

Quality: Tired of Making It Twice? Get It Done Right The First Time.

Being responsible for quality can be rewarding as well as frustrating. At the end of the week, often you don't know if your role has been mother or policeman. You may feel that *you* are the only one that is frustrated by having to rework what has been produced.

It's an all too familiar scenario: when product flaws are discovered and brought to production's attention, people give you that "deer in the headlights" look. Suddenly, they act like they just dropped in from Mars, with no clue about what is really going on in the plant. In turn, you're wondering how to deal with their myopic approach to meeting the bare minimum requirements. You've made a commitment to get products right the first time, but production's attitude is wearing you down.

Quality can be a problem in plant culture for many reasons. But no matter how pervasive the blindness, it *can* be remedied. In particular, two process tools can help expedite improvement:

1. Effective processes for identifying Non-Conforming Material (NCM).
2. Developing and executing Corrective Action Plans (CAPs).

Keeping product specifications current is the foundation for quality. If product specifications are not current, it is usually because NCM and CAPs are not driving specification revisions.

NCM and CAP Warning Signs

Although every manufacturing plant uses some form of NCM and CAPs, these tools are always subject to repeating patterns that wear down their effectiveness:

- NCM investigation formats are not designed to meet current needs.
- NCM investigation reports are not completed in a timely fashion
- NCM reports indicate that product specifications are ambiguous, not current, and do not include information pertinent to production.
- NCM process does not trigger an effective CAP or any corrective action plan at all.
- NCM history indicates problems are not resolved and are recurring.

- No company “champion” exists. Without a champion that is officially recognized as responsible for the value stream, process improvement is paralyzed by departmentalization.
- The NCM and CAPs processes are not designed to revise specifications.

Helpful Strategies

Birch Consulting has a number of proven methods for correcting problems with existing NCM investigations and CAPs.

Review the NCM investigative format.

Ensure that the NCM format includes all of the required information fields to identify the root cause of the hold. Establish measurements to track progress, and review these metrics to identify problem areas on which to focus. Be sure to make someone accountable for ensuring that any deviations are corrected. Finally, hold regular NCM reviews to make sure you continue to improve in this area.

Develop a truly effective CAP.

I have found that the best way to develop an effective CAP is to let operations offer input. Let them identify those process deviations that did not result in a hold but a near miss. This input can lead to all kinds of opportunities for improvement, such as:

- Product specifications and work orders are frequently ambiguous, and lack the information that production needs to get the product made correctly the first time.
- A new operator often does not know the product history, and as a result does not possess incidental knowledge required for quality output.
- Equipment is simply not operating within the performance tolerances that are required to meet specifications.

CAPs that incorporate this type of intelligence can be excellent tools to focus on improving people, process, and equipment when a hold did not occur. Commitment to this tool will:

- Remove ambiguity, which is a leading cause of poor quality.
- Identify true production capabilities, while keeping work orders and specifications current.

To really make CAPs effective, you must establish performance measurements to track progress. Remember, if it can be measured, it can be improved.

Enroll employees in the solution.

It is *always* easier to institute improvement and make the change permanent if employees are recognized for their accomplishments. A system that includes meaningful rewards makes the

improvement journey enjoyable, and usually means that the distance traveled is further than originally planned.

Establish a vision of the future where production is accountable.

There can be no permanent improvement without accountability. Hold production accountable for First Pass Release performance. This frees Quality to spend its time preparing the plant for the future, not rehashing the failures of the past.

About Birch Consulting Group

Birch Consulting specializes in using the tool you already have in place for improving first-pass releases. That's what Birch Consulting is all about: innovatively approaching, resolving, and breaking down a roadblock... without reinventing the wheel.

If you would like to discuss what Birch Consulting can do to improve your plant's production quality, give Ed Birch a call today for a free consultation at 208-762-9687. Or email Ed at edward@birchconsultinggroup.com .

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