



THE THREE-STEP GUIDE TO
IMPLEMENTING QUALITY

**DECIDE
DESIGN
DELEGATE**

REBECCA BRADSHAW

TESTIMONIALS

‘Rebecca’s practical approach to quality has always been about getting meaningful results without being lost in the jargon. This book will be helpful for anyone who seeks results and is in need of a straightforward approach to quality.’

– **David Hamer, Managing Director, HDAA**

‘The struggle for quality systems has existed for decades. I have read complex advice from experts and listened to bureaucratic explanations. Some sound great, but how practical are they? Rebecca does a fabulous job of simplifying the process and demystifying the art of quality. If you too are struggling with the “quality” challenge, read the book and take action. I’m sure Rebecca would be happy to help!’

– **Sue Kapourelakos,
National Manager, Disability Services, Able Australia**

‘A quality book for the service industry... at last! *Decide Design Delegate* is a must-read for board members, CEOs, and staff working at all levels of an organisation, who seek to understand the relevance and importance of quality systems. Rebecca’s informative and easy-to-read style is both relevant and full of practical advice. Her book is structured to encourage dipping into the text as needed while navigating the quality journey. As a service organisation, we value quality; Rebecca’s work reinforces the importance of quality systems without compromising individual service delivery. With Rebecca’s encouragement, we are all up to the challenge!’

– **Dr Carole Broxham, CEO, Moe Life
Skills Community Centre**

‘Great systems reduce the time, energy and resources it takes to get things done. Quality-management systems – done well – are no exception. By helping you integrate quality within your everyday work processes, this book does more than make quality simple. It makes quality efficient: leaving you to focus on getting the work you love done. And that’s just good business.’

– Peter Cook, CEO, Thought Leaders

‘I wish this book was around when I was a Quality Manager. It would have saved me and the organisations I worked in a ton of angst.’

– Sue Anderson, author of ‘Unshakable at Work’

‘Quality doesn’t happen by chance. It’s the outcome of a deliberate process. To decide to go further than others. But like any journey it begins with a single step. And one of the best steps you can take is to read this book. Decide. Design. Delegate; these three insightful words of quality guidance from Rebecca Bradshaw say it all. Just a bit more reading is required to create a higher-quality future for us all.’

– Dave Wild, Futurist

‘The world used to operate on the adage, “good, cheap, fast”: pick two. Now we know the consumer demand is for all three. If you want to scale, you need to embed quality in all you do. This book shows you how.’

– Matt Church, Founder, Thought Leaders

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Cover design by Popdesign via DesignCrowd

Typeset by BookPOD

Printed and bound in Australia by BookPOD

ISBN: 978-0-6483977-0-0

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia.

This book is dedicated to all of my wonderful family and friends. To my Mum, who gave me my value of social justice and my love of humans. To my husband and son, who surround me with love and support me to be the best version of me. To my friends and mentors, who give me the tools to design a life where I can do the work I love. To all the people in my life who have loved me, challenged me, supported and influenced me. To the clients who give me permission to help and teach me the value of listening.

I love each and every one of you, and thank you all for helping me write this book.

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INTRODUCTION

I've always disliked bureaucracy, so it sometimes feels strange that I have become so strongly associated with quality-management systems, which are often linked with compliance and bureaucracy. People often associate quality systems with standardisation, controlling people and processes; some people perceive quality systems as stifling innovations.

In my years working as a quality consultant, an external certification assessor, and a quality manager, I have become very familiar with the problems people face in implementing and maintaining a quality-management system. This book is by no means an exhaustive list of all the problems you may encounter, but hopefully I have identified the most common and frequently discussed issues. I want this to be a handbook to consult when you are facing problems. From this perspective I have distilled the many facets of quality into what I have termed the 'six principles' of quality management. The book is divided into three main sections that cover these principles, so that you can use it as an easy reference guide on your journey into quality.

The first section, Decide, is written as a quick and straightforward snapshot to help you understand whether a quality-management system is right for you. It describes the six principles of quality. Once you have a basic understanding

of these principles, you are better positioned to see how they fit neatly into the work you already do.

I find that the quality-management system consistently sits off to the side, rather than being integrated into everyday business: often the quality system requirements are not understood by those in positions of power and decision making. This section is written to help you get a basic understanding of how quality can support your business so you can decide whether a quality-management system is for you, and if it is, which type of system will work best.

The second section, Design, is written to help you design a quality system that is tailored to your organisation, supporting an integrated system rather than an add-on to your daily business.

Section three, Delegate, is about recognising the importance of the quality role and ensuring you have the right person or people doing the right tasks competently, giving you peace of mind that your compliance requirements are being met. This section looks at how you can use quality to strengthen the values of your organisation, supporting employees to understand why it's important they do things a certain way. This creates a culture where people do the right thing, even when no one is looking.

The quality-manager role can be a challenging and frustrating position. The Delegate section focuses on this role: understanding the skills and competence required, deciding where in the hierarchy and structure the position will sit, and ensuring there are effective monitoring and support systems in place. These components are vital in developing a

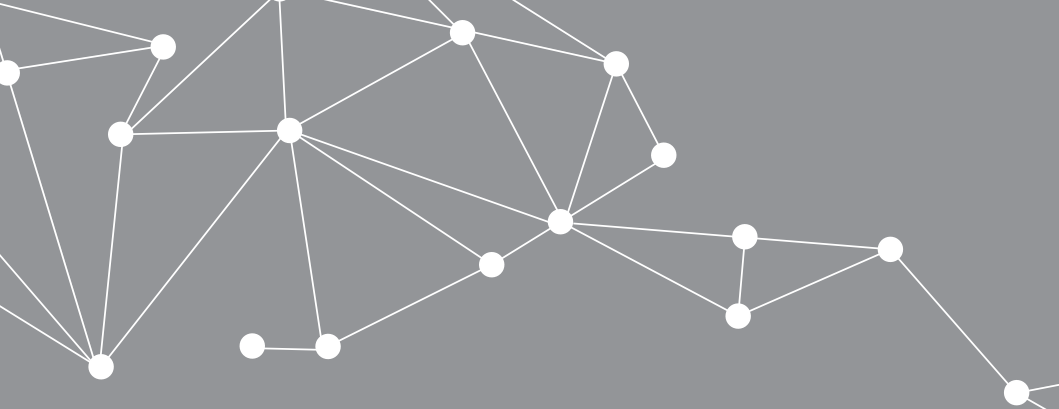
stable role. My work with quality managers at different levels across different-sized organisations has shown me that they share similar frustrations, no matter the workplace. This important facet of quality management will be addressed as I discuss how these roles are best supported, developed and maintained in your organisation.

I have included a ‘Where to now’ chapter at the end of the book, offering tips for certification, designed to help you save time and energy in the case of a quality-management system being audited externally, by a certification body. Many people in my network find third-party audit preparation to be resource-intensive, expensive and emotionally draining. This extra chapter is written to give you some tips on making it a more pleasant and worthwhile experience.

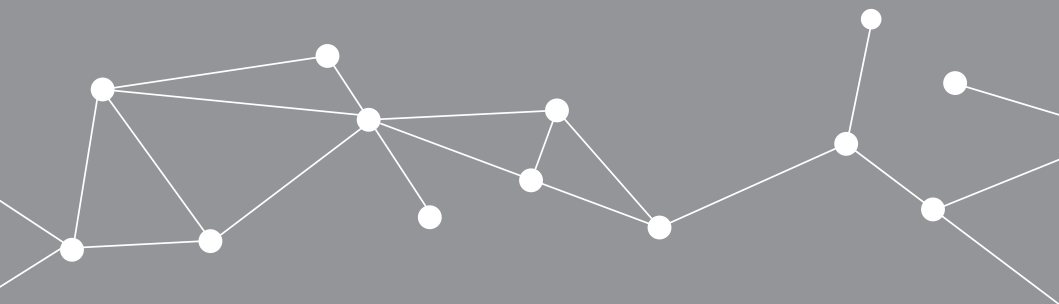
So please use this book to suit your needs. You can dip in and out of it, you don’t have to read it from start to finish. I want this book to be well used and shared across your team. Whether you are a leader deciding whether a quality-management system is right for you, a frustrated quality manager trying to get buy-in, or a team member curious about what the quality team does, use this book and let’s build a world where quality is just part of business as usual.

Love Rebecca





DECIDE



Quality – what is it and why should you invest?

Quality is a complex beast. Even defining it is complex. The Merriam Webster's dictionary calls it 'a degree of excellence'; the Oxford English dictionary calls it the 'standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something'. *Quality Digest* includes definitions from customers, and one of my favourites is:

Quality is the customers' perception of the value of the suppliers' work output.¹

It's a hard old thing to measure, and sometimes it can feel as though achieving it should almost be common sense. Maybe if everyone did the best job they could do, hey presto, everyone would be happy. If only it were that simple.

The *Quality Digest* definition is interesting because most of us have more than one type of customer: measuring and meeting their perception of quality can be difficult. In order to do this well, your quality system must have a strong focus on getting feedback from a range of customers to find out what they need, what you do well, and what you can do better.

One issue I find commonly is that some leaders don't really care about the quality-management system and see no value in it, preferring to focus on the bottom line as a measure of success.

¹ *Quality Digest* (<https://www.qualitydigest.com/magazine/2001/nov/article/definition-quality.html>)

What if I said to you:

‘You don’t like quality systems and you don’t see any value in spending a small fortune to have someone come in every year and audit you, and then create a whole heap of work that quite frankly does not make this particular ship go any faster.’

How do you feel – does it make you a bit uncomfortable because it might be true? Do you totally disagree?

I have spent many years working with organisations in the human services sector who are required to implement a quality-management system to satisfy their funders. As a nurse I am used to systems and processes; the medical profession has long had a culture of designing systems to reduce or remove the risk of human error. But my love of systems isn’t necessarily for everyone. I have worked with many leaders and organisations with a sound focus on understanding their customers and a strong desire to provide great services, but they can have a secondary interest in developing quality systems.

For me, the importance of quality systems boils down to this: not only is it about reducing risk, but also about ensuring resources are used effectively and that work systems are simplified, clear and support a culture of improvement.

As Draymond Green says, ‘If you’re not getting better, you’re getting worse.’

I want to be clear here that I am not advocating for certification to a quality-management system. There is research to suggest that the benefits of certification are

profound, and other research which suggests the costs outweigh the benefits. Take the article by Freek Vermeulen in the *Harvard Business Review*, ‘Can We Please Stop Saying the Market is Efficient?’². He talks about research from the Harvard Business School, which showed that ISO 9000, ‘in the long run, can have a severe negative impact on a firm because it hampers innovation. Yet, the short-term benefits are clear; adopting ISO 9000 often comes with some good reputational effects, an immediate increase in customers, and satisfied stakeholders. However, the negative effect on innovation, in the long run, may outweigh all of this.’

I will leave it to you to determine the value of third-party certification; however, I do address some ways to prepare for and survive them later in this book.

Why quality?

Over the years I have worked with organisations to successfully develop quality systems which need minimal input from staff and leaders, that generate evidence just by people doing the work they are tasked to do every day, and where there is no need for a full-time quality role because quality tasks are integrated into everyone’s daily responsibilities.

I have written this book to be used as a handbook for leaders and quality managers who want to make life clearer and simpler. I am also aware, though, that it is valuable for anyone going into business for themselves or already working for themselves.

2 Vermeulen F. (2009). ‘Can We Please Stop Saying the Market is Efficient?’, *Harvard Business Review*, 11 June 2009.

As a sole trader it can be easy to enthusiastically start selling, using only your technical skills. You get a couple of clients, and off you go. Before long, if you are successful, you find yourself working long hours and mistakes start to happen. You miss a quote, you lose track of invoices, you forget to follow up an existing client and lose out on a big contract.

You realise you can't do this alone. But where to start, who do you delegate to? Who else can you trust?

The good news is that by adopting a quality-management mindset, you can develop systems to help clarify the business, leaving you to focus on the work you love, spending time with your customers and delivering service.

I have seen quality-management systems that are fully integrated and working for the organisation. But, unfortunately, I have seen far more of them that are viewed as a nuisance, are an add-on to the everyday business of the organisation, provide no benefit to the organisation and, in some cases, actually create meaningless work and cause no end of frustration.

Where the quality-management system is not useful, people tell me about their frustration. Quality managers tell me that they can't get buy-in, that there is never any progress and that they're always having to reinvent the wheel, as new managers come and go and want to stamp their mark on the organisation. Some quality managers are frustrated that the quality-management system isn't taken seriously by their managers; when they go to them with projects to implement, they can't get any traction. Quality-management systems and the people responsible for them often don't

have a budget, but rather the cost is spread across support services and operations. The role of the quality manager can be to convince these divisions to spend money on quality initiatives: if there is no buy-in to quality, or the quality manager finds it difficult to sell the value of the initiative, it can be frustrating trying to get anything done.

Leaders of organisations required to undergo third-party certification often tell me that they resent having to pay for a quality-management system and all that this entails, when they see no benefit. Sometimes leaders complain that the quality manager is creating extra work and that people don't have enough time to do their work already. Surely, if they are paying for a quality role, that person should be able to do the work.

My answer to this is that when you truly want a quality-management system and design, one that suits your organisation, you will have more-streamlined processes which can continually be tweaked and improved to meet your customers' needs. Documenting how you do things makes it much easier to recruit the right people and provide them with a road map of how you want things done. This in turn strengthens the culture and results in consistent outcomes for your customers.

Standardisation versus individual services

One thing that often turns leaders off a quality-management system is the standardisation of processes for everyone. This is particularly common in the health and human-services sectors, where organisations prefer to be person-centred and provide services based on individuals' needs.

The good news, though, is that you get to choose which processes need to be standardised and which ones can be tailored for individual customers. Using health and human-services as an example, there are things that can easily be standardised without compromising individual service delivery; things like the management of complaints and incidents, perhaps invoicing and supplier management, and the way contracts are managed. The actual services delivered can still be determined with the customer, but by having core processes controlled and standardised, your staff can focus more time and energy on individuals without having to think about how to manage a complaint each time it occurs.

In his book, *The New Rules of Management*, Peter Cook talks about systems as being like conscious habits, reducing the energy it takes to get something done. For key processes this can mean people are saving time, becoming more productive and spending more time on the important things.

A good quality-management system will support you to delegate tasks appropriately, and then monitor that the work is being carried out effectively. This can give leaders, sole traders or managers in small business peace of mind that core business processes are happening and happening well, which in turn allows them to grow the business.

When you have a quality-management system that isn't working, it's easy to blame the system or the quality team. In my observation, it's the way the system has been designed that creates problems. The great news about this is that you can fix it easily.

Which quality-management system?

There are a number of reasons you might choose to implement a particular quality-management system. It may be prescribed by a funder. You may implement a quality system because it will help you to win tenders and contracts; you may want to delegate responsibility for certain tasks to another person, so you need to be clear about what the process is before you delegate. Or perhaps the Chairperson of the Board has a friend whose organisation implemented it and they love it (true story, as I witnessed in one workplace).

The 9000 Store defines a quality-management system as:

*'a set of policies, processes and procedures required for planning and execution (production/development/service) in the core business area of an organization. (i.e. areas that can impact the organization's ability to meet customer requirements.)'*³

To translate this, we could say it's 'the way you do business'.

Whatever framework you choose, there are commonalities across standards. These commonalities are embedded across a range of certifiable and non-certifiable standards. One decision you may make is whether you want a third party to assess your conformance/compliance to a standard and give you a certificate, or you may choose a voluntary standard and monitor it yourselves. Sometimes the decision is made for you, in the case of health and human services and the food industry.

3 <http://the9000store.com/iso-9001-2015-requirements/what-is-iso-9001-quality-management-system/>, accessed 8 June 2018.

Here's a brief summary of a couple of examples so you can see the similarities.

Non-certifiable quality frameworks

Lean

Lean organisations have a focus on maximising customer value, using less resources by eliminating waste. Lean manufacturing is based on the concept that using resources for any purpose other than creating value for the customer is waste. Lean organisations believe that waste should be controlled and eliminated, which improves product or service delivery and makes the organisation and its processes more efficient. The concept was derived in the 1990s, mostly from the Toyota Production System.

Lean Six Sigma is a set of tools and techniques used for process improvement in organisations to support the quality-management system, but Six Sigma does not define a quality-management system in itself. The tools of Six Sigma were developed to improve the quality of processes and their outputs by identifying and eliminating the causes of defects.

