

Dr. Die Cast



Do your “Systems” Insure Your Company’s Success?

(Taking a Second Look at Your Procedures)

W. Edwards Deming, PhD., was fond of repeating that it was often “the system” that prevented companies from reaching their full potential.

We sometimes become so rigid in our drive for “Zero Defects” that we lose sight of the fact that the process is really “Continuous Improvement”. Once we have all the procedures in place, we convince ourselves that we have arrived and stop looking for opportunities for further improvement.

From experience I learned, “If you want to know what’s wrong with your department, manufacturing, quality, tool repair, equipment maintenance, purchasing, engineering, human resources, accounting, sales, management, or shipping, don’t ask your fellow department members. Ask another department that relies on their services, that is to say their customer. Who is “your customer”? Often, it is not the final user of your company’s product or service but the next person or department that receives your product or service. For example, the die casting department’s customer is most likely the machining department. The machining department’s customer could be final assembly or shipping. The recipient of your work is your customer. Often the ones closest to a problem can’t see it because, “after all we’re just following the procedures that were established before we ever joined the company”.

For now, I’m using “system and procedures” as synonymous. Quite often procedures are created to prevent a problem from reoccurring or for the convenience of the department.

For example, signature levels to authorize a purchase allow upper

management to keep on budget and control cash flow. The person who initiates a purchase request may not have full knowledge of budget constraints. At the same time, the person writing that requisition may be the only one in the company that understands the urgency of a purchase. What if the purchase is necessary to keep production running to avoid an interruption at the customer’s plant, but all of the key signers are on vacation? Or at least the one with the authority to approve the dollar amount needed. Do you have procedures or people in place who can keep the plant running without interruption in your absence? We can never have too many understudies.

What about a human resources department that sets the standards so high that no applicant is good enough? Job vacancies can go for weeks or months while waiting for the perfect applicant. I haven’t found one yet, but I’ve seen some people with very little experience and a great work ethic that grew to become valuable members of the company.

Another example could be an accounting department that completes the production report of the previous day’s production, but only makes the report available around lunch time. If the report identifies problems, they are not clarified until the first shift is nearly half over. An accounting or data processing system that provides the production results “earlier rather than later” will provide manufacturing with important information they need in order to prioritize tooling and machine maintenance in time to accomplish the needed repairs while the

regularly scheduled resources (departments) are still fully available.

What if I find a procedure that is counter-productive? How many people or departments are required to write or revise a procedure? Sometimes the question that needs to be asked is: “Why do we have this procedure? Where did it come from? Who does it benefit?”, etc.

The automotive and international quality systems such as Q.S., ISO, and other standards were intended to insure a higher level of quality and stability. The intent is, by having good procedures and following them, you will produce better product at a profit. The standards are effective as long as the procedures were created based on reliable historical data. I have observed some companies that despite having the highest “quality” ratings still performed poorly. The reason was their procedures were not tied to proven manufacturing process parameters. (As quoted, “We have very simple procedures and follow them”.)

Don’t get the impression that I’m against checklists and written procedures. I wouldn’t get on an aircraft if the pilot threw out the pre-flight checklist. Properly applied they save time, reduce mistakes and in some cases even prevent injuries, accidents and save lives.

Hopefully the above areas have sparked some ideas. They are not intended to single out any particular people or departments. We can all improve at listening and observing our operations when we work with the goal of continuous improvement.



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