

Fascinating quality - 20 years of ISO 9000

Theo Zahner

From national multiplicity to one standard recognised world-wide

Specifications for the characteristics of products and services have been with us since time immemorial. After decades of experience in complex economic sectors (mechanical and electrical engineering, military technology, aerospace technology, as well as energy technology), procedures for the proof of quality were developed. Initially this was applied to long-term sources of supply to create a climate of confidence in which the requirements for the characteristics of the products could be seen to be fulfilled.

The various national standards and the many individual company standards were more of a hindrance than a help. The desire of industry for internationally recognised sets of rules steadily increased.

In Ottawa the first meeting of the newly created ISO TC 176 (Technical Committee) which had the task of specifying internationally applicable requirements for a quality management system took place in 1980. The work was driven forward internationally with a great deal of enthusiasm. The first edition of the ISO 9000-1987 series of standards was also published as a Swiss standard.

As a result, more and more large firms did without their own regulations and instead referenced the ISO standards as an obligatory component in their procurement conditions.

The economic savings and the operational simplicity of having neutral and reliable audits and certificates were obvious. In many countries, the standards also obtained national legal recognition as an important element in the prescribed procedures for conformity evaluation. Some trade associations, which had long offered resistance, now not only intensively took up the standards, but even introduced additional specific requirements (e.g. in the automobile, medicinal products, aviation and foodstuff sectors).

From quality assurance to a process-oriented management system

The ISO 9001/2/3:1994 was well understood in the industry, and some companies had already specified the requirements of the standard in their process chain. Towards the end of the 90's, the desire grew increasingly for a process-oriented standard adapted to the value creation chain and, above all, because the growing service area had problems with the existing structure of standards. The revision of the requirements and the definition of the four main process groups (management, resources, value creation, measurement and improvement) made the standard more understandable and helped the ISO 9001:2000 management model to win wider acceptance. More and more

industries from the service area such as health services, training systems, tourism and public administration were inspired by systematic quality management.

The ISO 9000 (et seq.) series of standards also served as a model for further successful standards, such as environmental management (ISO 14001), occupational health and safety (OHSAS 18001), food safety (ISO 22000) and information security (ISO 27001, ISO 20000).

The ISO 9001 management model therefore served as a basis for the integration of all theme and industry-oriented requirements. In addition, it is a solid foundation for progress towards Business Excellence.

Value in the future

The ISO 9000 series of standards experienced the most widespread application of any standard ever. Its management model is the most widely implemented management model in the world. Today, the standard counts over 1 million certified users. The growth rates are steadily high, both in industrialised countries as well as in the countries of Asia and South America.

The global challenge to the economy of resource efficiency, sustainability and innovation as well as for the inclusion of all stakeholders, is ideally supported with the ISO 9000 series of standards.

Correctly applied and reliably certified, the management model and the requirements of ISO 9000 (et seq.) remain an important key to lasting success.

Valued customers, we thank you here for your dedicated commitment to maintaining and improving enterprise quality at a high level. Quality is truly fascinating, quality creates confidence, confidence creates lasting success. However, above all, we wish you considerable quality of life.

Theo Zahner
Managing Director SQS, Member ISO TC 176

SQS
Swiss Association for Quality and Management Systems
Bernstrasse 103
P.O. Box
CH-3052 Zollikofen
Switzerland

Tel: +41 31 910 35 31
Fax: +41 31 910 35 45
<http://www.sqs.ch>