

Adopting Your Own Quality Program



BY STUART McAULAY

The concept of Quality Management Systems (QMS) in aviation has finally forced

all commercial operators across the nation to achieve an acceptable level of compliance in order to continue operating. Larger organizations have been dealing with, and living with, QA strategies for years, while some of the smaller outfits seem to still be struggling to understand what constitutes compliance. The philosophy has trickled down, though, to even the smallest of organizations. Once the reality of these programs hits home through Transport Canada's Program Validation Inspection (PVI) process, many smaller companies had to raise the white flag and call in consultants or advisors to point them towards compliance. The only catch is that company personnel have to become truly involved and not expect these quality concepts to be controlled by outside sources. Working together to

form a working model appropriate to the company gives certificate-holders a basis for ongoing quality control activities.

The QMS program is not a project, but a living process that incorporates a much broader scope than just doing an annual audit. The applications of ongoing reviews and making the subsequent changes to how things are done are referred to as continuous improvement. As long as there is room for improvement, we will continue to utilize the risk management process to reduce organizational weaknesses.

Even when maintenance managers understand the value of a proper QMS, the idea of implementing and subsequently managing it, as well as continuing to serve their customers, is a stretch to say the least.

Many AMO managers have attained a position of leadership after years of turning wrenches and mastering the technical responsibilities associated with working on aircraft. Along the way they have been challenged with writing manuals, considering human factors, and managing employees. Some managers are natural born leaders and have adapted to this calling with little adjustment. Some have even embraced the new opportunities to broaden their career portfolio. However, there are still many who see this evolving QA role as nothing more than a thorn in the side of their mandate to just carry on doing business as usual. The added burden of quality program development and safety management is still outside of their comfort zone. It is the denial of the natural evolution of a safety sensitive industry striving to achieve the next level.

Those caught amidst the forces of change want to know when the good times of improvisation and reactive measures were replaced with more rules, risk analysis, and systematic audits. Many AMEs do what they do very well. They are technically minded and have performed countless inspections, engineered modifications and crafted many repairs. There are those who just make a living at it and those who have a deep passion for all things related to aviation. The role of the AME has been accepted as paramount in making their work relevant from one aircraft to the next while working from the same page as the ever-evolving regulations. The industry will nevertheless continue to change in order to keep improving safety through the adoption of new concepts. Those who keep moving with it will surely see the light of change while being followed by those who are still reluctant to conform. Industry leaders have reflected on the experiences of the past while forging ahead to introduce new ways of managing themselves and their systems. The acceptance of quality management principles has been a part of general aviation for over two decades now, but they have also not been truly understood or utilized effectively by many until quite recently. The acceptance of quality training and phased implementation has allowed many in the aviation community to move ahead with it as the AME leaders of today step into some of these expanding roles.

There is no doubt that an AME stepping into a world of Quality Management Systems is going to face a learning curve. The acceptance of mandatory human factors continues to form the basis for understanding human thinking and interaction. The application of Quality Management has been a bigger pill to swallow, as it aims beyond the individual and into the bigger company picture. Quality control activities are essentially an ongoing assessment of these factors within the corporate systems of the workplace. The AME then becomes a critical participant as both the subject-matter expert and the interface between man and machine. The AME must be truly involved in the program in order for it to evolve as expected. The stale excuse of accepting the status quo is no longer a sustainable alternative for a forward-thinking model of continuous improvement. A living QMS program is only going to be as effective as the group of men and women who foster a cultural sense of positivity within their organizations. They must buy into it even if they are not yet completely sold on its ultimate benefits. Many of these benefits are not even recognized because they manifest themselves as simply not having an incident or accident due to the preventive measures created by well-thought-out policies and procedures. The benchmark for

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success then becomes the realization of fewer incidents over time.

Compliance with regulatory requirements for the sake of compliance alone is not going to be enough to sustain your profitability or safety record within your organization. The philosophy of Quality Management is intended to change the corporate attitude of complacency in an environment that always has room for improvement. Transport Canada has given us the framework, but it's clearly up to us to work on the attitude. Accepting the role of quality as an investment in your business is often a hard sell when we live in uncertain economic times. All energies must be directed to the task at hand and keeping your head above water. However, the time has come to really look at these types of programs as opportunities to reduce the potential for failure of your systems. The obvious by-product of the extra effort and initial investment may actually result in long-term cost savings and/or more efficient time saving measures. The results ultimately affect the safety picture as well as cost efficiency for the company. The reluctant investment of our time and energy to meet a minimum

standard in order to please Transport Canada will not produce measurable results. Transport is more interested in the company's ability to manage the program rather than performing an audit themselves. This is essentially the heart of the PVI activity. Effective change will only come about if we are willing to please ourselves in the process.

Although the role of the AME manager will be central to his or her overall program, the involvement of outside resources can help to further direct your path. Quality consultants and trusted advisors are available to those who need the support. Smaller organizations may also benefit from this type of relationship during the audit process. A proper audit involves a trained auditor who knows how to objectively look at your organization. The size and scope of your program and audit package need only be as complex as the size of your organization. Intermediate-size companies may need to look at creating a new position of Quality Manager to manage the ongoing activity (including the audit) within the overall program. This could also be an extension of specific AME duties as long as

the Quality activities take precedence over the AME activities. This is where it may be beneficial to hire an AME who also has Quality training or is at least willing to learn that part of the business. Remember that this role will remain ineffective if it is only a name with a title rather than a professional commitment to change.

The AMO environment has definitely taken on a new image. People are taking on new roles and adopting new perspectives pertaining to their work. Companies are learning to evaluate their human resources more effectively in order to fill those new responsibilities. Although it is difficult to quantify the number of potential incidents that have been avoided because of good quality programs, many organizations will still recognize the fruits of their labor over time within the constant cycle of continuous improvement. Quality assurance in the AMO has moved from being the latest buzzword to becoming the driving influence behind all company systems. If you treat the potential of the program with respect, you will certainly remain in favor with Transport Canada and even more important, with your own staff and customers. ■

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