

## **PLANNING THE QUALITY VISIT**

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### **Introduction**

In reviewing articles on “quality auditing”, it is apparant that there are two distinct schools of thought on how such an audit should be conducted.

One school of thought treats the audit as similar to a bank audit. The purpose of the audit is to check if agreed upon standards are being followed and if not, why not. The audit is based on suspicion, not trust.

The other school of thought treats an audit as an opportunity for the top management to find out, “How’s it Going?”. The objective of the audit is to learn what the problems may be and what to do to remove barriers to continuous improvement.

We favor the latter view. However, we have noticed that while there are definite procedures established for the former view, we have not found any instructions for executives and participants for the second approach. Our purpose in writing this paper is to provide a framework for those who wish to use these visits to improve systems.

To remove all implications connected with the use of the word “audit”, we prefer to refer to a “quality visit”.

Our view of the purpose and style of a “quality visit” is based on our belief that the people in the enterprise should behave as a “learning society”. We propose that any enterprise which pursues quality should regard itself as a “school of business within a company”. In this school there is no differentiation between teacher and learner. In this school everyone may teach everyone else. Each person can learn from the others. The quality visit provides an opportunity for people to learn from one another through presentation of data, discussion of experience and analysis of the results of improvement activities.

**The Kinds of Lessons to be Learned in a Quality Visit**

During a quality visit there will be many opportunities to exchange knowledge and know-how. But the visit should do more than that, for knowledge and know-how, powerful as they are in problem solving, only develop competence. People need to develop wisdom in choosing what is worth doing. They also need to develop confidence.

Confidence is very important. People need to feel confident in the tools they acquire, confidence in the way people can and will work together, confidence that the management is stable and has constancy of purpose and confidence in themselves. The reason confidence is so necessary is shown in figure 1, which illustrates the delays which can occur between the start of quality management and when convincing results are available.

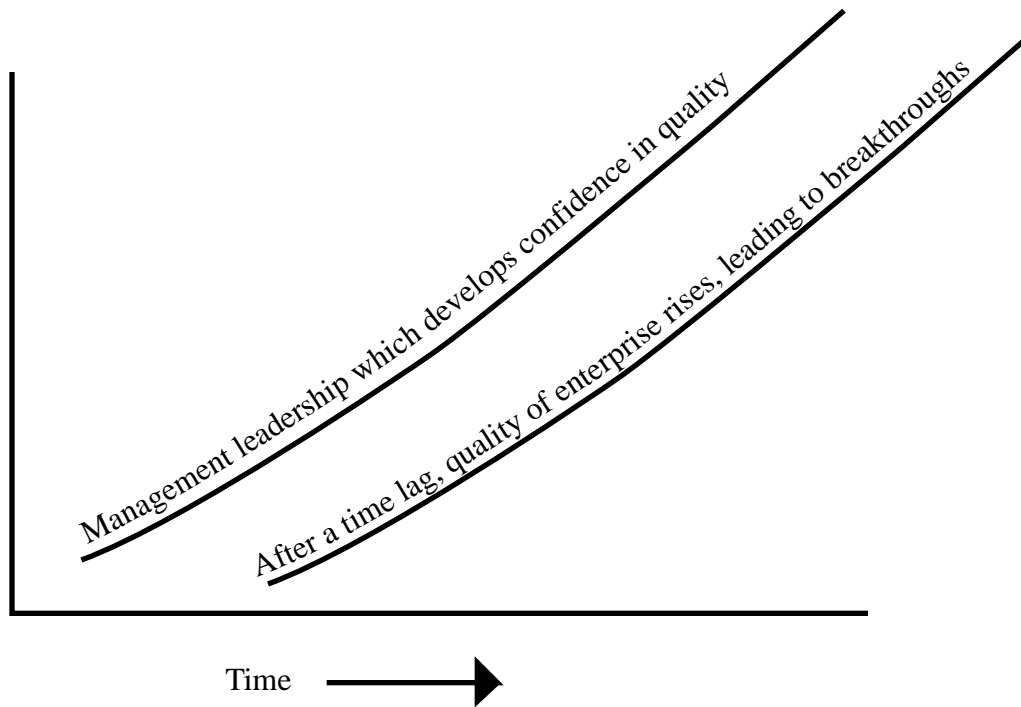


Figure 1. The time lag between management action and results. Continued attention to improvement can lead to breakthroughs.

