

QUALITY SYSTEMS and CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

ADVANTAGES OF QUALITY SYSTEMS

Quality Systems organize your company with a focus on achieving quality through process control and improvement, rather than through product testing and inspection. As such, Quality Systems prevent quality problems rather than react to them. By identifying risks and managing them through a Quality System, a company can reduce rework costs, customer dissatisfaction and scheduling delays. A company can boost profits and remain competitive in today's global market. As your company grows, the systems approach can facilitate change and expansion and, if desired, forms the foundation for Quality Management System registration such as ISO 9001.

DEVELOPING A QUALITY SYSTEM

Developing a Quality System begins with the assumption that your company is already a success, but can be improved. The first step is to define the existing system by flowcharting management and production processes. Flowcharts illustrate the path of information and work, from identifying customer requirements to shipping final product, showing interfaces and responsibilities along the way. The tools used to control work – such as procedures, training, software, forms and checklists – are also identified. The extent and selection of these controls depends on the complexity of your products or services, the amount of risk your organization can tolerate and your company's management style. Keep in mind that too many controls can be as detrimental as too few.

With your processes and controls defined, gaps, inefficiencies and risks become more visible. Flowcharts make changes and improvements easier, helping management anticipate additional resources needed. In the end, the flowcharts themselves may not be as valuable as the process of creating them. Flowcharts help all parties understand how work is being done and come to a consensus on how the work should be done. Flowcharts also facilitate training and monitoring quality.

CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

With the basic systems defined, improvements to processes, products and services can be made. Improvement begins by establishing measurable goals, such as reducing rework. Progress towards these goals is monitored, and where indicated, action is taken to investigate and make improvements. Worker feedback is also valuable and workers must be encouraged to report problems and make suggestions. They are on the front-lines of making your product and supplying services to the customer. They are first to know of any problems and they are the first to see opportunities for improvements. Customer satisfaction must also be monitored. If you don't keep your customers happy – someone else will.

Management support is essential for the success of a Quality System, which must go beyond establishing goals and policies. The Quality System is how you run your company. Worker empowerment and commitment to take responsibility for their quality is also essential. Quality is an attitude, from top management down through all levels of the organization. Quality must be the company culture.