

Whose Responsibility Is Quality?

There are two different aspects to this question, and they can be broken down into concepts of responsibility and accountability.

Firstly, the responsibility for quality rests with senior management: in fact, with the Chief Executive Officer (Managing Director, President, etc). This must be, because the C.E.O. is responsible for the overall performance of the company, and is the only individual who can encourage - and, if necessary, force - the management personnel controlling various functions to allow principles of quality management to "percolate" through the activities of their department.

Secondly, the accountability for the quality of an activity (the extent to which that activity meets the needs of its customers) must rest directly with the people carrying it out. This applies to all activities, not just manufacturing: clients are just as frustrated with other problems:

- * delivery of the wrong material, through an order entry error in the sales department;
- * dispatch of the wrong quantity of goods, through an error in the stores department;
- * invoicing at the wrong cost, through an error in the accounts receivable department;
- * provision of incomplete technical advice, through a problem in the marketing department;

Whilst it is true that department managers are responsible for the activities of their departments, it is frequently the case that managers are not aware of the fine detail of how every job is done; the manager can not therefore be blamed (even if blaming actually achieved anything, which it never does) for the fact that some of the fine detail is not done correctly. It is the responsibility of the person actually carrying out a task to do so correctly: if this is not possible, the manager should be advised to make it possible!

The responsibility for the quality of an activity rests with the people who carry it out.