experience is a wonderful teacher; experience shows you the road; it's easy to see the road once you've driven it. What turns off that road of quality might Japan have made **if** you hadn't turned wrong off onto another road you would have gotten here faster or more easily?*

KUME: I think it is based on what you think about the quality control, the perception of quality control. It is not magic, by all means. It is something that you must do, direct thing, direct way. Open sesame and the treasure is there. That's not the concept of quality control.

But rather the quality control is something that should be implemented by the manager and by the people on the floor. The right way, the right time, the right thing, within the organization. That's the only way you can do it the right way.

Q: In the next ten years from now, what will distinguish the excellent companies from the companies that are only good, or satisfactory?

KUME: In a company management, what is important is the new product development and new technology development and evolution, to match the changing pace of the society. And always a quick response is very important. To

respond to the technological change and develop new products.

But quality must come first. And those companies that can do it are called the excellent companies.

Q: What are the most significant new learnings about what brings success in quality?

KUME: As I said before, what you must do, must be done in the right way, and always must be done in the right way. And that type of steady efforts in the long run brings about success. Therefore, the short-term perspective, or short-term pursuit of short-term profit is not good.

Always grasp what are required by the customers and always try to match their requirements and bring them quality. And such steady efforts would bring about a long-term success for the companies. And I believe that is what I have learned throughout the process and history of Japan.

Q: What are the major differences between quality in Japan and quality in the United States?

KUME: The quality control in Japan and in the United States is quite diverse. And, therefore, it's very difficult to say what is black and what is white. It's easily distinguishable. In Japan there is different types of quality control. Some are superior and some are more inferior than that of the United States. So it varies.

When I visit the United States, I often notice this. Perhaps the Americans are not so concerned, so much

concerned about the customers, but rather they are more or less self-centered. That's my impression of the times.

But recently, the Malcolm Baldrige Award indicates the recognition on the customer satisfaction and quality control. So I think that's changing. But, in the past, the Americans were not so concerned about the customers. But recently, perhaps, it's changing.

But, of course, again, there are different types of companies and always exceptions. But, in general, I think, that's what I think.

Q: May we look now at Dr. Juran, and to his contributions. What are the key lessons that Dr. Juran has brought to Japan on the subject of quality?

KUME: Dr. Juran has given a great impact and effect on Japanese management. The quality management, so called, is imperative part, integral part of management. That is the biggest lesson he taught the Japanese management.

Back in those days, the quantity ... important than quality. The comfort (?) was more important. So the quality control was understood as simply the inspection. But inspection is only a small part of quality control.

So quality management and quality control, as part of it, he taught the Japanese management. And that had to be introduced in management as an essential part of management. That's what he has taught the Japanese management. And we owe so much to Dr. Juran for that.

Q: How have Dr. Juran's teachings been used day to day by Japanese companies?

KUME: I personally feel that the Juran Spiral -- so called -- is something that I respect so much. And Deming Loop is another concept. And I think that's the basis of Japanese quality control. The so called deployment concept has a foundation of the so-called spiral concept developed by Dr. Juran.

Q: What is your personal experience with Dr. Juran?

KUME: I met with Dr. Juran for the first time in 1969, during the first International Conference for Quality Control in Japan. And since then, I've had the pleasure of meeting with him several times.

What I remember vividly about Dr. Juran is his so-called the ethic proceedings. He has read from the first page to the last page in the conference. And I also submitted some papers. And Dr. Juran has given me some critical and precise comments to my papers presented to the conference.

I was a very young scholar then, and I never even imagined that my papers will be read by a great scholar like Dr. Juran. I remember he read my papers and not only that, he's giving me such precise comments. And I was so much impressed and touched by Dr. Juran's as a person.

And, since then, I have the pleasure of speaking with him and meeting with him in different occasions.

In San Francisco recently, the quality control convention was held, and I also had the pleasure of meeting with Dr. Juran and had a meal together. And we had a heated discussion about the Chinese quality control. And I had a great time. About the standardization process in China, we talked about. And that goes back to historical research of Dr. Juran. And he's asked for my comments.

Q: How did you first become involved in the subject of quality?

KUME: Myself and the engineering department of Tokyo University where I belong, we require the fourth year students to engage in the research before graduation. And each student must select a professor under whom each student should work on his research before graduation. That's called graduation research.