We have observed that in some enterprises after good results have been obtained, the management may abandon quality management principles. Because of the time lag between management action and results, the company experiences good results for a short time after the management has begun to deteriorate. This result, which

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is shown in figure 2, leads to extreme cynicism on the part of the employees and creates a situation from which it is very difficult to recover.

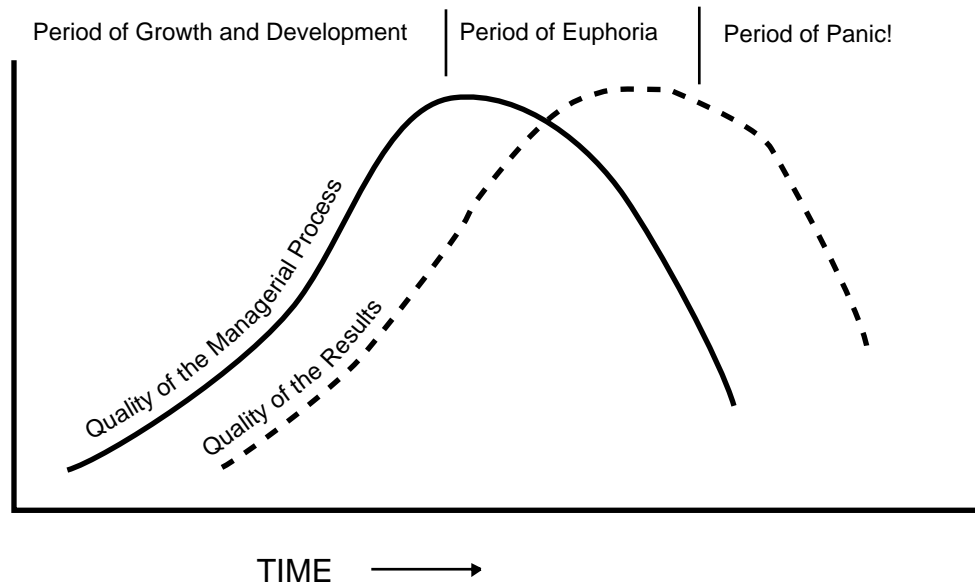


Figure 2. There is a time lag between management action and results, up and down. The deterioration in performance shown in figure 2 does not have to occur. If the leadership concentrates on increasing their own and everyone else's confidence in quality management methods, by encouragement and appreciation, the quality of the performance of the enterprise as a whole will rise.

The quality visit, therefore, does more than just allow learning about knowledge and know-how. It can boost morale and create a sense of teamwork between the different levels of the company.

In conventional management, too often a visit by executives is an occasion for apprehension. The fact that the statement, "I'm from headquarters and I'm here to help you" is used as a well known joke, indicates how much damage an "audit", in the style of a policing activity, can do.

### **Two Common Mistakes in Implementation of TQM**

In the implementation of TQM in a company, two kinds of mistakes are often encountered.

1. **Impatience:** Too many people expect "instant pudding". They expect that measurable results will occur very quickly, without a time delay.

To change a machine in production, we expect to take one week.

To change the way a person works, we expect may take a month, but only with intensive learning and practice.

To change the quality of the management processes within a function may take several months.

To change the corporate culture may take a year or several years, depending on the confidence of the leadership.

**2. *A personal ambition to dominate and an unwillingness to appreciate that people want to do a better job in their own way.***

If the leadership understands that people should be encouraged to solve their problems, then the methods of TQM will work successfully and improvements will be forthcoming.

If the leadership attempts to subvert this desire of the people, and tries to substitute its own thinking, then panic will be induced among the people and they will develop apathy with respect to quality management principles. They will become frustrated and will lose confidence in the leadership.

**Who Participates in a Quality Visit and What Should Be Accomplished?**

Four categories of persons should be involved in the visit:

- Personnel from the function being visited.
- Senior executives
- Representatives of functions which are either “customers” or “suppliers” to the function being visited.
- A manager of the quality visit process, who will see to the logistics, the preparation of prior reports, the agenda, the final documentation and the proposals for follow up activities by all parties.

