QM&T August 2003 Newsletter

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QM&T's Web Based Forum for Students

QM&T are pleased to announce an additional facility for students to communicate with fellow students. The web-based forum will enable them to discuss problems and concerns and assist them in their courses they have undertaken. To access this site you would need to login and register on the QM&T's website, and by using your password you can then enter the forum. http://www.qmt.co.uk/discussion/qmt_discussion_web/index.htm. However, if students have a specific problem relating to their course, and they need tutor response, they should contact help@qmt.co.uk

Six Sigma to Help Trains Run on Time

According to a news article in the Times newspaper, Network Rail will be adopting the Six Sigma technique to try to make the trains run on time. The Six Sigma technique is a statistical analysis technique used to improve business performance. This technique will be used in five problem areas – points, signals, track circuits, operations and autumn readiness, allowing Network Rail to understand the root causes of the equipment and management failures that cause delays. This should help them to understand why things go wrong and move towards preventive action using the Six Sigma approach. The technique encourages managers to analyse each business process to determine the time required, the resources used, quality and cost.

The Six Sigma concept was originated by Motorola in the late 1980's. It enabled them to become one of the first winners of the prestigious 'Baldrige Award for Quality'. Other star performers such as GE Allied Signal, Navistar, Polaroid, Bombardier also developed Six Sigma programmes. Six Sigma has different levels of progression, with practitioners graduating from yellow belt to green, black and master black belts before becoming "Champions". The Six Sigma goal is to reduce defects to just 3.4 in every 1 million opportunities, which is better than a 99.9% success rate. According to this report, last year only 79% of British trains ran on time and by using Six Sigma it is hoped to reduce the delays by almost 50%. If you would like more information on Six Sigma programmes, please visit http://www.sigma-6.co.uk

Root Cause Analysis

Recently QM&T have embarked on a number of Root Cause Analysis (RCA) courses with various clients and the approach has been to run a RCA course but with the following unique additions.

- Pre-course work was set.
- Rather than using preset exercises it focused on delegate's own "opportunities for improvements", subsequently delegates were required to complete their own RCA with their specific Problems
- E-mail support was provided by QM&T's team of experienced RCA professionals. Certificates were awarded when delegates had satisfactorily completed their exercises.

There were some key areas of concern with this approach.

- Would the delegates do their own RCA–resourcing issues
- Would the RCA performed be of value?
- Would the problems and solutions be trivial?

In all cases these concerns were misplaced. The delegates appeared to get charged up and motivated to accomplish their own RCA and resourcing didn't become an issue. For more information please visit http://www.root-cause-analysis.co.uk

Internet Security

In a recent article in the Guardian newspaper, it was reported that ready-made code to bring down Cisco Systems' networking hardware has been made available on the Internet, just a few hours after its vulnerability was reported. Cisco discovered there was a flaw in its Internetworking Operating System (IOS). When the hardware is flooded with data, it stops working and needs to be rebooted, so a widescale attack could take a network down for many hours. A major part of the Internet is powered by Cisco hardware, so it needs to be resolved very quickly. For more information on the international Security Standard, ISO 17799 please visit QM&T's website www.qmt.co.uk

Chemical Disaster - Unacceptable Risk

According to an environmental watchdog, the UK's system for regulating synthetic chemicals amounts to a "gigantic experiment with all living things". The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) believes that the system fails to protect human health and the environment. The RCEP wants a check to evaluate chemicals within three years. Concerns are over approximately 30,000 chemicals used in the European Union which have not been comprehensively tested for any risks to people and the environment. The current rate of assessment would take a very long time to carry out. The European Commission has proposed a new way of assessing and managing these chemical risks, Reach - Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of

Chemicals. The system would give all 30,000 chemicals a quick check within three years. It would assess their toxicity, how long they lasted in the environment before they were broken down, and their tendency to accumulate in the bodies of animals. It would involve putting basic information about each chemical on a list publicly available on the Internet. The system would use computer-based molecular modelling to screen them, and computers to search the scientific literature. The commission says it expects most chemicals would be judged to be of no particular concern. However, a few hundred, and possibly more than a thousand, would be selected as high, medium or low concern and then assessed more thoroughly, with their use restricted or possibly banned in the meantime. There would be charges for using any of them, to pay for the new regulatory system and to encourage the use of less risky substances. A new chemicals safety co-ordination unit within the Environment Agency would oversee the new system. For more information please see BBC news.

ISO/IEC 15288 System engineering – System Life Cycle Processes

Is this standard set to have the same impact on businesses as ISO9001?

