

Quality Qorner

Just For Us

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When I was studying to take the certification examinations offered by the American Society for Quality to become a certified quality auditor and certified quality manager, I used the reference materials in the suggested reading lists. One reference that caught my attention was entitled, *The Memory Jogger*.¹ I thought at the time that anything that would help me remember *anything* about quality management would definitely be useful!

The Memory Jogger that I studied from has been in circulation for about 15 years. The content of this 3-1/2" by 5-1/2" pocket-sized, spiral-bound booklet features tools for continuous improvement and effective planning and provides examples of how the tools can be used to improve quality. Unfortunately, all the examples are about manufacturing processes and problems, forcing me to think hard about how the same tool could be applied to the quality problems we face in the health care and medical laboratory environments. For the purposes of taking the examination, however, the information I learned from this handy study guide was useful when answering several of the examination questions and working through the problem-solving cases.

Recently, some smart folks at COLA—an organization that promotes laboratory accreditation through education (www.cola.org)—decided that the medical laboratory community would benefit from having its own *Memory Jogger* of continuous-improvement tools with examples and cases from the health care community. Three COLA education and accreditation specialists, themselves medical technologists, teamed with the original authors to develop *The Memory Jogger II for Laboratory Operations*.²

Here's a short quote from the Foreword, written by the laboratory community's own quality control expert, James O. Westgard:

"COLA is taking an important step in embracing and promoting quality systems and state-of-the-art continual improvement tools. These tools can work in all size labs, at all levels of complexity. COLA is giving you the tools to succeed."

Although the 22 quality tools discussed in the book are arranged in alphabetical order, a tool selector chart at the beginning provides a meaningful organization to enable choosing the correct tools for appropriate points in an improvement project. The first grouping, *Working With Ideas*, includes commonly-used tools, such as brainstorming, cause and effect diagrams, and flowcharts. This section also includes lesser-known, but equally useful, tools, such as affinity diagrams, force field analysis, and multivoting.

The second grouping, *Working With Numbers*, contains statistical tools familiar to laboratory professionals, such as con-

trol charts (think Levey-Jennings QC charts) and histograms. This section also includes simple tools, such as check sheets, scatter diagrams, and Pareto charts, and introduces a process-capability tool to determine if a given process is conforming to customer requirements.

The last grouping, *Working With Teams*, summarizes key points of working in teams, such as starting a team, maintaining momentum, conducting effective meetings, and ending team projects.

A laboratory-oriented case study introduces the Plan-Do-Check-Act problem-solving process-improvement model in which a fictional laboratory project team used tools from all three groupings to determine why their small, but growing, referral laboratory was experiencing a decreasing test volume.

I do wish I had had such a wonderful resource for quality improvement and problem solving when I was our laboratory's quality coordinator. This booklet would also be a great resource for teaching quality management tools to laboratory students. I hope your laboratory takes advantage of the opportunity to have and use a quality improvement product made just for us, by laboratory professionals just like us. You can order it from www.goalqpc.com. It's inexpensive and multi-copy discounts are available.

In this age of electronic everything—shown on tiny screens—I find it comforting to hold a book in my hand and be able to open it directly to information useful in the laboratory environment. Now, I simply need a *Memory Jogger* to help me remember where I put my reading glasses!

References

1. Brassard M, Ritter D. *The Memory Jogger II*. Methuen, MA: GOAL/QPC, 1994.
2. Cardelino C, Harkins M, Johnson C, et. al. *The Memory Jogger II For Laboratory Operations*. Salem, NH: GOAL/QPC and COLA, 2007.

This Month's Quality Quote:

"Our work is critically important if health care is to get it right,"

—James O. Westgard, PhD

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