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As a result of the quality visit, it is hoped that learning will take place at many levels:

- At the level of knowledge and know-how: All participants should observe new approaches to problem solving and new ways to think. They should seek opportunities to apply the new methods and the new thinking in other aspects of their own work.
- At the level of “wisdom”: People should attempt to learn how to discriminate among the many things which might be done, learn how to coordinate their efforts with their “suppliers” and “customers” and learn how to decide which things are worth doing.
- At the level of confidence: People should learn that the methods really do work, that effective teams can be formed, that the enterprise can succeed by applying a total quality management approach. The executives should display their own commitment to TQM methods.

### **What Each Participant Should Expect to Derive from the Visit**

#### The Executives

- Wish to encourage people to direct their improvement efforts towards the goals and objectives described through policy deployment.
- Wish to understand the difficulties people have, either in the interpretation of these policies or in overcoming barriers to improvement.
- Wish to understand how the policy of “quality first” occurs in the daily work of the people.
- Wish to understand the difficulties people experience in attempting to work together across departmental lines. Are there impediments to people trying to serve internal customers?

For the executives the emphasis should be on process. Of course they should care about results, but they should understand that results come from processes and,

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therefore, the focus in the visit should be on processes. The executives should understand that at least 85% of the time, when there is a problem, it is with the system, not the workers. By emphasizing processes over results, they can remove the basis of fear among the managers, the administrators, and the professional staff whose work is being visited. Fearful people do not always tell the truth. The spirit of the visit should not be according to MBO (Managing by Objectives) but rather according to MFO (Managing for objectives). The objective of the visit is to learn. People who are afraid often learn the wrong things.

The executives should also be concerned to estimate the potential of the organization and seek ways to turn this potential into a result.

### The Participants from the Function Being Visited

- Have an opportunity to tell their story, to be heard, to have a sympathetic ear for their difficulties.
- Have a chance to enlist the aid of people who can do something about their problems.
- Have an opportunity to review their efforts at improvement and to be reassured that what they are trying to do is in harmony with the goals and objectives of the top management. Through dialogue with people who have a broader view than their own, they can increase their wisdom.
- Have an opportunity to discuss the systemic barriers to improvement and obtain help in removing them.

For the managers and workers in the unit being visited, the quality visit is an opportunity to have a dialogue with the top managers and to develop a mutual understanding of what needs to be done.

### The Representatives from the “Customers” and “Suppliers”

- Gain an understanding of how quality is defined within the unit being visited and how it relates to their own definition of quality of product or service.

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- Gain an understanding of the needs and difficulties within the unit and what they can do to create greater cooperation.
- Have an opportunity to create a dialogue with the unit and upper level management regarding cross functional management.

### The Coordinator

- Establishes the dates and agenda for the meeting.
- Issues the schedule for reports.
- Keeps a record of all proposals for action.
- Provides follow up reporting for all actions.
- Issues the minutes of the meeting.

The coordinator should develop the processes for the meeting and make them visible to all participants. After the meeting, the processes should be reviewed for possible improvements.

### Procedures

If the unit being visited is a division, then it is understood that the visiting team will be composed of company executives. If the unit being visited is a department or section within a division, then it is understood that the visiting team will be composed of division heads.

If it is at all possible, depending upon the size of the enterprise, all units should be visited by the CEO at least once per year. All executives should make quarterly visits to the units of their direct reports.

In preparation for the visit, the management of each unit visited, should prepare a report on its approach to quality management. The report should include:

1. A discussion of the activities undertaken as a follow up to the previous visit.
2. The quality objectives of the management. Towards which specific goals is the management directing the quality effort?
3. An explanation of how each goal chosen for the unit relates to the goals given in the policies which have been deployed.

4. The set of action plans put in place to achieve these goals and objectives.
5. Improvements which have been put in place since the last visit and the results thereof. The improvements should be separated into three groups:
  - a) Introduced by the staff and the managers,
  - b) introduced by the workers and
  - c) introduced by multi-disciplinary teams, consisting of people from different functions, different disciplines, etc.
7. Measures which indicate the degree of employee participation. The report should show what the management has done to encourage participation and how the efforts are progressing.

