Use Measures to Promote a Culture of Quality

Measures can help embed quality into the way employees work and think

Although organizations have been devising ways to measure quality for decades, many have not elevated the measurement of quality to an enterprise-wide concern. Most efforts focus on measuring quality within specific supply chain or product development processes, or they focus exclusively on results or finished products.

In 2011, APQC conducted a Collaborative Benchmarking study—Using Enterprise Quality Measurement to Drive Business Value—to find out how organizations track and measure quality in processes throughout their businesses. The study team considered the approaches of all the participants in the study, but it identified four organizations with particularly exemplary practices in quality measurement: Altera Corporation, Caterpillar Inc., Chemonics International, and Textron Inc. The team examined these organizations more deeply.

Based on the information shared in the study, most organizations are still only beginning to develop effective approaches to measure quality. Nonetheless, the experiences of the study participants revealed key foundational practices required to mount a stable and effective quality measurement system. The study team also noted several emerging practices that the four exemplary organizations are leveraging to get even better results.

One imperative for organizations trying to create meaningful enterprise quality measurement systems is to use measures as part of an effort to embed quality in the organizational culture. The more engrained quality standards are in work processes and activities, the higher quality the organization will naturally achieve. How measures are used drives people's behavior and attitudes toward quality. Measures can push people away as they resist change, or measures can help people understand what quality means in the context of their jobs. It depends on how the organization introduces and approaches measurement.

People pay attention to what is measured. Many employees naturally think: "If X is measured by the quality program, then X must play a role in quality." Measures highlight exactly how employees contribute to quality and help them understand how their actions affect organizational outcomes and profitability. Employees often feel motivated when they know the specific ways in which they influence the success of the business and when they are rewarded for positive contributions. The following practices help build that culture of quality and quality awareness:
**Foundational Practices**

- Celebrate quality practices and achievements with awards, events, or other activities and incentives.
- Create challenging goals that shift according to periodic reviews.

**Emerging Practices**

- Train all new hires on basic quality management principles.
- Provide transparent access to quality data to everyone in the organization.

**Foundational Practices**

More than half of the study participants celebrate quality practices and achievements in some way. Two organizations have high-profile annual awards for rigorously evaluated functions or teams. Many organizations have less formal monthly or quarterly recognitions of team or individual quality work. Even more use monthly newsletters to report on quality practices that have saved money, streamlined processes, or positively affected customers. At most organizations, celebrating quality encourages people to pay attention to quality principles in their daily work.

Study participants also use enterprise quality measures to influence the culture and improve performance by creating challenging goals (Figure 1). Collecting, analyzing, and reporting quality data at least quarterly allows leaders to frequently adjust goals and improve upon the status quo. This, in turn, sets a cultural expectation that the status quo is not enough—as they say at Textron, it creates a culture of “relentless improvement.”
Challenging Goals for Quality

My organization uses enterprise quality measures to drive higher performance by promoting challenging goals.

![Bar Chart](image)

All participants: N=21

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Figure 1

Emerging Practices

For the exemplary organizations identified in the study, quality is not just a set of tools, concepts, or policies; it is the way work is performed every day, by everyone. Enterprise leaders cannot dictate or mandate quality, but they can influence the culture of quality for their staff.

At Textron, quality improvement efforts involve creating daily opportunities for staff to interact with enterprise quality data, often in real time. Examples follow.

- **Practical problem-solving teams**—Quality issues are not just a problem for management. Often solutions come from operational staff. To tap into this wealth of knowledge, Textron trains all staff on basic Lean and Six Sigma quality concepts. All employees are part of practical problem-solving teams that meet frequently to solve quality issues. In some cases, customers and suppliers also work on these teams.

- **Daily Gemba walks**—This Lean manufacturing practice involves managers (and quality personnel) teaching and talking with staff on the production floor, where quality problems are visible. Textron believes the best solutions stem from seeing the issues firsthand.

- **Standard leader involvement**—Through a set of weekly meetings (five different meetings that each occur once a week), quality personnel work closely with operational leaders (e.g., procurement, manufacturing, sales, and finance) on quality issues.
Many study participants have seen positive changes in their quality cultures simply by providing a larger group of staff with access to enterprise quality data. Transparent data enables employees to pinpoint high performance and share best practices. In addition, transparency increases the sense of accountability because staff can view one another’s performance data—peer pressure at its finest.

Caterpillar’s online quality dashboard applies this concept by providing near real-time access to enterprise quality measures to all staff, customers, and suppliers. Caterpillar’s dealers can not only access quality data, but also input their own quality issues and review progress over time. This transparency is an outward indication of the culture Caterpillar has cultivated with internal and external stakeholders.

Chemonics instills a culture of quality by training all new hires on basic quality management principles. The quality management unit at Chemonics meets with new hires on their first day to train them on the quality management system, ISO 9001, and how to use the system’s process maps and tools. Six weeks after the initial training, the quality management unit provides a second training that hones in on the specifics of the quality management system by role.

Conclusion

From an employee’s first day on the job, an organization needs to instill the principles of a quality culture, introducing people to the systems and processes that contribute to enterprise quality. Personalizing the measures and connecting people’s daily work to quality help the workforce understand and appreciate quality and what it means to the organization’s success. Use measures to foster a welcoming, positive atmosphere that motivates people to achieve higher levels of quality.

For more information, read APQC’s best practices report Using Enterprise Quality Measurement to Drive Business Value.
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