And back in those days, there was a professor called Kawodo Ishikawa, Professor Kawodo Ishikawa. And at that time, I wasn't too much aware of quality control, but I happened to be able to have an opportunity to research under Professor Ishikawa.

And he took me to a manufacturing facility where they manufactured the glass windows for the automobiles. And they were practicing quality control more than 30 years ago. That's when I was a fourth year student at the University of Tokyo. And since then, I've been under Dr. Ishikawa's guidance.

Q: The quality revolution happened in Japan as it has in no other country, including America, even though Dr. Juran and Dr. Deming both came from America. As someone who has studied the subject, why has the quality revolution taken hold? Why did it take hold in Japan more than it did in America?

KUME: For one thing, the quality control in Japan was practiced in such an open manner. In other words, there were different ways of practicing quality control, and there were

many opportunities for the companies to present their way of quality control -- how they practiced it.

And they presented their way everyone. Therefore, it was quite transparent -- there was no secrecy there. And they were able to mutually stimulate each other and enlighten each other and educate each other for quality control improvement.

And that was their way of doing so in Japan. And we, the people in the academia, were able to learn about quality control in the corporations and then that was transmitted to other corporations. Therefore, there was a close linkage and a mutual enlightening process between the universities and the corporations.

That's the way it would mutually improve quality control. And if the secrecy was there, then that means that the development would stop right there in just one company -- as far as quality control is concerned. But that wasn't the case in Japan.

Often this question is asked us, the secret of success in Japan. I always point out the fact that mutual cultivation and mutual educational process was present in Japan. I always say that was the secret of success.

And also, Dr. Ishikawa had the organizing power to enhance that concept.

Q: But Dr. Juran and Dr. Deming said the same things and published the same books in America that they did here in Japan. Japan listened; the United States, in 1950, didn't even listen. Why?

KUME: Back in 1950, in those days, to be frank with you, Japan was simply lagging behind. And not just a little, but lagging behind. And there was a great gap between

Japan and the Western nations. Therefore, the best way for Japan to shrink the distance was to learn, ardently, and, therefore, Japanese were industrious students, because they had to learn.

And like the students, if they get better, they tend not to listen to the professors. But the Japanese had to listen because they were lagging behind. Now, the Japanese students don't really listen so much to the professors.

Q: That is a very interesting observation. Are things different today in Japan? In 1950, Japan was in crisis, and America was not. Today America is in crisis, and Japan is not. What's going to happen in the world in the next several years?

KUME: I would say this: the history, there is ups and downs, always in history. That's the fact of history. And when there is prosperity, that's bound to subside. And then, after they make efforts, then they again begin to enjoy the prosperity.

So Japan is amidst a prosperity, but I don't know how long it's going to last. Unless Japan would endeavor to sustain its prosperity, it's going to face the valley.

As for the Americans, as far as the ones I know, many American management is endeavoring to re-emphasize quality control. So I have the optimism vis-a-vis the American corporations, because of their perspective.

So they're concerned about quality control. And if they make efforts -- put into action -- ~~will~~ sure that they are going to enjoy the benefits. Because the quality control, it's something if you do, are you going to gain the benefit. I'm

not sure if that's going to apply to ... But at least companies that are willing to make efforts are going to succeed.

Q: Japan has lived the life of quality, quality control, for 40 years. The United States, three years, five years. Japan is like the father; we are like the children. What can the children in America learn from the father here in Japan about quality?

KUME: Forty years ago, Japan was the children and America was the father. And we, the children, learned from America, the father. A lot of things we learned.

And I don't think it's fair to say that U.S. is so much lagging behind in every sense. I don't think that's fair to say. For instance, space industry, space science, software industry, and service industry, part of service industry. In those areas of industry, I would believe that U.S. is ahead of us, and quite advanced.

So I don't think it's fair to say that America is always children in every way.

Q: But in America, the U.S., when we say Japan! We make excuses to ourselves. We say, oh, tariffs, laws, workers don't earn as much, they work longer. The cultures. Are the cultures among workers different in Japan and America? Does the U.S. work differently than you?

