WHITE PAPER

25 Questions to Ask When Your QA System Is Getting in the Way

What happens when your QA system no longer meets the needs of your organization?

Athenium
Performance Improvement Solutions

When QA outgrows its technology.

If industry outsiders looked at the quality assurance systems that many insurers use, they might not realize how central QA is to the insurer's success. Too often they would see home-grown systems that have not kept up with company changes and growth. They would see technology that is difficult to maintain and modify. They would see time wasted and errors made because of reliance on manual processes. In short, they would see systems that no longer get the job done.

Strong QA programs can improve workflows, training, productivity, customer service, and other factors that affect the company's financial health. However, when simple databases and spreadsheets are stretched beyond their limits, it becomes difficult for QA to support bottom-line goals.

Many QA managers are frustrated with lagging, inflexible technology that hinders their ability to be effective. Unfortunately, internal QA and IT groups often lack the capacity to develop a comprehensive solution that will meet long-term demands, especially those that are hard to foresee today. Internal teams often don't have broad exposure to the most current industry thinking and developments. In addition, IT is often overburdened with multiple large projects already in the queue.

Given the limitations of internal resources, QA managers are wise to explore advanced, commercial QA solutions developed specifically for the insurance industry. Before diving headlong into the search, however, the prudent QA manager will ask a comprehensive series of probing questions to determine the current state of QA and what is needed to successfully meet the many challenges of their evolving organization.

Consider if your company faces obstacles in these key areas:

- **Data Entry:** It may be difficult to integrate data from older systems and multiple silos of information into the QA system. This often results in incomplete or inconsistent data and requires reviewers to tediously enter data that could have been imported more efficiently.
- **Data Quality:** QA staff often spend hours and hours wrestling with data to make sure it is accurate, consistent, and complete.
- **Audit Process:** QA reviewers may find questionnaires are inefficient, hard to work with, and include manual processes than can lead to human error and hinder their productivity.
- **Analysis:** Older QA processes may have few or weak analytical tools that fail to meet changing management needs.
- **Reporting:** Reporting capabilities of home-grown systems may be limited in scope and detail. These systems often do not support important processes like calibration, nor do they give management the depth of insight they need to make impactful changes.

Leverage your internal team and peer network to identify solutions that are highly flexible, support future growth, and meet your most complex business requirements.

- **Industry Insight:** In-house teams simply don't have the ability to consistently talk with their industry peers to learn what works (and what doesn't) at companies with similar issues.
- **Ongoing Development:** Home-grown solutions don't have the benefit of being tested in a wide variety of situations, and they rarely keep up with state-of-the-art methods and systems.
- **Complete Capabilities:** Many solutions are put together piece-meal as immediate needs arise. Such systems don't scale, aren't flexible, and often have weak or missing support for vital functions.
- **Flexibility:** Most QA systems in place today do not enable QA to evolve with the organization. For example, modifying questionnaires is difficult, file selection models are inflexible, and reporting is not robust.
- **Growth Capabilities:** The above problems, as well as scalability issues, will only get worse as a company grows or requires changes to business and QA processes.

If even one of these issues presents a major problem, the QA department can suffer from low reviewer productivity, unreliable results, and difficulty meeting QA and business goals.

The role of quality assurance is obvious. Or is it?

Because QA has such a broad and powerful impact on decision-making and financial outcomes, planning your next-generation QA system offers an ideal opportunity to start a wider discussion about QA's purpose and goals with key front-line personnel, middle management, and executives. You may think that everyone agrees about what QA's role is and what the priorities are, but if you took a poll of your co-workers you might be surprised. How one views QA's role is inherently subjective; it is based on each individual's experiences, perspectives, and goals.

Supervisors will put the emphasis on identifying individual performance issues. Field managers need information to help them set and adjust goals for their offices. A higher level executive will be looking at the larger financial consequences of performance issues.

Of the many insights these discussions can generate, three things will inevitably become crystal clear. First, QA is many things to many people. Second, your current technology meets some needs better than others. And last, but not least, your system is expected to handle a lot more than it was originally designed to do.

Now is the time to evaluate how well your quality assurance system performs across the entire organization. Understand how well it meets today's objectives, anticipate needs based on known short- to medium-range plans, and think about the flexibility needed to meet possible long-term needs.

