



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### **Good Quality Plans can Save You in Case of a Disaster**

Project teams can create Quality Plans that address how the project will ensure that the final deliverables will meet the expectations of the client. The overall quality of the final deliverables is based on having good internal processes in place and measuring the quality of interim deliverables that help create the final solution.

#### **Organizations can create quality plans as well**

Project teams make up only a portion of the work that goes on in your organization. In addition to projects, you have people who are supporting production systems and processes. You also have many people that work in operational jobs that run the business. For instance, accounts receivable analysts use your accounts receivable software and actually call customers to track down late payments. Likewise, you have order entry people, shop floor workers, legal analysts, etc. These are the people that keep your business running.

We often think of organizational quality management as meaning ISO, Six-Sigma or Capability Maturity Model (CMM) certification. In fact, all of these are methods for achieving basic levels of quality on an organizational basis. However, they can also be rigorous and time consuming, and many organizations do not have the business need, or the ability, to reach a standard certification level.

On the other hand, all organizations have the ability to create an organization-wide Quality Plan. A properly executed Quality Plan will set quality expectations for all groups. It will also have the added benefit of helping your company in case of a disaster.

#### **Think about the purpose of a Quality Plan**

Think about the purpose of gaining formal certification on the CMM scale or working toward an ISO certification. Much of the preparation is about processes. One of the major aspects of a quality process is that it is understandable and repeatable. If you were manufacturing products, you would want them all to be as consistent as possible, with as little unplanned variation as possible. If you were working in the order entry area, you would want to understand how to accept orders from customers and enter them into your software as consistently and efficiently as possible. You cannot have a controlled, repeatable process when everyone does things differently. There may be aspects of the job that require some creativity, but these should be understood within the context of a standard overall process.

The way you achieve this level of quality standardization is by documenting your processes, training your people and measuring the results. In this way, people know what is expected of them, and you can compare how people do their jobs versus the standards. You have probably all had some experience talking to customer service people that were obviously following set procedures. Sometimes you can tell by the way they talk to you that they are using a prepared script. Sometimes you can tell by short pauses in their



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conversation as they wait for screens to change as they are being guided through a process. In any case, the company is trying to gain efficiency and consistency by documenting the processes.

### **You need to recover your processes in a disaster**

Think about what would happen if a disaster struck your business. Consider a major fire, flood or even a terrorist strike like the 9/11 attack. Now think of all of the things that need to be recovered to be able to get your business up and running. The first things people think about are your data, business applications, telecommunications, etc. In fact, in most disasters your data and applications may be most important since they are unique to your business.

The other thing that is unique to your business is your employees. In a real disaster, you may have to change locations and get new equipment. If extreme cases, like 9/11, you might also need to find new people. The question is, once you have a new physical site up and running, are your people going to be able to jump in to continue their jobs? In the chaos of a disaster, you don't know. You may have people helping out in areas that are not familiar to them. For instance, if you are a cable TV company, you can bet that you are going to be inundated with calls to your customer support center after a disaster. You will need to add people that are not normally familiar with the support process.

### **Enter your Quality Plan**

The same Quality Plans that help you standardize and improve your overall quality will also help you in case of a disaster. This is based on having your key processes documented and followed. Having the processes followed consistently ensures that current staff can quickly get back into their productive routine, even if they are in strange surroundings and unusual circumstances. Having your procedures documented also allows new people to quickly get up-to-speed in new processes. They may not have the processes committed to memory, but they should be able to quickly learn and follow the basic processes that will allow your business to continue operating while you are trying to get back to a normal operating environment.

Depending on the sophistication of your Quality Plan, you could also document basic roles and responsibilities, which will also be valuable if you have to put new people into place after a disaster. Your Quality Plan might also include quality related metrics that you can continue to capture. You would expect that quality will suffer in the short-term as a result of a disaster, but continuing to measure will allow you to know when your processes have stabilized and the quality level has returned to pre-disaster days.

### **Summary**

Typical disaster plans include the ability to recover all company data, infrastructure and systems so that your company can quickly recover and continue with its business functions. However, usually a disaster plan does not include the ability of people to continue to execute your business processes. If your staff is relatively intact after a disaster, you may be okay. However, if a disaster requires you to put new people in place,



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you will find that having your systems and your data are only part of the problem. New people won't know what they are supposed to do.

Having a Quality Plan in place will bridge this gap by documenting the processes and procedures that are required to run the business. If your company is certified in CMM level two or higher, or is certified as in ISO or Six-Sigma, you probably already are documenting and following standard processes. However, other companies should still consider creating less formal organizational Quality Plans that will result in processes being documented and followed in normal times as well as after a disaster.