

## Taking Quality to the Next Level!

When I took the role of managing the Quality department for OnPoint, after working at customer site for several years, I met with many individuals across the industry to learn about their experience in implementing Quality programs within a mid-size company.

I was astounded as I learned what “culture of quality” means to different organizations. More often than not, these discussions revolved around the “sales” benefits of the certification as opposed to the benefits of having a “Quality culture”. I do recognize that there is a strong sales component to these certifications: holding them often allows you access to customers, RFP’s, contract vehicles, etc. that you wouldn’t have access to if you didn’t hold the certifications. However, I believed that the bigger long-term benefit of consistent repeatable processes and optimization of these processes through the continuous improvement loop came from cultivating the “Quality culture” within the organization.

I decided to take my vision of the “Quality culture” to the next level for OnPoint. OnPoint held ISO 9001, 20000, 27001 and CMMI Level 3, and while focus on a short-term, sales, pay-off is important, it cannot be the only benefit we reaped from these certifications. I decided to pursue the long-term goal of aligning Quality to the organization’s strategic goals. I started to question, “ How can Quality add value beyond the “sales” value? What role can Quality play in helping OnPoint achieve their strategic goals? What are the critical factors in rooting the Quality culture within the organization? What are the challenges? ”

As I embarked on this journey, I came across many hurdles. I realized that first and foremost, it is critical to have a mindset change. I heard, “I don’t know why I am doing this”, “I am doing it this way, because the procedure said so”, or “I have to do a clean-up activity this week because we have auditors coming in next week”, etc. The goal of these standards is to facilitate what you are doing, but it sounded to me like the processes, policies, and procedures were perceived as inhibitors or roadblocks in the majority’s minds.

Everything starts at the top. I knew that in order to ingrain a “true” Quality culture, commitment from leadership, compelling vision, pervasive behaviors, and companywide shared values are the key. I needed help from leadership setting the tone, articulating the vision, and the expectations. I met with the President of the company with my vision of expanding the Quality role across the organization while aligning it with the organization’s strategic goals. We discussed how the pursuit of Quality can advance OnPoint’s objectives and how can Quality role be expanded across the organization. We discussed and agreed that it is crucial for every employee to understand that Quality is everyone’s responsibility, and everyone plays a significant role in it.

As the clear message came down from the top , I saw a shift in the mindset. Employees started to realize that they don’t have to keep doing the things that they have been doing for many years, they are not the slaves of the policies and procedures, and they can play an integral role in improving the processes. They started to recognize the benefits of Quality as they saw the

standardization that reduced confusion, but also understood that they have the opportunity to tailor and enhance the process if it was not meeting their needs. The stigma associated with the Quality being rigid started to revolutionize into Quality being the road towards the efficient and productive operational culture . Policies and procedures that were there for years began to transform into processes that modeled efficiency. As employees started to participate in suggesting improvements, they felt valued and heard, which in turn improved employee morale and boosted motivation.

Quality introduces efficiencies and effectiveness into the processes through continuously looking for ways to enhance the process while reducing the cost. It answers the question of “How can I do my job keeping it lean, effective, and at the low-cost?” Reducing redundancies from the processes lowers operational costs resulting in increased revenue. “Quality culture” boosts employee engagement and collaboration through encouraging employees’ participation in process improvement activities resulting in higher retention rates. With higher collaboration comes the new innovative ideas and solutions to the problems. These are few of the many benefits that organizations can benefit from through creating the real “Quality culture”. Quality is not a department, but a critical function across all areas in the organization and if empowered, it can go long ways for the organization.

While it may sound like a no-brainer embedding a “Quality culture” for any organization, more often than not, Quality is faced with the challenge of quantifying the returns. How do you quantify the savings when implementing a lean, effective process? How do you translate the employee engagement through process improvements or collaboration into a cost saving? How do you measure employee motivation? These are some of the many questions that can mislead organizations seeing the bigger picture of how Quality is adding value to the organization and unless leadership understands and is aligned, this will prevent organizations from taking the Quality department to that “next step”. Perhaps, a strategy could be thinking of creative ways to quantify these into metrics such as capturing increase in employee engagement in identifying improvements, or ways to track the labor costs before and after implementing the new process.

Luckily, I have been in an organization where the leadership supports my vision of the “Quality culture”. My focus is not limited to audits, management review meetings, and ensuring that our certifications are in place, but also working strategically with the departments across the organization to identify the opportunities for improvements and helping them with finding the solutions to the problems. As a Quality leader, ask the question, “What role can I play to solve strategic problems?”, “ What lessons organization have learned through the project, proposal, or task as simple as executing against a process?”, and “What can you do to improve that process the next time?”

In summary, leadership commitment and alignment are vital in embedding a “Quality Culture” and addressing the Quality challenges. Organizations can derive many other value-added benefits besides “sales” through expanding the role of Quality across the organization. I believe that Quality is not a department, but a key to the Organizational excellence. I ask you to challenge

yourself and ask the question, “how can you take Quality within your organization to the next level?”

For any feedback or questions, contact the Quality Director at [Farhana.jamil@onpointcorp.com](mailto:Farhana.jamil@onpointcorp.com)

#### About OnPoint

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