KUME: Whether it's value to say that or not, that is questionable. Many people say that, the cultures are different. People work hard. If they believe that they're going to be recognized for their hard work, I'm sure that any people would try to work hard and be motivated and if they'll

be able to share the outcome of their efforts, they'll be more motivated.

The Deming Award judgment was given in Florida, back in -- in those days, they presented excellent ideas and I realize that ... was applicable in Japan, was also applicable in the United States. The quality progress is something that is enjoyed by everyone.

Q: The video that we're making of Dr. Juran is like a portrait, painted by many artists with many brushes. Tell us about your portrait of Dr. Juran.

KUME: I am not quite sure if I got the question.

Dr. Juran is a person of believe of the philosophy and he's even more hard-working than Japanese, as I mentioned. A big, thick proceedings. He sacrificed all the weekends and read it through. And just regular people wouldn't do it. And he consistently published various writings.

In viewing the aspects, it's not just Japan or U.S., but one leading scholar, or pioneer, in this field, and I respect him.

Q: When both of us are 150 years old, we will look back in books and read. What did Dr. Juran do for the Japanese economy and for Japanese companies? What will the history books in Japan say about what Dr. Juran did for this country?

KUME: These are the quality management was promoted to the Japanese management and he talked about it so clearly and precisely, and he impressed the management and motivated -- the quality management and the Japanese management.

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Dr. Juran and Dr. Deming, these two were the ones who contributed mostly to Japan. Dr. Deming was strong in statistical aspect. In terms of management, Dr. Juran was the person who contributed most.

Q: In the United States, there is much confusion -- Dr. Deming, Dr. Juran. They're almost seen as the same person. Even among many people in business. This video will be seen by business people and my wife, who doesn't know anything. Could you explain for my wife what did Dr. Deming do -- what is statistical process control and how it's used? And what did Dr. Juran do, and how were his teachings used?

KUME: Regarding Dr. Deming, he is known for the Deming Prize. At the beginning, the statistical method was viewed quite important.

And then we went to TQC. Of course, the statistics are quite important, but also we put more emphasis on management. At that time, we come to Dr. Juran and learnings from him. And it became more important.

Dr. Deming, Dr. Juran, they're not teaching different things to us. Basically, their purpose was to create or manufacture good products, so they're not different.

(END OF TAPE NUMBER ELEVEN)

Hitoshi Kume

Video Roll #12

Q: -- in books, and his accomplishments. But what should his great grandchildren know about Joseph Juran?

KUME: It's quite difficult question to answer because, first, you need to understand the quality management and what it's all about. Otherwise, it's difficult to understand what Dr. Juran did. We have Nobel Prize, so getting Nobel Prize is indeed great. However, what did Nobel do; not many people know about him or his accomplishment.

So Dr. Juran was a great motivation to Japanese ... themselves quality management. However, if someone doesn't understand quality control, it's difficult.

Q: Dr. Juran's grandchildren may not have any understanding at all about quality control. But they understand that they had a man who was a great grandfather. What would you like to tell his great grandchildren?

KUME: Not only for Japan, but for the world, he was the pioneer, in terms of quality management. That's how I will explain about him. Then, what is quality management? If someone doesn't understand that, it's difficult to understand his accomplishment in quality -- like the Nobel Prize recipient.

He understands that he was really awarded, but his accomplishment may not be fully understood by laymen. So

it's difficult to explain the truth of it, or quintessential to the children.

Q: But while we may not understand quality management as a process or a method, our lives, how we live every day, the products we use, are different, somehow. How are all of our lives different because Joseph Juran taught in Japan, taught in the u.s.?

KUME: I don't quite understand.

The real persons who understand Dr. Juran and his concepts are the ones who are deeply involved. Like my wife, she has met him, and she knows him, but not many people know about him. He has left a great contribution. However, quality control is not something really exciting or eye-catching, but its steady effort.

Therefore, his are not the type of work that will be popular. And that's one of the great things about Dr. Juran.

Q: Are cars different and better because of Dr. Juran? Is auto glass better? The electronics better because Dr. Juran taught?

KUME: I beg your pardon?

Of course, it's not only because of Dr. Juran. Because even though someone here could ... , he has to take an action. So upon Dr. Juran's extraction, many people made the great efforts, and we have to evaluate those efforts, too.

There are many people who know the theories, and talk about theories. But they have to take action. And the degree of action and efforts determine the quality.

