Quality info

Assess Your Organization's Quality Culture

New technologies have empowered customers to seek out the best products and services at the lowest cost and shortest delivery times. Customers can compare price and delivery information as well as reviews about product quality. Thus, the importance of sustaining outstanding quality in order to stand out from competitors and be profitable is critical. It requires a sustainable quality culture with intrinsically motivated employees who view quality not as a chore but as a source of satisfaction.

Of course, integral to a quality culture is the work environment that promotes team spirit, growth, and fairness. A sustainable quality strategy depends on creating a culture of quality. In this article, we'll describe four key success factors for creating a quality culture as well as a way to measure where your organization stands.

Critical success factors for a quality culture

Although factors that affect a quality culture vary from industry to industry and country to country, it's safe to say that these four major factors are common among all:

1. Leadership

2. Motivation

3. Empowerment

4. Work environment

Leadership

Leadership plays a key role in establishing and sustaining a quality culture. One of the key skills that a leader needs in order to develop a quality culture is the ability to craft, and more important, communicate the quality vision, mission, and values. According to businessdictionary.com, vision is an inspirational statement of what an organization would like to achieve or accomplish in the future, and a mission statement is a description of the organization's current core activities. Values are the important and lasting beliefs shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad. Values serve as guard rails in making all business decisions.

Motivation

Employee engagement is key in nurturing a sustainable quality culture. According to a Gallup poll published in 2015, only three out of 10 persons felt engaged by their jobs, i.e., involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace. The slow and a difficult process of changing a corporate culture is directly related to the values, beliefs, and mindset of employees.

Two types of motivations drive employee engagement: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation can be achieved through rewards, recognitions, and money; however it's less effective than intrinsic motivation in achieving full employee engagement Intrinsic motivation is driven by an interest or enjoyment in the task itself, and exists within the individual rather than relying on external pressures or a desire for reward. Intrinsically motivated employees make it easier to realize excellent results. The self-determination theory asserts that employees are at the highest level of *intrinsic* motivation when their competence development, autonomy, and relationship conditions are met.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a management practice of sharing power with employees. A structured and disciplined shifting of responsibility and authority to employees "empowers" them to make decisions regarding matters of quality within the guardrails of company values. Empowering employees improves product quality and customer satisfaction.

Work environment

Workplace policies and conditions play a big role in creating a work environment that promotes quality culture. Work environmental factors that also impact quality culture are the reward and recognition system, personal development, and trust within the team.

Quality culture assessment

An assessment of quality culture will tell you the maturity level of the quality culture in your organization.

Start by identifying the *enablers of quality culture*. Figure 1 provides a checklist for conducting an organization-wide assessment of quality culture.

Legend

• (F) Critical success factor

• (QCT) Quality culture trait

• Scoring criteria: Assign 1 for each QCT that has been met and 0 if QCT does not exist.

A score of 3 is the maximum score for an enabler

F	Item	Enablers	QCT 1	QCT 2	QCT 3	Score
LEADERSHIP	1	Quality vision	An inspiring quality vision has been articulated.	Quality vision has been drilled down to all levels of employees	Employees are aware of how they contribute to achieving the quality vision.	
	2	Values	Values are established, widely communicated, and understood by all employees.	Values are used by all employees as guardrails in making decisions	Values are considered a real strength by customers and suppliers.	
	3	Leadership role	Management at all levels is actively engaged in quality matters.	Leaders empower employees and give them autonomy to accomplish results. If needed, leaders help employees to succeed.	The exemplary behavior of leaders is a source of inspiration for all employees, who imitate leaders' actions to improve quality.	
	4	Accountability	Every leader owns a set of key process indicators (KPI) and takes the necessary actions to achieve planned results.	Employees are involved in establishing product/service, quality, and delivery KPIs and deadlines.	The process owner is accountable to initiate actions to improve KPI's and related processes.	
	5	Leadership skills	Leaders regularly assess their leadership skills with appropriate tools.	Leaders seek and accept feedback from co-workers and take actions to enhance skills. Leaders provide positive behavioral feedback to employees.	Leaders consistently use the plan-do-check-adjust (PDCA) cycle to learn and improve.	

