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Article



Artur Aleksandrovich Blagorodov

Institute of Service and Entrepreneurship (branch) of DSTU
postgraduate student

Yulia Igorevna Prokhorova

Institute of Service and Entrepreneurship (branch) of DSTU
Bachelor

Marika Vladimirovna Taube

Novosibirsk State University of Architecture, Design and Arts named after A.D. Kryachkov
PhD, Associate Professor
Novosibirsk, Russia

Svetlana Yurievna Korablina

LLC TsPOSN «Ortomoda»
Ph.D., Associate Professor, Deputy directors

Galina Yurievna Volkova

LLC TsPOSN «Ortomoda»
Doctor of Economics, Professor, General director
Moscow, Russia

FORECASTING QUALITY COSTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW AND IN-DEMAND ASSORTMENT OF FOOTWEAR BY CONSUMERS IN RUSSIAN REGIONS

Abstract: In their article, the authors realized that an integrated approach to managing the quality of materials and products remained a mystery. The reason is simple: most authors had only planned such research but hadn't implemented it due to its complexity. Now, this problem is solvable because it's manageable and offers the opportunity to take a step toward philosophical solutions. It might not all work out, but we decided to take the risk.

Key words: Integrated approach, quality management, philosophical shore, materials, finished products, Hedgehog in the Fog, comprehensive research, worldview, methodology.

Language: English

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Introduction

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To a large extent, the uncompetitiveness of domestic footwear was due to flawed methodology for measuring and evaluating its quality. The problem lies

in a certain discrepancy between the quality assessment of footwear, as designed during the development stage, formed during production, and verified during the final inspection before sale, and consumer quality assessments. The gap between actual quality and consumer expectations significantly

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impacts consumer preferences and, consequently, competitiveness. The smaller this gap, the greater the competitiveness of footwear. The difficulty lies in the fact that when evaluating footwear quality, consumers rely largely not on quality indicators regulated by regulatory documents, but on their own tastes and perceptions of what footwear should be. Moreover, many consumers' perceptions of quality are sometimes superficial, relying primarily on organoleptic indicators, which do not always adequately and objectively characterize footwear.

Very often, the need to assess competitiveness arises even before a new product is launched, i.e., during the design and development stages. This is because the level of costs during the consumption and use phases is more than 80% dependent on the footwear characteristics established at various stages of its development. During the detailed design and prototype development stages, the designer can reduce these costs by no more than 15%, and once the product is in production, the change can be as little as 5%.

Therefore, at the pre-design stage of new product development, a multi-variant forecast must be developed, providing information on the potential technical feasibility and timeframe for achieving the identified goal. Therefore, researching consumer demand for footwear is crucial for improving the quality and competitiveness of manufactured products. It is essential to determine the criteria by which customers evaluate quality, as they will seek to purchase footwear with the desired combination of properties.

In order to evaluate the significance of consumer quality indicators for footwear at the design, production, and sales stages, we used an expert method of personal assessments—ranking—which allows us to sufficiently take into account the opinions of both shoe manufacturers and potential consumers.

Main part

Experts are asked to rank a set of factors that determine the consumer quality of footwear. The initial rankings are first transformed as follows:

$$R_j = \sum_{i=1}^m r_{ij}, (1)$$

Where R_j is the sum of the transformed ranks across all experts for factor j ; r_{ij} is the transformed rank assigned by the i -th expert to the j -th factor; m is the number of experts; n is the number of factors. The factor weights are then calculated:

$$W_{ij} = \frac{r_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^m r_{ij}} (2)$$

$$W_j = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^m W_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^m \sum_{j=1}^n W_{ij}} (3)$$

Where W_j is the average weight of the j -th factor across all experts.

A group of 100 experts was divided into two groups for the survey: consumers and manufacturers. A number of requirements were imposed on the survey participants from the manufacturer group:

- special education;
- position held;
- work experience.

Leading specialists from footwear companies in cities across the Southern Federal District, including Shakhty, Rostov-on-Don, Krasnodar, Volgograd, and elsewhere, were recruited to identify experts. Faculty from the Department of Leather Products Technology, Standardization, and Certification at the South-Russian State University of Economics and Service were also engaged as experts. The experts ranked the indicators by importance, i.e., their impact on footwear quality, in the questionnaire. Women's footwear—boots for the fall and spring seasons—was chosen as the subject of the study.

During the survey, experts were given a questionnaire containing factors influencing the quality and competitive advantages of footwear at the design, production and sales stages (Table 1).

Table 1. Questionnaire form

Factors	Rank
1	2
Shoe design stage	
X1 – compliance with fashion trends	
X2 – shape of the toe part	
X3 – heel shape	
X4 – heel height	
X5– sole thickness	
X6 – shoe upper blank design	

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X7 – model design	
X8 – color scheme	
X9 – shoe flexibility	
<i>Stage of shoe production</i>	
X1 – type of upper material	
X2 – type of bottom material	
X3 – quality of connection of upper parts	
X4 – quality of execution of the shoe upper blank	
X5 – toe stiffness	
X6 – heel stiffness	
X7 – strength of fastening of bottom parts	
X8 – bottom finishing quality	
<i>The stage of footwear sales</i>	
X1 – attractiveness of appearance	
X2 – novelty of the product	
X3 – mass of shoes	
X4 – price	
X5 – brand prestige	
X6 – advertising	
X7 – service services	
X8 – packaging quality	

Respondents were asked to arrange the factors in descending order of their influence on the quality and competitiveness of footwear (rank them), i.e., the factor that the expert considered the most important received a higher rank – 1, and the others – in order of decreasing influence on the competitive advantages of footwear, i.e., 2nd, 3rd place, etc. If the expert could not decide on the assignment of a place for two or more adjacent factors, then he assigned them the same rank.

The expert survey results were processed on a personal computer using the specialized program "RANG." The distribution of ranking results indicates that the opinions of consumers and manufacturers serving as experts coincide on many points. Significant quality indicators were established during the design stage:

compliance with fashion trends – X1;
toe shape – X2;
heel shape – X3;
heel height – X4;
shoe upper blank design – X6;
model design – X7.
Less significant:
color scheme – X8;
shoe flexibility – X9;
sole thickness – X5.

After statistical processing of the results of the expert survey, it turned out that all of the above factors remained significant.

At the production stage, the following factors are significant for producers and consumers:

type of upper material – X1;
type of bottom material – X2;
quality of connection of upper parts – X3;
quality of execution of the shoe upper blank – X4;
strength of fastening of bottom parts – X7;
back stiffness – X6;
Bottom finish quality – X8.

At the implementation stage, the following are significant indicators of footwear quality for all experts:

attractiveness of appearance – X1;
novelty of the product – X2;
price – X4;
shoe weight – X3;
brand prestige – X5.
Less significant – advertising – X6;
service services – X7;
packaging quality – X8.

To forecast quality costs taking into account consumer requirements when developing a new range of footwear, based on the results of an expert survey at the design stage, it is necessary to determine the weights of all significant factors using formula (4).

Let us assume that the costs of improving the quality of one unit of production for each factor are known, which are determined by the vector: $p(p_1, p_2, p_n)$. (4)

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Then we can determine the expected costs of changing the quality of the designed product:

$$M(X) p1w1 p2w2... pnwn. (5)$$

This method of estimating expected costs can be used at the stages of production and sales of products.

The conducted research covers the entire spectrum of consumer and production requirements for footwear, affecting its competitiveness, and also allows for the forecasting of costs for improving quality at all stages of the product life cycle and should be taken into account by manufacturers when developing their footwear assortment.

In many industries, when preparing for mass production of new products, a comparative evaluation is necessary to decide on the manufacturing sequence or select one from a range of designed products, as well as for highly effective advertising and presenting the product's technical advantages to buyers. In common practice, this task is accomplished through expert product assessment by specialists using difficult-to-compare technical and economic indicators with different levels of significance and measurement units. For example, products may have different weights in kilograms, costs in grams, or air permeability in $\text{dm}^3/\text{m}^2 \text{ s}$. Finding the specifics of product assessment is achieved through a complex compromise that compromises the specificity of each indicator, introduces subjective "importance" factors that are often criticized, and so on, which are difficult to justify and prove.

This part of the intellectual task can be solved more demonstrably in a human-machine system with a network architecture for product evaluation. For example, such an assessment can be obtained in a design preparation management system for light, food, and other industries by visualizing the overall product evaluation. Then, control is reduced to choosing a trajectory in the multidimensional phase space of product properties that best satisfies the criteria of the complex system's primary function (e.g., market penetration, production, and sales of all products within a specified timeframe). In traditional systems analysis, such problems are formalized by decomposing the complex system into a selected

number of subsystems. However, in this case, the connections (relationships) between the subsystems lack a topology; they are formally separated. This can be compensated for by a formalization method that identifies connections (relationships) using the mathematical apparatus of set theory and general topology, and, in particular, the model of a fluctuation parameter capsule. Implementing such a comparative analysis of a number of products and identifying priorities is relatively simple (Figure 1).

The entire information field is divided into planes by four lines, forming eight vectors and eight zones (there may be a different number). Information about each of the eight properties selected in our example is plotted on the lines. In this case, for footwear characteristics, demand is the cost price, weight and flexibility, vapor permeability and moisture absorption, and aesthetic properties (scores) are environmental (sanitary) pollution from non-natural materials. The obtained experimental numerical data are plotted on the graph's rays if they are available in natural units of measurement, for example, cost in hryvnias, weight in grams, and demand and aesthetic properties in scores assigned by experts. The resulting visual representation of a complex system, represented as a polygon, allows a designer or buyer to make the right decision regarding the comparative evaluation of different product models, ranking them into a preferred order by comparing the areas of the polygons. This figure contains a range of other information in addition to visual information. For example, the areas of the figures enclosed between the rays and their sums reveal the advantage of the areas of "positive" indicators of high aesthetic properties and demand for flexible footwear over a product with greater weight, higher production costs, and less environmentally friendly artificial parts. Thus, in the example shown in Figure 1, the advantage in the combination of the two indicators is with sample #1, which has a larger total area in the "positive" sectors of the properties. This is an effective visual advertising technique that helps select a sample with superior "overall" properties, which are difficult to compare.

