

# ISO 9001 seen as framework for accountability in North American non-profit sector

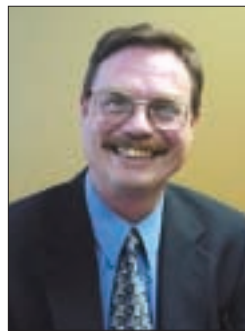
When the Business Education Council of Niagara, Canada, achieved ISO 9001:2000 certification recently, it was seen by associated industry education bodies and sponsors as a "major breakthrough" that would hopefully spread through the US and Canada, and a "significant step forward" for the non-profit sector in terms of accountability in the eyes of clients, sponsors and funders.

**T**he Business Education Council of Niagara (BEC)<sup>1)</sup>, one of the largest and most diverse industry education councils in Canada, has become the first of such organizations in the country to achieve certification to ISO 9001:2000. BEC was recently audited and certified by KPMG Quality Registrar Inc.<sup>2)</sup>.

Dr. Donald Clark, President and Chief Executive Officer of the US-based National Association for Industry-Education Cooperation (NAIEC)<sup>3)</sup>, which operates in the United States, Canada and the

United Kingdom as the clearing-house for information on business/industry involvement in education, described the accomplishment as "a major breakthrough" that he hoped would spread across the US and Canada.

"The staff at BEC Niagara go the head of the class for this," he



BY MURRAY MOFFATT

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Niagara Falls, home to the Business Education Council of Niagara, consists of two dramatic waterfalls on the US-Canadian border on the Niagara river between Lakes Erie and Ontario. The American Falls spans 300 m with a drop of 51 m, while the Horseshoe Falls on the Canadian side stretches 790 m with a fall of 49 m. Much of their flow is diverted to generate electricity, but they remain spectacular tourist attractions.

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BEC Niagara Executive Director Ted Palmer (left), and BEC Niagara Board Member David Adams, Vice President Finance, Niagara Credit Union, at the ISO 9001:2000 certification ceremony.



'Accountability is a recurring theme in considering the impact of a quality management system,' says Connie Shoalts, BEC Niagara Manager of Finance and Administration and ISO Management Representative for Quality.

remarked. "ISO 9000 is a powerful tool to stimulate the alliance between education and the business community in developing a reliable, high performance educational system, aligned with workforce and economic development in communities across Canada and the United States."

Commenting on the implications of certification, Ted Palmer, Executive Director of BEC Niagara, said, "What it simply means is that we have achieved a new, measurable, level of accountability to the public, our clients, and to our various funders, donors and sponsors."

"We began the ISO 9000 certification project in November 1999 and it has involved a lot of hard work and dedication by everyone on staff," he added. "But I believe it's an excellent process for any non-profit organization because it sends a clear signal to stakeholders and the public that you are constantly evaluating the services you provide to clients, and the management of those services. And customer satisfaction and project outcomes are measured on an ongoing basis as well."

BEC is a charitable, non-profit corporation that facilitates alliances between education, industry, labour and community organizations in order to enhance education and employment opportunities, and promote personal and professional growth. Funds for programmes under the BEC umbrella are received from a variety of sources, including the federal and provincial governments, the District School Board of Niagara, the Niagara Catholic District School Board, and corporate sponsors on a project basis.

## A growing trend

Achieving certification to an ISO 9000 quality management standard is a growing trend in the service sector, including non-profit organizations. According to David Muil, KPMG Senior Manager, ISO 9000 – seen as a good marketing tool five years ago – is now considered by the manufacturing sector as a condition of doing business, and is approaching that status in the service sector as well.

"You now see ISO 9000 compliance in banks, hotels, law firms, health care services and educational institutions," he commented. "They're doing it because it's a business management tool, a team effort which puts in place a process to monitor, measure and im-

prove. We try and stress that this is a risk management tool which shows that an organization has demonstrated due diligence if their processes are ever called into question."

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## Implementing ISO 9000 in the service sector

Connie Shoalts, BEC's Manager of Finance and Administration and ISO 9000 Management Representative for Quality, said that it became obvious very early in the implementation process that interpreting standards originally written for the manufacturing sector would be very difficult, so a consultant specializing in quality management systems for service organizations was contracted to provide guidance.

That consultant was Rose Johnson, of Eden Quality Management<sup>4)</sup> who agreed that achieving ISO 9000 certification was a growing trend in the service sector. "There's no question that for non-profit organizations like BEC, it's all about accountability in the eyes of clients,

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sponsors and funders. It can represent an edge in the ever-tightening competition for both public and private sector support. However, I believe the strong internal benefits of a quality management system often outweigh the external benefits."

Ms. Johnson pointed out that customer satisfaction was one of several new requirements of the recently published ISO 9001:2000 standard. One of its eight quality principles is that adherents should be customer-focused organizations. In that endeavour, BEC monitors feedback from all programme participants in order continually to improve its services.

"An organization like BEC must understand current and future client needs and exceed customer expectations," she added. "A factual approach to decision making is another quality principle related to clients. It means you have actually done the research to see that customers want the programme or service you are offering and are willing to use it."

According to Connie Shoalts, accountability is a recurring theme in considering the impact of establishing a quality management system. "We follow very specific procedures and have a system that is constantly under review. That's something we can proudly show any potential sponsor, whether it be the private sector or the government."

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**A significant step forward**

BEC's accomplishment has not gone unnoticed by its sponsors. Jim Williams of the Canadian Federal Government's Human Resources Development Canada<sup>5)</sup> called the

ISO 9000 certification a significant step forward for the non-profit sector in meeting the same quality standards as any commercial business. "Any way we can improve or bolster customer services is great," he stressed. "While ISO 9000 is only one

vehicle, it is an internationally recognized set of standards. Ultimately, it all results in better value for the dollars that the federal government spends on services to citizens through funded agencies like BEC."



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Through ISO 9001:2000 implementation, says Ted Palmer, Executive Director, Business Education Council of Niagara, 'We have achieved a new, measurable, level of accountability to the public, our clients, and to our various funders, donors and sponsors.'



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The Business Education Council of Niagara works in partnership with area school boards to enhance education and employment opportunities, and promote personal and professional growth.