The standard contains a range of generic processes for the management of all stages in the life of any product or service in any sector. Stuart Arnold, who edited the standard, says, "It enables organizations to handle the complexity of present day products and services. It fits well with basic business practices and with quality management practice already in place. It offers a route for business improvements that will become necessary as technology offers fresh opportunities and customers demand products with better performance and services that better meet their needs"

He expects that in the future the approaches described in the standard will become part of standard business practice across all industries and sectors.

Software Compliance Ignored

According to a recent survey on software compliance it was claimed that over half of the technology professionals interviewed admitted that their company does not have a formal programme in place. Vector Networks, who conducted the survey, explained that businesses are concerned about the cost of implementing software compliance programmes and the lack of visible return on investment. The Federation Against Software Theft (Fast) has warned that by not running a compliance programme, IT departments are missing out on the opportunity to save large amounts of their IT budget. They are also leaving themselves open to fines for software piracy. Separate research conducted by analyst Aberdeen Group found that most large enterprises own approximately a third more IT related software and equipment than they believe they have or can account for. It was suggested that software providers should help users with the compliance issue by developing auditing capabilities in their products to make it easier for companies to track what they use. For more information please visit www.itweek.co.uk

Mobiles to Save Disaster Victims

It has been recently reported that mobile phones could soon help the emergency services rescue people caught in disasters such as an avalanche or an earthquake. Scientists from Toshiba's research labs in Bristol are developing a system that will make all mobile phones in a disaster area send out an alarm tone to help locate their owner. A beeping handset could lead rescue workers to people buried under snow or trapped inside a collapsed building. The ideas came from a snowboarding trip that got researchers thinking about a rescue system. For more information please see BBC news.

On-Line Music Piracy

The US record industry is planning to sue people who swap music over the Internet. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) will be gathering evidence against users of "peer-to-peer" software such as Kazaa, and file £90,000 lawsuits against them.

It claims that users are illegally offering to share copyrighted music. RIAA expects to use the data it collects as the basis for what could ultimately be thousands of lawsuits charging individuals with copyright infringement. Any individual who continues to offer music illegally to others now faces the risk of a civil lawsuit. According to RIAA, if found guilty, they could be fined several thousand dollars and potentially be subject to criminal prosecution. For more information please see BBC news.

Child-Resistant Packaging

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is introducing a new standard for child resistant packaging to help reduce the risk of poisoning. The new standard will provide an internationally recognised test method for assessing the child-resistant characteristics of packages before they are placed on the market for consumer use. ISO 8317:2003, *Child-resistant packaging - Requirements and testing procedures for reclosable packages*, will introduce an improved child resistant packaging and will contribute to the overall safety of children. According to the UK Department of Trade and Industry, poisoning by solids and liquids accounted for 1 in 25 accidents to children under the age of 4 and represented nearly 28,788 poisonings nationwide in 1999 alone. ISO 8317:2003, which replaces ISO 8317:1989, has been updated to include a new test method for adults between the ages of 50 and 70 - thereby providing not only a measure of the effectiveness of the package in restricting access by children, but also in permitting access to its contents by adults. The new standard is the work of ISO technical committee ISO/TC 122, *Packaging*, subcommittee SC 3, *Performance requirements and tests for means of packaging, packages and unit loads*. This standard is available from ISO national member institutes and from ISO Central Secretariat. For more information please visit www.iso.org

Quality Tap Water

According to a recent study, carried out by the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI), the quality of water in the north east of England is better than ever and at an all time high. However, there are still some concerns about lead contamination originating from lead pipes found in older properties, which if replaced, would eliminate this matter. For more information please see BBC news.

New ISO Guides for Product Packaging needs of Consumers

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has just published two new guides for writers of standards that will help them address purchase information and product packaging needs of consumers. The new editions of ISO/IEC Guide 14 (purchase information - on goods and services intended for consumers) and ISO/IEC Guide 41 (product packaging – recommendations for addressing consumer needs), which replace the 1977 and 1984 versions respectively, have been updated to take into account the new consumer requirements and expectations, to reflect the growing demand for standards in the field of services and to address new methods of purchasing, e.g. Internet sales. Both Guides are available from ISO national member institutes and from ISO Central Secretariat. For more information please visit www.iso.org

Quality of Airline Websites

According to the IT accessibility charity AbilityNet it has reported that none of the nine most popular airline's websites are fully accessible for the visually impaired. It rated Virgin Atlantic's site to be the worst, as it displays important information in difficult to access Flash animation. EasyJet's website was judged to be the best, although it still has a few features that cannot be used by the visually impaired. These website which are inaccessible to the disabled could be committing an offence under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, although no cases have yet been brought. For more information please visit www.abilitynet.org.uk