### **The Agenda for the Quality Visit**

1. The head of the unit being visited should present an oral report, based on the written report, but augmented by presentation of more detailed graphs and data.
2. Presentations should be followed by detailed descriptions of the reality of results obtained through improvement activities. Presentations should be made by QC Circle teams, by management directed teams and by staff who have contributed to the quality improvements. In each case the presentations should use the format of the "QC Story", i.e., describe how the P-D-C-A cycle was applied in their improvement project.
3. A Q&A session should be held immediately following each presentation, referring to actual data, documents, records, standard operating procedures and including a visit to the place where the work is done.
4. The visitors should provide immediate feedback to the function being visited, commenting on the recognizable contributions, the areas in which progress has not been made and giving suggestions for what might be done about them. The spirit of the discussion should focus on lessons learned and what might be done by either the visitors or the persons being visited to improve the situation.



### **The Process**

A quality visit should be an example of a quality process. Everyone should be informed concerning how the process works and everyone should understand their part in the process.

In the following diagram we show a flow chart for the procedure to follow in a quality visit. We have divided the flow chart into two parts. Figure 3 shows the various processes which precede and follow the quality visit. Note that the process ends in a review of the process itself, leading to further improvements.

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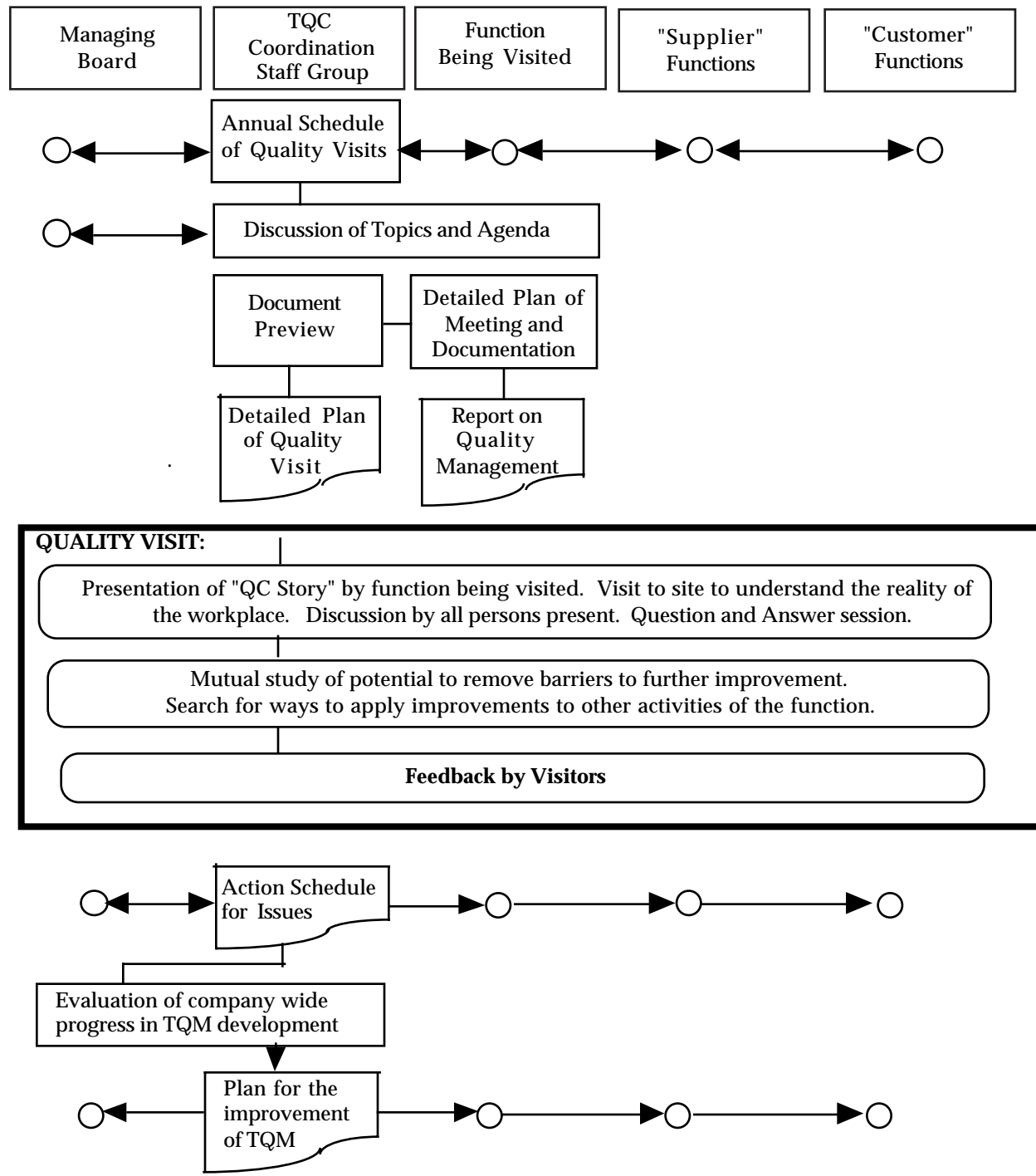


Figure 3. Flow chart for arranging a quality visit.

