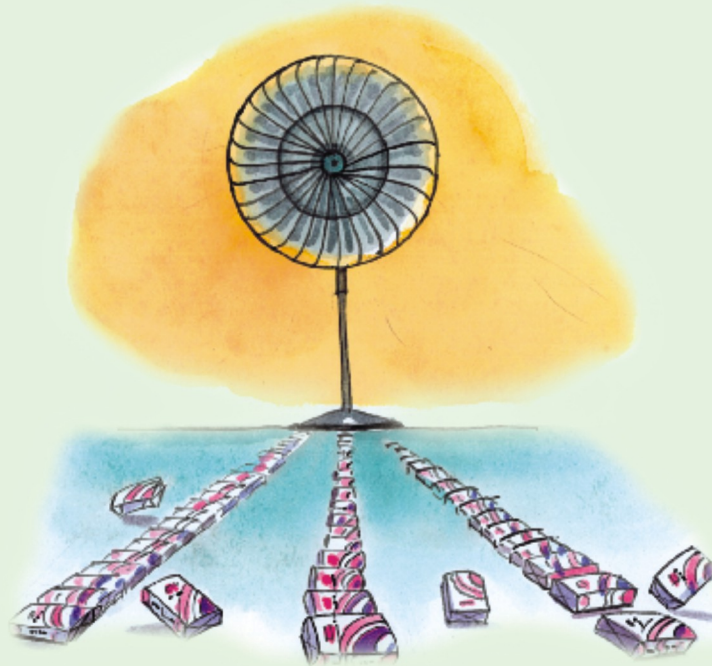


Solutions, Not
Problems

INNOVATION



One of the most memorable case studies on Japanese management was the case of the empty soapbox, which happened in one of Japan's biggest cosmetics companies.

The company received a complaint that a consumer had bought a soapbox that was empty. Immediately the authorities isolated the problem to the assembly line, which transported all the packaged boxes of soap to the delivery department. For some reason, one soapbox went through the assembly line empty.

The management asked its engineers to solve the problem. Post-haste, the engineers worked hard to devise an X-ray machine with high-resolution monitors manned by

two people to watch all the soapboxes that passed through the line to make sure they were not empty. No doubt, they worked hard and they worked fast, but they spent a whoopee amount to do so.

But when a rank-and-file employee in a small company was posed with the same problem, he did not get into the complications of X-rays, etc., but instead came out with a brilliant solution. He bought a strong industrial electric fan and pointed it at the assembly line. He switched the fan on, and as each soapbox passed the fan, it simply blew the empty ones out of the line.

The world is drowning in information, but starved of knowledge.
— John Naisbitt