

## Quality Management ~ An Overview

You may be surprised to learn that many people don't know what "quality management" is ~ and just as many are not even sure that they understand what is meant by "quality" "in the workplace".

If you are one of these, don't despair, for there are many at very high levels of management who would also struggle with these.

The first difficulty is to recognise that, in business, in the workplace, "quality" has a very specific meaning it doesn't mean "good", "expensive", "better", "best", "top quality", in the way that we sometimes describe the "quality" of items or services in our social or domestic lives.

### In business, quality has a specific meaning.

It means "fit for the purpose", "meets the specification", "meets the criteria", "achieves the standards targeted", "satisfies the needs of the customer".

Many variations, but all underpinned by the fact that each phrase implies that there is a "standard", a "specification", a "criteria", a "need" that has been identified, is known, and is recorded as being the "target", the "performance level" that must be achieved.

The product, or service, is then measured against those.

*\* by the way, "no complaints from customers this week" is not a quality measure ~ there may have been many dissatisfied customers, but they haven't complained !*

### So how do you know if an organisation is taking "quality" seriously ? here's how:

in the organisation you will find that:

- all staff know the organisation's policy (approach to) quality
- staff at all levels have been involved in creating or improving that policy
- standards, for every key activity, have been agreed on and clearly (usually in writing) laid down
- these standards are achievable, measurable, reasonable, but as high in terms of performance as the organisation can manage, given the resources it has
- all staff involved in any activity have been trained in and understand the quality standards for that activity
- a monitoring system is in place to ensure the standards are maintained
- a continuous improvement system is in place to ensure that the standards are improved where possible
- corrective action is taken when a standard is not achieved
- individuals and teams are rewarded for consistently achieving the standards
- end users / customers (could be product users, could be patients, could be cinema goers, could be bank customers etc) are regularly asked to give their views on the quality of the product or service
- staff at all levels of the organisation, from the most junior to the most senior, are proud of their work and are visibly striving to improve the quality of the work they are involved in

If you see this ~ then the organisation is taking quality seriously ~ it is managing quality.

If you're a manager in an organisation, and you don't see this ~ you have a responsibility to start working towards it, at least in your own area of work - **now !**

If the organisation belongs to you, and you don't see this ~ you have a responsibility to start changing things - **now !**

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