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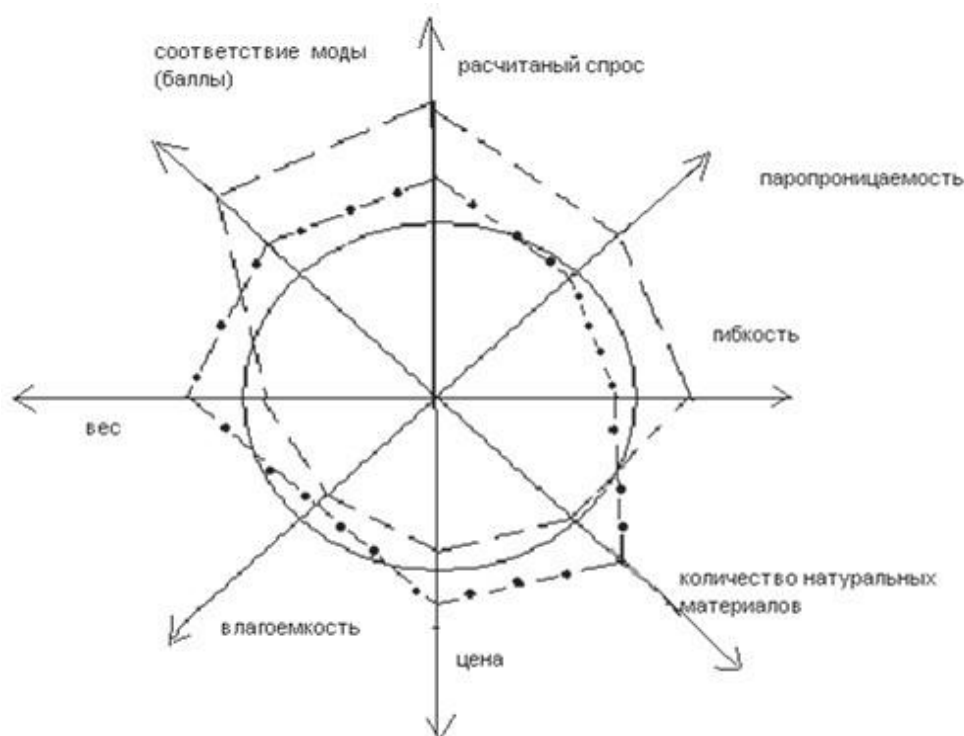


Figure 1. Summary properties for a combination of indicators of shoe samples

This method for selecting the "best" product is relatively simple and straightforward, allowing for informed decision-making. This method can be used for technical and business evaluations of various products in industries such as consumer goods, food, electronics (for example, INFINITE, showcased at CEBT 2024), and others.

At the intersection level of the circle and the axes, the values of eight standardized indicators (if any) or averages for the assortment in their units are indicated; the data for each sample N1, N2, etc., plotted on the axes, are connected by straight lines.

Scientific and technological progress in the production of special footwear involves not only technological improvements, the development of advanced materials and automated equipment, but also the imparting of new useful properties, as well as the development of modern methods for assessing footwear quality and testing equipment. The creation of products with a higher level of quality, approaching and even exceeding Western standards, should be considered a key development area for domestic footwear production. It is essential to develop special footwear designs with an expanded range of properties and characteristics, which must be strictly defined and metrologically controlled. To improve the effectiveness of metrological quality assurance for special footwear in the near future, it is necessary to align these standards with international standards (ISO) in force in the EU (European Union) countries:

- nomenclature of measuring instruments and measurement accuracy standards; methods for performing measurements, testing and control;
- metrological certification and calibration of control, measuring and testing equipment.

In recent years, many domestic industry standards have ceased to meet modern requirements and require radical revision to ensure that the regulated and specified characteristics of footwear are in line with the latest global scientific and technological advances and take into account the development trends of the standardized objects. The globalization of the global economy necessitates aligning domestic standards, particularly for safety footwear, with international standards (ISO), which are more stringent and have a broader range of specifications. This is essential for companies seeking foreign investment, attracting foreign customers, and thus entering the Western market and effectively competing with Southeast Asian competitors.

To successfully implement domestic regulatory and technical documentation for safety footwear, reflecting summarized data on footwear quality and providing comprehensive evaluation methods that guarantee a high-quality product, it is necessary, first of all, to change the customer's mindset and bring it closer to the Western one. The philosophy of Western customers who purchase safety footwear for their company's employees is as follows: If an employee feels comfortable wearing the footwear and experiences no unpleasant or irritating sensations when their foot contacts the shoe, they are not

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distracted by these factors, therefore, their attention is not distracted, they make fewer mistakes at work, experience less fatigue, and their productivity and quality of work increase. Unfortunately, our entrepreneurs view safety footwear for employees radically differently. They prefer to minimize this expense at the expense of quality, forgetting that of all costs, the greatest return comes from investments directly directed at personnel and improving their working conditions. The modern approach to the creation of safety footwear, used abroad, is characterized by three essential conditions under which footwear must meet: namely, providing the stated comfort.

These latter requirements are rarely met in domestic special footwear, and our safety testing methods need to be significantly expanded.

The aesthetic component is missing here, the necessity of which is dictated by the requirement to create an attractive appearance for special footwear, which is especially important for female personnel, otherwise it will be a negative irritant for the wearer.

The difference in approaches to the creation of special footwear is clearly demonstrated by a comparison of international ISO and Russian standards (ISO 20344:2004 and the Russian standard "Special footwear and materials for the upper and lower parts of special footwear").

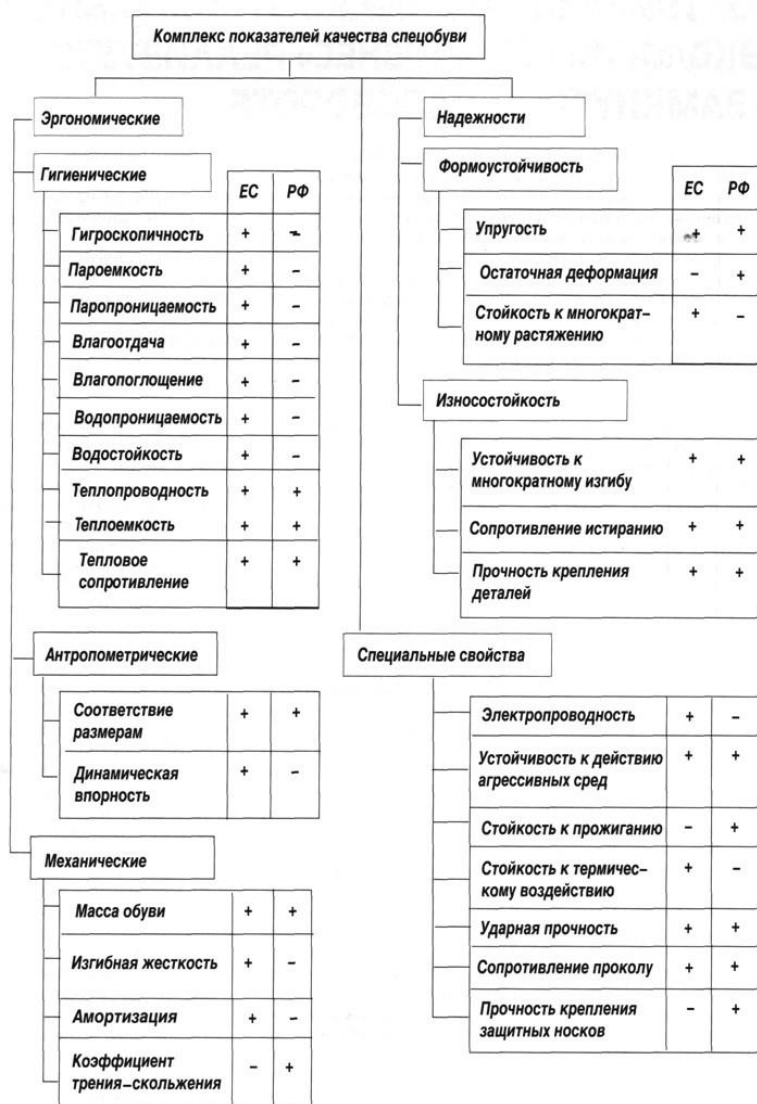


Figure 2. Quality indicators of safety footwear

The diagram (Figure 2) shows the systematized quality indicators of special footwear, where the plus sign (+) indicates indicators whose testing is provided for by the relevant ISO and RF standard, and the

minus sign (-) indicates those not included in the testing procedures of the standards.

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Let's consider testing methods carried out according to the ISO standard, but absent from domestic standards for safety footwear.

1. ISO 20344:2004 provides specific methods for assessing the ergonomic characteristics of safety footwear.

Three wearers, wearing properly fitted safety footwear, perform the following tests:

- walk normally for 5 minutes at a speed of approximately 6 km/h; - climb up and down 17±3 steps in 1 minute;

- kneel down, squatting.

After completing all tasks, each shoe tester fills out the questionnaire shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Questions for assessing the ergonomic characteristics of special footwear

1. Is the inside of the shoe free of roughness, sharp edges or hard areas that cause irritation or injury?	Yes	No
2. Does the toe cap or the edge of the toe cap of the shoe pinch or squeeze?	Yes	No
3. Does the shoe have any features that make it dangerous to wear?	Yes	No
4. Is it possible to fasten the fastener on safety shoes comfortably and correctly?	Yes	No
5. Can you perform the following actions without any problems: walking, climbing stairs, bending your knees, squatting?	Yes	No

Conducting this type of simple testing provides a fairly objective idea of the ergonomic performance of the footwear being tested and can serve as a barrier preventing the penetration of uncomfortable special footwear into production.

2. The ISO standard includes tests to determine the energy absorption of the heel of special footwear. This is a crucial indicator of the shock-absorbing properties of footwear. Such devices reduce impact and quasi-impact loads that occur when the heel of the shoe contacts a hard surface, such as a concrete floor. Insufficient shock absorption results in a significant

reaction force that is transmitted through the human musculoskeletal system, causing negative consequences.

The testing equipment must be capable of measuring compressive forces up to 6000 N and must also have a device for recording load-deformation diagrams.

The test uses a movable stop, which is a cut-off rear part of a standard polyethylene block (Figure 3).

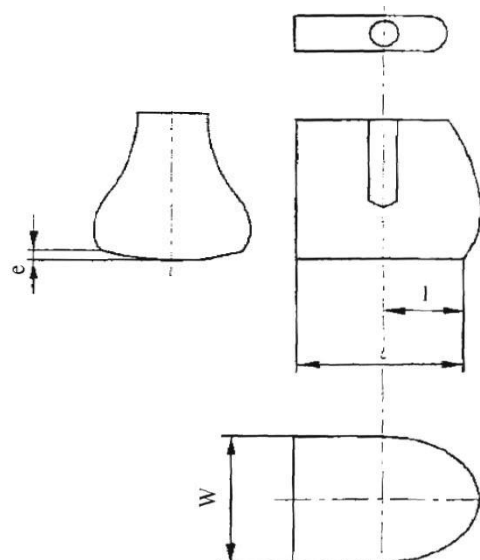


Figure 3. Energy absorption test movable stop

The dimensions of the movable stop are given in Table 4.

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Table 4. Dimensions of the movable stop depending on the shoe size

Shoe numbering			Dimensions of the movable stop		
Metric	Stitchmass	$\pm L2$ mm	$\pm l2$ mm	$\pm W2$ mm	$e \pm 1$ mm
235	Up to 36	65	32.5	52.25	2
245	37/38	67.5	33.7	57	2
255	39/40	70.5	35	58.75	2
265	41/42	72.5	36.2	60.5	3
275	43/44	75.5	37.7	62.25	3
285	45 and above	77.5	38.5	64	3

Test procedure

At the beginning, the deformation of the heel part of the bottom of the shoe s_1 is established and recorded, corresponding to an applied load of 50 N. Then the recording device is turned on, which draws a load-deformation diagram, while the speed of movement of the movable stop should be set in the range of 10 ± 3 mm/min, and the value of the applied load at the end of the test should slightly exceed 5000 N.