Total Quality Management (TQM)

Total Quality Management was designed to improve the process performance of a company. The techniques of TQM are designed to help improve efficiency and standardisation of processes. These techniques are used to aid quality management, but do not provide a whole framework for a quality-management system. Whilst many concepts of TQM are still used, in theory the overall concept has been rendered obsolete by ISO 9001.

Certifiable Standards

ISO 9001:2015

ISO 9001 is an international standard that is used by a variety of organisations wanting to control and improve their processes. ISO was written so that it can be used in any organisation including product and service delivery. Like many quality-systems standards, it has its foundations in manufacturing. It moved to service-based industries, with its language evolving to include products and services.

This standard can be used as a framework for developing a quality-management system and can also be certified by a third-party certification body, providing assurance that a quality-management system is in place.

Australian Business Excellence Framework

The Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF) is an integrated leadership and management system. It contains criteria that are deemed essential to organisations sustaining high levels of performance. It can be used to improve aspects of an organisation, including product quality and financial results.

Common themes

Common themes between these concepts and standards are that they are designed to make your organisation more efficient, have less waste, meet your customers' requirements and provide value for your customers. Whilst they have different criteria and requirements, they all have commonalities, which means that you can design a process

that works for you and it should meet the requirements of any of the standards.

Where a certifiable standard is used, there are usually criteria mandated (you can tell because the standard will say you 'should' or you 'must' do something). But otherwise, the way you interpret the standard will determine how effective it is for you.

When we look at quality-management systems we are actually looking at business systems; it is useful to have this in mind as you interpret any standard. Remind yourself that this is about business, and it will keep you focused on what you need to achieve.

Craig Cochran in his book *ISO 9001:2015 – In Plain English*, says he 'avoids using the word quality in relation to the standard any time I can get away with it. ISO 9001 is a management system standard, period.'⁴

I agree with Craig. I like his approach as it moves away from the misconception that quality is an add-on, rather than core business.

When considering a quality-management system you need to account for the capacity and competence of the team, and existing or desired communication and reporting processes. All of these things need to be considered to ensure the culture, function and structure of the organisation are not negatively affected but are supported and able to support improvement.

4 Cochran C. (2015). *ISO 9001:2015 In Plain English*, Paton Professional, CA

Six Principles of Quality

Over my years working with a range of organisations I have observed and categorised six important principles that are integral to a quality system. These principles are reflected in the chart below and consist of audit, improvement, communication, risk, document control and reporting.

No one of these is more significant than another, and it is important that all of them are in place to support a quality business structure. If one or more is missing it can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the quality system, and therefore your business. They are interrelated and interdependent: I recommend ensuring they are all given priority in your business.



Principle 1: Audit

Why internal audit?

When we speak of internal audit, it's all about how you 'keep an eye' on the way you do things in your business. Are you

doing the things you said you would, are you doing things safely and in the most efficient and effective way?

Most quality-management systems will include some kind of internal monitoring. Being unclear about the role of internal audit and what you are expecting it to measure can lead to the creation of a complex, resource-intensive and inefficient system. In the following sections we will examine the key components of an effective internal audit system. We will look at how to use these so that your audits are meaningful and straightforward, yet provide you with the information you need to know you are doing the right things right.

Risk-based audit

The simplest place to start is to decide which of the risk areas in your business need to be monitored. If you have a process that inherently has more risk attached, then the focus should be there. If we use the example of the health and human-services sector again, an example of a high risk would be errors in medication; a lower-level risk might be that equipment in the first-aid box has expired. If you were to trend your data I would bet my bottom dollar there would be more medication incidents in a service than there are incidents where a plaster wasn't available. It's surprising then, that most organisations I visit will have someone check the contents of the first-aid kit monthly but do a medication audit annually, if at all.

If you are unsure about which are your highest risk areas, you could ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do our complaints come from?
- Where do our incidents occur?

- Where are our unhappiest staff (think high staff turnover)?
- Which are our newest processes?
- Where do we have compliance requirements?

Once you know which risk areas of your business you want to monitor through audit, the next question is how often. Again, using risk as a barometer, you can determine whether certain processes need to be looked at monthly, annually or once every three years. Spreading your audits out over three years (the typical cycle of external third-party certification) means there is more scope to do sampling over time and extra audits can be scheduled if risks are identified.

Keeping auditing simple is the key. I have seen many organisations complicate it with long checklists, laborious meetings and lengthy reports. You are doing an internal audit: this should be about variance reporting. Your report can be as simple as:

'This is what we say we do (in the procedure) and when I spoke to people they confirmed that this is indeed the way we do it. When I looked at records, I could clearly see that they do in fact follow exactly what the procedure says. Therefore, I can safely assume that we are doing what we say we will do.'

Of course, you can't just look at one procedure, talk to one person and read one record. You need to audit a big enough sample that means you are confident the results are a true reflection of what is happening across the organisation.

Sampling

The level of sampling depends on the risk involved in the process and the number of examples of the process (clients, customers, contracts etc) within the organisation. As a rule of thumb, certification bodies routinely use 'square root plus 1'⁵ as the preferred method for sampling. It's long been advocated as a reliable sampling method, and there's nothing to stop you adopting the same method.

As an example, a client of mine works at one site where five people are supported to live independently. They sample all files in the house every year. I have another client who works across 14 houses with approximately four to six people in each house. They sample four houses a year, looking at four files in each house.

You can devise your own sampling process for audit, just make sure it's a big enough sample to satisfy yourself that the results are sound, and indicative of what is happening across the organisation. Look at a sample from all your different teams, programs and sites.

Audit schedule

Once you have determined what you will audit, and how often you will audit, you can now develop an audit schedule to keep you on track. An audit schedule can be in any format you prefer; I've seen a simple Word table operate as effectively as a more complex database. The most important thing is

5 Muralimanohar J. & Kannaiyan J. (2011). 'Determination of Effectiveness of the "Square Root of N Plus One" Rule in Lot Acceptance Sampling Using an Operating Characteristic Curve', *The Quality Assurance Journal*. 14. 10.1002/qaj.482

that you use and monitor the schedule. Plan your audits and make sure they happen, that's the key.

Once you have planned and scheduled your audits, all that's left is to determine who will undertake them.

The audit team

It's best practice that the person auditing a particular process will be independent of that process. If you are the manager of a department it's unlikely that you will be unbiased enough to audit your own team. The Standard ISO-19011 Guidelines for quality- and/or environmental-management systems auditing talk about this, saying the selection of auditors has to 'ensure objectivity and impartiality'⁶. You will need to look at your available and potential audit team within the organisation and determine who has the personal attributes and capacity to conduct audits. If you have a designated quality person or team, they are probably a good place to start; however, the size of your audit schedule will help you decide whether it is realistic for one person to conduct all of the audits across the organisation.

Some organisations choose to outsource their internal audit. This can be a great option, particularly if you are small or don't have anyone on board with the capacity to undertake audits.

Audit reports

Considering how your auditors will report their findings is important. One frustration I hear from many internal auditors is that they do the audit, write the report, then nothing

6 International Organization for Standardization, *ISO 19011:2011 Guidelines for auditing management systems*. 2011-11.

happens. What accountability and reporting processes will you implement to make sure that issues are resolved? Have you got clear accountabilities and responsibilities defined, so that everyone knows who is responsible for actioning audit findings?

Without clarity in these areas, your organisation risks investing time and money with no resulting improvement.

Principle 2: Improvement

Improvement is the cornerstone of a quality-management system. To measure improvement, you need a starting point: you need to know exactly what level of service you are providing *now* so you can track that you are getting better. I advise people to start with the basics, start by looking at compliance requirements and make sure to meet these at the very least. Then you can strive to be better than compliant.

Champion	Leader in your field	Increased growth and revenue
Common	Equal to your competitors	Benchmark equally with competition
Compliant	Provide expected service	Receive basic funding

One difficulty with the term ‘improvement’ is showing the leadership team the value of improvements identified through audit. Typically, improvement is incremental, such as slightly improving an existing system and the benefits may not be immediately obvious. Changing the wording in

a procedure to better reflect the language in a standard is hardly earth shattering, and is unlikely to alter the bottom line. However, identifying risk will provide value. You should be sure that audit findings are meaningful and focus on risk: they shouldn't be petty. This way your findings will support better engagement with the leadership team.

Consider the focus of your leadership team. Are they interested in developing new systems or rethinking ways of doing things completely, rather than simply adding on to the existing way? No matter, you can use internal audit to clarify how things happen now, and use process mapping to develop and design new ways of doing things. Process mapping is a simple way to really understand how you deliver your services. There are some great resources out there and personally I like to get everyone together with some Post-it notes and a long wall, to nut out exactly who is responsible for which parts of a process. With software such as VISIO it is easy to show people the tasks and responsibilities involved in a process in a clear and visual way.

Process mapping and audit can be used together to identify areas of duplication, role confusion and gaps.

Principle 3: Communication

Know your stakeholders

Communication is a vital part of any organisation's business process – not only how you communicate, but with whom you communicate. ISO 9001:2015 prescribes that organisations identify all of their stakeholders and customers. Knowing who your customers and stakeholders are, and what they

need from you, will help you plan engagement strategies and give you a clearer picture of what your customers need.

Communicating can also include how you communicate the values and culture of the organisation. Do you have an induction, provide training, supply mentors and coaches, offer supervision or write a newsletter? Are regular staff meetings the ways that you communicate, and if they are, do you have a consistent approach – for example, with a fixed agenda? Or does each team discuss only what they feel is important? Do you use meetings for reflection or dictating?

How you communicate can directly affect the culture of your organisation and it's worth considering your overall strategy for keeping everyone in the loop.

Designing a simple table (see table on page 24) that clearly outlines all of your stakeholders, and describes what they need to know and when, can support communication across the organisation. Communication isn't just about your customers, it's also about your internal communication systems; how are you communicating with staff, how do staff communicate with support services, and vice versa? Art Markman's *Harvard Business Review* article⁷ identifies that complaints of poor communication can be a symptom of feeling that responsibilities are not well defined and staff aren't clear on what they should be doing. If you can get a strong communication structure in place which outlines who is responsible for what (maybe through agenda and minute action items), then you have the foundations for a clearer communication strategy. That, combined with leadership that

⁷ Markman A. (2017). "Poor communication" is often a symptom of a different problem', *Harvard Business Review*, 22 February 2017.

encourages collaboration and information sharing, should go some way to promoting a happy and effective team.

Type of interested party	Name of interested party	Requirements of interested party
<i>Funding body</i>	<i><Insert name></i>	<i>That we meet funding agreement requirements</i>
<i>Certification body</i>	<i><Insert name></i>	<i>That we continue to meet the standards against which we are certified</i> <i>That we engage in planning and scheduling</i> <i>Update any changes to scope</i> <i>Correct use of the certification mark</i>
<i>End user</i>	<i>Clients/other</i>	<i><Insert feedback></i>
<i>Brokered services</i>		
<i>Employees</i>	<i>Staff and volunteers</i>	
<i>Subcontractors</i>		

Take that one step further and look at what you communicate, when and to whom. Express this simply in a table (see table on page 25) that lets everyone know which meetings they need to attend, how often and what the purpose of the meeting is. Considering methods of communication like supervision and newsletters, as well as meetings, is a great way to assess your overall approach to communication and determine where there is duplication.

Communication forum/type	Timeframes	Attendees	Terms of reference available
<i>Management review</i>	<i>biannually</i>		
<i>Coordinators meeting</i>	<i>weekly</i>		
<i>OH&S Committee</i>	<i>quarterly</i>		
<i>Staff meetings</i>	<i>monthly</i>		
<i>Alliance meetings</i>			
<i>External contractor meetings</i>			
<i>Network meetings</i>			
<i>Newsletter</i>			
<i>Staff supervision</i>			

I have a client who undertook this simple mapping of communication and discovered what they already suspected: there were too many meetings. The matrix provided a clear picture of duplication and where meetings could potentially be combined. Some members of the leadership team were meeting three times a month as part of different meetings. Collectively, they decided to combine these into one meeting a month with a stronger agenda and saved themselves a heap

of time, better spent doing the work they love. I'm pretty sure I've never heard anyone say they wanted more meetings. Determining and documenting your communication plan can be a real time saver.

As in most organisations, you probably use a variety of methods to communicate to your customers and the broader community: contracts, marketing material, website, information packs and brochures. These are all ways of reaching the customer, describing and controlling the work that you are able to conduct with them.

Beyond that, there is the way you communicate once the work is done. Some organisations use feedback surveys to drive the continuous improvement system. Whether you use something like a Net Promoter Score (NPS; used to gauge the loyalty of a firm's customer relationships⁸), or a survey with a list of questions, whether it's paper-based or electronic, whether it's expensive or free, all this isn't as important as the way you *use* the feedback.

Using feedback

Ensuring that data is collated and analysed is vital. I often see piles of feedback surveys that have been returned, but unfortunately there are no resources to collate the data. The whole exercise becomes a waste of time and money. Even worse is when I see feedback surveys carried out to satisfy a third party, rather than to identify any opportunities for improvement.

8 Reichheld F. (2003). 'The One Number You Need to Grow', *Harvard Business Review*, December 2003.

Principle 4: Risk

As an auditor, I talk about risk a lot with leadership teams. The methods used for monitoring and measuring risk controls across organisations can vary considerably. It's not uncommon for me to see a risk register that hasn't been updated or reviewed for over a year. It's not uncommon for an organisation to determine the strategic risks to the organisation, like risks to their reputation, risks to funding, risks to loss of equipment and succession planning. Organisations may have policies and procedures that have been documented to meet funding requirements, which address operational risks like people working in isolation, transporting clients and working with children.

I commonly see two levels of risk-planning occurring, often in isolation of each other. Those responsible for governance of the organisation usually look at strategic and organisational risk, whilst operational risk is often managed locally by departmental team leaders or program staff themselves. In a worst-case scenario, an organisation relies entirely on risks being identified and prescribed by external funders.

Many people struggle to identify their risks. One of the simplest ways to identify your risks is to look at your compliance requirements. Working in an environment where quality is talked about frequently, leaders speak of being a 'quality organisation'. Whilst this desire to 'be the best' keeps you competitive and supports you to achieve your financial goals, it is equally important to recognise that at a minimum you must meet legislative and funding requirements.

In order to be an organisation who adds value for your customers, you need to meet the minimum (compliance) requirements and then exceed them.

How confident are you that you fully understand your compliance requirements? Do you have an organisation-wide register or database listing your legislative requirements? Do you have a risk register where you've identified all of the strategic and operational risks that could occur, so that you can put strategies in place to reduce or eliminate that risk? Do you have suppliers and contractors who provide services for you or on your behalf? How do you manage those contractors?

We must accept that in business there are risks. The way we address and manage these risks will determine how much of an impact they have when incidents happen. Where there are risks there are usually incidents. It is rare to have no incidents or complaints, particularly when you work in the service industry. There are too many variables to control.

Having a process that is streamlined and transparent, which allows your customers to communicate with you and tell you where things have gone wrong, is vital in terms of managing your risk.

Take the time to identify and understand your risks and monitor them, it will be worth it.

Principle 5: Document control

Document control is the pillar of the quality-management system that people love to hate. Over the years I have seen many different iterations of how people manage information,

from the complex to the ever-more complex. Keeping it simple is the key to document control. You need to identify what is the critical information people need, what policies and procedures and forms need to be accessible. You can then work out where you will store them, bearing in mind that if you store them in such a way that people can change them (think Word documents on a shared drive) it's likely that people will make unauthorised changes, or worse, delete your important work!

Many organisations make the mistake of forgetting to keep a master copy of important information. Keeping an original master copy is important: make it a priority.

Once you are sure your documents are safe from harm, it's about making sure people can get to them easily. Research quoted at Business.com states that 'document challenges account for 21.3 per cent of productivity loss.'⁹

The same article observes that 83% of knowledge workers lose time because of versioning issues every day, and explain that professionals spend 50% of their time searching for information and take an average of 18 minutes to locate each document.

It's not uncommon for me to work with organisations burdened by too many procedures that are accessed on an intranet where there is an ineffective search engine. If it's too hard for people to find the information, they will simply do it their way. You are then in danger of people undertaking work in a way that is not in line with your business practices. This

9 Mikado M. (2017). 'Stats That Will Make You Rethink Your Document Management Strategy', *Business.com*, 22 February 2017.

may not be important for some processes, but if it impacts on your brand, your reputation or your customer experience, then it is a real risk.

How many procedures do you need?

If you are responsible for writing policies and procedures in your organisation it can feel like a pointless task. You slave away in your office, go through hoops to get them approved and then discover that nobody actually reads them.

On the flip side, for staff on the ground it can seem as though they are drowning in procedures. Or too few – they can never find the information they need when they need it.

