

BUILD A COMPREHENSIVE QUALITY PROGRAM AND BECOME A CALL CENTER HERO

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Abstract

By implementing an effective quality model, you can become a hero in your contact center. This article presents the building blocks for a comprehensive quality model—from strategy to documentation. All the steps are tied together to ensure the quality model contributes to the overall success of the organization.

The article provides specific examples and considerations as you begin contemplating the quality functions. How does a quality model impact interdepartmental linkages, your infrastructure, and your support groups? Is it necessary to make the model flexible in light of changing customer demands? Is it necessary to make the model consistent across multiple centers and multiple access channels? Is it necessary to link quality with external measurements of customer satisfaction? Although your answers to these questions will reflect your unique situation, the article will put the pieces in place to help you evolve into a contact center quality guru!



Build a Comprehensive Quality Program and Become a Call Center Hero

Kathryn E. Jackson Ph.D.

Have you been asked to develop a comprehensive quality model for your company's contact center(s)? This seems like a daunting task to most of us. But if you implement the following eight-step plan, you can become your company's contact center quality guru. Besides having a complete 360-degree view of your contact center's quality, you will also make fiscally responsible quality decisions. The executive management team will certainly applaud you for that!

This article is about the overall scope of building a quality model. Here are the steps you should take to build a quality model.

Step One – Strategy

It's impossible to build any kind of quality model without knowing what you are trying to accomplish. When Response Design goes into a company, we often find multiple teams working on multiple projects – each team thinking they have correctly defined the overall strategy, when, in fact, each team is headed toward a slightly different destination. It is critical to know the overall strategy of the organization.

The next step is to determine how the quality strategy contributes to the overall strategy of the organization. This is not a “once and done” activity. You have to keep checking to make sure the overall strategy hasn't changed or that you haven't strayed from your original path. This kind of strategy check should occur no less frequently than on a quarterly basis.

Step Two – Objectives

Once you know the strategy, the objectives must be identified. There are a lot of options available. By looking at quality award criteria (e.g., Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award) you can design a set of comprehensive objectives. Your quality objectives might also include:

- Increase customer service and customer satisfaction levels
- Increase employee productivity and efficiency
- Identification of training needs
- Support of human performance management infrastructure
- Develop and implement a continual process improvement plan
- Monitor workflow process trends
- Recognize needs and expectations of all internal and external customers
- Implement a voice and data monitoring process
- Define and implement surveying needs
- Establish customer access service levels
- Ensure a cost effective quality program
- Define and update quality processes and procedures



Step Three – Quality Functions

The quality department is the audit function for all the activities of the contact center to ensure that the customer is WOWed (effectiveness – delivering what the customer requires) and that the customer is WOWed in the most cost-effective manner (efficiency).

It's not okay any more to simply say that I am measuring customer satisfaction and that 85% of my customers are "extremely satisfied" with our products or services. Quality is a moving target. So what happens when the needs of the customer change? How do we know what they require now? How do we know we are asking the right questions? When we get their answers, how do we know what actions are the right ones to take? Which actions have a definite return on investment (ROI) attached and which actions have the best ROI?

What basic functions of the quality department help make these fiscally responsible decisions? Let me suggest the following:

Customer surveys

Best practice companies highlight several critical elements for customer surveying. First, companies must have an overall survey plan that defines why they survey, when they survey and the methods they use to survey. Best practice companies use several surveys and data collection methods to collect all the information they need (event driven surveys, automated surveys, annual surveys, etc.). The real key is to have a plan and know why you are contacting your customers.

Employee surveys

The research on the linkage between customer and employee satisfaction is definite. There is no customer satisfaction without employee satisfaction. The quality department must survey employees to determine their level of satisfaction. Action plans must be developed and implemented to improve any areas causing dissatisfaction. (Caution – be sure not to implement an employee survey until you are ready to take action. Not taking action on survey results just causes more discontent!)