The area of the diagram bounded by the load graph, the abscissa (deformation) axis, and two vertical lines corresponding to displacement s_1 (at a load of 50 N) and s_2 (at a load of 50,000 N) represents the absorbed energy. This area is calculated using a known method, such as graphical integration or a digitizer.

The formula given in the ISO standard is not entirely correct; it would be more correct to write it as follows.

$$E = \int_{s_2}^s F ds, ()$$

Where F – applied compressive load, N;
 s – deformation, mm.

The acceptability condition is written as follows: the energy obtained as a result of the experiment must be greater than or equal to the specified one, i.e. $E_{on} \geq E_{ad}$.

3. The domestic standard (GOST 12.4.151–85) provides for the determination of impact strength only for protective toes of special footwear.

ISO standards specify impact resistance tests for special footwear, not only for the toe area but also for other areas of the shoe that, when worn in industrial settings, are subject to forceful impacts that could cause foot injury if protection is not installed. For example, the ISO standard specifies the impact resistance of the instep protector (between the metatarsal and shank).

For this purpose, a steel striker weighing (20 ± 0.2) kg (Figure 4) is used. It falls freely along vertical guides from a specified height onto the test specimen, generating an impact energy calculated using the potential energy formula. The striker's wedge-shaped head is 60 mm long, with the edges of the wedge forming an angle of $(90 \pm 1)^\circ$, and the steel hardness is not less than HRC 60. The tip of the wedge is rounded to a radius of (3 ± 0.1) mm (Figure 3). During testing, the striker must not deviate from the vertical by more than $\pm 17^\circ$.

For the shoes being tested, internal wax molds are cast that replicate the shape of the last. The frame of the device must have a mass of at least 600 kg and a 400 x 400 mm metal plate with a thickness of 40 mm must be attached to it.

Wax molds are inserted into the shoe being tested and secured with fasteners. The sample is secured to the frame plate using a clamping device. A striker positioned above the sample should strike a point on the instep of the shoe at a distance from the toe specified in Table 5.

Table 5. Coordinates of the strike point

Shoe size, stitch weight	Distance, mm
36 below	90
37–38	95
39–40	100
41–42	105

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43–44	11
45 and above	115

4. The ISO standard provides for the determination of the shock-absorbing capacity of an ankle protection device connected to the upper of special footwear.

This article only covers some of the testing methods in accordance with ISO 20344-2004, but even these demonstrate the attention that manufacturers must pay to the ergonomic and protective properties of safety footwear.

In today's increasingly saturated market with consumer goods, the most pressing issue is ensuring the quality of products offered meets consumer demands. Among consumer requirements for footwear, the most important are ergonomic ones, defined by the concept of "comfort."

Footwear certification testing is based on current regulatory documentation, which sets out technical requirements and testing methods for determining key quality indicators. To support this, the quality indicators and testing methods for determining them are provided below.

What is the "Russian Quality" Program? The organization's promotional materials state that it "identifies high-quality products and services available on the Russian market and informs consumers about them; enables companies to demonstrate to consumers that the quality of their products or services is significantly higher than the standard; and enables government agencies to procure high-quality products and services." The "Russian Quality" seal, which a company receives upon successful participation in the Program, becomes the most authoritative proof of such quality. Upon completion of its participation in the Program, a company can present to interested parties not only a diploma but also an assessment program and a report on its results as proof of high quality.

The results of successful participation in the Program can be used in marketing and advertising campaigns, when demonstrating capabilities to clients and customers at exhibitions and fairs, and when participating in competitive bidding and tenders. To promote products bearing the "Russian Quality" label and enterprises that have received the Program's diplomas, the following is provided:

- holding all-Russian, regional and industry presentations
- products awarded the "Russian Quality" mark;
- publication of all-Russian and industry catalogues "Russian Quality";
- release of the Bulletin of the Russian Quality Program;
- posting information about the diplomate enterprise and its products on the Program website on

preferential terms www.roskachestvo.ru and other Internet resources;

— participation on preferential terms for program diploma holders in exhibitions and fairs held with the participation of the All-Russian Quality Organization;

— publications in industry, regional and national mass media."

In accordance with the documents: "Regulations on the "Russian Quality" program" CEP VOK No. RK-01-02 and "Regulations on quality assessment programs used in the "Russian Quality" program" CEP VOK No. RK-06-02, Work Program No. RK-PR-CEP-47-02-05 was developed, which included the following points:

- products being evaluated;
- the nomenclature of the assessed product quality indicators, their acceptable and optimal values and the scores corresponding to them;
- determination of actual values of quality indicators;
- assessment of the ability of production to ensure stable product quality; - conclusion on the compliance of product quality with the highest level.

The quality of the declared models of everyday men's footwear was assessed in four groups: functional indicators (1), characterizing the durability of the product; ergonomic indicators (2); aesthetic indicators (3); indicators of the quality of packaging and labeling (4). The first group included such individual indicators as:

- strength of thread fastenings of shoe upper blanks, N/cm for one stitch;
- strength of thread fastenings of shoe upper blanks, N/cm with two lines;
- sole attachment strength, N/cm;
- residual deformation of the toe cap, mm;
- residual deformation of the back, mm;
- in the second group:
- weight of a half pair, g; flexibility of shoes, N/cm;
- Thermal resistance of the upper part of the shoe, m² °C/W (for winter shoes); Thermal resistance of the bottom of the shoe, m² °C/W (for winter shoes);
- in the third: silhouette, points; appearance, points; interior decoration, points;
- in the fourth: quality of labeling; quality of packaging, points.

The permissible values of the indicators, as well as their list, are established in accordance with GOST, indicated in Table 6.

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Table 6. Quality indicators and test methods for their determination

Name of the quality indicator	Test method (GOST, standard, etc.)
1	2
1. Footwear. Method for determining the total and residual deformation of the toe cap and heel counter	GOST 9135–73
2. Footwear. Method for determining the strength of sole fastening in footwear using chemical fastening methods	GOST 9292–82
3. Footwear. Method for determining the strength of thread seams connecting upper parts	GOST 9290–76
4. Footwear. Method for determining flexibility	GOST 9718–88
5. Footwear. Method for determining the strength of fastening of the bottom parts	GOST 9134–78
6. Footwear. Method of determining weight	GOST 28735–90
7. Footwear. Method for determining the total thermal resistance of footwear	GOST 12.4.104–81
8. Shoes. Acceptance rules	GOST 9289–78
9. Footwear. Labeling, packaging, transportation and storage	GOST 7296–81 GOST 16534–71
10. Shoes. Determining grade	GOST 28371–89
11. Quality indicators system. Footwear. Nomenclature of indicators	GOST 4.12–81
12. Footwear. Terms and Definitions	GOST 23251–83
13. Footwear. Methods for determining linear dimensions	GOST 9133–78
14. Shoe lasts. Technical specifications	GOST 3927–88
15. Practical training in leather goods technology. Edited by V.L. Rayackas. Moscow, 1981.	
16. System of product development and launching into production. Light industry products. Basic provisions	GOST 15.007–88
17. Everyday footwear. Technical specifications	GOST 26167–84
18. Footwear. Durability standards	GOST 21463–87
19. Shoemaker's Handbook. Technology. Moscow: Legprombytizdat, 1989.	

Let's turn to the second group of indicators. Clearly, these indicators do not provide an assessment of the comprehensive footwear characteristic (comfort), which interests the consumer, most of which are determined empirically. Comfort depends on numerous factors, but the most significant are the design characteristics of the shoe model and the properties of the materials used. The prospect of developing shoe quality assessment methods should be linked to the use of CAD. The physical and mechanical properties of materials determine the force interaction between the foot and the shoe, provide protection from environmental influences, and determine its microclimate. In this context, the automated comfort assessment method developed at the A.N. Kosygin Russian State University, based on the physical and mechanical properties of upper material packages, appears quite attractive.

The method is implemented within the framework of a complex, the software operation diagram of which is shown in Figure 1.

Therefore, in addition to the identified groups of indicators, it seems appropriate to include another group, "Comfort," whose criteria, in our opinion, include the temperature and relative humidity of the interior space, and the pressure of the shoe upper on the foot. Factors influencing the pressure of the shoe on the foot include relative elongation, relative humidity, and the rigidity of the material packages, for which we have established variation levels and rational values based on the operating and manufacturing conditions of the products.

The developed tool system implements methods for automated shoe comfort assessment and the creation of the most efficient upper packages based on the physical and mechanical properties of materials. It also provides an express method for selecting shoe designs of a specific quality and purpose. The practical significance of the system lies in reducing the subjective factor in selection, collection, and organization.

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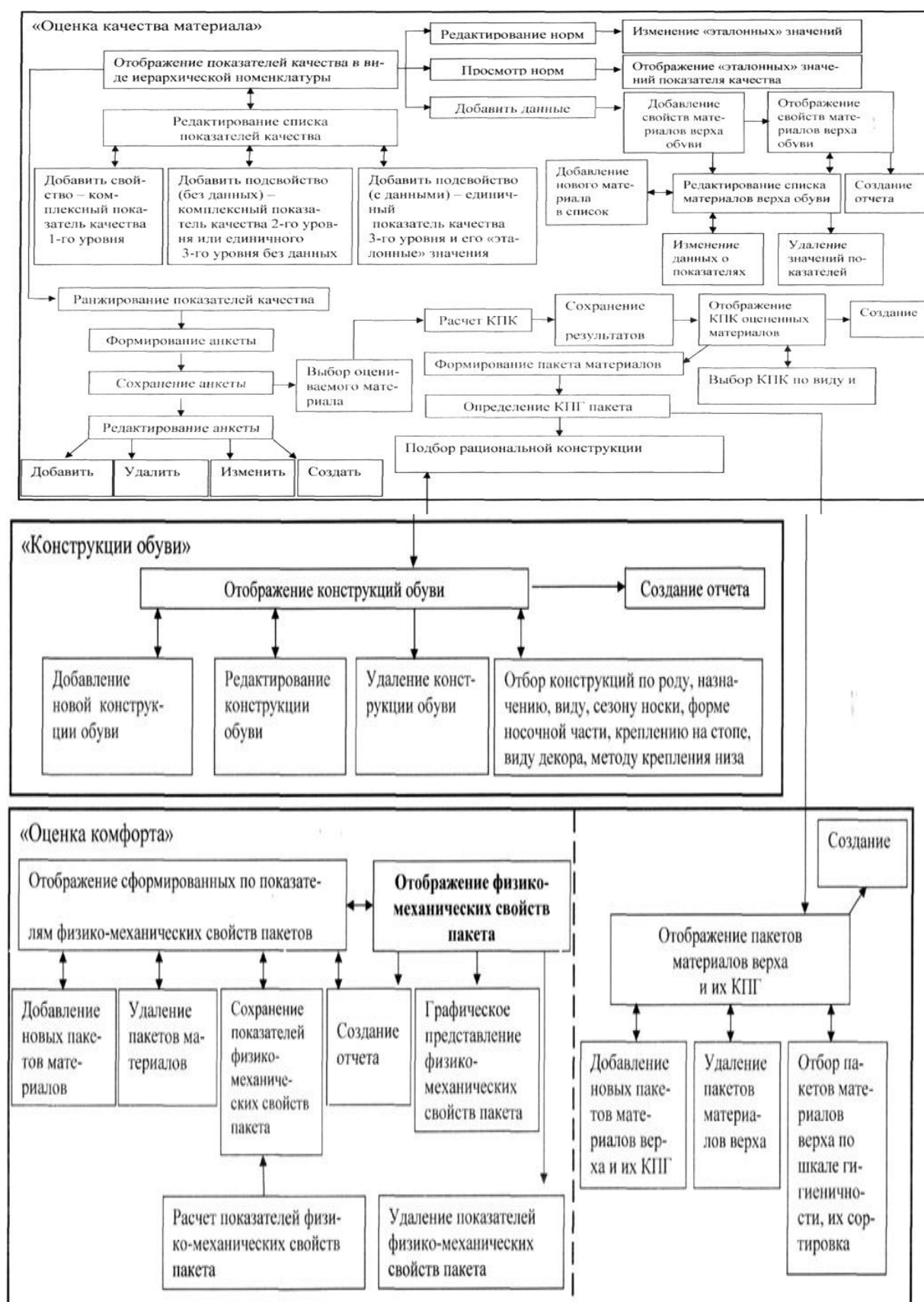


Figure 1. Scheme of operation of the software for empirical indicators for assessing the quality of products

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Quality and the Market: A Marriage of Convenience - there's a separate text for this section. Marketing experts agree that consumers prioritize product quality. Market monitoring confirms a strong tradition of demand for quality goods. But not everything is so simple and obvious. The fact is that statistics is a pure operator, and statistical data are therefore absolutely dependent on the chosen conceptual description of the process. Statistical results are always correct, as they are obtained using proven mathematical apparatus, but correctness and truth are two very different things.

