Quality info

Seven Habits of A Mature Quality Culture

According to *Harvard Business Review,* less than half of employees say their organization exhibits a culture of quality. And while the benefits of a quality culture are huge—think hundreds of millions in savings—getting there doesn't happen overnight.

Instead, it requires sustainable habits that provide a foundation for long-term change. Below, we look at seven of the most important habits of a mature quality culture.

1. Walking the talk on quality

It's a mistake to think aspirational messages like "quality first" are enough to lead your organization to a quality culture. Change is only possible when leaders are engaged at every level, consistently demonstrating quality principles in action.

In practical terms, this means leaders must:

- Make frequent and highly visible appearances on the plant floor

- Be curious and engage in nonjudgmental conversations about quality

- Roll up their sleeves to help when necessary

- Avoid behavior that puts cost, output, or schedule above quality

The last point is especially important. If you *say* quality is the top priority, but your actions indicate otherwise, your credibility is lost.

2. Making quality everyone's job

Immature quality cultures put quality in a separate silo, relegating it to no more than administrative work. Mature organizations involve cross-functional teams in quality improvement, recognizing that quality affects every area of the business.

A prime example is implementing a layered process audit (LPA) program. LPAs involve frequently checking high-risk processes, preventing defects through multiple layers of verification.

By drawing from all levels and departments, LPAs also provide a structured framework for making quality everyone's responsibility.

3. Energizing your team

Not everyone is going to be excited about quality or having additional work. Yet, in a mature quality culture, leaders find ways to energize the team and get people on board. Strategies include:

- **Harnessing the competitive spirit:** Instead of discussing how quality drives savings, tap into people's competitive nature. Talk about blowing the competition away, or saving the company from failure in a mission-critical product launch.

- **Making quality personal:** Connect your team's work to the bigger picture. Is it protecting driver safety? Defending national security? The last thing you want is people thinking they just make a widget.

- **Sharing expectations and results:** Everyone needs to know his role in improving quality. Just as important, people need to see the results. Monthly scorecards are a key tool in showing people their work has a measurable impact.

4. Focusing on processes

Across all industries, a culture of quality demands a proactive approach aimed at preventing problems rather than putting out fires. That's difficult when quality people only conduct rear-facing product inspections, which is why mature quality cultures look at upstream processes.

LPAs, for example, allow organizations to check high-risk processes before errors lead to defects. Checking and rechecking areas linked to previous quality and safety issues fosters process standardization and reduces variation. This consistency is a hallmark of quality culture.

5. Monitoring and measurement

Mature quality cultures invest time and resources into proactive monitoring and measurement. It sounds obvious, yet only one in three companies track the cost of quality, one of the most important operational metrics.

Beyond just looking at failure costs, mature organizations develop leading indicators that provide early warning of problems. For instance, analyzing your audit data might reveal correlations between:

- Audit completion rates and defective parts per million (DPPM)

- Time to closure for corrective action and significant quality escapes

- Number of annual audits and customer returns

Your metrics will be unique to your organization, but the goal is the same. When you see leading indicators slipping, you can take action before customers are affected.

Audit Completion Rates Increase Yield

6. Encouraging openness

When you look at companies with mature quality cultures, you'll see they don't shy away from problems. They know that finding problems before they leave the plant is far better than having the customer discover them.

How do you create a culture of openness?

- **Staying calm when you discover mistakes:** If you fly off the handle, people will hide problems from you.
- **Involving management:** Having leadership participate in audits shows a commitment to quality at the highest level. That inspires people to open up with their own observations and improvement suggestions.
- **Quickly resolving problems:** When someone identifies an issue, you follow up with timely corrective action. Otherwise, people see no point in sharing.

7. Fostering innovation

Companies that treat quality as a cost instead of an investment are penny-wise and pound-foolish. Conversely, mature quality cultures give their teams the time and budget to pursue quality improvement projects. That may mean cutting back the red tape, but it can also lead to huge breakthroughs.

Finally, mature companies reward these successes with recognition and even financial incentives. When employees are taking the initiative to pour their energy into these projects, you can be sure that your quality culture machine is humming along.

"Customers don't measure you on how hard you tried. They measure you on what you deliver"   Steve Jobs

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