

Hajo Meyer 'the progressive industrial engineer' retires

Niels Wiedenhof

'My professional life is the only part of an extremely complex and sometimes very difficult life of which I can say: if I could start my life over again tomorrow, I wouldn't do anything differently. Working for Philips has always been a complete pleasure. I have felt totally at home here, and I have marvelled at the standard of these laboratories and at the impressive quality and vitality of Philips as a whole 'what more can I say?'

A striking Meyer outpouring - there will be more - at the beginning of a discussion with Dr. H.J.G. Meyer shortly before he retired as managing director of the Research Laboratories, a position he had held since 1974.

Dr. Meyer never made any secret of his opinions. He aired his views with conviction and often vociferously where after he was always open to contradiction by informed parties. Known to many people simply as



Dr. Meyer

'Hajo', he joined the Research Laboratories on October 10, 1950, after completing his studies in theoretical physics under Prof. J. de Boer at the Municipal University of Amsterdam. Those who know how demanding a tutor Prof. de Boer was will attest to Meyer's achievement in completing his studies within five years. Six years later he received his doctorate in a theoretical subject in solid-state physics from the same University. In 1964 he became a group leader and three years later he was appointed director management team, as a progressive industrial engineer.

Hajo Meyer positively glowed when I told him that. 'Is it so? Well, I take that as a compliment. When I was young, I often thought about becoming an engineer. But the war destroyed many things. Then, I found a new home in the Netherlands and the only thing that I knew for certain after the war was that I was really interested in physics. However, I never lost the strong practical bent that I had always had. I am proud of that too. Moreover, I have never been afraid to use my intuition. Let me put it like this: the best possible training for an engineer is theoretical physics.' Another outpouring.

Leader

'You can see that I'm like a fish in water here, I have always felt at home here. Especially as the commanding officer, the leader of the group. I always felt privileged to be able to stay and work in the Research Laboratories. Within Philips it is a microcosm of thinking and doing. It is the only central body where you will encounter all the Company's top technical experts. As managing director, therefore, you get an unbelievably broad and rich insight into what is going on.

I am also happy to have been involved in such a tremendous transition from one outlook on research to another.

'On my departure from the Senior Staff I described this as research that nowadays we must change Schopenhauer's saying to: what counts is not knowing the hitherto unknown but using some knowledge to do what has never been done before.

Now that is what we here in the laboratories and in Philips have done with great success.

'We have made great advances with optical communication techniques, the CCD's, and we are the only company in the world to have successfully made the transition from tubes to semi-conductors ... I could go on and on. Think of opto-electronics where Philips leads the field. The Compact Disc, into which our Audio division has put so much effort, the DOR disc, LaserVision. All things everyone knew about but we did what no body else did.

These are all manifestations of our strength.

We have the great privilege to live in a part of the world where we have freedom of thought and freedom of action. Such a part of the world is inextricably bound up with entrepreneurial production. It forces you, in order to survive, to put all new scientific and technical knowledge into product renewal. Now, I think, and I should like to emphasize this, that our product-filled world is the small price that we have to pay for our expensive freedom.

The greyness, disconsolateness, hopelessness and inefficiency of the alternative are sufficiently familiar. I feel entitled to say this so emphatically because I know, indeed I have experienced how little one can survive on, but also how much freedom is worth.

'The features of these laboratories, the Research Laboratories? Let me say first of all that they are of top quality.

Another feature which I find particularly important is the truly unique, friendly atmosphere. I don't think there's another laboratory in the whole world where there is such a mix of intellect and learned to listen properly to the people from industry, our product divisions. Hence my variation on Schopenhauer's dictum. We have learned how to get results quickly working together with our product divisions. And then of course, the Research Laboratories have a pioneering role within international Philips Research. It is the main laboratory with many disciplines, a long scientific tradition and many contacts with the development sector. Such an ideal situation is not created in a day: that takes decades. You cannot just transfer a laboratory like this from one place to another and think that within a year everything will be working perfectly again. Another important factor which should not be forgotten is the fact that the Board of Management places such store by research.

This makes it possible to have scientific and technical development as the guiding principle when drafting our research programs.

'Of course, the advent of micro-electronics has changed many things and will continue to do so. We are now looking at possibilities of expanding our research and development activities in the field of integrated circuits. Highly intricate processes are involved and you can only command and control these if you have experience of them. Only then is it possible to make refinements. Mastery of Engineer 'Uvely' because Meyer was a real man of action and in the corridors of the laboratories this managing director with the theoretical background was also often described as a typical engineer. Or, in connection with his last position in the 1950 the German philosopher Schopenhauer's dictum still applied in the Research Laboratories: what counts is not so much seeing the hitherto unseen, but thinking the hitherto unthought of about that which everyone sees. That is a quite beautiful description of fundamental research.

However, time passes and things change. In the last few decades I have been able to contribute to the present-day maxim in concept which has gradually gained in importance with the advent of micro-electronics.'

Having retired, Dr. Meyer will put his experience as an industrial manager at the service of government advisory bodies.

As far as manual skills are concerned, he is a violin-maker of some stature - 'I hope that my violins will be brought to life by professional artists.'

He became managing director in 1974. He retired on September 1 1984 after 34 lively years with Philips.