For something "correct" to be "true," the entire chain of logical and mathematical operations must be verified for accuracy. Certification is required not only for physical and software products. The underlying knowledge must also be certified, otherwise, flaws in the initial judgments will migrate to the inferred knowledge. And no technology will correct the inherent flaw.

In the ideology of production, especially in the production of consumer goods, the concept of "quality" must be a system-forming factor. We anticipate the objection: "What's the point of quality if quality criteria limit quantity, and the prioritization of quality characteristics will undermine product range and drive up prices?" and we have a response to these opponents.

If product quality isn't ensured, no amount of quantity will improve the situation. One will have to either accept what is (to professionals) an obvious (and even obvious) deception of the consumer, or compromise one's professional competence and deliberately lower quality standards, allowing a fundamentally inferior product onto the market. As for product assortment, its dependence on product quality requirements is relatively arbitrary and indirect. Product assortment is tied to the technical state of production, technology, and the professionalism of the developers.

The more visible the features of a civilized market, the more pressing the issue of quality becomes. Moreover, the issue of quality has moved from the realm of theoretical relevance to the level of practical relevance. Let's try to justify this shift in relation to Russian reality. The positive shift toward increased purchasing power among Russians over the past five years is undeniable. Official inflation statistics are clearly misleading, but even increasing them by a factor of 0.5 and arriving at a real average annual rate of 15-20%, we can only conclude that the well-being of the majority of our citizens has improved amidst a certain level of economic growth overall. The rate of change is small, but the fact itself is clear.

But how fair is it to talk about "well-being"? Money is merely an exchange equivalent. Earning more money doesn't necessarily make you better off. Money must be exchanged for necessary goods. And

here the problem of quality comes into full play. Having earned money, you can easily spend it "unnoticed," i.e., buy not a product, but a "phantom product."

"Phantom product" is a non-specific concept within a specialized knowledge system. Nevertheless, it's important to get used to it as a theoretical expression of the realities of an underdeveloped product market.

Speculating on the "white" and "gray" "spots" of a quality ideology in an extremely neglected state, "black" producers of low-quality consumer goods, together with sympathetic officials from the services responsible for product quality, have flooded the market with substandard products.

The ISO-9000 international quality control system is more reminiscent of the latest incarnation of the famous Potemkin village. Only what is clearly defined can be effectively controlled. Anything vaguely defined is a gateway for semi-legal infiltration into the consumer hunting grounds.

ISO-9000 should be used not as a management tool, but as a tool for preventing quality violations. The circle is thus closed, because a violation presupposes quality, and we haven't properly defined quality.

In the system of specialized knowledge, which is the ideology of production, "quality" is replaced by "the state of quality", which in turn is reduced to quantitative parameters.

Quantitative characteristics are given discrete expressions, and thus another derivative concept emerges. Only this time, not from the root concept of "quality," but from its derivative—the concept of "state of quality."

The militant drive to describe quality through quantity is astonishing. Almost two hundred years have passed since Hegel, who asserted that quality is the primary factor in defining a phenomenon, since quality is that which, when it loses its "what," ceases to be itself. It's time to embrace this simple truth: quality is defined not by quantity, but by properties. Using quantitative measurements, we must determine the "measure" of "qualitativeness" and the "state of quality" (the level of expression of quality).

Practice rarely corrects theoretical errors; on the contrary, it usually conceals them until a certain point in development. Theoretical flaws become starkly apparent in difficult socioeconomic circumstances and during times of political uncertainty.

It's no coincidence that such a unique time is "convenient" for the flourishing of theoretical uncertainty. The state, entangled in numerous problems, abandons control over economic processes, relying on the market to sort everything out. The market, however, has its own operating laws. The market adapts theory to its own interests. It doesn't obey the rules established by theory, but seeks to adapt

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these rules to its own advantageous relationship with the consumer.

The advertising claim: "The customer is always right" is a lie! Only the legal order that determines the nature of relations in the commodity market is always right. These relations themselves are built on the interpretation of product quality and the correspondence between quality and price. Whatever one may say, the issue of quality and its two aspects—the theoretical and the practical—will always be addressed.

In theoretical terms, one must strictly adhere to the fundamental postulate: quality is an association of properties that characterize the structural and functional uniqueness not of a single phenomenon, but of a set of phenomena united by common laws of formation and change. Therefore, quality can only be determined through the presence of corresponding properties. Given that, of all qualitative properties, only aesthetic ones (design) are directly assessable, comprehensive product certification is required, or more precisely, the product submitted for release to the market.

Moreover, testing a product for quality that meets consumer interests shouldn't be limited to technical and materials science assessments. Social, psychological, medical, and regional studies are required. Let's consider this statement using footwear as an example. Footwear, like clothing, is a product dependent on national and historical characteristics. Can footwear be recommended for sale on the market that doesn't take into account the specifics of geography, climate, or national mentality? Apparently, such products can be allowed on the market, but only in limited quantities, for the sake of diversity and expanding consumer choice. And this isn't a matter of "kvass patriotism."

Nature, diet, and traditions influence the anthropometric characteristics of the population: the configuration and proportions of the foot, lower leg, etc. Shoes designed without taking into account national characteristics—both anatomical and physiological—will inevitably contribute to the development of foot deformities. Shoes will lose their marketable appearance more quickly, and consumers will experience constant discomfort, which (considering that, on average, in Russia, shoes are worn without regard for recommendations until they become physically obsolete) can lead to the exacerbation of chronic diseases or even the development of new ones.

China has already dumped so many shoes on the market that the entire global population (approximately 6.5 billion people) could be shod "à la Chine." Chinese manufacturers are driven by their own interests: creating jobs and ensuring sales. They offer footwear designed and manufactured without regard for the national characteristics of consumer countries. Chinese footwear today poses serious

competition not only to our domestic manufacturers but also to countries that set trends in footwear fashion, such as Italy, France, the United States, the Czech Republic, and others.

For the fifth consecutive year, the Italian footwear market has seen a significant decline in production volumes. Activity in this segment of the domestic market is declining, and demand for Italian products on both domestic and foreign markets is low. Given the euro's strong exchange rate against the dollar, competition from Chinese goods is becoming even more intense on the Italian market, especially after the abolition of sales quotas on January 1, 2017. Footwear production volumes decreased by 12.9% in 2020 compared to the same period last year. In terms of price differences, product supply decreased by approximately 9.3% in absolute prices. From 2017 to 2020, Italian production fell by almost half to 281 million pairs, negatively impacting employment. Leather footwear production decreased by 8.9%, flip-flops by 23%, rubber footwear by 32%, and canvas footwear by 40%. On the contrary, Italy steadily imports around 150 million pairs of Chinese shoes every year.

The Italian manufacturer is losing ground in international markets such as the US, Germany, and France. The rise of the euro against the dollar, as well as the market shift in favor of Asian manufacturers, are negatively impacting the Italian manufacturer. According to the Italian Chamber of Commerce, more than 600 companies, including shoe manufacturers, closed in the first five months of 2020. The only market segment in which Italian shoe manufacturers maintain a leading position is the production of luxury fashion footwear for international markets.

Over the past 10 years, the number of shoe manufacturing companies in the Czech Republic has decreased from 120 to 47. But even this number may decrease due to the lifting of restrictions on shoe imports from China. While at the end of the 20th century, Czech shoe factories produced approximately 70 million pairs of shoes, last year that number was approximately 5.5 million pairs. In 2020, approximately 80 million pairs of shoes were imported to the Czech Republic, 55 million of which were from Chinese manufacturers. The average purchase price of a pair of Chinese shoes is only 54 crowns—an unrealistic price for Czech companies. "...No one buys our goods because we are unable to compete with Asian products in terms of cost, despite the fact that our shoes are much better in quality. "Unfortunately, Czech consumers prefer cheaper products, even though they know they won't last as long as our high-quality footwear," says Lubomír Chlumský, a member of the Czech Footwear Industry Association. His company has been producing and selling children's, women's, and men's footwear since 1998. As a result, Czech manufacturers are losing ground in their own market. The situation is further

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complicated by the fact that, as of January 1, 2021, the European Union, in agreement with China and the World Trade Organization, lifted restrictions on imports of Chinese footwear. They can only be reinstated if the entire industry, and on a European scale, is threatened.

US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, among the most important issues, notes the need to take effective measures to curb job losses in a number of American industries, which is also caused by growing competition from Chinese goods in the US.

But we still have a long way to go to match the progress made by Western shoe manufacturers. Russia's accession to the WTO has opened up market opportunities for many others eager to quickly offload low-quality goods. Moreover, unlike its Western neighbors, Russia already faces the fatal problem of expanding "gray" imports, which has arisen due to imperfect customs legislation and the spontaneous development of "shuttle trade." As Anatoly Kvashnin, the Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Siberian Federal District, stated in an interview, the annual volume of "gray imports of Chinese goods" into Russia reaches \$6 billion. However, even in a civilized market, allowing footwear to enter the domestic market without restrictions based solely on positive assessments of the quality of raw materials, related materials, and fittings, along with significant expansion of footwear production, threatens Russia's national security.

National attitudes toward footwear can be quantified. Products can easily be measured for compliance with certain requirements, but it's important to keep in mind that the quality itself is assessed solely on a "present or absent" basis. Once a quality is recognized as existing, the expert can proceed to the next step—measuring the intensity of its existence—to determine how stable and pronounced the quality is.

The absence of even one of the product's qualitative properties, or its insufficiency, means only one thing: the product should not be considered a commodity. In exceptional cases, it is considered conditionally approved for sale on the national market.

