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Leaders leading quality

Get a return on your quality investment and reduce your workload

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Why is quality so hard to achieve?

Working in the human services sector can be a calling and a passion and most leaders in this arena would agree they are not in it for the money. People choose to work in human services so they can do just that, work with humans. People want to provide the best service possible and see great outcomes for people who access their organisation.

It can seem that the penalty for accessing government funds to deliver these services is implementing a quality management system (QMS) and maintaining certification when you can't see any benefits.

Certification costs for some organisations can exceed \$50,000 a year, and when you add in the cost of the quality role (anywhere from \$60-120,000 per annum for one position) it can be costly to maintain certification.

As a leader in the organisation it is your job to set and meet budgets, and justify the money you are spending on your QMS. Are you seeing a return on your investment?

You would hope that by investing this money and receiving certification you have eliminated (a) any inefficiencies, (b) achieved a perfect score in customer and staff satisfaction leading to (c) increased referrals, and (d) low staff turnover. You should expect to see a reduction if not an elimination of incidents with strong risk management processes in place.

If we look at the news however we can see sadly that this isn't the case. Stories where certified organisations continued to have problems that they didn't know about or couldn't manage effectively continue to be reported¹.

You could argue that if client safety and satisfaction isn't guaranteed by certification and the implementation of a QMS then what is the point of your financial investment. You could feel that you are not getting the return on investment for your \$100,000+ that you are spending on quality.

It can be difficult for leaders to see the real value of having a QMS. Some argue that the money would be better spent on client service delivery. Certainly, one of the biggest issues communicated to me as an assessor is that people do not have the time to do the extra work demanded by the quality management system. Managers don't have the time to develop the systems or review and keep processes updated, there is no time to conduct audits, particularly for large and complex organisations who have multiple certifications.

Case Study

Consider one government funded organisation I work with who operate across Victoria and NSW. They provide disability services, and services for out of home care, they also provide services in the community for TAC clients whom they support with acquired brain injury. The organisation also has a commitment to equality in the community and have volunteered to be certified to the Rainbow Tick standards. This service in one year is audited by external parties at least four times, with some audits lasting up to 10 days with a team of auditors. This doesn't include unannounced visits by the department of Health and Human Services for residential houses and community visitors.

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-04/lifestyle-solutions-care-abuse-allegations/8659154>

There is no argument, there is a cost involved with quality but that cost should provide you with a return on your investment. If yours isn't, then read on....



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How do you really feel about quality?

I have identified three types of attitude about quality, conflict, cooperation and consolidation. The attitude your organisation and leadership team have will affect the way you approach quality and determine how cost effective your system is.

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Attitude	Style	ROI
Consolidation	Committed	100%
Cooperation	Connected	50%
Conflict	Costly	0%

Conflict

For many organisation leaders, it can feel that quality is just another expense they can't afford. Money is already tight and when you consider that many organisations are providing services at a loss² under NDIA it can lead you to wonder why you do it. But you know why you do it, you want to provide a range of fantastic services and you know your services are the best.

If you are struggling to be financially viable though you can focus on the expense of quality rather than seeing the benefits. Whilst you want to provide a safe and quality service it's hard to see the return on investment and instead you feel frustrated that even with precious resources being allocated there are still issues not being addressed in your organisation.

In this situation, you and the team see quality as an addition to the everyday work of your organisation, it's an extra burden. You may employ a quality manager or even a team who are responsible for quality and they are expected to get your organisation through third party certification to keep funding coming in.

A common mantra in these organisations is "Quality is the role of the Quality manager"

Organisations like this do not have an integrated quality management system, it sits off to the side and creates a lot of work for many reasons, not least because often the person charged with responsibility for the quality management system is neither training in QMS or positioned high enough in the hierarchy to get the work done. This role often reports to a person or team who don't understand what they do or why it's important.

² <https://www.nds.org.au/pdf-file/052bb005-fe17-e711-8231-0050568e2189>

Cooperation

Once an organisation starts to connect the importance of quality and an integrated QMS then people start to see benefits. These organisations will have a competent quality manager or team who have been able to streamline systems making them easy to understand and use. These organisations start to see that quality doesn't have to create **more work** and that actually when its working its really just the work that people should be doing in their everyday roles. The sticking point here is that there is still a quality role developing and coordinating the QMS. Usually they are positioned more effectively and can support the organisation by having buy in from the leadership team, but they still face some frustrations as they don't have their own budget, and don't have the authority to make leaders accountable. They are developing systems with limited input from the leadership team and this can mean they create extra work for these leaders. This can lead to frustration as there is a whirl of activity at the time of audit rather than a systematic implementation and review process throughout the year.