A QA solution for the entire organization.

While every company is different, there are fundamental areas that all QA organizations must evaluate before looking at various technology options. Build the foundation of a thorough, effective search process by systematically exploring the following areas. As you consider these questions, wear as many hats as possible. Think like an auditor, unit manager, regional manager, division manager, and C-level executive. Solicit input from trusted colleagues. Go into full investigative mode to broaden your perspective. Ask the right questions and you'll ensure that your QA investment will meet the diverse needs of your organization.

The big picture.

1. What are the quality assurance and business objectives supported by the QA system?
2. Which individuals, departments, and business units rely on QA results to improve performance and meet goals and objectives?
3. Of the QA and business objectives that the system was designed for, which are now successfully met and which need improvement?
4. What are the consequences of failing to meet currently stated business objectives?
5. What additional processes and objectives would we like our future QA technology to support?
6. What do we need to do now to prepare for audit needs in three to five years?

Data gathering and integration capabilities.

7. Can the system automatically gather a complete set of up-to-date data from internal sources?
8. Do current processes require substantial QA time and effort to ensure that data is correct?

Ability to meet QA department objectives.

9. Can QA change questionnaires in a timely way or do external dependencies introduce unacceptable delays?
10. Do our reporting capabilities give us the information needed to monitor and improve performance at all levels?
11. Are QA results easily and appropriately accessible by the right people?
12. Are we confident that our reviewers are sufficiently calibrated so that they provide consistent, reliable results that are trusted by all internal clients?

Seek broad input about the strengths, shortcomings, and implications of QA results from representatives of diverse managerial levels, departments, and business units.

The best performance information for business managers.

13. Does the system capture and analyze all the metrics that managers need to identify root causes, prioritize problem areas, and appropriately address performance issues?
14. Do managers have the ability to aggregate, segment, and otherwise view results in the ways that are most useful to them?
15. Are performance problems linked directly to leakage and other financial consequences?
16. Does our QA system include development planning tools that enable us to improve individual and departmental performance?
17. Does the QA system provide remediation or action item tools to help manage and track the resolution of critical issues?

Tools to enable reviewer success.

18. How well does the system enable reviewers to perform complete, detailed, and accurate audits?
19. Are the questionnaires easy and efficient for reviewers to use, only showing them the questions that apply to the file at hand?
20. Do field reviewers have access to the information they need to deliver feedback and have a meaningful dialog with their direct reports?

Built-in flexibility to meet long-term needs.

21. How easy is it to adapt the QA system to fit new organizational structures resulting from reorganizations, acquisitions, or other situations?
22. Who is involved when QA questionnaires or processes need to be modified to meet changes in business processes?
23. How often does QA need to add new questionnaires or modify existing ones?
24. How easy is it for QA to create new reports and change the parameters of existing reports?
25. How scalable is the system to ensure that it can handle long-term organizational growth?

Moving in the right direction.

This list of questions is meant to be a starting point as you move forward in your search for a quality assurance system that successfully serves the entire organization. Undoubtedly, many more questions will arise as your team reviews the pros and cons of your current system, considers areas for improvement, and investigates a variety of technology options.

It is tempting to focus on relatively short-term QA goals that resolve the immediate issues that have been causing you to lose sleep. But to avoid more sleepless nights a year from now, encourage everyone on your internal team to dig deep when looking at future needs for their department, line of business, or managerial level.

Provide ample opportunity for key leaders to ask questions and provide input into areas that are relevant to their responsibilities and expertise. In particular, seek feedback on complex and global issues from those who understand the breadth of QA and business requirements. In addition, avoid tunnel vision; solicit the opinions of industry peers, business networks, and former colleagues who have appropriate knowledge and experience.

> Explore the entire QA process to determine inefficiencies within the QA organization, as well as those resulting from limited reporting capabilities.

Whether you ask 25 questions or 250, one thing is certain: It's well worth it to take a systematic, comprehensive look at your QA system and how it effects the larger organization. Through the process of questioning, you and your team will move in a clear, focused direction and take a well considered approach to exploring your QA system options.

Athenium delivers exceptional performance improvement solutions that optimize the QA process for insurers worldwide.

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