The occupation of the national market by foreign footwear manufacturers undermines the development of the corresponding sector of the domestic economy, which has historically been adapted to the specific conditions of national development and the peculiarities of anthropometric measurements.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that Russia, having been recognized as a market economy, has no right to disrupt the orderly relationship between political and market structures. Unilateral actions by the state in defense of its interests could be considered a violation of this status and lead to economic and other sanctions from the global market. The exclusion of foreign competitors from the national market must

be carried out in accordance with the recommendations and traditions of the international community.

Chinese, Turkish, and, to some extent, Eastern European shoe manufacturers have flooded our market and established a strong presence there, thanks to consumer demand for their products.

Buyers with limited financial means are attracted by price, design, advertising, product selection, salesperson engagement, and professional service. A consumer unversed in professional "secrets" judges quality by its outward appearance and service packaging. The sales service itself skillfully shifts the focus from quality characteristics to visually appealing features. Quality, as an association of the most important product attributes, is "broken." Of all the attributes that combine to form a quality association, only the attribute that benefits the seller is highlighted, as it truly represents the appropriate level of consumer interest.

Sequestering quality by replacing it with a simplified understanding is the most common market tactic. The unsatisfactory state of mass consumer culture, the absence of oversight by government agencies, their lack of initiative, and, in some cases, their direct interest in maintaining the current state of disorder, make it possible to manipulate public consciousness and control consumer behavior.

The occupation of the Russian market is, of course, temporary, caused by economic stagnation, limited consumer demand among the majority of the population, and the lack of an effective and consistent policy for the development of national production. However, the obvious inevitability of the situation is of little comfort. In Russia, they like to joke: nothing is more permanent than something temporary. To prevent a temporary phenomenon from becoming stagnant, the conditions that gave rise to it must be changed. Opportunities exist. First of all, it is necessary to understand the theory that guides practical actions.

Underestimating theory naturally leads to practical miscalculations. In our case, such underestimation appears to be deliberate. Otherwise, how can we explain that, with the generally accepted definition of quality through the association of an object's fundamental properties, only the bare bones of a quality criterion, i.e., isolated attributes, remain in regulatory documents? To some extent, quality theory itself is "to blame" for theoretical uncertainty and one-sidedness. The quality of natural phenomena differs from the quality of artificially created products. Natural phenomena are of natural origin, and all their properties are spontaneous. The quality of natural phenomena does not include their relevance to human needs. It is pointless to divide mushrooms by quality into edible and poisonous. The quality of mushrooms lies elsewhere, and this other quality determines their place in biological taxonomy. Trees are

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conventionally divided into beautiful and ugly, valuable and weedy. Such contrasts have no bearing on quality. Artificial products, on the contrary, are characterized, above all, by their compliance with our needs. Consumer properties are part of the quality system of artificial products, just like natural ones. And they don't just turn on, but they outstrip the natural ones in importance.

Shoe quality is determined by a combination of consumer characteristics. The material the shoe is made of is essentially irrelevant. What matters is that the material's properties ensure the consumer's functional demand for the shoe. Whether the shoe is made of natural or synthetic materials, given the price, is irrelevant to the buyer. What matters is that their expectations are met. However, domestic shoe (and other non-shoe) quality assessment practices invert this theory, focusing on natural characteristics. What will Russian quality ideologists do when animal rights activists take them seriously, as has happened in Western Europe, particularly the UK.

The most tragicomic thing is that the nature of the raw material is truly not such a fundamental issue if chemical and physical technologies are developed. Analogs of natural raw materials are a reality of today's production and are no longer a fantasy. But the quality issues are by no means limited to raw materials. Other aspects of production are no less relevant: taking into account national, age, and natural and climatic characteristics when determining the quality and conditions for product market entry.

Unfortunately, today, domestic input into developing policies aimed at improving footwear quality, and, in essence, ensuring consumer rights, is extremely inconclusive. One gets the impression that manufacturers' aspirations are completely disconnected from the interests of the country that gave them citizenship.

According to the theory of marginal utility and consumer choice, proven by international practice, consumers prefer the product that best suits their personal perception of utility within their financial means. The state's task is to create the necessary legislative preconditions to protect the interests of its citizens and develop a reliable control mechanism.

At the same time, the state must understand that consumers' consciousness is generally uninformed. Consumers lack the professional culture to navigate the complexities of choosing their course of action. Therefore, the state or organizations delegated protection must provide consumers with sufficient information about the consumer properties of products.

Instead, the buyer is offered, at best, a minimal set of material and technological characteristics, which is a gross violation of consumer rights. Product specifications should include, in addition to static data, detailed dynamic (behavioral) information. For example, product properties should be described in the

same way as reputable pharmaceutical companies do, outlining key properties, indications, contraindications, age recommendations, functional warnings, directions for use, storage conditions, and recommended shelf life.

Experience with this approach in other industries already exists. The development of information technology today allows for the creation of entire communication systems for product support, based on the CALS concept, which is widely used to improve management efficiency and reduce communication costs in the ordering, production, supply, and operation of products. The basis for this concept is the natural need to organize a "single information space" that ensures the rapid exchange of data between producers and consumers throughout the entire product lifecycle: from marketing to disposal.

We do not yet see anything like this in the actions aimed at improving the quality of footwear products. There is not even a desire to change the information situation that developed during the times when the range and quantity of goods were limited. To confirm this, let us turn to the opinions of specialists: "During the certification of mass-produced products, experts from the certification body (CB – author's note) assess the state of production directly at the enterprise or based on the submitted documents (in absentia (!) – author's note) (technical description of a specific type of product, a diagram of the technological process, material, components with sanitary and epidemiological reports on component materials and footwear, which confirm the safety for consumer health of the primary and auxiliary materials used in footwear). In accordance with the program drawn up by the expert during footwear certification in the IL (testing laboratory – author's note), the following indicators are determined: the strength of the sole fastening; the strength of the heel fastening; the strength of the thread seams of the shoe upper blank. When certifying children's footwear, the upper construction and hygienic properties of the materials used are additionally assessed for compliance with Sanitary and Epidemiological Regulations No. 42-125-439087. "To operate at the lower end of the price range, a company must produce footwear models that are affordable due to their low price and generally only include the basic set of features in accordance with the national standard."

What conclusions can be drawn?

Firstly, the industry still relies on an outdated approach—the simplest and only necessary one: do no harm to the consumer's health. Shoe manufacturers and their regulators have firmly grasped the first commandment of Hippocrates, but they haven't gone any further. Under these circumstances, it's unlikely that the siege of competitors will be held off for long.

Secondly, basic properties should not be equated with qualities. Properties can only be qualities in the production cycle due to its differentiation into

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technological operations. However, in this case, it is advisable to put "quality" in quotation marks, emphasizing the conventionality of the term. Otherwise, we will begin to operate with philosophical and scientific concepts, which will inevitably lead to a distortion of practical characteristics. Quality is an association of certain properties, so it is impossible to extract the properties that form the association based on production needs and pass them off as quality.

Third, it's high time to define basic properties conventionally, not limiting ourselves to the proposals of sanitary hygienists and epidemiologists. Much valuable information can be gleaned from the research of gerontologists, geriatricians, regional specialists, valeologists, and pediatricians;

fourthly, how long will the basic characteristics be practically devoid of aesthetic properties, even in a conspiratorial form?

The satisfaction with the de facto replacement of State Standards with national standards is also unclear. The adoption of international terminology in this component of quality ideology is of little use. If our production and ideological positions were aligned with European ones, then we could rejoice. As it is, chaos only intensifies. In the absence of corporate culture and traditions, firms left "free to roam" will resort to arbitrary action. Government agencies have acknowledged their own inability to manage market development in a civilized manner and have recalled the American fairy tale that the market will arrange and organize everything itself. The ineffectiveness of the state quality control system lies not in its status, but in its functioning. Unscrupulous and unprofessional officials prevent government agencies from functioning effectively. According to official data from the Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology, certification refusals average 2% per year. Meanwhile, over 30% of products are rejected directly at the point of sale. In the European Union, approximately 4% of the product range is subject to mandatory certification, not because European officials are liberal. The reason lies in the customs and traditions of production itself, and civilized relations in a market whose age exceeds the combined era of the Romanov dynasty and Soviet power. Haste inevitably entails costs. To move with the mainstream, it's not enough to dress and put on shoes like everyone else and fall into line. As long as the government and producers feign market relations, the mass consumer will have to pay the price, as the costs will fall on their shoulders. Exclusive buyers are protected from the vicissitudes of the Russian market by truly free choice. They purchase goods directly from reputable manufacturers. Officials are willing to do anything to be among these exclusive buyers. Companies are likely of the same opinion and are willing to pay officials for their own freedom of action. The situation can only be described as creeping

state anarchy. The state has begun to degenerate prematurely.

Until recently, according to official Russian regulations, 70–80% of product lines required state quality certification. Critics reject this practice and suggest adopting Western European practices.

They aren't bothered by the fact that the share of illegal and semi-legal businesses in Russia is estimated at 40–60%. This means that even though 70–80% of products need to be centrally tested for quality, less than 40% of certified goods are already on the market. Critics defend the interests of unknown manufacturers. And who will stand up for consumer rights? Officials, or perhaps judges, who are independent only by definition. All that remains are human rights organizations, which exist today and vanish tomorrow.

The motivations for quality improvement are directly linked to economic factors. This means that quality management aims to achieve economic benefits, i.e., is focused on generating profit for the enterprise. In today's environment, the economic success of a manufacturer is ensured by producing products that meet the following requirements:

- fully meets consumer demands;
- meets safety and environmental protection requirements;
- meets current standards and specifications;
- offered to consumers at competitive prices;
- is economically advantageous for production.

Managing the competitiveness of footwear in footwear enterprises in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts (SFD and NCFD) is associated with frequent changes in product range and the increasing influence of regional socio-economic factors.

Improving the competitiveness of footwear is only possible through the development of new models based on marketing information and in-depth research into the preferences of specific customer groups, accelerating product line changes while maintaining or improving the efficiency of the production system. Shoe manufacturers in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts account for a significant share of domestic footwear production, more than 30%.

Despite the large share of footwear production in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts, only 19.6% of demand for footwear is met; the remainder is imported from neighboring and distant countries. These imports are often smuggled. The import of cheap footwear is the most serious problem for domestic footwear manufacturers. Another problem for companies in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts is the lack of high-quality raw materials and components for footwear production, resulting in footwear from southern

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Russian shoe factories losing out on price to cheap imported footwear.

Furthermore, footwear companies in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts specialize primarily in men's footwear. Moreover, they produce virtually identical models in identical colors. Naturally, labor costs for women's and men's footwear are disparate. Therefore, women's footwear production in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts accounts for approximately 3% of the total, children's footwear production accounts for 15%, and safety footwear accounts for 40%. This low production volume of women's footwear is due to the fact that competition in the women's footwear market is much fiercer, and in this segment, shoemakers in the Southern Federal District immediately clash with Moscow-based and Chinese manufacturers, which currently hold the majority of the women's footwear market. Unfortunately, however, shoemakers fail to recognize the lack of footwear for older consumers in the women's footwear market, which Chinese shoe manufacturers do not produce, leaving a niche for manufacturers.

