

Just whose job is it anyway?

We are QA guys, aren't we? We are here to help; along with our alter egos, those auditor types? "Yeah, right!" and we actually mean it. So whose job is quality anyway? Are others involved besides us and auditors? Asks Ian Hendra, QNewZ columnist.



Dr Deming explained that quality is everybody's business, yet how do you make it everybody's business, because it is much easier said than done.

Familiar tune, perhaps?

Let's go back a bit.....and I doubt my experience is unique, so this is probably familiar to many of you. Over the years I have regularly been in the position where I have been commissioned to produce a set of management system documentation to cover delivery processes and procedures.

First time out it was a set of commissioning inspection routines related to clearance of retention payments for satisfactory installation. Then there were whole sets of documents to meet accreditation requirements for certification bodies. Followed by a corporate policy manual; a stand-alone internal auditing system; a few quality systems and HACCP manuals.


When it came to the work and effort involved, all were the result of in-depth research and downright hard 'yakka'. To me they were all works of art and crystal clear to boot! But only a few have been truly successful...even the documented systems that were backed up with full-blown 4-day training courses had their problems. So what was wrong? We all know that diagrams usually work better than wall-to-wall words (even in law firms!!) and that involving those at the sharp end is essential. Maybe in truth, there's more to this problem.

Smart Talk Trap...

*Smart Talk Trap*¹ is an article that appeared in the May 1999 edition of the Harvard Business Review. It struck so many chords in so many ways that I have carried the article with me ever since! It starts by bagging words like 'paradigm, holistic, lateral and actualize...' and points out that most of those who use them have no clue what they actually mean.

The Rewards of Action

In the course of our research into the knowing-doing gap, we met a consultant who was making a proposal to a large U.S. bank that was in good financial shape but wanted to do better. The consultant told us that as he and his team of eager colleagues put their proposal together from data provided by the bank, they came upon reports assembled for the bank by four other consulting firms over the past six years. The recommendations were identical. Why, asked the consultant, would anyone pay for the same answer five times? How crazy is that?

Very. But it is also altogether common. Business-people love to talk, which is fine when it leads to action. When it becomes a substitute for getting things done, shareholders, customers, and employees pay a price – and often executives do, too. The simple fact is, you can't take words to the bank, no matter how smart they sound. But when you close the knowing-doing gap, you discover the rewards of action. 

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Figure 1: The rewards of action.

Table 1: RACI Chart

People		Process							
Staff Member	Role	Financials	Take sales orders	Purchasing	Stores	Assembly	Hole survey	Grip testing	Despatch
Rusty Buckettt (Owner)	CEO R	A	R	C	A	C	C	R	
Edna Buckettt	Qa	A	A	C	C	A	R	R	A
Freda									
Buckettt	Sales	A	R	C	C	A	I	I	I
Justin Thyme	Buyer	A	A	A	R	A	I	I	I
Liza									
Dear	Factory	I	A	I	A	R	A	I	I
Thor Krench	Engineer	A	A	A	C	A	I	A	I
Comment		Rusty runs the budget	Everyone can take an order	Not everyone can spend	Limited access	All do this sometimes	Liza handles buckets with holes	Thor handles Bent Grips	Qa can halt despatch

Table 2: RACI - defining attributes

Factor	Defining attributes
Responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest authority with respect to this process, • Authorised to make changes to the process, • Can't delegate responsibility (but can delegate accountability), • Has power to spend money (or someone else is responsible in reality), • Has power to hire & fire (or someone else is responsible in reality), • Required to make sure resources and supplies are available.
Accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorised to make sure this process is implemented, • If delegated, may have the power to spend, hire & fire, • Does not have the authority to change the process without consultation.
Consulted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has expert information that affects the performance of this process, • Is affected by the upstream or downstream performance of this process, • Must be consulted when changes are made.
Informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to understand what this process entails and how it might affect them, • Must be informed when changes are made.

The article explains how current business jargon is used as a systemic substitute for taking action. "The Rewards of Action" clip is its final paragraph (Figure 1).

One day I was dumbfounded as I watched a silver-tongued mega-salary CEO sign off a top level system manual that he 'owned', without reading. And since that day *Smart Talk Trap* has been right up there as the ultimate treatise on "how not to do it" in my world.

Nothing has changed since 1999, that much is very obvious; I would even go so far as to say that *Smart Talk* is a major contributory factor in the financial mess that international business has become; how else would anyone actually underwrite a mortgage for more than it was worth? And in our backyard much of the documentation we struggle with fits the same kind of mould.

Communicate the RACI way

I have found only one way to get real people involved while neutralising the Smart Talk brigade. It is called the RACI chart: Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed (see table 1). To show you how it works, I have used Buckett

Enterprises Ltd² and reworked their LULU chart to manage capability and capacity in their world class bucket making business. Table 2 shows the defining attributes in the RACI chart system and implies the consultation processes necessary to ensure that the right level of communication takes place.

The outcome

When the RACI chart system works great things happen. The right people become empowered, those who need to know are informed, and the Smart Talkers have no audience. There are clear channels of communication for consultation that works a treat provided there's a will to keep it working. All you need next is a very clear way to describe who does what at the task level...that's where deployment flowcharts come in.....maybe next time....

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References

1. Smart Talk Trap, Pfeffer J., Sutton, Robert I., Harvard Business Review May-June 1999, <http://hbr.org/product/smart-talk-trap/an/99310-PDF-ENG>.
2. LULU – competency-based training from the past, Hendra I., QNewZ, May 2010.

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