



PERRY JOHNSON REGISTRARS, INC.



Quality Assurance vs. Quality Control – What's the Difference?

Quality is king in practically every industry, involving products' fitness for consumer use and conformance to applicable requirements and regulations. As a concept, quality has always been recognized and even rewarded, but it's only since the early 20th century that widespread formal study and definition of the concepts have been given emphasis. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of mass production, Quality Control and Quality Assurance were born.

Both Quality Assurance and Quality Control play large roles in quality management and can even be interrelated through various QMS activities. But what differentiates the two?

Quality Assurance (QA) is the part of quality management focused upon providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled – both internally to management and externally to customers, government agencies, third parties, etc. In a manufacturing environment QA can be understood as being made up of all the process controls, training activities, signage, machine engineering, etc. that an organization implements to ensure compliant products are outputted from the manufacturing processes.

Quality Control (QC) is the part of quality management focused on providing assurance that the outputs of a process will be controlled to the extent that any errors will be caught. In a manufacturing environment QC includes all the various inspection and testing activities that an organization performs (whether at the manufacturing station, within a dedicated QC office, or by qualified subcontractors.) QC is a part of QA, but effective QA cannot be made up solely of QC controls.

Determining Quality for Service-based Organizations

A common question for those approaching certification and QMS improvement for the first time is how to exercise QC and QA on services as opposed to tangible goods. Without a physical item to inspect or control the QA function in such an organization may not specifically include quality control of the service itself, but will reside in interpretive feedback from interested parties. Examples of this sort of feedback may come in the form of things like field reports, training debrief meeting notes, customer surveys, and construction site assessments. It is important to remember that every organization is responsible for determining requirements related to the products or services they provide to their customers. This means that intended outputs will be known before the service is provided. Every organization is responsible for ensuring that they can provide both QA and QC to the extent possible to ensure the intended outputs are achieved.

What is Inspection?

An inspection is the process of gauging a product or service's characteristics in comparison to an established standard through measuring, examination, and testing. This determination of conformity can be applied not only to physical products but processes and other results as well.

Auditing as a Part of Quality Assurance

It should come as no surprise that PJR considers auditing to be a crucial part of maintaining quality – but not just because it's a part of certification. Even uncertified businesses can benefit from having a regular and thorough internal audit program as part of their QA functions. An audit can provide keen insights into the effectiveness of other implemented QA and QC measures and provide a means of continual improvement in these areas.