The situation with children's footwear production by most shoemakers in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts remains more problematic. This is due to the abolition of federal budget subsidies for their production, imperfect taxation of children's footwear, and a lack of the necessary volume and style of lasts for their production. In the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts' children's consumer market, domestic manufacturers have been displaced by foreign suppliers who can afford to sell shoes on a payment-on-sale basis. However, these products, for the most part, lack certificates of conformity and hygiene certifications. Imported footwear is typically in the most popular, "average" sizes and is not intended for children. Therefore, children and their parents are currently forced to satisfy this need with affordable imported adult footwear. Providing children with properly fitted, physiologically appropriate footwear is a key challenge for domestic manufacturers, including those in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts. The situation in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts necessitates the development of a set of regional measures aimed at improving the socio-economic situation in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts. Increased purchasing power for high-quality footwear in the mid-price consumer segment determines the economic feasibility of developing footwear manufacturing facilities. Establishing a wide range of footwear production will transform the currently subsidized regions of the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts into self-sustaining ones, raising household incomes; stimulate the creation of new jobs; ensure the development of small businesses and support for legal private

entrepreneurship; and create the basis for bringing a significant portion of the real sector of the economy out of the shadow economy for the purpose of shaping the regional budget, as the implementation of a set of regional measures has economic, political, and social implications. The main stage of structural restructuring should be improving the technical level of production at footwear enterprises and the competitiveness of their products, ensuring the introduction of innovative products and high technologies, replacing certain types of imported footwear with domestically produced ones, and facilitating their entry into Russian and global markets. This requires measures to modernize and reconstruct existing footwear production facilities and create new ones, strengthen control and implement modern quality management systems, certify products and production facilities, develop a dealer and distribution network, implement an active marketing policy, and expand the use of leasing schemes for innovative activities. To revive children's footwear production in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts, organizational and financial support for footwear companies is primarily required from the Russian government, as well as regional and local authorities, namely:

- in the form of a reduction in VAT;
- provision of an open-ended loan;
- urgent loan at a preferential interest rate with payment deferrals for 3 or more years;
- in the form of support for footwear companies in providing high-quality, affordable shoe materials (natural, artificial and textile).

Furthermore, companies should be allowed to use balance sheet profits to replenish working capital to provide them with high-quality and affordable footwear materials when producing children's footwear under the same conditions as for financing construction, i.e., tax-free. State procurement for children's footwear with advance payment is also possible.

Local authorities need to take a differentiated approach to establishing the structure and amounts of local taxes, i.e., reducing their amounts for children's footwear production. Particular attention should be paid to creating opportunities for large and low-income families to purchase footwear through targeted compensation, the establishment of special departments, discounted prices, credit, and installment plans.

As global experience shows, leadership in the competitive struggle is achieved by those who are most competent in product range policy, who have a perfect command of the methods of its implementation and who can manage it most effectively.

A product range development forecast should show a trajectory that will ensure the company's product offering achieves the intended alignment with

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the changing market demand structure. Product range planning is a continuous process that continues throughout the product's life cycle, from the inception of the concept to its removal from the product line.

To ensure the competitiveness of footwear products from the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts in terms of quality and demand, it is necessary to transform the disparate light industry enterprises in these regions into a dynamic, competitive footwear cluster.

An industrial cluster is a group of geographically adjacent and integrated companies and related organizations operating in a specific industry (or multi-industry) and complementing each other. The Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts have all the necessary conditions for creating a footwear cluster, namely:

- educational institutions have been preserved and are functioning, continuing to train highly qualified personnel not only for footwear companies, but also for related industries;
- The regions of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts are characterized by the presence of a large number of unemployed people (the unemployed), the percentage of unemployed women is especially high, which requires the creation of new jobs and the reduction of social tension in these regions;
- the ability to produce a wide range of footwear not only by type, but also by fastening methods, including for children, taking into account the national characteristics of those living in these regions;
- The shoemaking traditions that developed in these regions are still alive, and even today 35% of all footwear manufactured in Russia in 2007 is produced there;
- Geographical and transport proximity to Western Europe, where footwear companies face an even more difficult choice: moving production to China, India, Taiwan, or Eastern Europe. Consequently, there are significant opportunities for investment and technological partnerships within the cluster with Western European footwear manufacturers;
- Gloria Jeans's positive development experience: 12 factories annually producing 20 million denim pieces under the Gloria Jeans and Gee Jay brands. The Russian company's leadership in the CIS market in a niche unconventional for the Russian light industry—denim clothing.
- potential for the development of a raw material base through the implementation of a program to develop cattle and pig populations;
- the presence of local manufacturers of certain types of components (soles, heels), including those that meet European standards.

The creation of a footwear cluster in the Southern Federal District will ensure:

- increasing the efficiency and productivity of enterprises, clearer coordination of work;
- increased attention to achieving business goals and meeting consumer expectations;
- achieving and maintaining conformity of the quality of the enterprise's products and services with the established requirements of consumers;
- achieving customer satisfaction that the required quality is provided and maintained;
- maintaining confidence in the capabilities of the enterprise among existing and potential consumers;
- opening up new market opportunities and maintaining existing sales markets;
- certification and registration of quality systems;
- the ability to compete in this field with larger enterprises (i.e. the ability to offer reasonable prices or maintain them).

Existing and newly established enterprises and firms in southern Russia, using the proposed measures, will be able to produce competitive footwear in sufficient quantities to meet the demand of various population groups with specific income levels and social security. The history of quality issues can be divided into two periods. During the first, serious interest in quality was largely limited to professional theory. Philosophers attempted to define quality and its systemic position; however, even in numerous philosophical debates, the concept of "quality" was not among the key issues.

The actualization of the theory of quality turned out to be dependent on the degree of development of the system-forming philosophical concept of "being" in the context of the basic concepts derived from it, i.e. those concepts that help to realize the ascent from the extremely abstract assertion of existence with the only distinguishing property of being, to exist, to a concrete understanding with an established content, thanks to the answers to derivative questions such as "What is everything made of?", "Due to what does everything exist?", "Is there non-being?", "In what systemic forms does being acquire its definition?"

Apparently, it was precisely the last of the listed questions that led philosophy onto the "path" of that interpretation of quality that "hooked" not only those who "established" a fundamentally new type of worldview in human history.

It's logical to assume that the problem of the substance of being, as the first step toward a theory of quality, was unlikely to interest anyone outside the limited community of philosophers. All indications are that it was of interest to those whose gaze was directed toward the Cosmos, into the depths of its structure, while the overwhelming majority of fellow philosophers were preoccupied with earthly problems.

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For the masses, variety and choice in goods were essentially unavailable. The plebeians demanded "Bread and circuses!" The feast of life in all its diversity was enjoyed by a small aristocracy. The issue of quality of life was addressed in accordance with the sociocultural architecture of society. This problem undoubtedly existed, but it failed to mature into a pressing issue for society. The reason is simple: there was a lack of sufficient mass demand for a quality product.

The issue of quality has acquired significant social relevance in the context of the transition to a mass production economy, the democratization of social relations, the development of education, the accessibility of education, and other cultural values. For the issue of quality to become one of the most important for society, it had to be relevant to the majority of those who make up that society. Without the right to freedom and the purchasing power to make choices, "quality" cannot be a priority in the mass consciousness. Elite demands for quality, however, are developed in exclusive, unconventional theories whose primary goal is not the attainment of truth, but the satisfaction of customer needs.

Of course, the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of natural and artificial phenomena were known long before these attributes became relevant in social existence and the consciousness that reflected its development. However, in light of our research, the existence of de facto knowledge of quality is less significant. The subject of our research is not the awareness of quality, but the development of an understanding of quality across different horizons of social history.

Development is a universal state of all existence, from the simplest material substrates to the highest forms of thought. Both quality and quantitative expression were improved, and the relationship between qualitative and quantitative changes became clearer. The emphasis shifted from quantity to quality. Having proven its evolutionary resilience, humanity shifted to the principle of "skill, not numbers." The struggle for survival gave way to a desire for a high standard of living, broadly defined. The struggle for a dignified quality of life began.

As history shows, having abandoned savagery and barbarism and laid the foundations of civilization, humans have noticeably changed in their outward forms of manifestation, but civilization penetrates the depths of human nature slowly and arduously. Biological history has imbued human nature with an active principle, combined with a developed capacity for thought, significantly superior to all other forms of reflection. But this entire superstructure formed over a rather rigid animal framework, subordinated to the systemic goal of survival in struggle. The conditions of struggle have transformed, introducing adjustments to the means and forms, but the natural foundation itself has proven highly inert.

The transition from natural, biologically based egoism to rationally active egoism, despite the well-known civilizational means of cultivating it, did not meet the predictions of either romantics or realist optimists. Civilization was marked by non-civilizational forms of relationships in its movement toward a quality life, which further heightened interest in quality. To rank among the most important issues, quality had to be presented in several functions: as an end, as a means, and as a condition for the development of all social actors at all levels of life.

For historians, history is events and participants arranged in a temporal sequence, a kind of chronology of significant facts in social and, to some extent, personal life. Philosophers and non-historian specialists see their own interests in history. Philosophical and specialized interest in history is driven by the need to understand the dialectic of process as it applies to human activity. The specialist seeks to discover trends in the past that provide solutions to their problems, often far from specific.

Intuitively, even at the dawn of civilization, the term history (historia) was interpreted as the study of a given process, as opposed to a chronological description. The Ionians called narrative, the account of the past, logos. Only later, in the works of the founders of philosophy, did logos acquire its modern meaning—thought, idea. Both Herodotus and Thucydides understood history as an understanding of the course of past events, necessary for "instructions in the way of life" for those living in the present. Having stood the test of time, historicism strengthened its position, becoming the ideological foundation of cultural memory. N.A. Berdyaev asserted: "From the first days of Creation...man is in the historical, and the historical is in man. To delve into the depths of time is to delve within oneself."

The past dissolves into time, leaving us, along with memories of the past, thoughts of the present and responsibility for the future. The new is always relative. Goethe was right when he said that everything intelligent is already known; we just need to think it through again.

History is a treasure trove of ideas, a gold mine for a thinking person, no matter what their occupation. Different attitudes toward history are the combined effect of two factors: the first is the interpretation of time, the second is the self-perception of time. In the pre-Christian period of history, time was understood cyclically, as the sum of repeating, self-contained cycles. With Christianity, this view of time changed. Time was seen as an ascent to the infinite, divided into a finite, earthly, and an infinite, extraterrestrial. The opposition between cyclical and non-cyclical views of time is characteristic of theological theory. It is of no interest to us, however, nor are the properties of time in their abstract form.

Since Hegel and Marx, it's not the concept of something in general that's relevant, but rather an

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immersion in the concrete, objective, or concrete, historical state of whatever becomes the object of study. In the case of time, it's not so much its universal properties that matter, nor its direction and direction. What's important is that everything that exists in time can only exist by conforming to these objective characteristics of time. To exist in time means to possess the properties of time. This proposition applies universally to both the infinite diversity of individual phenomena and the essential attributes of being inherent in them, which include "quality" and "quantity."