Internal quality monitoring

This is commonly accomplished through voice and data monitoring processes established in the contact center and by the quality department. The contact center management team uses the voice and data monitoring to improve the skill and knowledge of the agents. The quality department uses voice and data monitoring to track overall contact center quality and identify possible process improvements.

External quality monitoring

Many companies utilize outside vendors to validate internal quality scores. Most typical processes include remote voice and data monitoring (make sure the vendor is calibrated to your definition of excellence,) as well as "mystery shopping." One caution about mystery shopping. Mystery shopping is great to assess processes, but often falls short when assessing the excellence delivered by agents. Most contact center managers know that agents become very familiar with mystery shop scenarios and within several weeks all the "right" answers are shared.

General industry surveys

There are several ways a company can be involved in a surveying process to assess current performance. Just remember surveys do not necessarily tell you best practices. They simply tell you what other companies are doing and where you stand in relation to their performance. I like to compare some of these findings to the old story about the "lemmings going over the cliff." You may find out that the majority of contact centers are headed a certain way, but how do you know they aren't simply headed off a cliff? Make sure you join a reputable survey with sponsors that truly know how to analyze the data in light of the complexities of the contact center industry.



Response Design has a product called LeapFrog!™ that measures over 300-contact center metrics and produces a comparative study against vertical industries, contact center size and application as well as trends against best practices.

Auditing

This process should be done at least annually. There are many ways to audit with many different criteria. Response Design uses CCORE™ (Customer Contact Operation Review and Evaluation). CCORE™ is correlated to the Malcolm Baldrige criteria. CCORE™ not only reports improvement opportunities but also goes even further by presenting detailed project plans on how to implement the improvements. CCORE™ is truly prescriptive in nature. Audits should be performed both internally by the quality department, and externally by a qualified vendor. Some audits result in contact center certification. Before investing in certification make sure that the criteria for the certification has a credible foundation, has been validated, is well accepted within the industry and applies to your specific situation.

Compliment and complaint management

As the quality department it is your responsibility to gather, analyze and manage the compliment and complaint process in your company. These may come from external customers, internal customers or employees. It is important to develop a system that records, categorizes, archives, analyzes, and reports on complaints or compliments, so action can be taken to continually improve.

Process improvement

The quality department must develop a system that collects information on all possible process improvement opportunities. We have already named a few functions that will help (e.g., auditing, mystery shopping and complaints). One often-overlooked function is call monitoring. While you are monitoring calls, listen not only for skill and knowledge deficiencies, but listen also for process deficiencies. Along with your skill and knowledge call monitoring form, develop a process call monitoring form as well. You can record customer comments about process issues at the same time you capture your own impressions about the efficiency of your internal processes.

Let me give you a personal example for this. Last holiday season I ordered several items from a catalog. After hanging up from the call, I realized that I had not asked them to expedite the order for me. So, I immediately called the 800 sales number to ask them to expedite and overnight my items. Upon reaching the center, I was informed that once an agent hits “enter” on their PC my order is no longer accessible in the sales department. I would have to wait until the next day (after they got done processing my order and authorizing my credit card) and then call the customer service department to update my order. Had a supervisor been monitoring this call and noted my response, it would have been obvious that this was not a very customer pleasing process.

Once you’ve identified what needs to be improved, the quality team must initiate the improvement process. First, get a cross-functional team together to determine how to streamline the process. Then hold people accountable to ensure the changes are being made.

Virtual management

An often-overlooked quality function is the control mechanism that ensures the consistency of the quality delivered by multiple sites, departments, and customer access points (phone, fax, correspondence, Internet, email, video, etc.). If your goal is for your customers to experience consistent products and services no matter how, where, or when they contact you, then a virtual management plan is paramount.

Benchmarking

The quality department must continually update the knowledge of what is changing and how best practices are evolving. Benchmarking consortiums are becoming the most popular way to cost-effectively examine the industry and find the answers to current hurdles.



