



## ISO 9000:2000 the challenges of the new version

When Roger Frost invited me to contribute the first "Viewpoint" column to *ISO Management Systems*, he stipulated, "Everyone knows that, as Chairman of TC 176, you believe in ISO 9000 and so, for once, I forbid you to engage in the usual praise. Try instead to describe what is wrong – whether about the standard (which would surprise me!) or about the ISO 9000 industry, or about ISO." Our friend Roger, with his un-equalled flair, pressed exactly the right button to prompt my tendency to go against the grain. My only excuse is my conviction that one always stands to gain from questioning oneself. At any rate, it can be quite stimulating. Having said that, the opinions expressed here are neither those of the ISO nor of TC 176.

So first a statement of faith to avoid getting crucified. I do believe in the new edition of the standards:

- ISO 9000:2000
- ISO 9001:2000
- ISO 9004:2000
- ISO 19011:2002 (planned).

I know the amount of work that was put in by the experts and leaders of the working groups and subcommittees involved. Their work deserves to be publicized and I am convinced that the organizational approach they adopted deserves to be studied to identify opportunities for present and future standardization work, in particular the systematic use of project management techniques.

The thoughts I am putting forward here in no way diminish the value or the validity of this work, but on the contrary underline their merit by highlighting the challenges that had to be met. These challenges were numerous

- more contributive to the ultimate aims of companies.

It is this last challenge that I wish to discuss briefly. In my mind, one of the main problems with the 1994 version was that it left the door open to confusion between ends and means, and could therefore lead to an unwanted degree of variability in understanding the minimum requirement threshold. Between the rationale for the standard and a minimalist interpretation of its contents, there was an embarrassing margin which was liable to damage its credibility.

### Several initiatives

Technical Committee TC 176 took several initiatives to reduce this variability :

- first and foremost, by improving the standard;
- then by establishing a formal interpretation process;
- then by taking a structured approach to providing useful complementary information, in cooperation with the ISO Central Secretariat;
- finally, by reducing the variations likely to be introduced by the translation of the standard into languages other than English and

French, in particular by encouraging the preparation of an official international translation into Spanish, a first for ISO.

The 1994 version was criticised among other things for putting too much stress on *documentation* and *records* and not enough on ultimate purpose. To counteract this, the new standard places far more emphasis on *processes* and *results*.

Will the improvements to the standard really help to reduce variability in its implementation and evaluation? This will depend on two things:



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and included that of preparing standards which were:

- more generic,
- more clear and user-friendly,
- more compatible with the similar standards of the ISO 14000 series, and

- *Are companies likely to give themselves a more relevant and more effective quality management system?*
- *Are registrars likely to perform more rigorous audits of those management systems?*

One of the first issues that a company must now address is to *identify the processes needed for the quality management system* (clause 4.1, ISO 9001:2000). This involves the processes *that have an effect on the conformity of the product to requirements* (clauses 1.2, 4.1, ISO 9001:2000). These processes must be controlled and improved. The standard also requires that the system take account of the *customer's perception of the extent to which his requirements* are met at the time of reviewing the system's performance. The standard leaves no doubt, therefore, that the company is at the helm of its quality management system.

It is more obvious in the new edition that rather than following a recipe, the company should question its ultimate purpose and the performance of its system and, on the basis of specific information, undertake effective action to achieve the objectives set, including that of meeting the relevant requirements.

Clearly, a company should be encouraged to exercise its judgment appropriately, but this does not solve all the uncertainties, as can be seen from some of the typical questions I have recently heard:

- "If my employees get poisoned by the food served at the company's cafeteria, that can affect my processes and the conformity of my products. Should the cafeteria's processes therefore be controlled?"
- "Since each result sought should be seen as the output of a process, and since a process is a sequence of activities each having their own result, how far should I break down my processes to measure individual performance, analyse their fluctuations and introduce improvements?"
- confirming that companies observe at least the most minimal literal interpretation of the standard, accepting sometimes to betray to some extent the spirit of the standard;
- encouraging companies to implement a value generating system, sometimes teetering on the edge of consultancy, and at the very least, questioning the company's choices when these appear to be too minimalist.