So, what is the point of writing procedures?

If we get it right, they are a great tool for:

- supporting new staff to learn the culture of the organisation and understand the agreed way of doing things;
- managing risk, ensuring you are more likely to have consistently satisfied customers;
- providing a process to guide staff in doing the right thing every time.

When procedure writing goes wrong, it's a different story. Organisations with complex procedure frameworks, too many documents, and uncontrolled pieces of information that may not reflect current practice, can mean significant loss of productivity.

Is your system working against you? Do you have duplication, too many procedures, silos and outdated documents?

Before you begin your next procedure review, ask yourself if there is there a better way of doing this. What structure do you need? Do you want policies and procedures, policy statements attached to each procedure, do you want a policy for every procedure, or just a few overarching policies?

Do you want guidelines or standard operating procedures? Will you have program manuals or organisation-wide procedures that outline variances in programs?

If you can get the structure right, you can then determine how many documents you need to support a more streamlined procedure framework.

My motto is, 'If it doesn't matter how you do it, it doesn't need to be written in a procedure.' On the flip side, if it's important enough to be in a policy or procedure, make sure:

- it reflects what you do;
- that staff understand it;
- it's current.

But most importantly, make sure that staff can find it. If you write procedures, stick them somewhere people can't find them and forget about them for years, then yes – it probably is a waste of somebody's time.

Principle 6: Reporting

One of the biggest issues I see and hear is that people are not clear about their responsibilities and accountabilities.

The revised ISO 9001:2015 has moved away from 'management' language to 'leadership' language. This is intentional and fits with contemporary practice. It's no longer enough to tell people what to do, it's about empowering them to do it and understand why they are doing it.

People need to know what they are responsible for getting done. You can achieve this in a number of ways, such as organisation charts to tell them who they report to; position descriptions to explain what their roles and functions are. Often though, position descriptions are too vague, covering every eventuality (maybe designed without a clear understanding of the scope of the role). Some organisations rely on policy and procedure to tell people what to do. This again can cause problems because not everyone knows which parts of the procedure they are responsible for; where processes overlap it's easy to say you thought that was somebody else's responsibility.

You can't expect people to take responsibility when things don't get done or go wrong if you didn't tell them what they had to do in the first place. I have a firmly held belief that people go to work to do a good job, but if you don't give clear guidelines about what you expect from them they can't be empowered.

I often find that a culture of blame blossoms where people aren't clear about what they need. When mistakes happen, people become defensive and start blaming each other.

Leaders have to be really clear about what they expect people to do: make sure people in your organisation understand this. Have conversations so that everyone knows the expectations and agrees on the outcomes. Leaders have the added responsibility for managing performance if people don't do the work. Responsibility and accountability is about empowerment and supporting people to grow and learn, it's not about piling the work on so you don't have to take responsibility; it's never punitive.

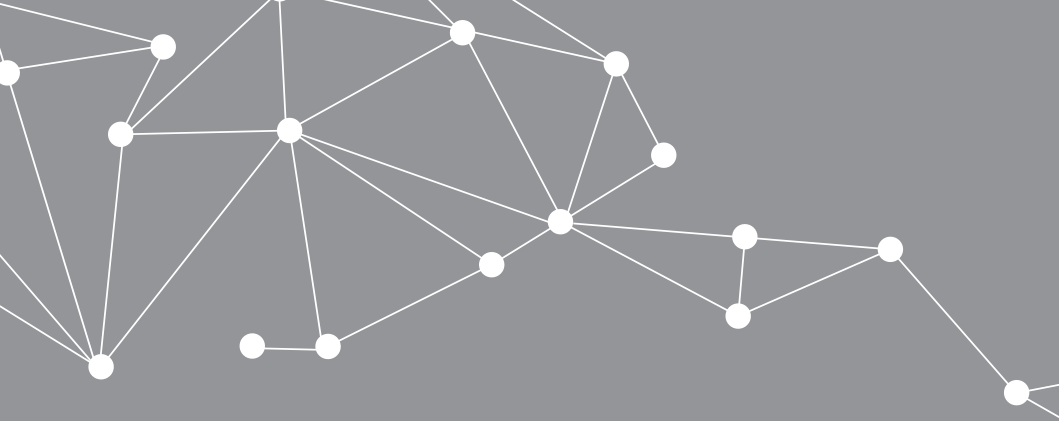
There is an expectation that people do their part of the work; it's like a jigsaw puzzle, requiring each team (let's call them the corners, the sides and the middle) to do its bit so the organisation has a complete picture at the end. The first step is to determine responsibilities, who needs to do what to complete this jigsaw. But then you need to think about how you can communicate with each team to ensure the jigsaw will be completed on time.

One of the most common approaches in business is reporting. How you report, how often, to whom, in what forum and format will be unique to each organisation, but the fact is, you need a system.

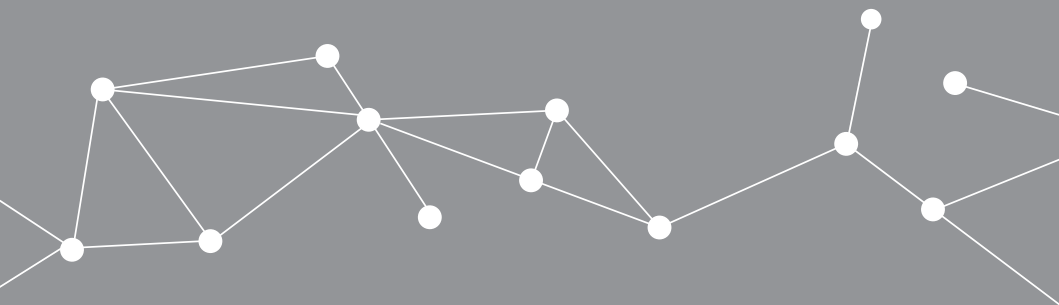
Ad-hoc reporting means inconsistency of data, which leads to more confusion. Without reporting you may end up with a jigsaw with only three sides.

Now we are clear about the functions and systems you need to consider when building your quality management system, let's look at how you can make your quality-management system work for you. Let's consider where and how quality fits into your business, before we look at quality and culture.





DESIGN



Quality and business

One of the biggest frustrations I hear from leaders is that the quality system is expensive and provides little or no value. It is often a stand-alone area of the organisation, with a quality manager, or a quality team. Attempts at integration can include facilitating a quality committee, but rarely have I seen a fully integrated system.

What would a fully integrated system look like? It will look very different for each organisation, but as a starting point we could think about:

- quality indicators as part of each person's position description
- quality as part of every meeting agenda
- quality reporting as part of each person's responsibility
- training about quality as part of induction
- quality statements for each support service or team.

One argument against quality I hear from many leaders is that quality systems stifle creativity and prevent organisations being agile. This can be true; I have certainly seen some systems which are so complex and time consuming that no one would have time for developing new ideas. But there is hope, and I want to explore that in this section.

Quality and agility

Do you work in an organisation full of bureaucracy? Do procedures go through the Board or CEO for approval, or can you handle changes at a local level?

Do you find yourself waiting for the next meeting, so that you can present your idea or get sign-off for your project?

Sometimes it can feel as though you face a wall of bureaucracy at every turn. This is a frustration particularly felt by the person in the quality role. This role generally involves working collaboratively across the organisation, which can mean ideas go through at least one committee and sometimes several. Quality managers can become frustrated when they raise ideas and then have to spend hours writing a business case to show why their idea is worth investing in, only to be told it's not a strategic priority at the moment. I often hear from quality managers when they start to question why they were employed at all, because their expertise isn't being given a chance; obstacles block innovation and implementation.

In my experience, frustration is one of the biggest problems faced by people in a quality role, although unfortunately it can be more widespread in some teams. There are a number of reasons, but one fundamental reason is the relationship and confusion between 'quality' and 'compliance'.

Many organisations who have to implement and maintain a quality system, perhaps because funders demand it, talk about quality but actually there is an expectation of meeting only minimum requirements. This can be at odds with the

person in the quality position who is striving to ‘do more’: not only meet the requirements of a standard, but to exceed customer expectations.

Being clear and honest about your expectations is key to ensuring the system works for you. When leaders simply want assurance that everything is ‘ticking along’ but they have a quality manager trying to do more, there can be frustration from both sides.

The person in the quality role is often the one who deals with external stakeholders like certification bodies and funders. These stakeholders communicate their needs through funding agreements, audits and contracts. The quality manager is usually on the frontline at audit time, answering questions, looking for evidence to ‘prove’ the organisation meets the standard, and facing the criticism of the auditors (perceived or real) if systems are found wanting.

Trying to communicate the importance of meeting these requirements to the leadership team can be tricky. When leaders aren’t directly involved in working with the audits they can find it difficult to empathise with the quality manager. It is not uncommon for a quality manager to report to the leadership team time and again that the organisation is not meeting their contractual responsibilities – yet nothing changes. Even more frustrating is when the external auditor raises the same issue, and suddenly it gets addressed.

Sometimes it can feel to the quality team like the only thing that will force action is when the external stakeholder calls to say they are coming to do an audit. We have all experienced the mad flurry of activity in preparation for the auditors. So how can we stop being reactive and time consuming? Is it

possible for organisations to adopt an agile approach to quality, and trust in the quality role to make decisions?

In the *Forbes* article 'How to make the whole organisation agile',¹⁰ Steve Denning says an agile leader trusts in the judgement and wisdom of those in touch with the customer. The quality role is a perfect example of a person who has a deep understanding of customers' needs. Remember, it's not just the end user who is the customer.

Problems can arise when the leadership team doesn't trust the quality position to make sound business decisions. This problem can be easily overcome if the leadership team has a thorough understanding of quality systems, are involved in designing the systems and can therefore recruit a person they know can do the work. When the leadership team knows what work needs to be done, they can monitor where things are working and where they are not. This gives them the confidence to develop a more agile approach to quality, allowing the quality manager more autonomy and responsibility for decision making.

Quality systems need to provide value. With an agile system there can be a more responsive approach to customer needs. If you think this approach wouldn't suit your organisation you may be right, but that doesn't mean it will never be right. Look at these three common factors that must be in place to support an agile quality system; you may not have them all, but you can work towards them.

¹⁰ Denning S. (2015). 'How to Make the Whole Organization Agile', *Forbes*, 22 July 2015. Retrieved at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2015/07/22/how-to-make-the-whole-organization-agile/#dea135158417>

A competent quality manager

This person needs to have a good understanding of strategic and business processes. Ideally, the position will sit within the leadership team and be involved in strategic and business decision-making on a regular basis. This ensures they are fully informed of the direction and interests of their key stakeholder (the leadership team).

Strong reporting and communication

Leaders and those in the quality role need an environment where accountabilities and tasks are clearly delegated and where reporting mechanisms are in place, providing assurance to each stakeholder that projects are running effectively, and key tasks are being completed, to manage risk.

An agile leader

In the article ‘Embracing agile’,¹¹ the authors say that leaders who don’t understand agile principles manage ‘inappropriately’. These executives launch countless initiatives with urgent deadlines rather than assign the highest priority to two or three. They spread themselves and their best people across too many projects. They schedule frequent meetings and many of them become overly involved in the work of individual teams. They talk more than listen. They promote marginal ideas that a team has previously considered and back-burnered. They routinely

11 Rigby D. K., Sutherland J., & Takeuchi H. (2016). ‘Embracing agile’, *Harvard Business Review*, May 2016. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2016/05/embracing-agile>

overturn team decisions and add review layers and controls to ensure that mistakes aren't repeated. With the best of intentions, they erode the benefits that agile innovation can deliver.

This management approach can feel very familiar to quality managers: too many meetings, being talked at, too many projects, decisions overturned and too many controls.

When you look at your organisation, do you have an agile system? Is your quality system more Tyrannosaurus Rex than self-driving car?

In an age where competition is stronger than ever, where ideas change so quickly, and regulators want more confidence in your systems than ever before, how are you as a leadership team working to be agile – not just in making money, but in providing quality?

It's not quality, it's just good business

I am on a mission to integrate quality into everyday business. I have spent many years working with organisations in the human-services sector who are required to implement a quality-management system to satisfy funders; and my experience has shown me many leadership teams with a strong focus on understanding their customers and a strong desire to provide great services, but a secondary interest in developing quality systems.

Would you be surprised if I said most quality managers don't have a budget? On one level this makes sense: in an integrated system the whole organisation would be responsible for a

quality budget. Unfortunately though, leaders tell me that they resent having to pay for a quality-management system and all that this entails, when they see no benefit. Leaders complain that the quality manager is creating extra work and that people don't have enough time to do 'quality' work. They think, 'Surely if I am paying for a quality role, that person should be able to do the work.'

I want this to be the year that quality becomes integrated into your business. I want to help you decide that you want a quality system and decide that you will integrate it into your business systems.

I want to help you design a system that meets your needs and for you to have input into the system, not hand this over to another person. You wouldn't let someone else decide the direction of your business, so let's not ask them what quality looks like for you.

Lastly, I want you to have the confidence to delegate tasks appropriately. If you can stop assuming 'the quality person will do that', you will be in a much better position to delegate appropriately whilst still keeping as much control as you need. Once you are comfortable being an organisation that accepts quality as an essential part of doing business, rather than crossing your fingers, you can have more confidence and get on with business as usual.

The important thing to remember here, though, is that you and all of the leaders need to be quality champions. You can't outsource the culture of quality. You can't delegate this responsibility to another person, even a qualified and competent member of the leadership team. You know what

quality means to you, and to your business. The quality manager's role is to report to you that the message is integrated, understood and getting the desired results.

I hear leaders say that they have a quality person who is responsible for quality; I also talk to a lot of quality managers struggling to get the leadership team to see the importance of their work. Ask yourself whether you are happy to get the tick of approval from a third-party certification body, or whether you want internal reassurance that quality is integrated into everything you do, all of the time?

How do you make sure that everyone in your organisation is doing the right thing all of the time, even when no one is looking?

I want to tell you a story about an organisation who contracted an expert to come in and 'get them through certification'. The consultant diligently wrote a folder full of procedures and charged over \$50,000. On the day of audit it was clear that even though they had a shiny procedure manual (colour-coded pages, flowcharts... it was very pretty), no one could answer any questions posed by the external auditor because nobody had been involved in their development and no one had read them. It just hadn't been seen as important, it was something the quality manager and consultant had handled. They now had a very expensive manual sitting on the shelves gathering dust.

When I work with new teams it is very easy to see when a quality system is truly integrated. I always try to talk to a member of the leadership team and it is clear when they

have outsourced their quality system to the quality manager or a consultant.

My message is simple: integrate, integrate, integrate. The ISO 9001:2015 revision puts a bigger emphasis on leadership rather than management and has dictated that full responsibility for quality cannot be outsourced. This is an important shift, which means it's no longer about managing the quality system. It's about leading and integrating quality.

So how can you integrate quality? There are three markers of successful integration that I routinely observe in supporting an organisation's quality-management system.

1. Shift your focus

You can start by really caring about quality. This shift in attitude and values will support the leadership team to fully integrate quality in their respective teams.

2. Support your quality manager to get buy-in

Positioning the quality role appropriately as part of the leadership team will mean that they have a better chance of influencing the leadership team and holding their peers accountable. This can be hard to achieve when you are trying to influence the behaviours of the team to whom you report. I admit that it's not impossible, and I will talk about this more in section three when we explore the quality manager role.

3. Support staff to stop resisting quality initiatives

Staff can often find it difficult to cope with too much change. The whole point of quality is that you adapt, in order to improve and meet your customers' changing needs and expectations. Creating a culture where

change is embraced, rather than feared, will support the acceptance of the constant change of continual improvement.

If we are going to see a world where quality is part of business as usual, we need to integrate quality, stop complying and start championing.

As Yoda says: 'Do or do not. There is no try.'

It isn't enough to want a culture of quality. You have to work to make sure everyone is on the same page, and the easiest and most powerful way to do this is through your organisation's values. Let's look at how quality and values work side by side to create positive outcomes for your clients, customers and the organisation as a whole.

Quality indicators

My background as a nurse and my work in the health and human-services sector means that I have a particular interest in quality and culture. Specifically, I look at how organisations with certified quality-management systems can still find themselves exposed in the media, where episodes of abuse and neglect occur.

If a service is certified to a quality standard, which focuses on meeting customer requirements, then how can this happen? In this section I want to explore how you can develop a set of indicators as part of your quality-management system that can help you to measure your culture of quality.