Consolidation

The most cost-effective organisation has a fully integrated quality management system. These organisations have allocated responsibility for each 'quality task' within existing roles. The leadership is fully committed to quality and work is integrated into their everyday work. They don't need a quality manager to tell them what to do or why quality is important, they understand its importance and can measure its benefits. These organisations have set accountability within the leadership positions which includes monitoring of work they have delegated to competent team members. The organisations QMS is integrated and quality is everyone's business. Throughout the organisation people have a common understanding of how their work impacts on their customers and the problems which can occur if they are not doing the quality tasks that need to be done.

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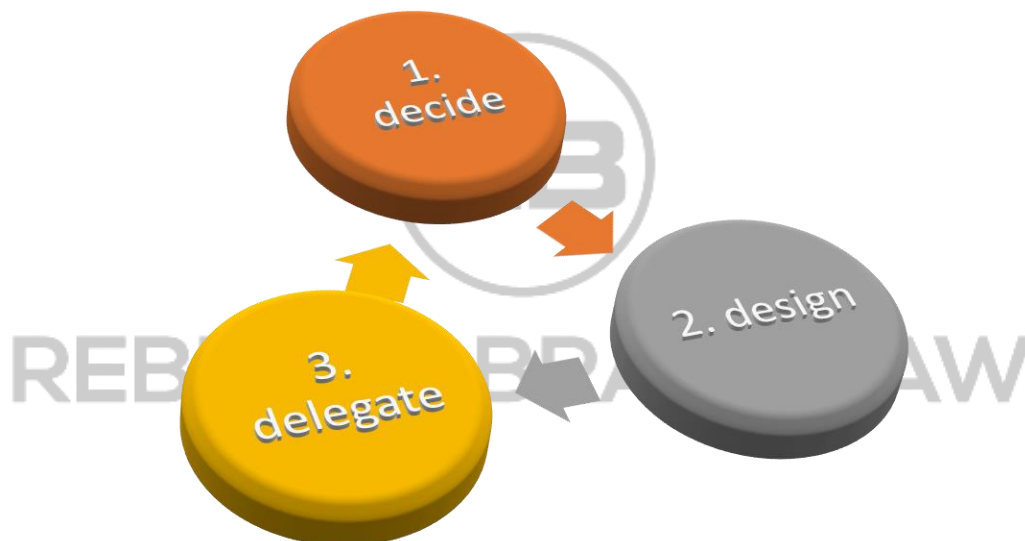
Cost effective quality

You might be surprised to know that getting a fully integrated quality management system is not as hard as you think. If we can describe it in one word that word would be:

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Accountability

To get a fully integrated system the leadership team must make three decisions and act on them:



1. Decide why you want or need a QMS. Then you can decide which QMS best suits your culture and needs and will provide a sound framework for you to build on. This could be an existing framework like ISO 9001, the Australian Business Excellence Framework or the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program or you may choose to develop your own framework drawing on research and best practice.
2. Design the look of your QMS. What tasks will be involved in creating a culture of continuous improvement and positive outcomes. What reporting do you need in place to make people accountable, what do you want to measure?
3. Delegate who can do the tasks, who has the competence and positioning based on your reporting mechanisms to report that the work is done and outcomes are achieved.

Take Action

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Making the decision to commit to quality and consolidate systems will lead to cost savings. When you have a leadership team who comprehend not just the importance of a quality management system but also the nuances of how and why they work, and a commitment to undertake the quality work then you have a recipe for cost savings.

Having quality systems overseen and managed by anyone other than the leadership team is like relying on the handbrake every time you want to stop your car.

Delegation of tasks to competent people will drive ownership at each level of the organisation, strengthen accountability and reporting and provide confidence that systems are efficient and effective, satisfaction results are accurate, and risk are managed.

Decide – Design - Delegate

Rebecca Bradshaw

Rebecca is a cultural change agent passionate about understanding and building on your values. She works with organisations committed to embedding a culture of quality. Rebecca works with leadership groups and individuals to raise the profile of quality by better positioning the quality role to deliver recognisable results.

Rebecca specialises in keeping quality simple, designing systems with organisations to reduce workload rather than creating extra work.

Rebecca has worked as an Auditor, Consultant, Trainer and Mentor for over 10 years, helping organisations across Australia to identify risk, develop systems to manage those risk, improve productivity and give business leaders peace of mind that people are doing the 'right thing'.

Her years of experience auditing and working with organisations led Rebecca to develop programs to support organisations to build a value based culture, training and coaching staff and leaders to internalise

the organisation values, reduce incidents, increase customer satisfaction and allow leaders to sleep at night.

Some of Rebecca's clients include: Youth projects, Benetas Home Care, City of Melbourne, City of Yarra, Moonee Valley City Council, Absolute Care and Health, Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative and Queen Elizabeth Centre.

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