

'It's What's In the Bottle That Counts'--

VALUE ANALYSIS AND ENGINEERING AFTER 22 YEARS

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Some questions have been asked of me: Has Value Analysis/Value Engineering been used in so many "thin" applications—almost of the "name only" variety—that the effectiveness of the over-all technique is weakening? Is VA's utilization as a motivational tool starting to weaken its general usefulness as a professional discipline? Is the concept remaining virile and increasing in effectiveness? Does there remain for the manufacturing organization further potential in the VA techniques for significant benefits?

My father, an ardent teetotaler and a Nebraska farmer, kept on a high shelf a whiskey bottle containing a yellowish fluid. It was labeled "Rat Poison." As a child, I wondered a thousand times whether it was whiskey (which he considered rat poison) or if he actually had filled the bottle with rat poison. He's gone, the bottle's gone, and we'll never know. But we do know that for whoever uses it, it is what is in the bottle and not the name on the label that counts.

I have observed cases in which long-existent good practices have been given the name of Value Analysis or Engineering, when their objective was to reduce costs. The use, or mis-use, of the name has brought some benefits because it caused "effort." Had the ingredients, as well as the label, been VA, the yield would have been three to five times as great per man hour expended.

Incentive arrangements by the military to bring the benefits of better, simpler, lower-cost weapons through the use of the disciplined problem-solving techniques of VE have shown to thousands of people the desirability and necessity of learning its approaches.

Some of these people have secured excellent training; some have started almost "name only" applications of the method. But essentially all have followed through by increasing their knowledge.

It is my studied belief that there is so much *good* work being done in so many places by so many people, that if we continue to learn and improve the best—and when possible, eliminate the worst—proper development will be achieved.

I learned some valuable philosophy from my very delightful wife, Eleanor, a few days ago. She said: "I don't know why you like me so much. I can't swim, I can't ride a bicycle, I like to sleep late in the mornings." After some thought, I replied: "I guess we like people and things for what they *do*, and pay less attention to what they *do not* do. I can list a hundred things that you do mightly well."

So, I'd like to indicate to PRODUCTION's readers some things that the VA techniques do mighty well and will continue to do well in the future:

1) Produce better answers from most decision-makers by keeping all attention focused on the heart of the situation. What functions (use and aesthetic) do the customers want, and how could the keenest thinking provide them?

2) Provide a precise, effective step-by-step thinking system, both for the formulation of meaningful solvable problems and the solving of them.

3) Achieve better answers faster to vital questions concerning function/cost.

4) Teach the VA-disciplined thinking to in-plant people so that they, themselves, can operate profitably in a highly competitive environment, with great benefit to management and employees alike.

5) Make champions of good people. A good golfer wins lots of games; but when competition is keen, and it is important to him to win, he gets coaching. When business competition is keen, and it is important to have competitive selling prices with good earnings, VA approaches are the techniques of champions.

6) Allow management to set goals for and achieve much lower costs, while keeping all customer qualities and values in their products.

7) Provide a much-needed sharp tool in the fight against inflation. Through the better thinking action that VA produces, provide the functions the customer wants without requiring more of his money to purchase them.