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Avoiding Soft Quality

Bridging the Healthcare Quality Gap

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Program Objectives

- Describe soft quality
- List the three most common forms of soft quality
- Describe the risks associated with soft quality
- List the characteristics of soft quality

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Defining Soft Quality

Soft quality exists when a quality activity creates the perception of action without creating any value-adding change!




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The Common Forms of Soft Quality

- **Discipline**
- **Creation of a New Form**
- **Mass Education**




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Discipline


- **Creates perception of action without actually fixing anything in most situations**
- **Creates paper to show surveyors and document action**
- **Plays to a common misperception that all errors are a factor of human error**
- **Is one of the most damaging forms of soft quality for the workforce**



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Most all errors involve some level of human error. The real questions that need to be answered are why did the human error occur and why did the current systems of defense not prevent it!




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Mass Education

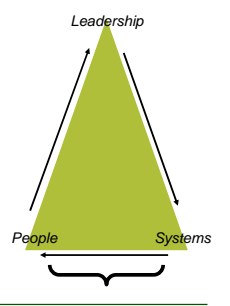
- **Makes one-on-one interactions about performance unnecessary**
- **Easier than isolating the underlying cause**
- **Demoralizes those who are doing it right or trying**



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Soft quality such as discipline, the creation of a new form and mass education is a poor choice in most situations because the best corrective action generally lives in strengthening the system/people interface!



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Soft quality is an easy choice because it doesn't challenge status quo. It creates the perception of action without requiring change!



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Patient Satisfaction

	1	2	3	4	5
1. The quality of our food.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3.6	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The friendliness of our staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 4.6	<input type="radio"/>
3. Our timeliness in answering phones.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 4.1	<input type="radio"/>
4. Safety in the parking lots.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3.5	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Another common characteristic of soft quality is poor systems of feedback from the workforce to leadership to determine whether the system modification has had the desired impact – improvement performance that fosters efficiency, effectiveness, and user-friendliness !

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Soft quality is generally very expensive. It is a major contributor to the costs that increase the percentage of a healthcare organization's earned revenues that have to be dedicated to quality! The problem is that they rarely, if ever contribute enough to compensate for their cost and, over time, force rework!

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Cost of Soft Quality

- *Soft quality commonly adds steps to what already exists.*
- *It requires a long term investment in additional resources that can then not be used for something value-adding.*
- *It commonly is hardest on the frontline workforce.*

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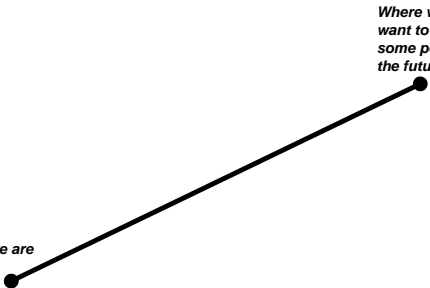
Soft quality is commonly the equivalent of placing a band-aid on an infected wound. Alone, the band-aid can not treat the under-lying infection. With time the wound requires more and bigger band-aids to manage its impact! The extra tasks inside soft quality are intended to hold a broken system together. Most often, the flaws in the system will simply manifest in other ways over time.



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Where we are today



Where we want to be at some point in the future

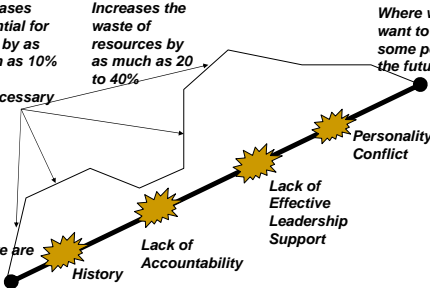
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Increases potential for error by as much as 10% per unnecessary step

Increases the waste of resources by as much as 20 to 40%

Where we are today



Where we want to be at some point in the future

History

Lack of Accountability

Lack of Effective Leadership Support

Personality Conflict

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Avoiding Soft Quality

When evaluating a proposed quality improvement initiative ask the following questions:



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Avoiding Soft Quality


1. Does this action involve discipline, mass education, or the creation of a new piece of paper? As these are the most common forms of soft quality, they must be accepted with great caution.



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2. Does this action promote change to an existing system or procedure to make it more efficient, effective, or user-friendly. The key word in this question is change. If status quo remain unchanged and the improvement adds steps or points fingers, it is most likely soft quality.



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3. Does this action require departments or persons to engage in extra steps to compensate for the weaknesses in another area of the organization because that area finds it difficult to change or the originating department has a control issue?



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4. If this action adds steps to an existing system or procedure is it done for the purpose of making it more efficient, effective or user-friendly or is it done to create defenses-in-depth to protect the patient?



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5. Does this action require a long term commitment for additional resources?



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6. Does this action require us to speculate about the activity that will provide the desired improvement?



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Soft quality is health care's habit. That means that it will take a concerted effort to reverse it. Soft quality is generally easier than choosing the correct path because it is task-oriented rather than systems-design-oriented. It allows leaders and managers to create activities that look like action on the surface but protect status quo. For people who aren't great change agents, soft quality is the preferable choice. The problem it creates is that it generally doesn't not move health care to a higher level of performance and over time it actually undermines the operational, financial and reputational integrity of the provider.

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