I was very fortunate to attend the Disability Commissioner's Preventing and Responding to Abuse: Guidance for Victorian

Disability Service Providers conference in 2017. For me, one of the highlights was hearing Peter Oakes, professor of clinical psychology at Staffordshire University, talk about his work on indicators of concern. His work explores the early signs that people might be at risk of abuse in services.

The key message that I took away from Peter's sessions was his statement that organisations have a 'propensity to slip towards a pattern of abuse'. This resonates with me, as I have been working with organisations looking at a phenomenon I call 'slippage', meaning that people don't start out to abuse the people they support, but rather the culture within the team slips until the behaviour is normalised.

I am a big believer that people come to work to do the right thing. I believe that if we provide people with the right tools to do the work, they will create wonderful relationships and outcomes. If we provide people with enough time to do their work, enough resources, enough knowledge and understanding of the organisation's values, then we can 'manage' less, knowing people are doing the right thing even when we are not watching.

The key, in my opinion, to reducing slippage is linking behaviours to organisation values. This theme was discussed throughout the Commissioner's event, with a consistent focus on building strong cultures. The idea of building strong values-based cultures was also the topic of a recent study published in *Pro Bono*,¹² which identified that 52% of

12 2017 NFP Governance and Performance Study (<https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2017/09/new-study-warns-nfps-need-strong-culture-profits-survive/>)

respondents to the survey said culture had not been formally on their board agenda in the past 12 months.

Defining your values

The starting point then, is to look at your organisation's values. They need to clearly articulate what you stand for. There is a tendency for organisation values to be rather bland: respect, integrity, caring etc, and it's important to really spend time looking at what you mean when you use these words.

In his talk, Peter also covered the importance of treating people as humans and not as 'others'. As he described, 'other and different is a short step to being less human.' This mindset manifests in behaviour when we see staff treat customers as a set of tasks rather than a person with individual needs. One example provided was the statement 'Will you DO Malcolm or will I?' when describing supporting a person with their personal care needs. Another example could easily be 'Will you serve table 6?'

When you look at your values, what behaviours do you want and expect to see, so that you know people are working within the organisation's values?

A good example I often refer to in the health and human-services sector are organisations that place value on choice. People will tell me that their clients have person-centred plans, and choose the programs and activities they are involved in. Yet I will hear and observe an adult client being told 'No, you can't have another coffee, you've already had one.' This is clearly not behaviour consistent with the value

of choice. When questioned, the staff member may (in their opinion) have a logical explanation for their decision to deny the second coffee. They may feel that too much coffee is unhealthy. It's not the organisation's value of choice that is being displayed, but rather how the staff member values health.

Values and behaviour

Within society we all have individual needs, but we also have shared needs and wants. Maslow's¹³ hierarchy of needs identified five motivational needs: physiological, safety, belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation. More recent research has expanded on his theories, and there are a number of world views to choose from. At the most basic level, we all want to be happy, be loved, have friends and be safe. When we start seeing people as 'other' we run the risk of dehumanising them, treating them as a task and, eventually, potentially seeing them as a bother.

This is not only happening in the human-services industry but in many service industries. Any time where staff perceive the customer as a nuisance or causing trouble, when staff feel that customers are making their life difficult on purpose, are situations where slippage can occur and affect your customer experience.

Building a strong organisational culture, based on the shared values of customers, staff and leaders, will support people to observe and display agreed behaviours. As Rosabeth

13 Maslow A. (1943). 'A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological Review*, 50(4).

Moss Kanter¹⁴ says, it is the conversations around values that matter, not just the values themselves. ‘People can be more readily relied on to do the right thing, and to guide their colleagues to do the same, once they buy into and internalise core principles.’¹⁵

Making values visible

I work with lots of organisations that have developed client charters or service-delivery models which are linked to their organisational values. I did a piece of research to look at what are the most common values displayed by organisations working in human services in Victoria in 2016, and I discovered there was quite a theme. I found the top five values were respect, integrity, diversity, passion, accountability.

These organisations work across homelessness services, children’s services, aged-care and disability services; some are not-for-profit and some are for-profit, the demographics of their clients and workers including age, culture, gender, sexuality and income are wonderfully diverse. With such diversity, I expected to see a wider range of values on display. My review of published values from 30 human-services organisations in Australia confirmed what I have seen in my years of experience: that organisational values are largely meaningless. I’m not alone in thinking this; Patrick M. Lencioni¹⁶ agrees. His article questions the validity of values using the corporate values of Enron as an example

14 Moss Canter R. (2015). *MOVE: Putting America’s Infrastructure Back in the Lead*, WW Norton and Company, New York

15 Moss Kanter R. (2010). ‘Ten Essentials for Getting Value from Values’, *Harvard Business Review*, 14 June 2010.

16 Lencioni P. M. (2002). ‘Make Your Values Mean Something’, *Harvard Business Review*, July 2002.

(‘Communication. Respect. Integrity. Excellence’ – sound familiar?) in light of their deception in 2001.

If you aren’t aware of the story of Enron: it was a corporation based in Texas working largely in electricity and natural gas, communications and pulp and paper. In 2001 the company was involved in fraudulent activities which were described as intentional, wilful, systematic and institutionalised. The Thomas article¹⁷ in the *Journal of Accountancy* offers a great insight into of the slippage of a culture.

Lencioni also calls most values statements ‘bland, toothless, or just plain dishonest.’¹⁸ In my experience, value statements are developed with good intentions, but remain unchanged and uncommunicated. Over time they become meaningless.

The risk to organisations who do have tokenistic values statements is that staff can become disillusioned with the organisation, particularly if they feel they signed up for one thing and yet received another. There is much discussion about millennials in the workplace, and their desire for work which provides meaning and social good. Whether this is true only of millennials, all of us, or none of us, is up for debate. But one thing is clear, if you say you’re about something, and then behave in a contradictory way, people will not trust you.

Eric Garton’s research¹⁹ has shown that inspired employees are three times more productive than dissatisfied

17 Thomas C. W. (2002). ‘The Rise and Fall of Enron’, *Journal of Accountancy*, 1 April 2002,

18 Lencioni P. M. (2002). ‘Make Your Values Mean Something’, *Harvard Business Review*, July 2002.

19 Garton E. (2017). ‘What If Companies Managed People as Carefully as They Manage Money?’ *Harvard Business Review*, 24 May 2017.

employees. If we consider that dissatisfied staff will reflect their dissatisfaction onto our customers, we can see how damaging and costly disillusioned staff can be.

‘Empty values statements create cynical and dispirited employees.’

Patrick M. Lencioni²⁰



Case Study

Health Inc has a service-delivery model which maps the client journey from intake to exit. The executive team who developed the model discussed the consultation process they had engaged in and how they had intentionally linked the charter to the organisation’s values in an effort to align values with practice.

The philosophy was that with procedures linked to a service-delivery model based on values, staff would work to those values in every interaction with clients.

When I talked to the staff about the new service-delivery model, everybody was enthusiastic about it but for completely different reasons from those of the executives.

Rather than talking about the values and working with clients in a new way, they simply told me ‘I click on this bit of the model on the intranet and it takes me to the forms I need.’ Practical, but far less inspiring.

²⁰ Lencioni P. M. (2002). ‘Make Your Values Mean Something’, *Harvard Business Review*, July 2002.

Altitude effect

The altitude effect is a phenomenon where those members of the organisation at a higher level have a much more positive view of the company's conduct than those lower down in the hierarchy. They must look outside of themselves to see a true picture.

As the old saying goes, just because you think it, doesn't make it true.

In my experience, when values and behaviours are truly aligned, you can recognise it easily by talking to staff and observing people in the organisation. Often these organisations just 'feel right'.

So what can you do to make sure people in your organisation (and your customers) understand and work by your values?

There are three areas you need to cover:

Alignment

- Make sure your organisation's values are aligned with your customers and staff. You will need to talk to people to understand their values; don't make the mistake of assuming their values are the same as yours.
- Recruit to values, not competence. Don't just employ someone because you are desperate; take the time to make sure they are a cultural fit, as well as a skill fit.

- Make sure your values are linked to quality and strategy. Is the word 'quality' anywhere in your strategic plan?

Analysis

- Talk about what your values mean to everyone. Match and communicate observable behaviours to your values, so that people can clearly see when staff are 'doing the right thing'.
- Document the behaviours that display these values. Celebrate the behaviours so that there is no opportunity for slippage.
- Leaders need to lead: behaviours and values must be communicated. Leaders must display behaviours that align with organisational values. Don't let there be a culture of 'them and us'. It's values for all and behaviours to match.

Accountability

- Develop accountabilities around values, not just the bottom line. Make people accountable for their behaviour, don't just promote them out of your department.
- Manage people who are a bad fit. Make supervision and performance-management meaningful.
- Ignite passion and celebrate those who display your values. Resist the urge to tell people only when they are doing it wrong. Celebrate the positive behaviours and share the good stories.

Values are often taken for granted, not articulated and not used to the best advantage.

As Simon Sinek says, in his 2009 Capture Your Flag interview with Erik Michielsen, ‘If you have to write “honesty” on your wall to remind you to do it, then you probably have bigger problems anyway.’²¹

Hopefully, you have organisational values which are understood, behaviours that people can observe and model, and structures and accountabilities in place that mean people who are a bad fit don’t have an opportunity to negatively impact on your amazing culture.

Unfortunately, not all organisations are in this position and there are still opportunities for people to act in ways which are contrary to the values of the organisation. So, what is ‘slippage’, how can you spot it, and what can you do about it if it’s happening?

Slippage

I love working with organisations where values are embedded. It’s the difference between staff knowing the values in theory versus showing you the values in everything they do. I recently stayed at a hotel whose website articulated the belief that satisfying guests relies on staff working cooperatively and respectfully. I observed this in every interaction with staff, except one – and that person stuck out like a sore thumb!

When people truly understand the values of an organisation they are more likely to do the right thing, even when no

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KE-sKK5X64A>

one is looking. Where people don't know the organisation's values, or their own values do not align with those of the organisation, there is a risk of 'slippage'.

I define 'slippage' as a subtle reduction in personal standards. I once contracted a cleaning firm in the day-procedure centre where I was the Director of Nursing. Initially, the staff were enthusiastic and the place gleamed. After a few months, we started to see the enthusiasm had waned, furniture wasn't moved so floors weren't cleaned properly, mirrors were streaky and toilet-roll holders were left empty. Nothing earth shattering, but the standards were slipping.

Most of us are guilty of slippage at some point in our lives. It's important to notice when it is happening and bring our standards back to where they align with our values. We all know of the stationery stealers at work: it starts with a pen here, and a notepad there, and before you know it they are printing off invitations for their children's birthday parties, putting them into office envelopes and posting them using the franking machine.

Sometimes the slippage starts because people are unhappy at work, but I want to focus on the slippage that occurs because values are not understood or not aligned.

I once worked with an organisation that operated residential shared houses for people with a disability. They were forced to implement a procedure to stop staff using their own 'fly-buy' cards when doing the shopping with the people who lived in-house. This is an example of slippage. The staff will tell you they have personal values of honesty, and the organisation has values of respect, choice and decision-

making; but still, people are putting their own interests first. Nowhere does the organisation talk about values of honesty, trust, justice or faith.

It's like the anecdote of a frog slowly being boiled alive because it doesn't recognise the increasing temperature in a pot of water. Organisations don't see the slippage until some major incident occurs and then leaders exclaim, 'How did this happen!'

People don't go to work to steal from clients or customers, to make choices for them or to abuse them. But, over time, slippage can occur where the organisation fails to determine the values and behaviours that are acceptable. Managers document values, and sometimes these are displayed on posters around the office, a link on the website or a PowerPoint at induction. However, unless these values are understood, unless staff can articulate and observe the behaviours which align with these values, leaders can't be sure people are doing the right thing.

As Rosanna M Fiske says, 'If management sets values, who owns them?'²²

So, what can you do to communicate your values and the expected behaviours in order to avoid slippage? I believe there are three actions which are crucial to the success of your organisation in evading slippage.

22 Fiske R. M. (2011). 'The Business of Communicating Values', *Harvard Business Review*, 26 July 2011.

Collaborate

Talk to people across all levels of your organisation about their values: what is important to them. If you work in a service industry, then I would suggest involving clients and customers in this discussion.

Communicate

Once you collectively agree on the values that are important, help people to understand them. Not just the words, but what do they look like, what behaviours are acceptable and what are not? What will we tolerate and what won't we tolerate? Can you set up a group to champion this with representatives from across the organisation, and which involves your customers?

Counsel

Help people to observe their own behaviours and those of others and talk about where they see good and bad behaviour. People need a safe way to communicate when they see unacceptable behaviour; managers and leaders need training in helping people to receive feedback where their behaviour is not acceptable.

I will leave you with my final example of slippage before I encourage you to start the conversations about values in your organisation. Strengthening the values in your organisation is a vital step in designing a quality culture.



Case Study

John is a 57-year-old man who lives in a house which he shares with four other people, all of whom have a disability. John has a history of night-time incontinence, which is managed with a mattress protector and incontinence aids at night. A new staff member is allocated to be John's key worker. The staff member has recently implemented a 'rule' that John is not to be given anything to drink after 6pm, to help with his incontinence. This is communicated at a staff meeting and accepted by the team.

A new employee joins the team and questions why John can't have a drink after 6pm, as John has been regularly asking for a cup of tea before bed.

The new team member is informed that if John has a drink it means he is often wet in the morning and staff have to change his bedding.

The new team member asks whether John has received an incontinence assessment from a medical practitioner and is informed that no, he has not.

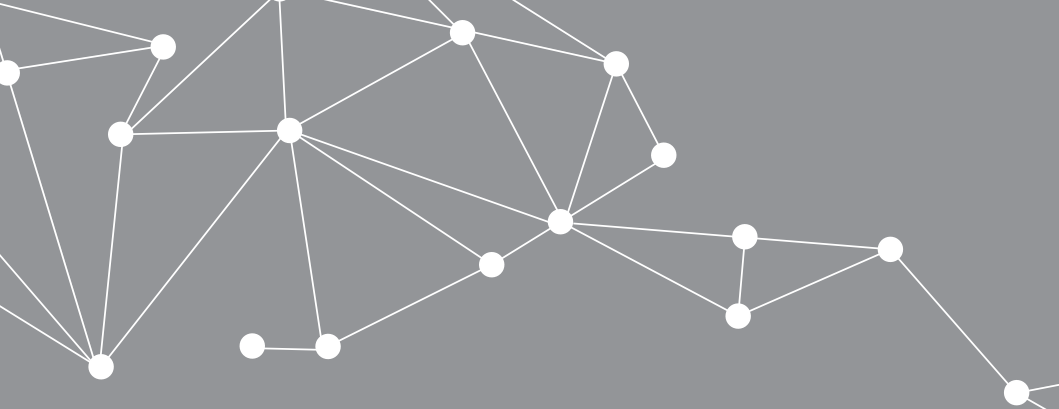
We can learn the following from this example:

- staff made a decision which was not based on expertise and with no consultation;
- the decision was accepted by the group without contest;

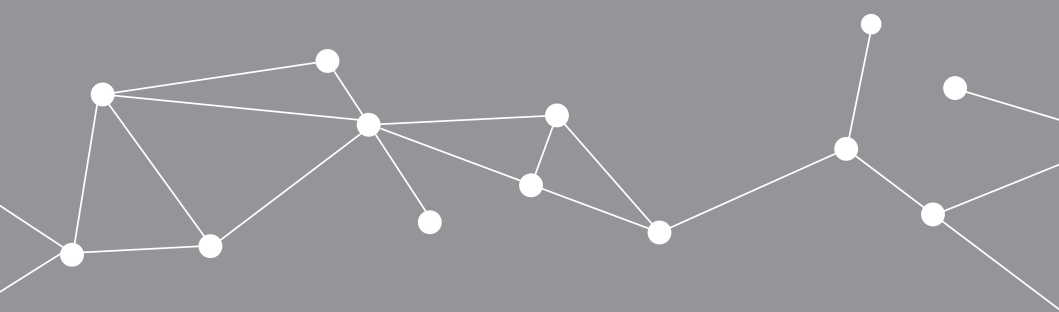
- the decision appears to be in the best interest of the staff, rather than the client.

It can be easy to put people into a box where they become a set of tasks. When these tasks become a nuisance, then the person is perceived as a nuisance (remember Peter's description of 'other and different is a short step to being less human'). Seeing people as a set of tasks is a sure way of seeing them as other.





DELEGATE



Quality and culture

We have looked at what quality is, focusing on the six principles of quality and how they fit into everyday business. Integrating quality into everyday business is a theme of my work and a passion of mine. It may seem like common sense but as I have learned, there's no such thing as common sense.²³ It's one thing to build systems and processes to support quality. However, controlling documents, setting up meetings and reporting structures, auditing the work we do and collecting data to measure how effective we are is only part of the project.

