

7.4: Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management (TQM) was discussed in detail earlier. TQM goes hand in hand with the Just-In-Time (JIT) philosophy because quality is a major source of uncertainty and non-value-added activities in an organization with poor quality practices. TQM promotes continuous improvement, doing it right the first time, designing quality into products and processes, and establishing an overall focus on prevention as the primary quality activity.

Employee Empowerment

Front-line employees play a critical role in successful JIT practices. They work in partnership with management and each other in the continuous pursuit of excellence. There are several ways in which front-line employees contribute to JIT success:

- Employees work together in problem-solving teams to gather data and build consensus on how to improve work processes.
- Employees are responsible for understanding the quality measures of their work and what they need to do to meet the needs of internal and external customers.
- Each employee is empowered to take action to correct problems.
- Employees have cross-functional skill sets that allow them to be assigned to areas which need help, and to help them adopt a broader (“big picture”) view of the production process.
- Unlike a traditional “push” environment where line workers are relatively independent of one another in their work activities, JIT employees are connected by the “demand pull” discipline, where work is not produced unless the downstream work center needs it. Demand-pull promotes the inter-connectedness of workers.
- Front-line employees are responsible for the basic maintenance of their machines. This helps employees have a better understanding of the condition of their equipment and its ability to meet quality and production requirements.

Management works with employees by being coaches and facilitators rather than authoritative supervisors. Managers are charged with hiring employees who can work in a proactive team environment, and provide the training and incentives to build a work culture that is focused on continuous improvement.

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