Q: In America, there seems to be as companies become involved in TQC, there's a small number of people who have

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great enthusiasm and knowledge. There is always difficulty in expanding from the small number of people to the entire workforce, everyone. What have the most successful Japanese companies done to get everyone involved?

KUME: Basically, this is what Professor Ishikawa said. QC starts from education and ends at education. Therefore, good education should be given to the employees, managers, or the owners.

And among Japanese companies, some people are against the promotion of QC -- like one-third are deeply involved, one-third they're not much interested, one-third, no comment, they're not clear about their intention.

Therefore, continuation is the key, in a sense. Continuity is essential. It's easy to start, but it's difficult to continue.

Q: Japan has sustained an effort for 40 years. In the U.S., people lose interest after one year or two years, the efforts fall apart. What is the secret to sustaining the effort?

KUME: Juran's Spiral. And that idea was deeply understood. Because of that, we sustain the effort.

I sometimes think that the culture -- hunting and farming societies we talk about. Hunting society -- at a chance, they jump on. If there is a prey, and then will make sole efforts to hunt it. However, in farming society, they cultivate farms and yards, and that sustained effort brings fruits.

In Japan, we had basically the farming society. And the concept of QC matched the style. Of course, in the U.S., they are farming, but in terms of the origin, from Europe they went for the Gold Rush, in a sense, maybe, some of them. So maybe it's different.

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It's only a hypothesis that I entertain. I'd rather listen to Americans about it. I'd like to learn from them.

Q: In America, we think everyone in Japan is magic, quality. After 40 years of practicing quality methods, what things still frustrate the Japanese, that you have still not been able to do in quality?

KUME: Understanding of QC is still lacking. When the management party changes, some of the activities may decline, which was continued for a long time. And I think it's such a waste -- it's too bad.

So the importance of quality control must be even more clearly understood by the management and the employees. You might have an impression that Japan is perfect in terms of quality control, but that's the wrong perception. If we stop some efforts that declines.

Q: You said that you liked to study the Americans. What do you study of Americans? Since you seem to be doing so many things so much better.

KUME: Instead of talking about what we can learn, but rather the quality control is one type of management methodology. And whether it is the methodology that can be applicable only in Japan or not, that is one big issue.

And I don't think it's applicable only in Japan. And if some people say it's not applicable in the United States, we should try to find out why. I don't believe that's true, though. But if you think it's true, then you should try to find out why it's not applicable in the United States.

And by developing better insight into that, I believe that quality control, per se, would improve in quality and also the

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content of it is going to be more easily understood. And I don't think that it's really so different, about those two countries.

Q: Many people have told us that Dr. Juran has a wonderful humor.

KUME: Uhm, humor.

Q: Can you tell us about Dr. Juran's humor?

KUME: I'm sorry, but I don't really have much recollection about that. I do remember that he made me laugh, but because of my limited English proficiency, I don't have a good memory of what he exactly said.

Q: Years from now, you'll think about Dr. Juran. Is there a time or an incident or an activity that you will always carry with you when you think of Dr. Juran?

KUME: As I mentioned before, he has always been very serious, industrious, and he has been always impressing me as a hard worker. And I'm sure that's what I would think of him always.

Q: To this day, when people reach his age, many people fish, play golf, dig in the garden. Dr. Juran is busy writing, typing. What keeps Dr. Juran so busy? Why does he not stop?

KUME: I don't think it's something that I should respond to. But rather Dr. Juran, himself, should respond to that question. But I think that same thing can be said about my

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teacher, Dr. Ishikawa, Kawodo Ishikawa. They share similar traits. They're both -- Dr. Ishikawa and Dr. Juran are both hard workers.

The difference is that Dr. Juran didn't drink so much, not as much as Dr. Ishikawa. And that's the only one distinguishable characteristic. But both professors have worked so hard, all their lives, for quality control.

Q: What have we not spoken about Dr. Juran? Anything you would like to say about Dr. Juran.

KUME: I would say that the more you get to know Dr. Juran, you find more about him. He had bow tie and he had some mustache. And, at first, I felt that he was not easily approachable. But then, as I got to know him, I found out he had a great sense of humor and a warm personality.

And I came to feel very close to him. And that's how I feel about him now.

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