How do we bring everyone in the organisation along for the ride? How do we build a culture of quality, where everyone understands what quality looks like, talks about quality with consistent language, knows how to measure quality within the context of the work they do and is proud of the quality product or service that is produced?

In this section we will look at how you can find champions of quality in existing team members, using positions and roles to drive quality. We will look at how you can design your own quality indicators to help you determine the culture of the organisation; are there uncontrolled risks that keep you awake at night, or aspects to be celebrated?

23 Taylor J. (2011). 'Common Sense is Neither Common nor Sense: How often is common sense correct?' *Psychology Today*, 12 July 2011. Retrieved from (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/201107/common-sense-is-neither-common-nor-sense>).

Reshape, not restructure

In my experience the middle management of many organisations is under-utilised. These team members are the link between the coalface and the leadership team. This is where I consistently see the least clarity regarding responsibilities and accountabilities, and yet these are the people charged with managing the workforce and ensuring quality products and services are being delivered. Some organisations may decide to restructure, but I propose that by rethinking the work of the middle manager you can build a strong support system for the team and the leaders.

To me it seems the most sensible place to drive and champion quality in your organisation. Let's look at how we can utilise this position effectively and support middle managers to drive a culture of quality.

Building capacity

Capacity building towards a culture of quality can occur at any level of your organisation: it may be area managers or coordinators, it may be team leaders or house managers. The title isn't important, but where this person sits in the organisation is important. For simplicity, I am going to use the term 'team leader'; in my experience this is a complex role with many challenges reflected in other middle-management positions.

The *HBR* article by Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, 'Why Middle Managers Are So Unhappy',²⁴ identifies that those

²⁴ Zenger J. & Folkman J. (2014). 'Why Middle Managers Are So Unhappy', *Harvard Business Review*, 24 November 2014.

people who feel ‘stuck in the middle’ are the unhappiest at work. They discuss nine complaints, including that people feel undervalued and overworked, but surprisingly the most common complaint is poor leadership. The article describes toxic leadership as one cause of unhappiness, but I don’t think this is a full enough explanation of how dynamic the position can be.

It’s quite popular at the moment to blame leaders, and whilst I agree that the leadership team is responsible for designing systems that support people in building a strong and positive culture, I think it’s time to stop blaming and look at more practical ways they can help middle managers.

If you have a middle manager or a group of team leaders who report to you, chances are you wish you didn’t have to spend so much time managing them and could leave them to ‘get on with it’. One of the common complaints I hear from organisations is that the middle-management role is not effective; *it’s not working to capacity*.

The executive team feels that they are supporting the team leader more than they should be. They feel that the middle manager should be able to just get on and do the work, instead of coming to them with every problem. The team leader can feel trapped in the middle, trying to supervise a team and reporting to a manager who doesn’t support them.

Team leaders often feel overworked and overwhelmed. In my experience, it is not unusual for staff to feel resentful, claiming that the team leader isn’t pulling their weight, particularly if they are not effective at delegating (and simply delegate everything).

Conversely, when a team leader doesn't carry out their work in front of the team, the team can question just what it is the team leader is doing. I see this a lot, where people in a team-leader position are given extra administration duties, which takes them away from more hands-on work with their team.



Case study

Jessica works as a support worker in a residential house supporting five people with a disability. Jessica has been part of the team for 10 years and has recently been offered the position of team leader.

Historically, the organisation placed a team leader in each house, but two years ago moved to a new model where team leaders are responsible for three houses and are no longer rostered on to support clients.

Jessica is quickly overwhelmed, when in the first week two of the houses she is responsible for have staff shortages. Jessica can't fill one shift and decides to do it herself as she used to work in that house and wants to support her old team. Unfortunately, whilst she is on shift, there is an incident at another house. Unable to leave, she calls her manager to deal with it.

The following week Jessica decides that there are some tasks she can delegate to the support workers in each house, which will free her up for the new tasks she is still learning. She calls a team meeting and delegates some daily and weekly checks: first-aid box, fire drills,

client file reviews, cleaning rosters, staff rosters, filing casual shifts, organising maintenance, etc.

Quickly after the meeting, the staff get together. ‘What was that about?’ they complain to each other. ‘The last team leader used to do all of those things. What is Jessica going to be doing, if we are doing all of her work? What’s the point of having a team leader if we are doing all of the work?’

The team agree, ‘It didn’t take her long to start bossing us about!’

In the face of this resentment, some team leaders find it difficult to shift from their previous role. They continue to undertake the day-to-day, hands-on tasks: at the expense of their new role. This can lead to a breakdown in the relationship with their manager, who feels they are not doing their job.

Keeping the people you work with every day on-side can sometimes be easier than upsetting your manager, whom you may only have to see once a month. Doing the work you are comfortable with can be the easy option when faced with a raft of new tasks you are less familiar with or don’t know how to do.

Building capacity in three simple steps

Providing each person in the team (individual staff, middle managers and leaders) with clear tasks, responsibilities and accountability can make everyone’s life less stressful, stop

people feeling overwhelmed and busy, and help people to prioritise their work.

As we have already discussed, lack of clarity around tasks is a contributing factor to overwhelm and tension. There are three things leaders can do to support the middle-management role (and they are surprisingly simple).

Decide the purpose of the role and delegate tasks to the position

This means being clear about the day-to-day tasks and the reporting requirements of the role. Which tasks are part of the role, what can be delegated to the team, and with which tasks can the middle manager expect to get support from their leader.

Prioritise tasks

We may think we should let the middle manager decide, but when the team leader is promoted from within the team it's easy to see that their priorities may still be customer and client focused. This makes it hard to prioritise paperwork and meetings over satisfying clients' and customers' immediate needs.

Define the level of decision-making in the role

Be clear about your expectations. When should a team leader definitely seek advice, and when are they free to make autonomous decisions? Fear of getting it wrong can mean middle managers are afraid to make decisions; they defer to their leader, which can in turn leave them feeling that they might as well do it themselves.

Clarity is key, as Brian Tracey says:

‘Clarity is essential. Knowing exactly what you want builds your self-confidence immeasurably.’²⁵

The middle manager and leadership

I have always found the team-leader role to be vital, yet undervalued. It’s interesting when I remind team leaders that their title includes the word leader; they are often surprised and admit they have never considered themselves leaders. We have discussed the frustration of the team-leader position and touched on one area that can be fixed easily, teaching team leaders how to delegate.

Team leaders and managers can have opposing views about the appropriate workload for the position. The manager can feel the person isn’t working to capacity, wondering what they do all day, whilst the team leader can feel completely overwhelmed and reactive. Problems arise when people are promoted to a team-leader position and are suddenly expected to manage people who were previously their peers and friends. One team leader explained to me that he was bullied by the staff he worked with when he became the team leader. He was forced to take extended leave and eventually left the organisation.

One team leader revealed that they were suddenly expected to undertake supervision of the team with no training. Staff did not take them seriously as a manager because, other than the title of the role, nothing had really changed. They were expected to work with the staff one minute and manage their performance the next.

25 Tracy B. (1998). *The Gift of Self-Confidence*, Jaico Publishing House, India.

Team leaders can feel like the meat in the sandwich. There are expectations from above and below; trying to meet them can feel impossible. This is compounded when the role is only given a few hours per week of administration time, plus the expectation that they continue in their old role.

Executive teams often tell me that sometimes team leaders' inconsistency in performance can be a frustration, which causes them to lean more heavily on 'good' performers. This creates problems of overwhelm in some, and resentment in others.

In my experience simply promoting someone into the team-leader role isn't enough. Without a planned approach to support people through levelling up, it's all a bit hit and miss. You end up crossing your fingers and hoping for the best, which in turn creates burn-out for team leaders and their managers.

The 'Peter Principle' satire written by Laurence J Peter (1969)²⁶ was a fake theory that still attracts attention today. It addresses an organisation's propensity to select candidates for promotion based on their performance in their current role. The theory is that the promotion puts them in a position where they can no longer perform competently, and therefore eventually everyone in an organisation is working in a role they are not competent to perform. The key is educating people to be really clear about their role, providing support and training to ensure the person is competent, even when promoted.

²⁶ Peter L. J. & Hull R. (2009). *The Peter Principle: Why Things Always Go Wrong*, Harper Collins, New York.

The team-leader role can be invaluable in helping executive leaders be more strategic. It frees them from the operational activities of the day-to-day and gives them time for the deep thinking and strategising needed to keep pace with external changes and drive growth in an ever-changing business environment.

If you have team leaders, how are you supporting them? If you are a team leader, how does your organisation support you? Upskilling your existing workforce provides an opportunity to retain them and their intellectual property. This knowledge and history with the organisation can lead to a deeper and stronger culture.

We can and should provide training on leadership, but there are also simple things that the middle manager can do to relieve the overwhelm and free up time to concentrate on being a leader.

Planning your workload

When I work with team leaders I ask them to do a simple task. We first make a list of all of the tasks they are responsible for. Then I ask them to identify, under three headings, which tasks:

1. can be planned
2. are reactive
3. can be delegated.

They are often surprised to discover the number of tasks they can plan rather than react to.

There will always be some jobs that are reactive, and we just can't plan these. We have to deal with customer issues as they happen, and there will be deadlines or opportunities that need our attention unexpectedly; we need to be ready to shift our focus and deal with these as they occur. I'm surprised though, at how many people still have a to-do list that is far too long to manage. I encourage people to slot pieces of work into their calendar, which means they are more likely to complete it rather than continuing to push it further down their list.

The beauty of planning is that it frees up mental and physical time. Add to this the opportunity to delegate some tasks that don't necessarily need your attention but can be effectively and efficiently managed by another member of the team, and you suddenly feel a whole lot lighter. You're in a clearer headspace to make better decisions. Knowing which tasks can be delegated can give you a sense of freedom and possibility, but *actually* delegating is another matter. Let's look at how you can do it painlessly, without overwhelming your team.

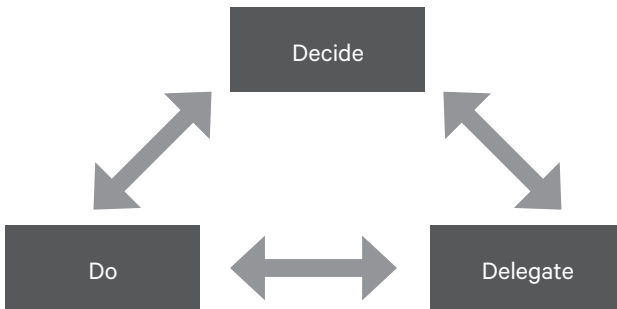
Effective delegation

Many of us struggle to delegate. We can easily feel overwhelmed with the task of delegation. We may feel that we are the best person for the job or we can struggle to give over control. In some situations where there is a culture of blame, we are just plain scared to hand over control in case it all goes horribly wrong. Not being confident in the abilities of the person you are delegating to can be a real barrier to delegation. Sometimes, we just feel it's easier and quicker to do it ourselves. Finding the time to upskill a new team leader

if you are a manager, or a team member if you are the middle manager, can quickly find its way into the too-hard basket.

The problems faced by leaders, middle managers and team members are the same. People usually feel that their role isn't clear. They aren't even sure which jobs are theirs, let alone which of these jobs they can pass on to another person. Often, people can feel that their manager or team leader doesn't trust them and doesn't give them any autonomy. Sometimes the role has evolved over time and there is no clear position description, so tasks are assumed and can be forgotten or duplicated.

So how can you delegate quickly and effectively, support growth and autonomy within your team, and prevent the misguided assumption within the team that you are handing over all of your work, leaving you with plenty of time to watch cat videos?



Decide

Deciding that you are going to delegate is a good start, but you also need to decide *what* you will delegate. You will need to choose tasks that can be easily taught, and therefore you will need to look at who in your team has the necessary skills.

Not all tasks or team members are created equally and it may not be appropriate to delegate a task across the team.

I often see tasks delegated to everyone, rather than a specific person. One example is the weekly OHS checklist. In the human-services sector, for example where an organisation provides accommodation in a shared setting for people with a disability or children in out-of-home care, there is a requirement to conduct regular OHS (occupational health and safety) site inspections. These are vital to ensure the safety of the people in the house. The forms are long and repetitive.

When you are looking to delegate you need to ensure you have the right person for the job. You don't want to choose the person who simply ticks every box without actually walking around the site, you want someone who is risk-averse and keen to ensure safety means safety. Delegating this task to everyone means you run the risk of the tick-and-flick expert doing the check more regularly than the risk-averse expert. You want to make sure you get the team member who checks that issues are followed up, not the team member who fills in the form, files and forgets.

Delegate

When you are deciding which tasks and team members to delegate to, you also need to think about what outcomes you require. Too often we delegate without describing what we expect to see at the end, and then are disappointed when the outcome is not what we had hoped for.

Be really clear about what you expect to see. If we use the OHS checklist example again, we could say 'I need the form

to be completed and filed by the third Thursday of the month. It's important that it has a date on it, and please make sure any comments or actions are emailed to me separately straightaway.'

This is very different from 'Can someone make sure they fill in the OHS checklist every month?' Without clear instructions, people will complete the work based on their perception of how it should be done. If your expectations and their perception don't align, personalities start to take over.

Making sure there is time and opportunity for teaching is key. Setting clear expectations and designing clear instructions means that you can be assured the work is being done to the standard you require, within the time frames you require.

Quality-management systems, particularly when audited by a third party, require the production of evidence. When you are delegating you want to be confident that people are doing the work they are delegated; designing systems that naturally generate evidence is the key.

Do

Constantly checking that work has been completed can make you feel like a micro-manager. It can also make the team feel that you are checking up on them and don't trust them. So how can you be assured the tasks you have delegated are completed? There are several ways: checklists, report templates, and meeting minutes are all good examples of documented evidence to show that work has been carried out.

You may decide that you need a combination of all these. For example, there may be a number of checklists that must be completed every week. The team member could be provided with a report template where they confirm that each of the checklists has been completed on time, with a space for variance reporting to identify where work has not or could not be completed, or where issues have been identified and reported. These reports could be fed into a meeting, so that managers at each level receive the same information.

As we have said, quality-management systems generate evidence that the work you say you will do is actually done the way you said it would be. Using checklists, reports and meeting minutes are great ways of providing evidence without creating extra work and without having to check that work has been done.

It's one thing to have the work delegated to the right person; certainly, receiving regular reports will help reassure you that tasks have been carried out, but how can you be assured that there is a consistent culture of quality at every level? How do you measure what quality looks like for your organisation?

The Quality Role

In the previous sections we have described quality and how it should sit within existing business processes. We have talked about the important link between quality and the culture of the organisation, looking at using existing middle-management positions to drive quality and prevent slippage.

The next decision to consider is whether you need a person to manage and coordinate quality activities. This will largely depend on the size and complexity of your business, and the existing knowledge and understanding across the teams.

The quality role comes in many shapes and sizes and with many different names. Common examples include quality manager, quality officer, quality coordinator... the list is quite endless.

Whatever the name, I usually find that the position has certain common key tasks. Examples of these are as follows.

- Scheduling, coordinating and undertaking internal and external audits
- Monitoring of a quality plan or register
- Managing complaints
- Managing privacy issues
- Quality induction
- Quality reporting
- Management and/or reporting of incidents
- Development and/or monitoring of a risk register

- Scheduling, attending and/or reporting to management meetings
- Staff training in quality, incidents, privacy, complaints etc
- Policy and procedure development and review
- Management of the document-control system

This list is not exhaustive but gives you an idea of the scope of the position.

The importance you place on quality, the resources you have available to spend, your existing infrastructure and the knowledge you and the team have about quality-management systems, will all play a part in how you shape the quality role within your organisation.

At this point you may decide that you don't need a designated quality role, you may determine that these tasks can be comfortably integrated into existing roles (including middle-manager roles). If this is the case, then congratulations! You have a fully integrated system.

If, as in most organisations, your compliance and legislative requirements are complex, your programs and services are diverse, and your current workload is at maximum, then you may decide that having a person be responsible for coordinating quality is a great idea.

The key is getting the right person for the job; the first thing you need to decide is *what is the job?*

One of the common frustrations for people in a quality role is the lack of clarity in their job. Many people tell me they feel

frustrated about their role. Common frustrations that people experience in a quality role are:

- inability to get buy-in
- no clear position description
- reporting to a person who doesn't understand (or doesn't see the importance of) what they do.

Let's look at the biggest cause of frustration in more detail.