Although the quality visit has been described in a formal way, we urge all who participate in the visit to create an air informality and freedom to encourage

discussion. It is important the the purposes of the quality visit not be lost in a bureaucratic treatment. The quality visit should not take on the character of a tea ceremony.

### **What Should the Visitors Seek to Learn?**

The objectives of the visit are to learn how the quality effort is going and to seek ways to improve it. Therefore, the emphasis should be on *process*, not *product*. Here are some of the key questions the visitors might investigate:

- With regard to action plans:

Are the measures selected for tracking progress appropriate to the objectives?

Do these measures provide leading indicators of progress or are they only results (lagging) indicators?

Are the measures useful to upper management, also, in giving a leading indicator to whether the goals of the upper management will be met?

Do the measures relate to customer requirements? (Internal or external)

Are the goals reasonable with respect to past performance and an analysis of the potential of the system to produce good results in the future? Are they realistic and yet challenging?

Do the action plans relate clearly to the expressed goals?

2. With respect to the improvement activities:

Does the *set* of improvement activities, taken as a whole, represent a coherent attack on the goals and objectives. Or are they a random collection of individually inspired efforts? Is the action of the management in setting priorities evident?

Are the analyses which accompany the improvement activities based on data and fact? Have the data been analyzed properly and carefully to provide the basis for the improvement activities?

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Where countermeasures have been adopted, is it evident why the countermeasures would be expected to lead to the desired improvements? Have measurements been made to confirm that the countermeasures are adequate and successful?

Have improvements been captured in improved standard procedures? What has been done to prevent the problem from recurring?

3. With respect to the pursuit of quality management by the management of the unit being visited.

Appropriateness of the themes chosen for improvement projects.

Time taken for completion of projects.

Usefulness of the measures of quality chosen to track progress. How have the managers used the information?

4. When visiting the place of work the visitors should take notice of:

Housekeeping;

Cleanliness

Orderliness, remove materials not in use, keep good order for all materials, machines and equipment

Standards

Visualization of the progress of TQM projects

Visualization of quality indices for the function

Use of "fail safe" and "fool-proofing" to promote safety.

Concern for safety in floor maintenance, walkways, work areas.

Care for the environment

These observations will be useful in setting the goals of the enterprise for the future.

5. When visiting the place of work the management should engage the workers in conversation. The visitors should notice how the workers respond to questions such as these:

What improvement projects have you been working on?

When you worked on the projects, what gave you the most difficulty?

What gave you the most pleasure?

As a result of your improvement efforts, do you recognize other aspects of your own work where the same thinking might be employed?

Do you see opportunities in other places to use the methods your team developed?

### **Special Responsibilities of the Visiting Executives**

The visiting executives have a special responsibility to help build confidence in the enterprise. The visit is an opportunity for them to demonstrate their commitment to the processes of TQM. Their questions and advice should illustrate their intention to make “quality first” a way of life in the enterprise.

The quality visit is an opportunity to promote learning in the enterprise. Therefore the executives should be on the alert to recognize and promote greater learning and understanding by all who attend.

- If new knowledge and know-how have been developed, this development should be recognized and appreciated.
- If new ways to form and operate teams have been developed, these, too should be recognized and appreciated.
- If the executives have done their own work properly, they will be aware of the future demands which will be made on the function being visited and they should consider what education and experiences will be useful to prepare the unit for the future.

### **Conclusion**

We have tried to make it clear that all parties to the visit should make it their objective to **learn**. The visit is not an attempt to catch someone doing something wrong or failing to do what was agreed upon. The objective is to work together to

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improve the way the system works.

If it should occur that someone is doing something dishonest or not telling the truth, this fact will become evident to those who understand TQM. Such cases are expected to be rare and, of course, have to be dealt with. But because they are rare, the entire visit should not be designed to deal with such rare cases.

People who do not know how to manage according to quality management principles may need a policeman to enforce their will. TQM trained managers do not.