

## WHY DO I DO WHAT I DO ?

While discharging cargo from a vessel, few Hatch Tally Clerks, at crane hook point on quay fill in a Hatch Tally sheet describing what cargo came out of what hatch. Upon discharging at quay, Cargo is then stored in different sheds & another Tally sheet called Receive Tally sheet gets generated in the shed. Both the Tally sheets contain similar information like Quantities & type of cargo. The information between the two tally sheets is tallied. This process is so error prone that details rarely tallies, defeating the very purpose of the title " The Tally sheet ".

When the General Cargo Supervisor was asked Why do you have to prepare 2 different Tally sheets when one can do. His reply was " It's been going on for the last 15 years ".

In an oil refinery , while analysing & reengineering the Tank Wagon Loading & despatch process, it emerged that a 72 wagon load rake (train) containing half a million dollars worth of Petrol, Diesel & Kerosene has to cross three refinery gates before it can be handed over to Railways for onward movement to customers. This was one of the main reasons for time lost in waiting. When asked why do you need three security gates to prevent theft – team answered - it is the requirement of Industrial Security Forces department ( an independent agency to prevent pilferage & theft ). When Assistant Commandant of Industrial Security Forces was contacted his reply was that it is none of their requirement & these are all refinery gates. They only man it.

A dusty corner in a shed is earmarked as " Records ". It contains about 20 different types of records, each religiously maintained for 5 to 7 years. Some of the records maintained are like Manifest from agents, Extra Work report, Empty container removal advice, items auctioned, cargo location book, employee attendance punch cards etc.

When the Shed Incharge was asked why do you keep all the records for 5 –7 years, his reply was " just in case ". That is just in case Internal financial Auditors or Courts or Management or Customers ask for it & we should have it. When probed further it became clear that usually there are only 5-8 enquiries a year & that too pertaining to Receipt or Delivery of cargo of not more than 2-3 years old. When asked then why do you keep ALL the records for 5-7 years. Answer was nobody has asked us to remove / destroy the records. There are also situations where after 7 years some records are not destroyed , but archived in another " safe " location. For some records retention period of even 3 months was more than enough as compared to 7 years being maintained.

For delivery of cargo to customer one port uses Issue Tally Sheet & other port belonging to the same company & located within few miles of each other , uses

Delivery Tally Sheet. Purpose of both the Tally sheets is same – to deliver cargo to customer. Formats of both the Tally sheets are different. When the concerned Assistant Manager was asked why both are different, – his reply was we never thought about it & moreover how does it matter. It is not important. When Tally clerks were asked as to does it matter to have different formats reply was " Yes it does matter. When we are transferred from one port to another, initially they find it difficult to adjust & take some time ".

I can go on & on with such examples. Behind all these examples, there is one common fundamental issue – Paradigm of basic assumptions & beliefs among people of doing a particular job in a particular way & not to question it, even though technology, policies, rules, customer requirements, people , times - just about everything has changed, ***except the way we do things here***. The " taken for granted " view. The Existing Mindset.

To improve work, there are many useful tools like 7 QC tools, Statistical Process Control, Reengineering, etc. While reading books on Reengineering by Michael Hammer & James Champy. I learnt two simple & very powerful questions

"WHY DO YOU DO WHAT YOU DO ?" &

" WHY DO YOU DO THE WAY YOU DO ?"

I learnt to use these questions effectively while facilitating workshops on Process Reengineering, conducting meetings, in daily routine work , wherever I sensed an opportunity to improve the work or felt it important to ask.

Having the courage to ask these simple questions is what is needed. Not only to others but to yourself too. Answers to these questions open up a whole lot of improvement opportunities - some incremental some transformational. It can even fundamentally shift the existing paradigm & take us to a totally new paradigm.

You may like to know what happened to Tally sheets or Tank wagon loading process or records & what opportunities it provided. I will be brief here. Preparation of Hatch Tally sheet was immediately withdrawn resulting in saving of more than US \$ 600000 annually on a recurring basis, improving productivity of discharging cargo thereby improving vessel turn around time at berth & above all bringing in accuracy of records.

For Tank Wagon loading & distribution process 2 out of the 3 security gates were removed within few weeks of discussions. It radically reduced the waiting times of rakes ( trains) at gates, brought in huge savings in demurrage bills, faster turn around times of locomotives & wagons, release of Industrial Security personnel, & above all faster deliveries to customers.

Except for couple of important records retention periods for most of the records were radically reduced. This pioneering initiative by one department set an example & the success story was repeated in other department. Apart from creating lot of office space & better management of space, success story will be further used to spearhead better records management. Better records management also helped immensely to change the existing paradigm that ISO : 9000 produces records , records & only records.

Above examples do not necessarily radically transform the business, but it surely demonstrates the power of questioning the routine. All this happened because somebody had the courage to ask this simple ( may be foolish sounding ) question & blast the deeply rooted & strongly held existing paradigm. Questioning the generally accepted set of routines & basic assumptions, helps in changing the mindset of people.

Among the employees, there is a need to cultivate the practice of questioning the fundamentals. As more & more people start challenging the routines, rituals, systems, policies, procedures, etc. change can gradually become a way of life in the organisation, a second nature & eventually it can trigger the cultural change process. This approach is generic & is applicable in any kind of business.

To close let me share a reply from late Dr. W. Edwards Deming. When he was asked what is his secret of success ? He replied " I ask the right question, I listen & I know the answer. The more I dwell on it the more I realise what wonders can this simple approach of asking the right question can bring & begin the change process.

**By**

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