Buy-in

I like to describe the quality role as a project manager. They often don't have a budget separate from other departments; therefore, a large part of their role is convincing other departments to be engaged in their quality work. It is not uncommon for people in a quality role to struggle to get buy-in for their ideas. Where quality is not a strategic priority it can often be seen as a side project, one that should be managed by the quality person. It's not uncommon to hear 'Well, doesn't the quality person do that?' People can become so frustrated that they begin to display negative, adversarial behaviours. Quality managers can become negative, not listening, even being considered a dictator by their colleagues.

For the person experiencing this frustration it can put a stop to their productivity. They can feel unheard. Many quality managers have attained professional qualifications and consider themselves experts in their field. It can be a blow to your ego when people do not understand the importance of your work. It can be a case of Catch 22, though. The more frustrated they become, the more adversarial they are

perceived to be, the less productive they become, and the more people stop listening.

I have seen people move to a position of coercion and manipulation. Robert B Cialdini, in his book *The Psychology of Persuasion*,²⁷ provides us with methods to persuade people to comply. I find most of us can recognise when we are being manipulated, and it does nothing to build relationships. I have managed to train my Labrador to comply with my wishes using liver treats; unfortunately, I have found the same trick does not work with colleagues.

If you want your quality manager to be the ambassador of quality, defined by dictionary.com as ‘a representative or promoter of a specified activity’,²⁸ someone capable of getting things done, getting people to say yes and then do the work, then you need to position them appropriately. Preferably, do this within the leadership team and support them to hold people accountable at all levels of the organisation.

If you are a leader, you need to be clear about the work you are delegating. If you are employing someone to build a quality framework and then implement it across programs and services, then they need to be able to work with the decision makers and hold them accountable. If you want someone to write your policies and procedures, you need a content expert who is positioned within the hierarchy to support the quality manager to access each level of management.

You have decided that you need a quality manager and you are prepared to provide resources and support to ensure

27 Cialdini R. B. (2007). *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Harper Collins, New York.

28 <http://www.dictionary.com/>

they can be effective, but do you really know what you need? What skills and personality do you look for in a quality manager?

Which quality manager?

One problem you can face when recruiting for a quality position is that you may not actually know what you need. It is not uncommon for me to talk to leaders who are unsure of what the role entails. They can sometimes feel at the mercy of the quality manager to tell them what they will do, what they will report, and when.

Hopefully, after reading this book you'll be better positioned to understand the quality role, and the principles of quality, to support you in employing the right person for the job.

Looking for a person with a cultural fit is as important as finding a person with the right skill mix. This doesn't simply mean they get along with everyone in the team, but that they fit the organisation's culture, wherever you are on your journey with quality. If you are at the beginning and looking for someone to help meet your compliance requirements, then be honest about that. If you have a well-established system that needs an overhaul and redesign to improve processes, then you are looking for someone with a deeper knowledge of quality management.

There is nothing more frustrating to a quality manager than to secure a dream job with an organisation that espouses its high-level commitment to quality and improvement, only to realise very quickly that what the leadership team actually want is someone to get them through the audit.

The key is to be clear about what quality really means to you, define the tasks of the position and then recruit appropriately.

The list of quality tasks at the start of this section will give you some idea about the person you are looking for. When you consider that the role of the quality manager is to work across teams, get buy-in from a range of people, manage projects, understand compliance, and have a desire to improve, you can get a sense of the type of personality you are looking for.

In my experience, a good quality manager has great strength of character, is a good communicator, is able to interpret a range of information and report to different levels of the team. Even the best quality managers, however, do face frustrations with their role. I want to take a minute for those quality managers reading this book to look at how you can relieve some of the frustration, allowing you to be all in, every day.

Relieving frustration

When you are frustrated it can feel like you're always trying to convince people, banging your head against a brick wall and getting nowhere fast. Let's look at some simple techniques you can try to stop the frustration and create a space where you can enjoy work.

Get to know the people you work with

Not just their name, but what is important to them at work, how do they like to operate and communicate, what are their values. If you find that people in the team aren't engaging

with you and are reluctant to be involved in quality activities, it can be beneficial to spend time creating connections with them and really taking an interest in them. You may discover that there are deeper reasons why they aren't engaging with you and you can start to break down these barriers.

Finding out how people prefer to be communicated with and how they like to receive instructions can help. I have a friend who would text her husband daily to tell him the jobs that needed to be done whilst she was at work. She did this on the train as a time-saving strategy. She would often have to follow up to make sure jobs had been done and there was some tension when jobs weren't done. One day, after a rather heated conversation, he told her he didn't like the texts, that they made him feel like a child rather than a partner in the relationship. After further discussion, they identified that a quick call would mean he felt more involved in the decision-making process, and less like he was being ordered to carry out a list of tasks for someone else.

Be helpful

Generosity breeds generosity. Be careful you are not being manipulative, but rather, genuinely sharing your expertise and helping solve other people's problems. You all know that one person who remembers everyone's birthdays and makes a special effort to help out when you need it. There are people in your network whom you go to when you need help: you are willing to return the favour if they need you. Conversely, you can probably imagine someone who never helps and never shares their knowledge. How do you interact with them?

If you can work to understand what people need and be willing to help them solve the problems they are facing, you may find they are there for you when it is important.

Develop a team spirit

Working alone might mean you get things done more quickly, but if people haven't been involved, they won't buy in. When you are trying to complete a piece of work and struggling to get buy-in, it can be tempting to try and do it all solo. This creates several problems, not least that you might not have all of the necessary skills and that ultimately there won't be an integrated quality system if you are the only person working on it. It's lonely working alone. Supporting team members in their journey to quality, even if it's moving slower than you would like, provides a better outcome.

Be enthusiastic

If people hear you complaining about how hard and boring your work is, they are not going to want to be involved. I worked with a nurse unit manager who constantly complained to the nursing team that the accreditation process created so much work. She complained about the extra paperwork, the exhaustive audits and the futility of procedure writing. It's no surprise that the culture of quality was not positive and people resisted any attempts to be involved in quality activities.

Be consciously competent

Qualifications are not enough. You need to know your stuff, be willing to share and acknowledge where you need help. It's

OK to acknowledge that you don't know everything, but it is equally important to make it your mission to be the best you can be. As Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella paraphrased after reading Carol Dweck's best-selling book, *Mindset*, 'Don't be a know-it-all; be a learn-it-all.'²⁹

These are great starting points, but let's explore the quality manager role a little further. How do you impact your ability to get buy-in and can you do it better? How can you, as a quality manager, make life easier for yourself and the team, helping everyone to embed and integrate a culture of quality that supports business as usual?

Be useful, not a nuisance

How you are perceived could affect how much you achieve. I work with a lot of quality managers and people in a quality role. Many of them describe their frustration at not being able to get any traction on their ideas or buy-in for their projects. It can be easy to fall into the trap of questioning why anyone would listen to you, particularly if you feel that where you are placed on the organisational chart means you have no positional power.

The good news is that your position and role title aren't the only factors that affect how you are perceived and how effective you can be at work. In my experience, many quality managers and people in a quality role are given the job for reasons other than their exceptional expertise and

29 Weinberger M. (2016). 'Satya Nadella says this book gave him the "intuition" he needed to revamp Microsoft', *Business Insider Australia*, 5 August 2016. Accessed at <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/microsoft-ceo-satya-nadella-on-growth-mindset-2016-8?r=US&IR=T>

knowledge of quality systems. Common reasons for being given the quality role include:

- a program suddenly needs certification to continue funding
- the old quality manager left, and you have been here the longest
- the new CEO decides the organisation needs to consolidate the complex system of policies and procedures, and you look like you are up for the challenge
- you are the only person in the organisation who has any time to take on the 'quality project'
- you were seconded to write some procedures for three months... That was ten years ago!

In situations like this, people can struggle to understand how they can get buy-in when they have no perceived authority. It's important to understand that where you sit in the hierarchy at work does not need to define you. There are things you can do to raise your profile. Let's explore a few of these before we explore the positional power myth.

Have something worthwhile to say

People will listen to you wherever you are positioned in the organisation if you have something worthwhile to say. It's less about your title and more about whether you are perceived as an expert in your field. If people see you are knowledgeable about the problems they face and the solutions that can help them, they are more likely to listen to you.

This sits nicely with the idea we talked about previously, where you can be generous with your expertise and help other people solve their problems.

A word of warning, though: sometimes, when we feel we are the expert, there is a tendency to become a nuisance. Just because you have all the answers doesn't mean you should make decisions for the whole team. Let people work to their own conclusions with you supporting them to make informed decisions. As Alec Issigonis says: 'An expert is someone who tells you why you can't do something.'³⁰

Don't be that person!

Make an impact

Just because there are people above you in the organisational hierarchy, doesn't mean they are better than you at your job.

You need to make an impact in your role. Try not to compare yourself with what others do well in their roles. Let people see the value of what you know and do. Sometimes it can be hard to measure what you do; spend some time thinking about how you can measure and communicate success so that others can see the impact of your work on the success of the organisation.

If you haven't been given measurable indicators for success, then make some. To start, it could be as simple as 'We achieved certification with less non-conformance than last time.'

³⁰ Alec Issigonis Quotes, BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved 9 June 2018, from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/alec_issigonis_399885

Collaborate

You must become the person that people can't do without and sometimes for this you need a healthy dose of optimism. If you love what you do and can see real value in it, then you can communicate this to people in a way that helps them to see the value.

Think about who you need to help you achieve what you need, but also how can you help them. Ask yourself:

- What do you know that they don't?
- What do you know that they need?
- How can you help them solve their problems?

Being useful, knowledgeable and able to show how the work you do adds value to the team, the individual or the organisation, are all ways that help you to be perceived as a critical member of the team, regardless of the position title on the organisational chart.

On the flip side, if you're a nuisance, a hindrance or a pest then you will struggle to get buy-in. You have the power to influence how you are perceived and received at work.

The advice from Dorie Clark³¹ to cultivate true knowledge of your subject matter and share your knowledge is sound, and will serve you well in your quest to get buy-in and position yourself to deliver results.

31 Clark D. (2015). '3 Rules for Experts Who Want More Influence' *Harvard Business Review*, 22 May 2015.

Don't be a person who keeps themselves to themselves, working only on projects that serve them. Get out there and see what you can do to help others with your expert knowledge. Getting to grips with the idea that you have no authority because of where you sit in the organisational hierarchy will be the biggest advantage you have. Let's debunk the positional power myth.

The positional power myth

You may feel that where you are positioned in the hierarchy means that you have no authority and no right to ask for the help you need.

Simon Dowling, in his book *Work With Me*,³² argues that your position needn't be a barrier. He says, 'be someone who takes power not from their position or authority, but from their ability to engage others and generate true authentic buy in.'

If you have ever watched *House of Cards*, you will recognise these traits in the character of Frank Underwood. He didn't need the position of president to have the real power, although that was his aim. He used his ability to 'persuade' others to get what he needed. I'm not suggesting we all become as ruthless and manipulating as Frank; indeed, the work of George Monbiot suggests that we don't need to be ruthless, because 'people are basically and inherently nice.'³³

So how can you move from pushing people along to getting the authentic support? We have already talked about building

32 Dowling S. (2016). *Work With Me*, John Wiley and Sons, Milton, QLD.

33 Monbiot G. (2018). 'This is how people can truly take back control: from the bottom up', *The Guardian* (Australian edition), 8 February 2018.

on your expert knowledge and collaborating, so let's look at these in a bit more detail.

Be the expert

Perceive yourself less as an employee and more like a consultant or a specialist. Consultants are brought in as the expert, when the organisation feels there is a skill gap. Make your role the go-to person when people need expertise. You may lack confidence, but remember: you do the job you do because the organisation thinks you can! Show them they are right.

Involve people in decisions

Involve people in as many aspects of your planning as you can. Just telling them what you need from them at the implementation phase reduces your chances of getting the support you need. If people have been involved in understanding what the project is about and why it is important, they are more likely to back you.

Fix their problem

If people have a vested interest in the outcome, or you provide a solution that will ease their own workload or fix a problem that affects them, they will work with you. You should find out what their pain point is if your project does not go ahead. You should help people to understand what's in it for them, and provide a solution that they feel is manageable.

The good news is that George Monbiot's work indicates that people are inherently nice and have a tendency towards

collaboration for survival. Tap into this survival instinct and you will get the support you need.

In many organisations people can feel that the quality manager should do all of the work related to quality. In fact, in many organisations the quality manager does do all of the work. It's not uncommon for people in a quality role to develop systems and processes to generate evidence to meet the needs of certification assessors rather than the needs of the business. We will look at this in more detail later.

So how do you get everyone else involved? It's not possible to do quality in isolation, it is not a one-man show. If your organisation is committed to a truly integrated and effective quality system, getting everyone involved is key. Let's look at how it can be done.

Quality is everyone's business

If you have ever heard or uttered the words, 'the quality manager does that', then this section of the book is for you. The quality role is often delegated to one person, with everyone else thinking that quality isn't part of their job. But quality isn't like most support services. It isn't procurement, focusing on one system; quality sits across all systems and programs across the whole organisation. If one part of the business sits outside of quality, it will affect the customers' outcomes.



Case Study

A community-services organisation needed one part of the business to be certified to ISO 9001:2015 to meet funding requirements. The organisation executive was not enthusiastic about this and many support services, including human resources, finance and procurement did not want to be involved. They argued that their systems were appropriate for the business and saw this as an operational requirement, not their issue.

Other program managers who did not require certification also insisted that they didn't need to be included in the scope. They defended their position that their operations were effective as they were.

The general manager of the in-scope program did achieve certification, and maintained that certification successfully year after year.

The problem was that the program had to develop its own systems because the organisation's broader systems did not support certification. Document control across the wider organisation did not meet ISO 9001. There was no version control, and everyone had administration rights, meaning anyone could change any document on the Client Records Management (CRM) database.

The program quarantined a section of the CRM and secured access to maintain document control.

The human resources process for ensuring the currency of police and Working With Children checks did not meet ISO requirements, so the program developed its own database where it could run reports to ensure compliance.

This meant that staff were double-handling information, but gave the auditors the reassurances they needed.

The process for invoicing clients handled by the finance team did not meet the program requirements for ISO or the funder, so they designed a checking process to track invoices outside of the finance department process. Again, it meant that they were double-handling invoices.

This organisation is not an isolated example, but it does highlight the importance of including all sections of the business to ensure the quality system does not generate extra work.

Apart from impacting on the customers' experience and creating extra work, a quality system that is managed solely by one person and not integrated across departments can mean that systems are designed to make the quality manager's life easier at certification time, rather than supporting the business all year.

It can feel like an impossible task to design an integrated quality-management system, and leaders tell me one reason it doesn't happen is that they just don't know which tasks to

delegate to whom. Everyone is just so busy that leaders feel adding one more layer will be the tipping point.

In times of change, many tasks get delegated to quality (because they fit nicely into compliance) and the workload can suddenly become overwhelming.

Leaders hope the quality manager will implement something that works for the organisation, but without input from leaders and other stakeholders it can result in a process that meets compliance and provides evidence for audit – but creates extra work for others.

Knowing what can be delegated into existing positions and setting clear accountability can help embed a stronger quality culture, rather than having a burdensome add-on. I love the work of Ron Ashkenas, where he talks about un-muddling accountability. In my experience people feel a sense of injustice when leaders are not clear about who is accountable for which tasks. It is easy for people to feel others aren't pulling their weight when accountabilities aren't established.

Ashkenas, in his article 'Why accountability is so muddled and how to un-muddle it'³⁴, says there are three accountability traps:

- the complexity of your organisation's structure
- work processes are constantly evolving
- people work hard to avoid it.

³⁴ Ashkenas R. (2012). 'Why accountability is so muddled and how to un-muddle it,' *Harvard Business Review*, 26 November 2016.

Johnathan Raymond, in his article 'Do you understand what accountability really means',³⁵ explains how we have a deeply held association between accountability and punishment; this supports Ron Ashkenas's view of why people avoid accountability to avoid punishment.

Deborah Mills Scofield, in 'Let's bring back accountability',³⁶ wants to create the working environment where it's easier to have accountability be the norm than not. In my experience, accountability provides clarity and supports people to perform well. In my discussions with leaders, they tell me accountability (with the right level of support) gives them peace of mind that risks are managed.

When you have a quality-management system that is delegated appropriately, and people are accountable for their part of the system, things can run smoothly. The quality role can be used more effectively as a resource to keep projects on track, ensure compliance needs are considered, develop best-practice systems and monitor risks internally.