	6	Customer focus	Leaders proactively communicate current and future expectations of customers to employees.	Customer feedback is the key driver of continual improvement.	Both direct customers' and *end users'* expectations are considered when making improvements.	
MOTIVATION	7	Motivation (intrinsic)	Employees are provided an environment to enhance competence.	People are empowered to plan their work. They are motivated to improve work processes to grow and prosper.	People have good relationships and leverage each other's strengths to achieve higher performance.	
	8	Motivation (extrinsic)	Employees are rewarded for results achieved.	Teams are rewarded for achieving targets.	Employees are eager to be recognized publicly for improvements and results achieved.	
EMPOWERMENT	9	Empowerment	Employees have a certain latitude to make necessary decisions.	Employees enjoy freedom in planning and taking actions to achieve best results.	Employees regularly and methodically assess progress made against agreed objectives.	

WORK ENVIRONMENT	10	Work environment	Employees' competencies are aligned with job requirements.	Employees are aware of priorities and goals to achieve.	Employees work in a well-organized and flexible environment.	
	11	Company culture assessment	The organizational culture has been assessed.	Feedback from the assessment is used to develop the company culture and reinforce the use of company's values in day-to-day activities.	Leaders make the correlation between their leadership style and the company culture.	
					Total score	

Figure 1: Quality culture assessment (assessing enablers)

Scoring

Score < 12	Organization is at the early stages of quality culture development.
12 <= Score <= 22	Organization exhibits some promising quality culture characteristics.
22 < Score <= 33	Congratulations. Organization has a mature quality culture, and it's on the way to excellence.

The final step is to *assess results achieved*. One of the ways to do this is to use the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) methodology shown in figure 2 below.

Relevance and usability	Scope and relevance	A coherent set of results, including key results, are identified that demonstrate the performance of the organization in terms of its strategy, objectives, and the needs and expectations of relevant stakeholders.
	Integrity	Results are timely, reliable, and accurate.
	Segmentation	Results are appropriately segmented to provide meaningful insight.
Performance	Trends	Positive trends or sustained positive performance for more than five years

	Targets	Relevant targets are set and consistently achieved for key results, in line with the strategic goals.
	Comparisons	Relevant external comparisons are made and are favorable for the key results, in line with the strategic goals.
	Confidence	There is confidence that the performance levels will be sustained into the future, based on established cause-and-effect relationships.

Figure 2: Assess results achieved

The two examples below illustrate the effect of quality on company culture. The first example is based on the validity of data, and the second on a coherent set of results and relevant targets.

Example 1: Approval style

Employees only share "good news" with leaders. If necessary, facts and figures in reports that leadership doesn't like to see are deleted. If this process is repeated at every hierarchical level of the organization, all problematic messages are either removed or worded in a way that the negative impact is lost. As a result, top management assumes that everything is OK, until they suddenly discover unpleasant facts.

Right decisions can only be taken based on reliable data. In the example above, the probability that the correct decisions will be taken is low, and there's a high probability that the quality program will become less effective over time.

Example 2: Constructive style

A coherent set of key results are identified. Ambitious but realistic targets are set and consistently achieved for key results, in line with strategic goals. Employees demonstrate team spirit in the execution of daily activities and have a process, customer, and result-oriented mindset.

In this example, conditions are present for a real quality culture development so that the quality initiative will have a chance to succeed.

Organizations may find implementing enablers and filling quality culture gaps a challenging task. An example of such a challenge is given in example three.

Example 3: In many organizations, hitting financial targets is the leadership team's main focus. The team doesn't put enough effort into communicating customer requirements and expectations. As a consequence, the organization faces many challenges in achieving competitive customer-satisfaction results.

Conclusion

There are many signs of an undesirable quality culture in an organization, such as expensive product recalls, dissatisfied customers, and loss of market share. Most organizations respond to poor quality performance by launching new quality initiatives. However, transformation efforts will be thwarted in the absence of a supportive quality culture.

"We define a "true culture of quality" as an environment in which employees not only follow quality guidelines but also consistently see others taking quality-focused actions, hear others talking about quality, and feel quality all around them."

Harvard Business Review

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