The Critical Role of the Quality Management Representative

By:

Efren Alvarez Galapon
Manager, Corporate Quality, Health & Safety, Environment
Mobile Business Company Ltd. (MBUZZ)
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Mobile: +966 54 805 46 15
Email: efren.a.galapon@iodynamics.org efren.a.galapon@gmail.com

If you work in a company that is certified with ISO 9001:2000/2008 standard, you probably have someone in your organization whose role is called “Quality Management Representative” or “QMR,” right? This QMR title is also referred to as the “Management Representative” (“MR”) or “Quality Assurance Representative” (“QAR”) in other companies with the Standard same certification. Before your company obtained its ISO 9001 Standard compliance certificate, you must have been one of those who attended the so called “ISO Awareness Course” in which the trainer explained the meaning and purpose of ISO 9001:2000/2008 standard in your organization.

Do you know that the title or designation “Quality Management Representative” does not exist in the standard? It is rather “Management Representative”! But why is it that many companies assign the title or designation QMR instead of MR?

This article highlights the critical role of the QMR in his organization and answers the last question as a side topic.

There are two areas in an ISO 9001-certified company in which the MR or QMR function is seen. Figure 1 shows the two locations of such areas. One is the corporate area (see organization chart of XYZ Construction Co.) and the other is in the project area.

ISO 9001:2008 defines the specific responsibilities of a Management Representative quoted (in italics) below.

5.0 MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY

5.5 Responsibility, authority and communication

5.5.2 Management representative

Top Management shall appoint a member of the organization’s management who, irrespective of other responsibilities, shall have responsibility and authority that includes

a) Ensuring that processes needed for the quality management system are established, implemented and maintained,

b) Reporting to top management on the performance of the quality management system and any need for improvement, and

c) Ensuring the promotion of awareness of customer requirements throughout the organization.

Corollary to ISO 9001:2008 standard is ISO 9000:2005 standard called “Quality management system – fundamentals and vocabulary” which serves as a sort of dictionary for users of ISO 9000 family of standards that defines specific terms. The term “top management,” for instance, is defined by said standard as a “person or group of people who directs and controls an organization at the highest level.” The term “management” is likewise defined by the same standard as “coordinated activities to direct and control an organization.” The term “quality management” is defined as “coordinated activities to direct and control an organization with regard to quality”—this is one logical reason why the term “Quality” is attached to the title “Quality Management Representative” because the QMR is basically operating within a quality management system.

On the other hand, an “organization” is defined as a “group of people and facilities with an arrangement of responsibilities, authorities and relationships.” Almost anyone who has been employed in any company has seen an
organization chart in which positions or titles are shown. The superior-subordinate relationship is also implied in the chart; however, the definition of roles and responsibilities are usually written separately in "Job Description" templates/forms.

What does “irrespective of other responsibilities” mean? Many ISO 9001-certified companies pick or designate one of their functional managers—e.g., Administration, HR, Operations, etc., to the role. The designated QMR or MR will then have dual functions. Many senior company officers think or believe that such a set up is just fine. This writer does not agree.

I have observed more companies employing dual-functioned QMR than companies employing full-time QMRs. One reason, I guess, is out of ignorance of the critical role of the QMR. Another is some form of politics (power play) and self preservation ("I'll appoint someone who will not threaten me during audit time") on the part of the person who has the capacity or authority to appoint, designate or hire a QMR.

The three ISO 9000-mandated “responsibility and authority” of the MR/QMR are critical to any ISO-certified company’s success in reaping the benefits of having an effective QMS.

Ensuring that processes needed for the quality management system are established, implemented and maintained.

It would help to know the definition of certain terms. Webster defines these related terms with examples: ENSURE may imply a virtual guarantee (e.g., the government has ensured the safety of the refugees); INSURE sometimes stresses the taking of necessary measures beforehand (e.g., careful planning should insure the success of the party); ASSURE distinctively implies the removal of doubt and suspense from a person's mind (e.g., I assure you that no harm will be done); SECURE implies action taken to guard against attack or loss (e.g., sent reinforcements to secure their position).

What are the processes that make up a quality management systems? They are actually the functional units or departments of a company, like: Marketing & Sales, Operations, Administration, Finance & Accounting, Human Resource Management, Information Technology, Purchasing, Logistics & Warehousing, among other.

Establishing a business process simply means “documenting” or “developing” a business process. A process documentation template, however, is needed in order to come up with a uniform format of all business process documentation. When all

*Figure 1 The Organizational Position of QMR*
the business processes are documented (developed)—that is, reviewed by all parties involved in each cross-functional business process and approved by the process owner (department head)—they are ready for implementation. Once implemented, they are managed (maintained) until such time comes for necessary adjustment or revision to meet the requirement/s of concerned stakeholder/s.