So how do you ensure everyone has quality as part of their role? One of the easiest ways is to look at the quality tasks that occur within your organisation, make a comprehensive list and determine who is and should be involved in this work. Who is the executive with ultimate accountability for each task and how do they receive information to track that it is completed? What reporting structures need to be in place to ensure people know which parts of the process are their responsibility and who to report to?

35 Raymond J. (2016). 'Do you understand what accountability really means', *Harvard Business Review*, 13 October 2016.

36 Mills Scofield D. (2012). 'Let's bring back accountability', *Harvard Business Review*, 30 July 2012.

Knowing what the work of the quality manager looks like is important. Listing the tasks is a good starting point: developing reporting systems with responsibilities and accountabilities for quality tasks will provide clarity and drive true integration.

The quality manager role can then become the overseer of quality, designing and improving systems which make everyone's job easier. This can only happen once compliance is met, and once quality is embedded. If these things are not in place, the quality manager role will continue to be overwhelming and reactive, rather than strategic.

Before we finish looking at the role of the quality manager I want to quickly examine two common pitfalls I see when quality managers are not supported with adequate professional development and when their team is not clear on what quality looks like for their business. The first happens when they begin to design systems and quality processes either because the organisation doesn't have one or they think they can design a better system.

The second pitfall is not implementing an effective internal audit process. Internal audit is the best way to keep an eye on how the organisation is performing. It prevents any unwanted and unexpected issues being raised at certification audit and it provides the leadership team with reassurance that everything is on track.

Out with the old isn't always the best policy

It is not uncommon for people in a quality position to change jobs with more frequency than they would like. Often the feelings of frustration I have talked about become so strong that the grass looks greener in any organisation other than the one they currently work in.

It can be easy to get excited when you secure the new quality-manager role. You may have been so frustrated because of the ineffective quality-management system at the old workplace; now this new job looks to be the utopia of quality management. Everyone at interview told you how the leadership team has a focus on quality, that the organisation is passionate about quality outcomes. Boy, are you ready for this.

It doesn't take long to realise, though, that the system in your old job was much more advanced than the one here.

This can lead to a feeling of disappointment and anxiety, as you realise you are going to have to build this baby from the ground up, and you don't know where to start. At least, when you started your old job, most of it was already in place and you were really just tweaking.

Before long, you find yourself Googling 'purchasing procedure' in a panic when asked to write one – wishing you had stayed in your old job.

Then you have a great idea: didn't they have a purchasing procedure at the old place? You search your computer and

find it, ready to present it to the leadership team the very next day.

Feeling very proud of yourself, you can't quite understand why everyone is not as pleased as you when it comes to implementation...

This exact story happened to a client of mine; in fact I have heard this story from many of the quality managers I work with. The problem is that quality systems don't always transfer easily across organisations.

Organisations have their own unique culture, their own personality; processes need to be written not only to match or build on these, but also need to consider the size and structure of the organisation. When you design a quality-management system, these are some of the things the leadership and quality manager need to consider in partnership. Leaders cannot simply delegate the design of their quality system.

Going back to my client in the story above. When I read the procedure they placed in front of the team I wasn't surprised they had been met with resistance. The previous organisation had been a large national service with sites across several states. The new organisation had one site.

The process for purchasing at the old job involved a request for tender with a 14-page document to be completed by the manager requesting the extra resource. The would-be supplier then had to fill in another 12-page document and supply referees, insurance and Workcover documents.

All of this then had to be approved by a regional manager before contracts were drawn up.

In the new, much smaller organisation, they needed a more simple and agile approach. They had few suppliers and many of these were built on local connections and relationships. They often didn't have time to seek out multiple quotes and were happy with a local and trusted supplier.

Rightly, people pushed back at the extra work created by the quality manager. So, what should my client have done?

1. Talk to people about what they do.
2. Find out why they do it that way.
3. Discover whether it is working for them or not.
4. Identify any risks or breaches of compliance.
5. Explore some other best-practice options.

It's then possible to draft up a procedure for consultation and present a final draft to the leadership team. It's a good idea to trial the new process before evaluating it, then roll it out as a new and approved way of working.

Your quality system is like the diamond at the centre of the organisation: it's unique and special and can't be replicated.

Transferring your old process won't always work, but talking to people in your new job about how and why they do it, working together to get it right, will help you with buy-in and make everyone's life that little bit easier.

Why there's no place for audit checklists

There is a misconception that you can generate an audit checklist, give it to anybody in the organisation and get a good picture of how well the organisation is doing. I disagree. In my experience, audit checklists tell you one thing: someone took the time to tick off an audit checklist.

Quality managers are often forced to use audit checklists to delegate internal audit where there are limited resources.

I am going to share an alternative which is quick, effective and can be taught easily: procedure mark-up. Moving from audit checklists to procedure mark-up will give you a truer picture of performance.

ISO-19011 'Guidelines for quality and/or environmental management systems auditing' outlines the process for collecting information as part of an audit. The Standard guidelines address sources, including interviews, observation and document review. Commonly, audit checklists focus only on review of documents. A checklist is developed and someone looks through electronic or paper documents, ticking off that the required document was there. This only gives you part of the story.

A good audit will include looking at procedures to see what should be happening, talking to people about what they do and verifying what they do by looking at a sample of records. You should review these three pieces of information to allow you, as an auditor, to make informed decisions.

You need to read your organisation's policy and procedure to understand what people do. The procedure should also tell you which records will be generated as part of the work (think client files, meeting minutes etc). You should talk to or observe people who do the work; this allows you to determine whether they understand the work and follow procedures. You should review records (remember those client files and meeting minutes) to verify that processes are being followed.

This is called triangulation.

The biggest risk when using a checklist is that you end up focussing on recording whether the document (usually a form or checklist) is there, rather than considering the quality of the work.

The solution

So, how can you ensure you get the best results from your internal audit, make sure risks are identified and also measure the quality of the work being carried out? Procedure mark-up. This is a great way to ensure you get the full picture.

Planning for your audit needn't be a lengthy process, but it should consider how you can triangulate your evidence. You should make sure you have an opportunity to read the procedure, talk to or observe staff doing the work and see records to verify the quality of the work.

One simple way to do this is to quickly do a procedure mark-up. You skim the procedure or procedures attached to the process you are going to audit. You mark off situations where

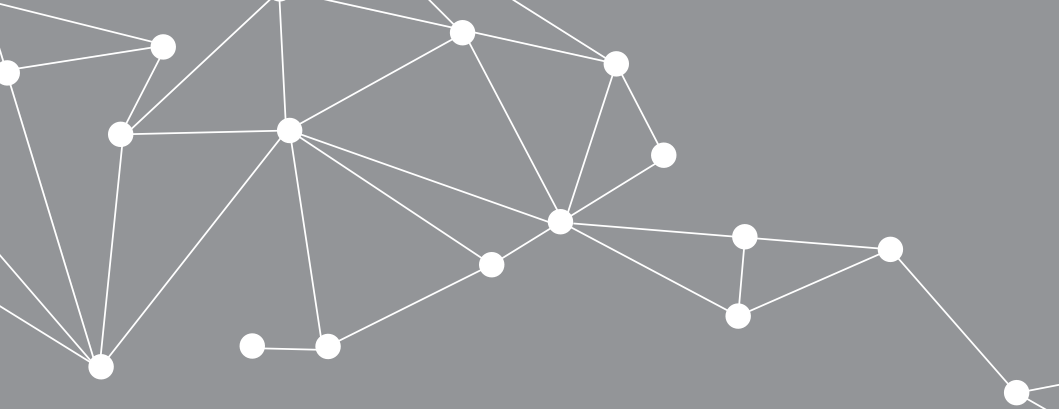
you can read, observe, talk to people and review records and then you use this as your tool to conduct the audit.

You can head to my website to see an example of procedure mark-up (www.rebeccabradshaw.com.au).

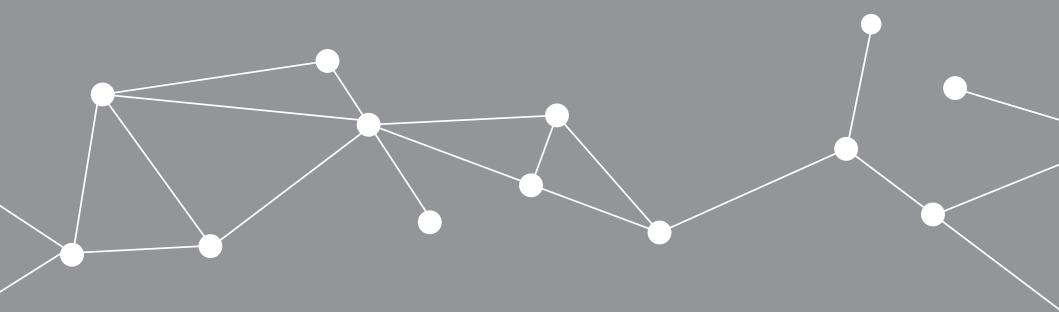
This audit technique gives you opportunities to triangulate your evidence. With this process, you can quickly prepare for the audit and be confident that you have a sound methodology for decision making.

Happy auditing...





WHAT'S NEXT



Preparing for audit

Once you have your quality-management system in place, and maybe a quality manager to coordinate the running of your systems, it's time to start thinking about certification. If this is already a requirement of your funder, then you may be ahead of the game. If not, then finding a certification body and auditor to suit your style is crucial.

Why understanding your 'auditor's style' is important

If your organisation is already funded by a third party and you are required to maintain certification to a particular standard, then you are probably experienced in being audited.

These audits carried out by external parties can be called many things. Sometimes it's a quality audit, sometimes the certification body calls it an assessment, which makes it sound less threatening. In reality though, it's a person or people checking that your organisation is in compliance to funding standards.

The definition of compliance in the Cambridge dictionary is 'the act of obeying an order, rule, or request'.³⁷ Depending on the style of your auditor, you can sometimes feel like you are being ruled over and need to obey.

³⁷ *Cambridge Dictionary*. Accessed at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/compliance>

In reality, when it comes to complying with mandated standards, what we mean is: proving to someone else that you are doing what the standards say you must.

The problem is that many audits are used to 'tick off' the criteria of the standards. Auditors must assess the evidence (read: proof) you provide, and make a determination about whether you comply.

There are several fundamental problems with this method of audit. One problem is that it can often turn into a 'tick and flick' exercise. The auditor asks you for a piece of evidence, you show them, they tick. This is particularly common with procedures; sometimes the auditor will simply look to confirm you *have* a procedure without reading the content. As we have already discussed, triangulation is important here. The auditor must assess that what you say you do in your procedures is what they observe when they meet with staff.

If you have an organisation whose ultimate goal is the certificate, this may be all you require. Continued funding may be all you need; but the hidden costs, including intensive preparation and redo to 'cover up' issues before the auditors arrive, can be expensive for the bottom line and for staff morale.

If though, you feel that spending anywhere from \$5,000 to \$100,000 over three years should yield some value, it's important to get the right auditor to suit your style. Many people feel they have to accept whichever auditor the certification body sends; but if you know what style you need it's OK to ask. Your certification body should provide you with

an auditor profile if they aren't available on the certification body website.

In my experience, the auditor can make or break an audit experience. People have given me examples of audits where the auditor didn't speak to anyone for the whole day, other than the entry and exit meeting. One client cried because the auditor was so aggressive and unreasonable. You wouldn't accept this for any other product you buy, and you shouldn't accept it from a certification audit.

There are three factors which can affect how you work with your auditor: their experience, their competence and their style. Understanding how they audit will help you decide if they are the right fit for you. It can turn a bad audit into a value-adding learning opportunity.

Auditor experience

The experience of your auditor is crucial. I have worked with organisations in the health and human-services sector for over 10 years and it's now relatively uncommon to be audited by someone who doesn't have a basic knowledge and understanding of what you do.

Being audited by someone outside of your field can be very painful. Take my health client who was audited by a person experienced in auditing agriculture. He asked so many questions about things that weren't appropriate, like undertaking an assessment for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease – a rare degenerative disease of the brain. Variant CJD emerged in the UK in the 1990s and was linked to the consumption of meat products from cattle infected with bovine spongiform

encephalopathy ('mad cow disease'). There were no requirements for the practice to do an assessment other than ask if people had travelled to the UK in the past 12 months, but the auditor was fixated on it. Perhaps it was the only medical question he felt comfortable to ask, although it wasn't particularly relevant. It wasted a lot of time and energy trying to convince him they didn't have a non-conformance. The disappointing thing was that where there were potential risks, like medication management, cold chain management, blood spills and needlestick injuries, he just didn't know what to look for. The practice received no benefit from a fresh set of eyes looking at their systems.

The other side of the coin is too much experience. The auditor may have run a service or business just like yours and spends the whole audit telling you how they did it back in their day!

Sometimes they may have worked for the very people who are funding you and demand absolute compliance for things that are outside the scope of the audit. It's important to read their profile on the certification body website to get a good sense of how their experience fits with your needs.

Auditor competence

This one seems obvious. An auditor who has been doing it for years will have a very different focus from a newly qualified auditor, but not in the way you might assume.

In my experience, new auditors are more thorough. You get more bang for your buck, as they really have a good look at your systems. More-experienced auditors may be willing to

‘let you off’, focusing more on strategy and the ‘big picture’ rather than compliance, which can leave some operational risk exposed.

Even worse is the auditor who has been doing it for so long, their only focus is getting the report written before they leave your site, making sure they don’t create any extra work for themselves by finding any non-conformance.

Tip: Check how long the person has been auditing, and don’t be afraid of newbies. They might provide more value than you think.

Auditor’s style

This can be a tricky one. Each auditor has their own way of auditing, whether it’s a preference for talking to people or looking at documents. It might be that they prefer to look at paper records or prefer electronic systems. I have witnessed auditors who have refused to look at electronic records and demanded everything is printed in hard copy.

Some auditors like to see evidence at the source, preferring to ask people to show them certain documents at their desk as they move around the organisation to talk to people, whereas some prefer you to bring everything to them in the boardroom. Some request an evidence folder, although I think (thankfully) this is becoming less popular.

Evidence folders can take a hard-copy form, dictating hours spent printing pages and pages of information, or it could see you saving records to a USB stick. You need to be mindful of privacy, confidentiality and loss of intellectual property when

you put information on a stick, which an auditor then uses in their own computer.

Preparing for this type of auditor can cost you hours. If you like this preparation as a form of self-assessment then it may suit you. If though, like me, you prefer them to ask people questions, observe documents at the source and talk to people who actually do the job, not just the quality manager, then it may be worth discussing the auditor's style with the certification body.

Finding an auditor who is happy to see evidence at the source can literally save you weeks in preparation. Knowing what you would like to get out of an audit is important in this regard. If you want to keep the auditor hidden in a room so no one can tell them all of the terrible things that are happening around the place (I know this isn't your organisation! It's the others...), you will like an auditor who is happy to sift through a suite of pre-prepared documents.

If you want to have a fresh set of eyes look over your systems, then go for a new auditor or at least an auditor who likes to talk to people and observe evidence at the source.

Whatever your preference, the important thing is that you use the audit for your benefit. A good auditor can help you see areas where you can streamline, consolidate, improve, save and strengthen your systems.

If you are still not convinced about making the effort to find an auditor for whom you don't need to prepare, let me explain why audit preparation means you're not efficient.

The real problem with audit preparation

Have you ever:

- dreaded a certification audit
- uttered the words ‘the auditors are coming (and not in a positive way)’
- found that a month before the certification audit there is a mad flurry of activity and increased workload to get the quality system up-to-date
- found your printing costs go up exponentially in the run-up to the certification audit?

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of these questions, then you my friend have an inefficient quality system that is not giving you a return on your investment.

Many organisational leaders that I work with tell me that they feel preparing ‘for the auditor’ takes up resources they don’t have. This preparation usually involves gathering evidence into either printed hard copy folders or electronic folders labelled with the criteria numbers of the standards. It’s time consuming, usually taking the quality manager offline for a few weeks in the run-up to the audit.

There are a number of reasons why people do this, the most common being that the organisation wants to make it easier for the auditor to find what they are looking for and get them in and get them out. People want to minimise opportunities for the auditor to ‘dig around’, and perhaps find things they have missed. They may want to reduce opportunities for the

auditors to talk to people and discover that things aren't as rosy in real life as they appear on paper.

Obviously, I'm not talking about you here. You have an open and transparent approach to quality; but let's just consider the organisations that I am talking about.

