

The Ten Building Blocks of a Quality Culture

I've been a big fan of Edward de Bono for about 30 years. Over that period of time he has given us hundreds of ideas about Creative Thinking. In fact, if you've ever heard the term 'lateral thinking', according to Wikipedia, "The term was coined in 1967 by Edward de Bono".

In my role as a catalyst to help organizations simplify their ISO 9001 Management Systems since 1992, I have used numerous ideas from De Bono. One of his books, 'Simplicity' has 10 rules of Simplicity. I realized that they translate perfectly to ISO Management Systems. This paper is on a Quality Culture, but it would work just as well for Environmental, Energy, Health and Safety, Information Security or **any** Management System you are using.

This approach will also guide Top Management onto the path to meet the requirements for the ISO 9001:2015 Standard, clause **5.1.1 Leadership**. These 10 blocks provide practical ideas to create a quality culture.

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Building Block #1

You need to put a very high value on Quality

Employees have to see Management walking the talk on Quality. To say that we value quality then implement a reward program for cutting costs is not consistent with putting a high value on quality. That's not to say that we don't have to pay attention to costs – we need to control and manage costs for sure, especially cash flow. It's to say that what we reward is what employees pay attention to. And not just cash rewards – rewards of acknowledgement, pats on the back, announcements, promotions and all the other subtle ways we signal 'what is important'. On the bottom line, quality pays in so many ways, not the least of which is doing it right the first time, especially in the world of services.

Improving quality will cut costs, so by rewarding quality improvement, the bottom line will benefit.

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 5.1.1 b): '*...ensuring that the quality policy and quality objectives are established for the quality management system and are compatible with the context and strategic direction of the organization...*'

Building Block #2

You must be determined to seek Quality

Any organization can say they are quality focused, but what activities would we see in our organizations if we were 'actively seeking quality'? What would we point to if a potential customer asked how will we fill their orders? If we are focused on cutting costs or finding new clients or getting a late order shipped by a very expensive expediter, we've already missed the boat and are only paying lip service to the concept of being **determined** to seek quality. "Nothing in the world", said Calvin Coolidge, "can take the place of persistence."

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 5.1.1 h): '*...engaging, directing and supporting persons to contribute to the effectiveness of the quality management system...*'

The Ten Building Blocks of a Quality Culture

Building Block #3

You need to understand your processes and their interactions very well

We need to be clear about what we're trying to do, and clear about values. The values must be communicated and understood – part of the fabric of our organization.

Deming's 'Plan, Do, Study, Act' mantra is a reminder that we can't improve quality without knowing how processes work and interact. The activity of studying our processes will also give us a better idea of how changes in one area will affect results in a process further down the stream. Outputs from one process become the inputs for the next process, and every action (or cause) has an effect somewhere.

'Taking a stab at improvement' can end up causing more harm than good.

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 7.1.6 Organizational Knowledge: The organization “...*shall determine the knowledge necessary for the operation of its processes and to achieve conformity of products and services...*”

Building Block #4

You need to design alternatives and possibilities

On the road to creating a quality culture, as on the road to anywhere, bumps can occur. We need a roadmap, or design, for creating this culture we're after. The studying we did in Building Block #3 can be a great set of inputs for the process of designing the path. Alternatives will give us something to fall back on if the way forward is not embraced by everyone.

Remember that your employees are intelligent, well trained individuals and will want to contribute their skills to this venture. Make sure the design allows for input from the 'experts' in your organization – the people doing the work.

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 5.1.1 j): “...*supporting other relevant management roles to demonstrate their leadership as it applies to their areas of responsibility...*” and 5.1.1 i), “...*promoting improvement...*”

Building Block #5

You need to challenge and discard existing elements of your Management System

Some systems can be helped by getting rid of 'non-value added' processes. Just because 'that's the way we've always done it' rings through our hallways doesn't mean we have to live with it. And Systems, by nature, just seem to grow on their own.

Lean activities, mistake-proofing and looking at workflow can help us find ways to challenge what we do and shed the 'muda' that Taiichi Ohno talked about in 'The Toyota Production System – Beyond large scale Production'. There are plenty of ways to improve the effectiveness of our management system if we're willing to step back and assess whether a process is as good as it can be. Our people won't buy into the concept of a 'Quality Culture' if they have to do

The Ten Building Blocks of a Quality Culture

things that they perceive are not adding value to the customer (internal and external) and are not regulatory or legal requirements.

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 10.1: *“The organization shall determine and select opportunities for improvement and implement any necessary actions to meet customer requirements and enhance customer satisfaction.”* and clause 5.1.1 i), *“...promoting improvement...”*

Building Block #6

You need to be prepared to start over again

Sometimes we just have to know when to quit, or admit that a ‘modification’ to an existing process is just not going to give us the best result. It’s easier to modify, (and usually less expensive) but it may be a bit like putting a coat of paint on a leaking foundation. Ultimately, we’ll be disappointed.