The standard understanding of the law of the transition of quantitative changes into qualitative ones simplifies the view of their connection. Both Hegel and Engels were far removed from the meaning propagated under the guise of dialectical development theory. Quantity does not directly transform into quality. A new quality, a qualitative state, arises as a transition from a previous quality. Under changed quantitative conditions, measure exhausts its reserve of functional stability.

Measure is a "qualitative quantity"; it indicates the limits of change in quantity without significant consequences for the given quality of the phenomenon. When quantitative indicators necessary for the achieved quality exceed the limits of measure, qualitative transformations inevitably occur. Simultaneously with the loss of the previous quality, a new quality is born from it, based on it, commensurate with the changed quantity. Measure occupies a key position in the relationship between quality and quantity. Quality specialists, however, prefer not to seriously discuss measure, reducing it to quantitative standards. As if measure were some kind of passing state of the "quality-quantity" system. It is necessary to clearly understand the objective and functional role of measure in the management of both quality and quantity.

"Measure" pertains neither to quality nor quantity. It expresses the systemic relationship between quality and quantity, linking them. So, first: quantity and quality interact through measure, and measure mediates their connection. What "benefit" will a practitioner derive from this conclusion? Mass production, including its "thrifty" variety, requires a dimensional characteristic; otherwise, the fairy tale of the pot of porridge or the "seven-flowered flower" has a good chance of being realized. Chinese consumer goods are a classic example of the destruction of dialectical unity in the "quantity-quality" system.

The market, by its very nature, is incapable of controlling the measure that regulates relations in the "quantity-quality" system. With the emergence of wholesale forms of development, the ascendancy of financial capital, and its natural offspring—large-scale speculation and intermediation—the modern market has pitted itself against production and lost interest in the state of production. The market,

exploiting the specifics of mass production, has become saturated to the extent of its perversion and can afford to dictate the qualitative characteristics of goods.

The state behaves in the market like a kindergarten teacher. It places the interests of the market above those of producers and the mass consumer. Under the umbrella of the general idea that the market drives production, the market and the state are merging. Quality and quantitative assessments are relegated to the realm of subjective arbitrariness.

Until a theory of quality is systematically developed, quality management theory will be based on empirical principles, which are incapable of encompassing the subject matter as a whole and are relatively meaningful within the limited context of production. For lack of anything better, they are used to extrapolate local experience to other conditions, achieving results through additional adaptation measures, which, unfortunately, are again temporary and partial.

A certain logic can be discerned in the kaleidoscope of changing quality management methods. Life, however, demands not a "definite" logic, but logical certainty in the form of a holistic, systemically grounded theory of quality as a methodological foundation for constructing universal principles of quality management theory. The starting point here should be the idea of the systematic nature of the "quality-quantity" relationship within the framework of their coexistence.

Quantity helps quality to fully blossom. A high-quality piece can be created in a single copy, but to fully realize the manufacturer's potential for quality, a single piece (or work) is clearly not enough. The Fabergé house secured its fame with its first branded piece, but it became a brand through subsequent successes in creating its collection.

An example of a systematic understanding of quality within the framework of measure—dimensional certainty—is small series, such as the production of collectible coins and medals. Quality is fixed within the boundaries of a quantitative value, which serves as a measure of its expression. This is not only about providing preferential conditions for the product's VIP consumer. The dependence of objective quality indicators on the quantity produced is also significant. Mass production is objectively associated with a decrease in product quality. Measure is the boundary service of quality; going beyond the measured quantity is a crime against quality.

A mass domestic manufacturer is unlikely to be interested in quality theory. It's irrelevant to them. If anyone were to stumble upon our reasoning, they'd likely smile at our naivety. Trying to restructure the Russian market with theory, to give it a civilized appearance, is classic quixoticism. First, we need to organize the market space through political will, legislative initiatives, and effective, not sham,

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oversight of the legal order, bringing back the manufacturer, eliminating the countless middlemen and speculators.

A true producer isn't interested in speculative operations. For sustainable development, it requires its own consumer, who, incidentally, is not at all opposed to having a defined and accessible producer within the framework of moral and legal relations.

A sense of national pride is nurtured by history and the existing reality. You can study at school using the best history textbook, but beyond history lessons, there's current life, which is more impressive than historical excursions. In the East, they say, "No matter how many times you repeat halva, it won't taste sweet." Theory has always been considered the best practical guide, albeit under normalized circumstances. By going illegal or semi-legal, a manufacturer alienates itself from quality and, naturally, from the theory of quality. This then leads to the substitution of pseudo-quality, and the costs of advertising hype rise.

Quality does indeed entail significant costs, but it guarantees a stable market position. By focusing on quality, manufacturers build confidence in their own and the nation's future. A well-developed understanding of quality guarantees future prospects even in the context of a domestic semi-market.

Let us try to formulate practically significant fundamental principles as an introduction to the theory of quality:

- Quality isn't simply the sum of the properties essential to a product's existence; it's a unique combination of them, typically built on two attributes—one more general and one more specific. For example, shoes are "clothing for the feet," a hat is "clothing for the head," a scarf is "clothing for the nose and neck," and so on. Consequently, they deserve the most attention.

- Quality allows for changes that do not lead to a loss of quality but that reduce or increase its consumer value; quality is a set of qualitative states that satisfy, to varying degrees, system-forming characteristics. Quality "play" allows for flexibility in the process of creating a product with a given quality, depending on the specific capabilities of the manufacturer and consumer.

- Quality does not exist without quantity; they are dialectical opposites, their opposition valid only within the boundaries of unity. It follows that, when creating quality, it is necessary to incorporate quantitative expression into qualitative characteristics, both in relation to individual product properties and the quantity of goods produced. A.K. Savrasov, finding himself in a difficult life situation, made several copies of his famous painting "The Rooks Have Come Back." As a rule, artist-made copies are of a high level of craftsmanship and command high prices. The artist was also paid. When P. Tretyakov was asked whether he would buy

Savrasov's copy if something happened to the original, his answer was predictably categorical – no! Quality requires not only craftsmanship but also inspiration. Inspiration fades with repetition. Quality is always quantitative, and quantity is qualitative.

- Quality and quantity are linked by a measure that is often overlooked. However, when defining quality, one must simultaneously consider its dimensionality, both from the perspective of market conditions and from the perspective of the quality attributes themselves. "Quality" is concretized in the concept of "quality." "Quality" is a concept that reflects the model image of a product, while "quality" defines the quantitative limits of the reality and reasonableness of quality (the physical and moral status of a product).

- Quality and the concept of quality are stable phenomena, but time changes them. Initially, quality was equated with meaning. The criteria for quality were the usefulness and magnitude of an object or relationship. With the development of consciousness and practical capabilities, the foundations for comparison and choice emerged. Quality becomes relatively distinct from quantity. Utility is differentiated, and participation is reconsidered as quantitative attributes. The evolution of the understanding of quality is directly driven by the embodiment of creative potential in activity. The discrepancy in the intensity of the advancement of individual skill, the interests of those called upon to clear the path of talent, and mass consciousness complicates the understanding of quality and the process of quality management. The concrete interpretation of quality, particularly its fundamental attribute of objectivity, acquires particular significance. The social theory of existence is built on a natural-historical foundation—its canvas was laid by nature, and its historical pattern was created by man. In the natural environment, all attributes, including such synthetic ones as quality, are products of spontaneous movement. In society, every phenomenon is subject to activity, incorporating both human mental and physical labor into its quality. Determining the quality of phenomena created by human activity is impossible without sociocultural specification. Therefore, two questions arise:

- In what status and to what extent does consciousness enter into what is traditionally called the quality of things (with services there is more clarity)?

The answers to both questions must be sought in the philosophical theory of alienation. Alienation theory has no direct relation to quality theory. It holds the keys to the methodology for constructing a theory of quality.

From the above discussion, it's clear that the authors aren't idealists; rather, they balance on the edge of pessimism and optimism. They are critical of the modern, pragmatic approach of market liberals to

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scientifically and philosophically grounded theory. A watered-down version of theory, in which a fragment torn from a general theory is transformed into the theory itself and tailored to the structure of a market distorted to suit speculators, suits the needs of economic theorists and suppliers of high-quality surrogates to domestic stores. How long the Russian economy will maintain this configuration is unknown to us (and not only to us), but global experience of economic development at various stages of economic relations shows that transition periods pass, and over time, economic life returns to normal.

The trajectory of the process of alienating human creativity to what exists outside of itself must necessarily preserve and activate the capacity for creativity. Unlike the existence of nature, human existence is not substantial. It is not self-sufficient and can only exist through mutual exchange, initially with nature, and subsequently with society, through which human relationships and interactions with nature are built. The instrument that ensures human existence is labor, and the highest quality of labor is manifested in activity.

The quality of activity, on the one hand, is an indicator of the quality of a person's life (as it should be!); on the other, quality activity is integrated into the quality of what they transform. The quality of "first" (natural) nature is formed spontaneously, as a set of objectively interconnected natural attributes. The quality of "second" nature (reconstructed, adapted by humans to their own interests) is synthetic. It is represented by a double helix formed by the natural attributes of natural material (possibly in human relationships, indirectly expressed knowledge) and the qualitative characteristics of human activity—knowledge, emotions, will, value orientation, and skill. Ultimately, the quality of a product, as distinct from the product itself, embodies the quality of the individual.

The individual is alienated in quality, and therefore, in principle, alienation is natural and does not oppress the individual. The negative consequence of alienation is caused by the disproportionate compensation for lost activity energy. Upon discovering a poor-quality product, a hidden manufacturing defect, or a seller's deceptive actions, a normal buyer becomes upset, primarily because of their own poor decision. Other losses in the transaction are usually compensated. A sense of imperfection in one's own taste and knowledge remains.

The quality of everything created by activity encompasses the properties of activity, both practical and spiritual, in an objectified (objective or functional) form. This leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to shape and guide the development of the mass consciousness's capacity for qualitative evaluation of goods: certain experiences were established during the Soviet era and demonstrated

their effectiveness: "circles," "schools," and "universities," including those initiated by television and radio. The place for systematic education of the mass consumer, professional assistance in developing a culture of qualitative selectivity, is today overwhelmed by aggressive advertising, the quality of which is uncontrolled or disproportionate to the scale of deception. Who should be the primary educator? The manufacturer, and only the manufacturer, for only they, according to the logic of developing understanding, should fully understand what quality is. Undertaking the production of a product without understanding the specific quality of a given item means professional failure in the marketplace. Releasing a product with sham quality is punishable by law, albeit formally and post-factum. This is precisely what suppliers of pseudo-quality goods hope for.

To be fair, let's say: true creators of quality products will remain pariahs in our market as long as law enforcement officials are confident of impunity for corrupt practices. Nevertheless, we must move forward. History, albeit ugly, is moving toward order.

WTO accession hasn't increased our supply of quality products, nor has it lowered their prices. The real prospect lies in the creation of a unified economic space within the Customs Union. This will create cross-checking of quality, weakening the influence of corrupt national forces on the market. As for the potential for increased interethnic criminal activity, the danger exists, but the different organizational conditions and intercriminal competition should slow the degradation of the market—the main obstacle to the development of high-quality national goods. The market itself, whatever its nature, will expand, and access procedures will be simplified.

