

The Ugly Truth About Most Quality Management Systems Implementation.

You have no doubt heard the mantra about how fantastic ISO 9001: 2000 is, and how it really does save you money in operating costs, and keeps customers happy...but how come the expensive consultants and registrar salesmen never mention the horror stories? Here are some comments we've heard from people who did not have a happy experience...

"I have seen no cost savings achieved as a result of being certified to ISO9001: 2000."

"If our customers did not insist on us being certified, we would dump ISO9001: 2000. It is not cost effective for us, and just creates a huge paper mill that has to be maintained."

"The standard is just a make-work system created and maintained for the benefit of the Quality Industry as a whole, with few if any practical benefits for small companies like ours."

"We expected a lot more from being certified than ISO 9000 has given us. It is an over-rated system."

Not many in the quality management business will tell you about comments like these listed above, all taken from actual ISO 9001: 2000 certified customers, and sad to say, they are more common than you might think.

Why is this so? Why are the quality management systems of some companies successful while others are destined for failure or even headed for the scrap heap? More to the point, which category does your company fall in?

There may be no single simple answer to these questions, but do you find yourself feeling that:

You got soured by the expense of both implementation and maintenance of the old ISO 9000 system, which became a huge paper mill, and this new version is just more of the same...

You, your Quality Department or Manager really did not grasp the whole concept of a process approach in your quality management system as a tool for the whole business...

You've implemented the ISO 9001: 2000 system, but it has not produced the results you expected, and has not expanded your share of the market...

You've heard of the many negatives of ISO implementation and certification, and as none of your customers are demanding it, you need to be convinced it is for you...

Sadly, these experiences are all too common, but the real culprit may be you or the owner or operations manager. **As in all such systems success must come from effective implementation, pro-active leadership, and a grasp of the essentials and benefits of a well-implemented system.**

Why people fear ISO.

Many managers, whether owners, middle managers, or employees, are tacitly afraid of the changes inherent in ISO, fearing that any change will expose deficiencies in their ability to manage. So they resist challenges to their management style; and change to the status quo or their “comfort level”.

Questions come up like, “How will this affect my getting a raise or a promotion?” or maybe, “Is my job being threatened? or perhaps, “How do they expect me to take on the ISO project when I already have my hands full doing my job? These questions should be expected and need to be answered in advance as much as possible to dispel such fears. In these scenarios there will be all kinds of other excuses offered for not being enthusiastic about meeting the challenges that come with adopting an **effective** management system ranging from a lack of money, to “we are too busy to take on this task right now”, to citing other companies’ alleged poor experience with ISO implementation or the registration process.

Where these opinions exist, and if certification has been imposed and/or mandated from above, it is therefore not surprising to find that in many cases “lip service” is paid to the concept or the reality of ISO certification, or even an ISO compliant quality management system. The spirit and real intent of the concept is not being visualized, or understood, and from this emanates all the negativity surrounding ISO 9001: 2000 QMS achievement.

The result of a negative attitude about ISO.

In many instances and even under the guidelines of the “new” and revised ISO9001: 2000 standard, many owners and managers still regard this as a “Quality” issue, to be relegated to the “Quality Department” for implementation, and not what it really is, which is a “management” issue...a valuable tool through which management can make improvements and changes in the company and change the corporate culture to be more responsive to external market influences and to customer needs.

It is probably true to say that managers or companies that maintain this defeatist perspective towards any of the ISO standards, and regard them as burdens rather than as opportunities for improvement will not be around for long. We live in a rapidly changing business environment, where “globalization”, free trade, and the ability to outsource almost any commodity or service have all imposed extreme competitive pressures on businesses. A good manager has to ask himself if his business will be around in five years, and will his job survive the changes that will occur in that short time frame. Gone are the days when success can be assured by doing it the “good old fashioned way, the way we’ve always done it.” The rules have changed, and today, companies should be more concerned about survival and keeping a customer base happy and satisfied than about anything else.

What to do next!

If upon reading this you think that perhaps your Quality Management System is not up to par, and is not the tool it should be for the successful growth and assured survival of your company, there are solutions to be had from a few select consulting firms that have achieved the mastery of innovative implementation of a proven QMS, or the

improvement of an existing system, or even the most cost effective maintenance of an established system.

Ten things that you must identify in any quality management consulting firm before you make your selection. When researching you must look for:

1. A company that seeks to provide answers to your problems rather than merely sell its services. A company that listens and observes more than it talks.
2. A company that has verifiable expertise in the areas in which you seek help, and that keeps itself up to date and educated on business trends and state of the art business practices. There are many consultants that give a good selling pitch, but come up short on experience and knowledge in the quality industry.
3. A company that is willing to spell out in a detailed cost proposal the services that it offers as these may relate to your needs. Consultants need to be willing to answer your questions before or when you ask them so there are no unpleasant surprises.
4. A company that will commit to dedicating one consultant to your job or assignment for its duration, so that you do not have to constantly re-educate other consultants. This provides coherence of effort and effective and timely completion of tasks.
5. A company that offers you options in its proposal to cover contingencies that may arise of which you are not aware or anticipate initially.
6. A company that offers reasonable flexibility in scheduling commensurate with your ability to keep to committed schedules, and is price competitive.
7. A company that will offer checkable references as to the timeliness and quality of the work performed for its customers.
8. A company that understands your needs, and will help do the work necessary towards meeting these needs, rather than just giving you assignments to accomplish on your own.
9. A company that assures the highest caliber of personal conduct and ethics in its consultants, who have the business experience and interpersonal skills to be able to induce trust and cooperation among your employees.
10. A company whose consultants are non-confrontational but firm in the advice or findings that are given, all to help you the customer.

Integrated Management Systems (IMS) provides an array of marketing and management consulting services (see www.ims-quality.com) and can provide fresh insight and new angles to solving your business or management problems. If you wish to explore this option, please go to the web-site and check and fill out the "Request Info" form. You will be contacted shortly thereafter.

Francis Crawford is the President of Integrated Management Systems. A consulting firm dedicated to providing both quality and environmental management solutions, located at 2183 Buckingham Road, #297, Richardson, TX 75081. Tel: 972 671 9590. email: fmc@ims-quality.com
URL: <http://www.ims-quality.com>.