

Customer Needs and Expectations

The Difference

Needs

Customer Needs can be defined as those factors of which both the customer and the company will be aware. They may either be expressions of need (end use needs or performance requirements), or translated into specifications (quantitative tolerances or expressly stated qualitative criteria).

They can be readily assessed through examination of the contract documents, relevant standards, regulations and laws.

They are the things that the customer has a right to expect from any supplier.

Expectations

Expectations, or implied needs, on the other hand, will often be unstated, but significant. They will often relate to areas where the customer has come to expect standards or performance, quality, service, image, discretion, finish, etc, that they may expect from other customers.

Because they are unstated, they can be easily overlooked, unless the system ensures they are always provided.

Meeting Them

Needs

Normal processes of reviewing orders will, if thorough and systematic, ensure that the customers stated needs will be identified. Having identified them, the system should either provide for them to be met, or concessions negotiated with the customer.

Expectations

The relative invisibility of expectations is often the reason for failures - everyone assumes they are being provided, without anyone ensuring that they are.

For this reason, the defining of these as a standard part of the system should be thorough - they can be included in inspection checklists, defined into the system's documentation, etc.

Blessed be he that expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.
(B. Franklin - sic)