We need to do a ‘cost versus benefit’ analysis and an estimate of the return on investment of doing a ground up new process versus retrofitting an existing one. Then top management buy in may happen and everybody wins. Top Management will be sending signals about the journey to a quality culture and those signals will make the road smooth or bumpy.

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 9.1: *“The organization shall evaluate the performance and the effectiveness of the quality management system.”*

Building Block #7

You need to use concepts

We need to walk out of the trees and look at the forest. Details are important, but can stifle our ‘lateral’ or ‘out of the box’ thinking. We need to see the long view in order to find a better way forward. Buried in details we’re like a fish trying to look at the water it’s swimming in. From outside of the forest, we can set a more general direction to developing the culture, tied into our Strategic direction. Focus on the details keeps our perspective too narrow to design alternatives and see possibilities. ‘Vague and blurry’ can sometimes open up the idea flow. Not good for brain surgery, but great for stimulating culture building.

Concepts that Management will have to promote will include Risk-based thinking and the Process Approach.

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 5.1.1 d): *“...promoting the use of the process approach and risk-based thinking...”* and clause 4.1 – ***Understanding the context of the organization***

Building Block #8

You may need to break things down into smaller units

We’ve seen the Process Approach – taking inputs, performing a number of activities and creating results that get passed on to the next stage. It’s much easier to change 100 things by 1% than to

The Ten Building Blocks of a Quality Culture

change 1 thing by 100%. Incremental change generally has less resistance and this applies to attitudes, as well. Processes can be broken into steps, diagrammed, studied and improved. This also adds an element of objectivity to the whole exercise – we’re not ‘doing quality’ just because the boss wants it, it’s helping us, too. If a person’s job becomes easier or more satisfying, it will help build a positive mood around a quality culture.

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 5.1.1 d): “...*promoting the use of the process approach and risk-based thinking...*” and 4.4.1 a) and b): processes and their interactions.

Building Block #9

You need to be ready to trade off other values in favour of Quality

There’s an anecdotal ‘constraint model’ in the world of Engineering: Quality – Price – Timing: pick any two. By staying focused on ‘errors are unacceptable’ (or at least have a rate of errors we can live with) we may have to give up some complex processes and find simpler ones that still get the job done but keep quality where we want it. Measuring stable processes, for example, can be a time-waster that we can trade off in favour of getting it out our door more quickly or delivering the service more efficiently. Measuring processes that are responsible for customer satisfaction or reaching strategic goals must be at the top of our lists.

Glodblatt’s work in the field of Theory of Constraints is much more comprehensive, but well worth exploring to get the full picture of how constraints can inhibit success on the road to a Quality Culture.

Management will have to decide how to allocate resources, like they have to with their Occupational Health and Safety programs. Do you have a ‘safety minute’ from time to time? Have a ‘quality moment’! Trading off resources is not always easy, but...

This links to ISO 9001:2015 clause 9.1.3: “*The organization shall analyse and evaluate appropriate data and information arising from monitoring and measurement.*” and 4.4.1 a) and b): processes and their interactions. What processes really support what is important to our customers? Our customers determine what ‘quality’ is.

Building Block #10

You need to know for whose sake quality is being designed into your organization

Here’s a quote from ISO 9000, clause 2.2.1 – the companion document to ISO 9001:

Quality focused organizations embrace a culture that inspires and drives behaviour, attitude, actions and processes in order to deliver value through fulfilling the requirements of interested parties.

The quality of an organization’s products and services is determined by not only the ability to satisfy a particular customer but also the intended and unintended impact on other interested parties.

The quality of products and services include not only their intended function, but also their perceived value and benefit to the customer.

The Ten Building Blocks of a Quality Culture

‘Interested parties’ is jumping out at us with this latest revision, and this broadens our earlier concept of a customer-centric world. Not gone, but modified.

We need to build quality into everything we do in order to create a quality culture. No small task, but taking bite-sized pieces one at a time with an understanding of the process flow is a good place to start. As Covey said, “Start with the end in mind”.

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He has designed and delivered Lead Auditor (and other) courses for BSI, QMI (now SAI Global), SGS , CGSB and the CWB Group. He developed and delivered the Assessor Training Program for Medical Lab assessors who do medical lab accreditation assessment for IQMH - the Institute for Quality Management in Healthcare, Centre for Accreditation.

He served on PC 280 to help contribute to ISO 20700:2017 **Guidelines for management consultancy services**, a standard published for use as a guideline for people or organizations for the assessment of management consulting services.