

THE MONSTRO CASE

You are quality manager for the Computer Division of Monstro Systems, Inc., a large electronics company. The Computer Division was once BRANE, an independent company which Monstro acquired in order to enter the computer business. Shortly after BRANE became a division of Monstro, the general manager (the former owner) resigned. He was replaced by Mr. Grady, who had been head of Monstro's Semiconductor Division. Soon thereafter, Mr. Grady brought you, his former quality manager, into the Computer Division. It became your job to introduce an appropriate quality system.

During the past three years, you have done an heroic job of improving quality of components purchased from suppliers, of setting up process controls to improve Production Department performance, and of setting up inspection and test procedures. There is agreement that what goes out the door now does meet the specifications. But you are hearing news of a field problem--downtime of the computers. Apparently, the causes are due to field operating conditions being different from factory test conditions. Also, to fix these troubles would require engineering changes in the product specifications, in the test equipment, and in the test specifications. It is not clear whether the downtime of Monstro's computers is any worse than that of competitors, but your Sales Department is unhappy anyhow. The main pressure has been on the Engineering Department to find ways to improve the product. The engineers have already come up with some design changes. However, the factory has been dragging its feet on making these changes effective ("It will increase our costs and slow down our deliveries"). The Customer Service Department is also dragging its feet on making these changes effective ("Our budget can't handle so many changes").

Last week you attended a seminar on Management of Quality. Some of the experts there, as well as other attendees, argued that a quality manager should take the initiative to coordinate the work of all departments in all reliability matters. At that time, it sounded like a good idea for the company (and, incidentally, for the importance of your own department). Now that you are back in your office, taking the initiative gives you some pause. Actually, no one has invited you to get into this downtime problem. Moreover, it's a mess and looks like someone will be in trouble before it is straightened out. So you sense that, if you take the initiative to get into this arena, you could become one of the casualties.

Problem: What action do you decide to take?