Let's be honest: the problem of quality remains theoretically one-sided, which is hardly noticeable because there is no proper organization for the production and marketing of high-quality products. Current practice is satisfied with this degree of certainty in quality theory. Quality management theory has been simplified to the concept of monitoring the conditions of high-quality production. Meanwhile, there is no systematic understanding of what constitutes product quality. Production is driven by the market. Speculators and intermediaries rule the market. The state strives to minimize its economic function before collecting taxes. There is no real effort to impart a civilized form of "buying and selling" to the market based on the principles of genuine freedom of competition. Oversight of essential quality indicators is limited to the point of being practically useless. The market dictates order to local and regional governments. A store director once ran the defense department. The culture of the producer and consumer is of little interest to anyone, and they are of no concern. Yet external order begins with internal

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order, with an awareness of the "political moment" conditioned by the economic situation.

Historically, the understanding of quality and the concreteness of its reality represented in a product reflect the economic and cultural development of society. During the era of guild production, quality was determined by the conservatism of manufacturing techniques, but even then, municipal authorities strictly monitored the quality of products, as well as the capabilities of potential producers; official regulations, approved by city or national authorities, were in effect. Agricultural products were controlled by consumers themselves.

The Industrial Revolution simplified the production process and created the conditions for mass production. Adequate quality control measures were required. As the social architecture became more equal and a wider range of goods became more accessible, notions of quality shifted toward its qualitative component. At the same time, the possibility of falsifying quality arose. From there, both de facto and de jure, it was only a step to substituting brand qualities. Going beyond the limits of measure opens the door to legal violations and moral crisis, even to the point of lawlessness.

Were the trends in the interpretation of quality and attitudes toward quality that emerged in the economy of mass production inevitable? No, they were generated by the new nature of production, reflected this nature, and to a certain extent constituted an objective reflection. However, beyond the object reflected by consciousness, there is a perspective of reflection determined by the reflecting subject's position of consciousness, their interests as a participant in processes occurring in objective reality.

Objective reality itself, by definition, is located outside and independent of consciousness. Its reflection is subjectivized, which, in general, seems consistent with reflection theory. However, it also allows, in particular, for subjective distortion—involuntary, due to misunderstanding, and conscious, for the purpose of gaining a temporary advantage. Competition is always a struggle, but unfortunately, the struggle is not always conducted according to the rules.

Quality has been and remains a subject of manipulation in the interests of those who control the market. Consensus on quality among creator, manufacturer, seller, and consumer is the sweetest fairy tale. Agreement is achieved between creator, consumer, and producer. This "trinity" embodies the subjective mechanism for resolving the problem of alienation. The creator—the product's creator—finds satisfaction in production and consumption. They realize their human potential in them. The producer is interested in a stable relationship with the creator and consumer. The consumer is satisfied with quality and a reasonable price. "Promotions" and "sales" do not confuse or deceive them.

The seller stands in the way of consensus. He is the party in the relationship that, essentially, has nothing to do with the quality of the product, yet he is the key figure in the market economy. We buy everything we need from him. He is a monopolist and, as such, dictates the terms of the relationship through price and profit margins. In Novosibirsk, not a single brand-name light industry enterprise has emerged in the past twenty years; on the contrary, a host of brand-name retailers have emerged. Retail aisles are proliferating, yet consumers are being assured that their production is unprofitable. Retail culture is being replaced by the concept of "sales quality." Retail culture is measured by product selection, price and availability, high-quality consulting support, the absence of queues, compliance with sanitary and hygienic standards, the appearance and behavior of staff, and customer service. "Retail quality" is determined by the proportionality of price and product quality, the conformity of the product to its certification, and the demonstration of the product. The seller's profit should not exceed the manufacturer's profit. Both need to avoid waiting for increased purchasing activity solely due to rising consumer wages, but rather create a most favorable environment for the buyer (without colluding with another market predator – banks).

Only in Russia, and only liberal marketeers, take every opportunity to recall how poorly people lived before the advent of genuine democracy—starving, living in rags, living in unknown places and ways. Monitoring quality of life—through quality consumption opportunities—is appropriate within the current era. There's only one criterion: is the consumer basket growing, and how is it growing?

Inflation is a necessary, but not sufficient, indicator of quality of life. The government has set inflation reduction as its primary goal. This indicator is indeed socially and economically significant, demonstrating market culture and, indirectly, the state of production. The downside of this indicator is its lack of quality. Quality of life is determined by the quantity of products consumed in monetary terms. Qualitative composition remains constant, and quality can only be speculated upon, as quality blurs quality. The quality of shoes, clothing, cereals, fish, vegetables, and fruits within a common name varies significantly. There is considerable scope for quality manipulation. The key to understanding quality is not the name, but the systemic characteristics of the product, reflecting the assortment, its changes, and the dynamics of the proportional representation of the constituent goods.

Quality represents a system of essential properties for a product—this is trivial and well-known, yet it is actively exploited. This is done by substituting properties or their systematic nature in a quality product. Essential properties are those that are not simply inherent to a product; they determine its

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functionality. Such properties are typically revealed during the product's intended operation; they are hidden from the untrained eye of the consumer. In its pure form, the market is an intermediary and should have no interest in product quality. The purpose of the market in the theory of commodity production organization is to organize exchange between producer and consumer. Market development stimulates increased production in the interests of the consumer within the limits of the market's infrastructural status.

The monopolization of production has led to the accumulation of financial capital, its autonomy, and market control. As a result, the market has transformed from an intermediary into a key actor, attempting to replace its indicator function—demonstrating the demand for goods—with the role of organizer of economic activity as a whole, which distorts the economic system.

The commodity economy was created by the production of goods and the demand for mass production. The system-forming factor here is the production of goods as a product necessary for consumption by others, that is, the process of alienation of consumption. Under natural production, product quality was hardly a pressing issue. Quality was "dissolved" in the conservatism of technology and technology, and the traditional nature of product ranges. The consumer raised the issue of quality when he gained the opportunity to compare products at fairs. The market, which grew out of fair gatherings, gradually enriched its representative status with advertising, taking control of producer-consumer relations. The levers of control are financial policy, and the main directions are two: influencing quantity and quality.

Product quality became relevant in commodity production. It became clear that the understanding of quality involved both sensory and rational thinking (the latter in the form of calculation). The subjective factor was objectified and fetishized. The market was unable to directly influence the objective properties of a product (through its own mechanisms), but it could very well objectify subjective perceptions. Thus, quality manipulation was first included in the functions of the market, then became an element of economic policy.

A sound and healthy economic policy is called upon to improve quality in two interconnected areas: technical and technological, supported by a strict legal framework, and sociocultural – providing comprehensive support for the development of conditions for the subjective perception of quality and countering the negative impact of advertising, which has long been a hallmark of market speculation on the importance of quality to consumers. The availability of choice and affordability do not guarantee a quality purchase.

In the current market, price and quality are divorced even at auctions renowned for their meticulous organizational culture. Buyers are transformed into experts, and this marketplace sham isn't so much bad as it is illogical. The market forces consumers to develop as individuals. To avoid being dupes, we, instead of being mere ordinary people with a wallet, involuntarily strive to learn more about the subject of our interest, raising our "buyer skills." The term isn't new; journalists use it, but for them it's a throwaway line, a verbal gimmick. For us, however, it's no longer a new combination of commonplace words, but a crucial concept, without which modern quality theory lacks a systemic, holistic form.

"Buyer qualifications" include, along with certain knowledge needed to locate a store, the price range of a product, and require basic information about the manufacturer, the product's quality attributes, the manufacturer's market reputation, the company's traditions, and the scale of its operations. In today's consumer market, a naive buyer risks becoming a victim not only of deception but also of their own carelessness, and therefore without any right to compensation.

Consumers in Russia are protected only formally. In reality, they must adhere to the famous maxim: "A drowning man (or "buyer") must save himself (read: "buyer")." Improving "buyer qualifications," if desired, is a mutually beneficial endeavor for the state, activating the national cultural heritage and patriotic sentiment of the mass consumer. However, there is another approach, tried and tested under Mao in China: "the worse, the better."

Imported consumer goods – not Chinese ones – were a big hit with us in the 1980s and 1990s!

The product range, packaging, and appearance were impressive. And the result? Ten years later, the manufacturer is bringing back Soviet brands, naturally without effective oversight, and not of Soviet quality.

Conclusion

We know how to make high-quality products and are fully capable of reclaiming "our" market. The issue isn't even price; the problem is the loss of control over the consumer market (and not only consumer market, judging by the failures in rocket technology, aircraft operation, etc.). They tell us: economic measures are needed. True, but that's a half-truth. If they are needed, then adopt them. The government should have more than just nominal power. It's time to understand that economics has always been politics, and economic theory, political economy.

Economic movement is self-movement, but it does not occur in a vacuum. The economy is the foundation of social movement. Society provides the conditions for economic movement, and the state has the right to vigorously engage in the mechanisms of economic self-movement, guiding economic development in the interests of society.

Impact Factor:	ISRA (India)	= 6.317	SIS (USA)	= 0.912	ICV (Poland)	= 6.630
	ISI (Dubai, UAE)	= 1.582	ПИИИ (Russia)	= 0.191	PIF (India)	= 1.940
	GIF (Australia)	= 0.564	ESJI (KZ)	= 8.100	IBI (India)	= 4.260
	JIF	= 1.500	SJIF (Morocco)	= 6.004	OAJI (USA)	= 0.350

It's astonishing. When it comes to the future of technological progress, futurologists of all stripes lament that the autonomous movement of technology will lead to robots dominating humans, and that it's better not to interfere with economic development. For whom is this better? The obvious conclusion is: not disrupting the economy's self-propelled movement is in the interests of those who privatized the economy and who employ "border guards" who forbid political control of economic processes.

None of the convertible currencies are backed by a high-quality commodity equivalent, and the "free" movement of currency continues under the guise of politics. Financial self-regulation creates favorable conditions for chaos in the consumer market. The state weakly protects the legitimate interests of domestic producers, even when the goods are the product of international integration. There is no political aggressiveness; politics drags along behind the economy instead of anticipating its development based on objective socioeconomic trends. One is tempted to believe politicians' explanations regarding the timeframe for WTO accession. It's good that they negotiated, creating a legal "safety net" for domestic producers of consumer goods. The problem is: how

will they take advantage of the concessions from the WTO?

The time for political action—not decisions—is most favorable. The haze of the 1990s and 2000s seems to be waning. Awareness of the qualitative advantages of many Soviet light industry and food products is returning. There is a revival in such operations, which could stimulate agricultural production in rural areas. Mistrust of consumer imports is growing, in part because of their mass production in China. Migration flows are stabilizing.

The harsh assessment of the socioeconomic situation and the direct reference to government responsibility for failing to implement the 2016 presidential instructions in Vladimir Putin's Address are associated with a determination to "tighten the screws" to ensure progress remains on track. The clear intensification of interethnic economic relations within the Customs Union and the reset of strategic relations with a focus on China, India, Iran, and Latin America are also evident. The real opportunity for full-scale cooperation with Egypt, Syria, and Iran—key states in the Middle East and northern Africa—all of this represents a unique international opportunity to restore balance in the domestic consumer goods market.

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