

Culture and the Quality Management System (QMS)

Talking about goodness is easy; achieving it is difficult.
- Chinese proverb

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The first and most fundamental step of a QMS design is establishing guiding principles. “We hold these truths to be self evident”, as in the Declaration of Independence, came 10 years before the Constitution. We need to secure our guiding principles before we focus on our QMS. The guiding principles for our country go on to say, “all men are created equal”. In a QMS this guiding principle is of great importance. Quality is a system, and is a whole that derives its characteristics (good or bad) from the interaction of the essential parts and none taken separately.¹ Management and workers are both essential parts. It is their interactions that assure a lasting quality product or service. All are equal and each has responsibilities. It is never what each part is doing separately that ensures the system will work well. It is their interactions. Often I hear, “we would have quality if only the workers would do their work right or it’s the management’s fault. If they would give more resources these problems would go away.” This is focusing on the parts and not the whole. Improving the parts does not necessarily result in lasting quality. Focusing on the interactions will give us what we want. Guiding principles must begin with our interactions. Why? Because our interactions will secure a lasting place where doing mistake and defect free work is possible.

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I suggest starting with three guiding principles.

Guiding Principle #1: Process fails more than people. Therefore, when there is a mistake or defect we will respect, honor and will not blame our fellow workers or management. We will blame the absence of a process or that the process needs replacing or improvement.

When capable work processes are coupled with a fertile workplace that is blame free, results are maximized. In *The Carrot Principle*, Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton presented a ten year study involving more than two hundred thousand people that showed how much more effective the “carrot” of praise is than the all-to-common “stick” of blame.² Dr. W. Edwards Deming said “managers must drive out fear.”³ Therefore, our companies must create a culture that actively seeks to banish blame, except for the process. Process Improvement is dependent upon free feedback and engaging willing workers that are not motivated out of fear.

¹ Ackoff, Russell L., *Ackoff’s Best: His Classic Writings on Management*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Chap 1, page 16

² Ben Dattner, *The Blame Game*

³ Deming, W. Edwards, *Out of Crisis*

Guiding Principle #2: Process converts our input into output. We will create or improve processes that will convert our materials, tools, equipment, and labor into products or services that meet the desired value the customer demands; while being efficient and ensuring that the resources we use will also result in value that is affordable to our customer.

Guiding Principle #3: Quality is doing requirements and standards.⁴ Requirements are born of value. Value is what the customer wants. Without the customer we do not exist.

Each guiding principle affects change. The largest and most fundamental question is, what do we want? Hopefully, we want to keep mistakes from becoming defects. Effective, efficient, defect free products, services and harmony in the workplace accomplishes the desired outcomes of management, employee and customer.

The change of behavior is the only way to have lasting change. We can whip people in order to obtain change or we can give them incentives. "Beat a horse and he will run....for a while."⁵ Remove either and we know what happens. The carrot or stick thinking has never resulted in lasting change. A QMS must be directed at what we want not what we don't want.

To focus on not making a mistake or defect is to focus on something we should not have done. Failure and mistakes are the fertile ground for gaining knowledge. It is the first concept of a learning company. Learn from mistakes and errors.

We seek improvement by looking at errors of commission and errors of omission. Only one is financially recorded. We record what we did wrong. We preach doing wrong is bad and we must avoid it. How bad is omitting what we should have done? How much does omission hit the bottom line? We often build a culture that says, "Failure is bad." Both kinds of errors must lead our processes to improvement. Bad is bad if we continue doing bad and don't learn and improve.

Redesign is birthed in innovation. Innovation requires freedom from fear. Again, let's create a QMS that has wellbeing in the work place as our guiding value. We must follow our guiding principles and direct our efforts at what we want not what we don't want.

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⁴ Philip Crosby, Quality is free

⁵ Deming, W. Edwards, Out of Crisis