Where was the QMR all this time when the various business processes that make the QMS were being documented? He facilitated and led the various process development teams toward their goals; he worked behind the scenes and ensured that all necessary information were captured; he served as a catalyst amidst warring departments; and most important of all: he integrated all the business processes into one holistic and seamless quality management system.

Reporting to top management on the performance of the quality management system and any need for improvement.

What should the QMR report to top management about the performance of the QMS and any need for improvement?

If the QMR is a dual-functionary, then he is most likely constrained to fully perform his assigned dual duties and responsibilities. It is also possible that his core function (as a functional manager) may suffer because this time his attention will be focused on two directions almost simultaneous. It should be emphasized that the management reports he is going to prepare will now be monthly consolidated reports derived from all the functional departments aside from his own department’s report.

On the improvement side, this is more burdensome because it calls for more varied roles and responsibilities of the QMR—that responsibility is facilitating various improvement teams.

Clause 8.0 of ISO 9001:2008 is “Measurement, analysis and improvement.” Before reaching the improvement stage, measurement and analysis must be undertaken first, respectively. All the business processes that make up the QMS need to be measured every month based on established process performance metrics—e.g., the number of days to receive ordered materials from a supplier. After gathering all the departmental monthly performance report, the QMR must conduct statistical analyses (simple, complex, or in between) on various measured performances. The results of these analyses will become the bases for recommending improvement. Top management will be privileged to choose which one it should approve for improvement or to be changed in the organization or in a business process. From there, the QMR will be required to facilitate process/quality improvement teams which demands time and energy. He will inevitably be required to prepare progress reports, too, on improvement/change initiatives—by then, he has already neglected much of his core functional duties and responsibilities if he does not have an immediate assistant under him.

Below are highlights of the key responsibilities of the Corporate QMR.

One area of the quality management system in which the presence of the QMR is observed and strongly felt is in quality audits. The QMR is the owner of the “Audit Process” and no other else. As a trained and competent auditor or lead auditor, the QMR is an independent entity—that is, he cannot be influenced by anyone in the organization: yes, and ethically speaking, not even the top man of the company should ever try to influence the auditor (QMR). The auditor’s “Audit Summary Report” contains findings that are supported by evidences (records) extracted from actual operations of a particular business process. Audit findings can be major or minor nonconformities. A major nonconformity finding may become a ground for many unpleasant consequences: one could be termination of employment; termination of Contract with a client or customer; and litigation in the courts of law; among other.

Ensuring the promotion of awareness of customer requirements throughout the organization.

In this regard, the “organization” can be either the corporate organization or the project organization or both.

In the corporate area, the QMR is an educator on quality matters and one of the mandatory educative seminars is ISO Awareness Course of which all employees must learn the meaning and purpose of ISO in their company. The corporate QMR in this respect stresses the importance of meeting the Customer requirements in each Contract his organization is awarded with.
On the other hand, the Project Manager in many companies becomes the de facto MR or QMR with this simple rationale—he is in charge of and responsible for the entire project; and, thus, represents his organization in the completion of all contractual obligations. In other companies, the project manager is not the project QMR/MR but rather the designated project Quality Assurance (QA) Manager or QA/QC Manager. However, during scheduled project quality audits, it is the corporate QMR (see Figure 1) who is authorized to conduct internal quality audits on the project’s quality management system which is embedded in the project-specific Project Quality Plan (PQP). Furthermore, the Project QMR/MR is the most knowledgeable person in the project team about the requirements of the customer which are defined in the Contract. And as such, it is one of his key responsibilities to orient all his project team members about the matter and this must be done more than once if necessary.

The biggest challenge to the corporate QMR in this regard, however, is how to rein the ears of the “big boys” at the top to listen to him first before he brings down the information down the grape vine of the organization. If the QMR fails from the top level, he is most likely to fail down the line to the ground level. The project QMR/MR does not have this predicament although he should always bear in mind that each project he leads is the equivalent of his entire company—that is, screw the project, and you screw the entire business enterprise. A dissatisfied customer will not award another Contract to you again and will even bad mouth you to other companies—too much a punishment for the screw up.

So, where should the QMR be attached in a corporate organization chart? Should he be a dual-functionary or an independent functionary? This author supports the latter.

The critical role of the QMR must not be underestimated. The QMR is responsible for these areas in a quality management system in which he operates: he is in charge of the entire quality management system; he is an independent quality auditor; he is an educator, trainer, and developer of competent quality professionals, like, quality auditors; he is a facilitator, leader, and champion of improvement/change undertakings. The Corporate QMR is likewise a trusted internal management consultant and he shares many confidential matters with the top decision-making officer of the organization.

Finally, the QMR is a generalist and not a specialist.