

Definition

Think about our business as a factory - an assembly line like that chugs along with units getting progressively developed into a final product. Imagine an auto manufacturing line: the frame moves slowly down the line with the first team installing the seats, the next team bolting in the doors, followed by the third team installing the seat belts. As the car gets progressively developed, it's important that the previous team's work was done with high quality. To ensure this, the door team may first measure the seat installation so it doesn't interfere with their door installation - this is an input quality bar. In the context of our business, the input quality bar is an objective list which is used to measure the quality of the unit your team starts with.

Instructions: How to Fix your Input Quality Bar

Step 1: Focus on your internal quality bar

You may be thinking: "Wait, I thought we were talking about the input quality bar, why should we focus on our internal quality bar first?" Many managers make the mistake of focusing on their team's input quality bar when their internal quality bar is also low. Before you even think about the input quality bar, you should be obsessed with your internal quality bar because this is something you can control. The input quality bar is dependent on someone else and therefore not as important. Even if you have a decent internal quality and zero input quality bar, don't progress until your internal quality bar is excellent. You should only proceed to step 2 if you have mastered your internal quality bar.

Step 2: Define the Input Quality Bar

Many teams do not have an existing input quality bar so you need to first define it. Teams may have an input quality bar but it is not documented and objectively defined. As you write your input quality bar, follow the same standards as defining your internal quality bar.

Step 3: Agree with your Supplier and Document

Once you've written down your input quality bar, schedule a meeting with your supplier, the team that works on the unit before it reaches your team. During this call, both teams need to agree that all produced units will meet this quality bar or be rejected. Once you've reached an agreement, publically document the input quality bars so ICs, managers, VPs and up have access to the objective input quality bar.

Step 4: Measure input unit quality

Before starting the work on any order, apply your Input Quality Bar checklist and accept the order only if it passes the Input QB. If the unit fails Input QB:

- Reject the input
- Give feedback to your supplier about why you rejected their unit (e.g. if unit tracked via Jira, mark the issue in a way that your supplier can search & track failures)
- Keep track of all input unit rejections and identify the reason for failure for each unit. Once more than 10 units have failed, identify the most common reason and schedule a call with your supplier where you identify solutions to fix the recurring issue

Note: what to do when your supplier is also your customer: (e.g. for Help Centers, the input for support tickets comes from the customer/end user)

- When you are dealing with end users, it is a bad practice to reject tickets. If you raise your Internal Quality Bar too much, your customers won't have any output from you, which will kill the business.
- Rather than rejecting it, you should guide your customer to provide you with better input (e.g. kindly request missing information).
- If you realize you are having recurring problems, you can benefit from automated solutions to improve the quality of your input.
 - You can create how-to documents / KB articles or create self-service automated solutions that are searched & populated real time when your customer is submitting a ticket for you.
 - You can use AUI / chatbots to provide quicker service or improve input quality.
 - You can use wizard/forms to guide your customer to supply high-quality input.