Get them in and get them out

If this is your plan, then I have great news for you. There are auditors out there with exactly the same plan. I have known auditors who like all of the evidence in neat folders on a USB so they can copy and paste information straight into their report. They like to get in and get out; some are even happy not to talk to people. But really, what's the point? What benefit do you get for the money you are paying to have them come and look at your systems?

Remember, you are paying for this experience: you should strive to get the best value for your money.

The good news is that there is no need to be afraid of what the auditor may find. Unless there are huge undiscovered risks to your staff or your customers, the consequence of a non-conformance is really only that you could learn a better way of doing things.

Whatever the motivation for audit preparation, I am here to tell you that it's not necessary and is an indication that your quality system is not working effectively. If you think the long hours of preparation is a form of self-assessment, my answer would be that you need to strengthen your internal audit system. If you have a quality-management system that

is integrated, understood and effective, there is no need to prepare.



Case study

A client of mine was explaining how busy she was in the run-up to a certification audit.

‘I have to upload all of the evidence onto the database,’ she said.

‘Why?’ I asked. ‘Does that help you prepare?’

‘No,’ she said, ‘it’s just that we bought it to make it easier for the auditor.’

‘But how much extra work is that for you?’ I asked.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘it normally takes me about two or three weeks but the old CEO liked it that way because it stops the auditor having to interview staff.’

After some discussion we discovered that there was really no benefit to the organisation, it simply meant that the quality manager was off-line and unable to do any of their normal work. This meant that by the time the auditor came, they were completely stressed out.

To me, this is like cleaning the house before the cleaner comes. I’m happy for you to move your knick-knacks so that they can get to your surfaces, but I don’t want you scrubbing the grout in the bathroom.

The audit, like your quality system, should be business as usual.

I mentioned earlier that if you use audit preparation as a form of self-assessment then you probably need to strengthen your internal audit. Some people feel that internal audit isn't a priority. They argue that they have external people audit them, so internal audit feels like a double-up. In some organisations it *can* feel like you are doubling up, particularly if you have to meet compliance to a range of standards.

I have worked with organisation leaders and quality managers who tell me they feel overwhelmed by the number of certification audits they undertake and question why they need an internal audit system at all. One client of mine provides services in aged care, children, youth and families, and homelessness. Between announced and unannounced visits, they feel they don't need to have an internal review of their own.

To answer the question 'Do we need to do internal audits?', let me ask you a question: 'Are you looking for compliance or improvement?'

Audit focus

Certification audits often have a stronger focus on achieving compliance. Even when the standard is voluntary, for example, where you are certified to ISO 9001: 2015 by choice, there can be an expectation that the auditor is assessing how well you comply with the standard.

Where an audit is compliance-based, either internal or external, it can generate fear in those being audited and drive a culture of covering issues.

An internal auditor who is looking to improve systems and work with the team can more easily be seen as a friend rather than a foe. People are more open and willing to discuss problems, meaning you can identify risks and get issues rectified in a way that suits your business long before the external auditor arrives.

The ASQ website provides definitions of internal (first-party) audit and external (third-party) certification audits.³⁸ The biggest difference is the underlying concept of rewards or penalties. Where the internal audit should be intrinsically motivated by the organisation's desire to improve systems, streamline processes, reserve resources and manage risk, external certification audits rely on external motivators and rewards: getting a certificate versus losing your funding.

Just as the usefulness of performance reviews for individuals are being questioned,³⁹ we could be asking ourselves whether certification audits are useful. I propose that the usefulness of third-party audits come a poor second to the power of well-run internal audits. I encourage all organisations to consider ways to strengthen internal audits, rather than relying on an external person to tell you where you could do better.

If you are questioning whether you need to have an internal audit system or not, the following considerations

38 <http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/auditing/>

39 Kenny G. (2016). 'Fixing Performance Appraisal is About More than Ditching Annual Reviews', *Harvard Business Review*, 2 February 2016.

underscore the importance of why you should proceed with its implementation:

- your focus is positive
- your focus is about improvement rather than compliance
- you can work with the team to identify improvement strategies that are meaningful for the organisation
- you can map many standards to support a one-system approach across the organisation, breaking down internal barriers and reducing silos – unlike certification audits that generally focus on one standard at a time.

I'm a big believer that if you have a strong internal review, certification audits are painless. Although they are sometimes a necessity, I can visualise a world where internal audit eats certification for breakfast.

Let's assume you have a great internal-audit system. You may still be required by an external stakeholder to undertake a certification audit. Let's take a look at the key pieces of evidence that you have at your fingertips to make the process as smooth as possible.

Having confidence that you have enough evidence for audit is really important. If you have ever been the person responsible for working with the auditor, you may recognise that sinking feeling when they suddenly ask, 'Can I see that?', and you are not prepared.

It's useful to reflect back on the six principles of quality in Chapter One to help you understand the evidence the auditor will want to see.

I want to reiterate here that I am not advocating that you begin a lengthy and time-consuming process of gathering this evidence for the auditor. But it is useful for the person scheduling the audit to be aware of the best place for the auditor to source the information. It also helps when embedding a culture of quality with the team to help them understand what the auditor will be looking for.

If we look again at the six principles of quality: (1) audit, (2) communication, (3) risk, (4) document control, (5) reporting and (6) improvement, we can start to unpack what evidence is generated from each of these systems.

Evidence

Audit

The obvious answer to evidence generated from audit is audit reports, but really that is the end of the cycle. The auditor may want to see your procedure that tells them what you do, they may want to look at how you schedule audits. They may be interested in training records of internal auditors or the service agreement or contract you have if you outsource internal audit. Lastly, they will want to see evidence that you have conducted an audit. That is the time to show them your reports.

Communication

The process of communicating varies considerably across organisations but there are some common themes. Meetings usually occur across most business structures as a way of sharing information, but when you think about it, there are many ways you communicate. You may have a newsletter or a regular memo. You may have a social media account or an intranet where people can share messages.

You may have supervision or reflective practice groups, planning days and induction workshops. All of these examples provide evidence of how you communicate. Remember, it's not just how you communicate with each other, but also with your customers and stakeholders. What external communication pathways do you have? This can include contracts and agreements, marketing material, advertisements; the list is only limited by your imagination.

Risk

Everyone manages risk differently. How people perceive risk will affect how they document their risk strategy. The more common pieces of evidence presented at audit include: a risk framework, a risk register or risk analysis, as part of project plans or strategic decisions.

As well as strategic, whole-of-organisation risk, it's important to think about how your teams manage risk at an operational level. In the health and human-services industry this includes things like patient and carer ratios, behaviour support plans, community-access risk assessments, medication plans, and asthma and diabetes management plans.

Document control

Showing the auditor your policies and procedures is almost always involved in an audit, but showing them evidence of how you control this information can be a little trickier. This is really an on-the-ground experience rather than a piece of paper. You want the auditor to talk to as many people as possible who confirm where they access information. You may have evidence such as a schedule for review of policy or procedure, or you may have meeting minutes which show the approval process. Some organisations have a delegation process for procedures to indicate who is responsible for their review and approval. There are no hard and fast rules, but think outside the box. How do you ensure people don't go around making up their own policies, procedures and forms? If you don't have a clear answer, your documents may not be as controlled as you think.

Reporting

This one is a bit like audit. It seems the obvious answer for this is... reports. It's not a trick question, and certainly it's important to have reports to hand. Track back a little though: how do people know what to report, and where, and when? Are there terms of reference for meetings that outline which reports go where? Are there report templates that ensure a consistent approach?

You may have reporting lines that are included in position descriptions, and an organisation chart so everyone knows who they report to. Delegation, again, is another example of how organisations define reporting lines and responsibilities. You can ask the leadership team 'How do you keep track

of what's going right, and what's going wrong?', to help you uncover which reports they get.

Improvement

I often hear that people find this one the hardest to evidence. It's not that they aren't improving, it's just that they don't talk about it. The ones that do it well will have reports that celebrate all of the great changes that have happened. Others will have newsletters that communicate the improvements to external stakeholders. Staff will be able to describe stories of great outcomes and how systems were improved following a review or audit or from feedback.

Having a central place to capture and track these improvements is a great help, not only as audit evidence but to help you capture all of the great examples that set you above the competition. It can be as simple as an Excel spreadsheet or as sophisticated as a database. What it looks like will depend on you and your resources, but I encourage you to have something like an improvement register to help you track how well you are doing.

So, you are all set for audit, you know the type of auditor you want, and you have resisted the urge to spend weeks preparing for the audit. You have ramped up your internal audit processes, so you are really comfortable and ready for certification audit day. But what happens when you have an audit that doesn't go to plan? What happens when you get a non-conformance?

The truth about non-conformance

Those of us involved in quality audits know the pain of receiving a non-conformance. We know it's part of the process of continuous improvement, it's good to get a fresh set of eyes helping us to identify improvements, blah blah blah. It hurts.

Business Dictionary defines non-conformance costs as 'costs incurred from failure to meet product quality requirements'.⁴⁰ The ASQ website defines the cost of poor quality as 'The costs associated with providing poor quality products or services. There are four categories: internal failure costs (costs associated with defects found before the customer receives the product or service), external failure costs (costs associated with defects found after the customer receives the product or service), appraisal costs (costs incurred to determine the degree of conformance to quality requirements) and prevention costs (costs incurred to keep failure and appraisal costs to a minimum).'⁴¹ Did I already say, blah blah blah?

Often, the only measures of our quality-management system are the costs associated with certification (costs can range anywhere from \$5,000 to over \$100,000 every three years, depending on the size of the organisation, based on sampling requirements included in the Human Services in Victoria (HSV) Scheme), the salary of our quality manager (if we have one), and how many non-conformances we receive at audit. But what is the true cost of these non-conformances? There are three contributing factors which determine the

40 <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/nonconformance-costs.html>

41 <http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/cost-of-quality/overview/overview.html>

true cost of non-conformance: the expertise of your auditor, the experience of your quality manager and the flexibility of your certification body.

Before we explore these in more detail, let's reflect on what a non-conformance actually is. In the real world it simply means that in the auditor's opinion, based on a sample of information that you have provided to them, you have not met the criteria of whichever standard they are auditing you against.

It does not mean you are the worst organisation, it does not mean you have failed and it does not mean you are bad people. It simply means that somewhere in the system something needs to be refined to make sure it is working for everyone. It's an audit, it's a sample, it's a part of what you do, and a non-conformance is never the end of the world. Everything can be fixed. The important thing here is how much it costs you to fix it.

We have already touched on the importance of finding an auditor with the expertise to match your business. But let's explore this a little more.

The expertise of your external auditor

I was auditing a large private hospital many years ago, who had implemented a records management system that a previous auditor told them they had to have. It had been a huge project and had cost them over \$150,000. They were telling me this story not to impress me but to bemoan the fact that the following year they had a new auditor who told them it didn't conform to ISO 9001. As you can imagine,

they were not happy. It is not uncommon for people to say, 'Well, why didn't the last auditor tell us about that?', or 'Well, the other auditor said it was really good'. It's important to understand that the expertise of your auditor isn't just about their understanding of your business, but also their ability to interpret the evidence you give them and make an informed decision about how that fits within the criteria of the standards.

If an auditor isn't able to do this well, you can find them raising non-conformance that may not be appropriate. The expertise and confidence of your quality manager comes into play here; let's explore how.

The experience of your quality team

I have a client who was audited and advised that they must implement a supervision process for staff which should include monthly supervision and be separate from the appraisal and performance management processes they currently have. My client has a very new quality officer who took this to be an absolute requirement. The quality officer assumed that the auditor was correct and did not offer any resistance.

I talked with the quality officer about the actual cost of designing and implementing such a project compared to the expected results and she agreed that it wasn't feasible, and that it was in fact an unreasonable non-conformance. The size of the organisation meant that such a formal and prescriptive process was just not going to fit with the organisation's budget, philosophy or culture. The important

thing to remember is that the standard did not prescribe such a requirement. The organisation was being audited against ISO 9001:2015, which does not include the word 'supervision'.

My tip to all quality managers, if you're not sure, is to ask the auditor 'Can you show me in the Standards where it says we have to have that?' This opens the conversation for you to explore whether the non-conformance is acceptable and appropriate. In this instance, if the auditor truly felt that the staff were not competent or were not being supported, the non-conformance could have read 'determine processes to ensure staff are competent'. This gives you an opportunity to design a system that will fit with your business. Non-conformances that are too prescriptive can be costly, and if your quality manager isn't experienced or confident to defend the organisation's position, you can find yourself fixing problems you don't have.

These conversations can be a great opportunity to make sure everyone is clear about how your organisation interprets the standards, but it can be difficult if you have a rigid auditor. This brings us to the last contributing factor on the cost of non-conformance, the flexibility of your certification body.

The flexibility of your certification body

Have you ever tried to have a non-conformance overturned by the certification body? I have, and it can be a lengthy and demoralising experience. I have also been lucky to work with certification bodies who are flexible and will work with you to reach a satisfactory agreement. Regardless, these conversations take time and energy, costing you valuable

resources whilst you find evidence to support your argument. Time, energy and money you could be spending on improving your systems.

Non-conformances that aren't appropriate stop you being proactive and keep you reactive. Being reactive is expensive. Every time an external auditor raises a non-conformance, you must evaluate the non-conformance, determine what the plan of action will be, develop the system, then implement, communicate and evaluate the new process to see whether it is effective. All of this has a high cost on time and resources. There is little time left to improve your business.

Organisations with fewer non-conformances spend their resources on improving their business, giving them a competitive advantage over those struggling to close out non-conformance.

Having the discussions with the auditor at the time of audit can save you the cost of trying to have a certification decision overturned.

THE FINAL WORD

This book was written to help give you a broad understanding of quality-management systems in a simple and straightforward way.

Now that you have read the book, you are in a better position to make a decision about whether implementing a quality-management system is for you. You have the information to ensure you choose the right standard (if it hasn't been chosen for you) and you have the tools to begin embedding quality into your everyday business.

If you are going to recruit a quality manager or quality position, then this book gives you the tools to get it right and prevent the frustration that I often see in the quality role from occurring in your organisation.

There are many books out there if you want to continue on your journey into quality. One book I recommend, particularly if you are implementing ISO 9001:2015, is the easy-to-read *ISO 9001:2015 in Plain English* by Craig Cochran.

Getting quality right is key to making it more compelling for everyone across the organisation. Moving from a place of compliance to a place where quality is embraced and understood will save you resources, alleviate frustrations like poor communication and the creeping scope of roles which leaves people unclear about their responsibilities. It will

help you manage organisational risk and gain a competitive advantage.

I have been fortunate to work with some outstanding organisations whose quality-management systems support and strengthen their culture. That is what I hope this book can do for you.

Let's keep in touch

You can keep in touch and receive my regular newsletter *Quality Quarters* by subscribing on my website:
www.rebeccabradshaw.com.au.

You can also email me with any questions at:
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Bradshaw loves quality-management systems and isn't afraid to admit it. From personal experience, Rebecca has seen how a poor approach to quality management can cost an organisation not only money but good staff. Quality is a mindset: when it works, it not only provides a great return on investment, but it builds a culture where everybody strives to do their best work all of the time.

Rebecca understands that the field of quality isn't everyone's idea of fun; when you feel like you are drowning in operational tasks, adding another component such as implementing a quality-management system can just feel too hard.

Originally from the UK, Rebecca trained as a nurse there and finds that her experience of UK systems now informs her approach to quality management in Australia. Her focus remains on risk management and patient safety.

Rebecca works with organisations that consider quality to be of high importance. She shows them how embedding quality management within the organisation supports workplace culture and provides positive results for internal stakeholders and customers. With a vast amount of experience working in the not-for-profit arena, Rebecca has worked to understand how quality systems can be designed so that they don't cause a financial burden. Rebecca believes quality can be simple and provide a 100% return on your investment.

DECIDE DESIGN DELEGATE

A quality book for the service industry... at last!

Love them or hate them, quality systems are not going away. Making 'quality' work for you is vital in a world where compliance requirements are increasing. The problem is, they can seem like a lot of work for little return.

If you are disillusioned with quality systems or are struggling to understand why you need one, this book will help you:

Decide what quality means to you and your team;

Design a quality system that works for you, not against you;

Delegate systems across the team, reducing the need for extra resources.

'Rebecca's practical approach to quality has always been about getting meaningful results without being lost in the jargon. This book will be helpful for anyone who seeks results and is in need of a straightforward approach to quality.'

– David Hamer, Managing Director HDAA

Rebecca does a fabulous job of simplifying the process and demystifying the art of quality. If you too are struggling with the 'quality' challenge, read the book and take action. I'm sure Rebecca would be happy to help!

**– Sue Kapourelakos, National Manager
Disability Services, Able Australia**



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