### A minimalist approach

When in doubt, a number of companies will, as in the past, try to get "The" answer from their registrar. The assumption here is that if you satisfy the registrar, you will meet the standard. Unfortunately, this too often leads to the minimalist approach I mentioned earlier. I have noted over the years that the activity of registrars lies somewhere between some widely spaced lower and upper limits, which are:



**Registrars are increasingly aware that their existence ultimately depends on just one thing: the credibility of their activity**

IMAGE BANK



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In fact, the part registrars have to play is not easy. They must not act as consultants, but some do actually train the staff in companies and their auditors are often approached for advice. Moreover, the company is "the customer". Some want value, others merely want a certificate with as few complications as possible and at the best possible price. The registrar has to deal with all of that. Therefore, the company-registrar partnership in itself is a potential source of significant variability in the interpretation of the standard.

That being said, the new edition of the standard is very different and requires new competencies on the part of auditors and registrars. This was clearly spelled out in a joint communiqué issued by ISO (ISO/TC 176 and ISO/CASCO, the Committee on Conformity Assessment) and IAF (International Accreditation Forum). Auditors are given less

freedom to simply “audit conformity to what is written in the procedures” and will have to take account more extensively of the purpose of the company’s quality management system: conforming products, efficient processes and an effective system.



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Quite a change for some auditors! It is already difficult as it is for a given registrar to achieve uniformity of judgment among its own auditors. One can therefore imagine the challenge involved in ensuring such uniformity between registrars and, what is more, worldwide. Only time will tell whether the registrars and accreditors have met this challenge in a satisfactory way and if the new edition of ISO 9001:2000 has managed to reduce the variability in its implementation and evaluation.

### Sectoral initiatives

Another issue is whether the fact that the new version of the standard is more generic will lead to more sector-specific initiatives, both within ISO and outside ISO. Each sectoral application can either become an additional source of variation or, on the contrary, help ensure greater consistency in a given area by taking into account the peculiarities of that sector.

ISO/TC 176 has been mandated by the ISO Technical Management Board to advise it and ISO’s technical committees in

connection with the discussion or development of such sector-based applications. To support this activity, the new edition of the ISO Directives will contain a revised clause on sectoral policy [clause 6.8.2]. Essentially, this policy aims to maintain the integrity of the ISO 9000 standards, on the grounds that if sectoral standards are developed without a framework, they are likely to undermine the generic standard and, in doing so, to jeopardize their own foundation.

To encourage and facilitate the convergence between sectoral standards, ISO/TC 176, at its Kyoto meeting in July 2000, further established a specific forum to provide groups interested in sectoral applications of the ISO 9000 standards with a place to discuss and think about such issues.

To conclude, let us recall that:

- in the process of developing the standard, hundreds of companies were directly involved in validation exercises with the dual purpose of assessing and subsequently dealing with difficulties in applying the new version of the standard;
- over the years, companies have accumulated significant expertise in relation to the ISO 9000 standards. One can assume that this experience will help them make the right choices when implementing the new edition;

- registrars are increasingly aware that their existence ultimately depends on just one thing: the credibility of their activity. The most credible among them are also the most active in setting the bar higher as far as the quality of their services is concerned.

Finally, I must congratulate ISO for *ISO Management Systems*. This periodical is intended as “the premier platform for exchange and dialogue among the worldwide user community”. It comes at a crucial time and one can only hope that many will take the opportunity to share their experience and points of view with us.

What an idyllic vision to be seated by the fireside one evening, the latest issue of *ISO Management Systems* in one hand, a glass of Scotch or a cup of tea in the other, and a pipe of good tobacco in the other... ■