Competitive analysis

The quality department must be constantly aware of what the competition is doing so customer satisfaction is continually addressed. It is a well-known fact that the contact center customer no longer judges a company simply against its vertical market competitors. Contact center customers look across all industries and have heightened expectations due to the high quality standards being demonstrated in each customer access arena. Shop other contact centers. See what they are doing with their technology and their service delivery. Ask your customers if they shop elsewhere and what they like about other companies' service delivery. Conduct focus groups of non-customers. Be creative.

Handbook of best practices

Once you've done all this work, how does the entire organization know what best practices are? They are relying on you, as the quality organization to scope that out for them and provide guidance. The easiest way we have found is for the quality department to develop and continually update a handbook that defines the best practices and describes how to best implement them.

Step Four – Quality Organization

Once you know what you are supposed to do, then you have to determine what kind of structure you will require to accomplish it. In a previous article, I dealt with the “how to” build an organization. The principles from that article apply here as well. (Please see the resource listing at the end of this article for additional information).

Step Five – Interdepartmental Relationships

We all know that quality does not stand alone. Quality is the job of the entire organization. That means the communication and dependencies have to be well defined and followed. Many companies are moving toward internal service level agreements. I've told the following story often. When Response Design performs a CCORE™ audit we ask the agents the following question: “When you make a promise to a customer that has to be fulfilled by another department, what is your confidence level that it will be completed in a timely fashion?” We seldom get higher than a 50% confidence level.

Customer relationship management is the business of the 21st Century for all businesses. The customer doesn't care what department “dropped the ball.” All they care about is that the ball was dropped. It is critical that the contact center is strategically integrated into the rest of the organization and that each department has the same commitment to external and internal customers. It is the quality department's charter to lead the way to get these relationships in shape.

Along with that, it is important to know the special dependencies that the quality department has with other departments. From our experience you will be relying most heavily on:

- Human resources (acquire and retain quality people)
- Training (embed the skill and knowledge required to deliver excellent products and services)
- Customer access (ensure the customers can access the products and services in a timely manner)
- Legal (determine legal requirements, e.g., voice and data monitoring)
- Systems (24 hour availability).



Step Six – Quality Infrastructure

In order to be able to operate the quality department there are certain infrastructure requirements. These will vary by organization but many will include:

- Voice and data monitoring technology
- Access to contact center during all hours of operation
- A cross functional advisory committee to address process recommendations and changes
- An agreed upon methodology for reporting findings and recommendations to other areas of the organization
- An automated system to capture and report performance measures and survey results
- A documented contingency plan should systems fail
- Security procedures and requirements
- A separate work area for the department that has limited and secure access (for confidentiality)

Step Seven – Functional Linkages

You could develop and implement all the quality functions described in Step Three without any thought as to how they relate to each other. However, we have found that it is best to leverage the knowledge gained from one function to enhance the knowledge gained from another function.

For example, are the components of your customer satisfaction survey linked to the items on your call monitoring form? Can you describe the “predictors of success” in behavioral terms so you can add these to your observation form? Let’s say in your customer survey you identify one predictor of success as, “I want to feel respected and important when I call.” Once you ask a few more questions, you find out that you can translate that into the behavioral elements of “being listened to” and “problem solved on first contact”. Your goal is to construct the call monitoring form to include the skills of listening and the skills of problem solving. Then you have a direct link to what your customer said they want and what you are assessing.

There are many similar linkages that can be done with each quality function to ensure greater validation and success.

Step Eight – Documentation and Forms

The last step is to ensure you have all your policies, procedures, and processes documented and that you have developed all the forms required (either online or manual). This may not be your favorite step, but it is required if you truly want a quality result.

Summary

Isn’t it exciting to think of becoming a quality guru in eight steps? As you know, Response Design is always here to help. The following Response Design products and service may assist you as you move along the guru continuum.



Kathryn Jackson, co-founder of Response Design Corporation (RDC) and call center expert helps professionals get more from their call center. Response Design is the how-to source for integrating the call center into the customer relationship. Its independent consultants use call center web seminars, contact center consulting, call center tutorials, call center benchmarking, world class customer service articles, and best-in-class customer service practices to ensure you get the most from your call center investment.

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