

Fixing the ISO9001 Quality Problem—Turn ISO 9001 Clauses into Your Business Quality System Specifications.

Abstract

Fixing the ISO9001 Quality Problem— Turn ISO 9001 Clauses into Your Business Quality System Specifications. In 1987 the ISO9000 quality management series was launched; superseding the earlier BS5750 document. It has progressed from its initial product quality focus to its now customer satisfaction focus. During all its life the question of the usefulness of ISO9001 to business growth and performance has dogged it. The greatest fault of ISO9001 is its lack in setting quality performance. It mistakenly asks companies to select their own quality standards to work to. That is its single greatest problem—the lack of quality benchmarks and is the reason why it is common to hear managers call ISO 9001 a waste of time. But if you address ‘quality’ correctly in your ISO 9001 quality management system you can turn your company into a world-class performer within three years.

Keywords: ISO9001, requirements for quality systems, world class business performance

ISO 9001 says nothing about how to become world class. That is its great weakness—plenty of advice but no method. You need to see that weakness in ISO 9001 for yourself otherwise all your efforts to introduce and use ISO 9001 are totally wasted as a way to improve and secure your business’ future. You might sell more product or service because you can say to customers that you meet ISO 9001 requirements, but they will soon see that your quality system has made no difference because the products or service remain the same as they were before ISO 9001 certification.

If you replicate what you already have you can only keep getting what you always got. Those companies that buy ISO9001 ‘out of a box’ and structure their documents to the quality framework needed for ISO 9001 certification have only added more cost to their business for no added value. You will be very lucky to find good answers that improve your company’s quality performance by simply filling the blank spaces of pre-packaged quality documents with the contents of your existing business system. It will get you an ISO 9001 certificate for your wall because you can show the ISO 9001 auditor that your quality management system satisfies all the clauses. But your business will be no better off because you are not striving to reach higher performance benchmarks.

Having best-in-class quality benchmarks is vital because with them you can measure your performance—you cannot kid yourself about how good you are or how far you are from world best performance. If you want to be an Olympian high jumper the current world record is 2.45 meters¹. If you cannot develop to the point where you can high jump 2.45 meters you will never be a world class high jumper—that is the benchmark you must meet to be amongst the world’s best athletes. What are the benchmarks that your business must meet to be great? Setting those targets is the start of creating a truly useful business quality management system; nothing else can help you be world class until you have a clear direction and focus.

Fortunately you don’t have to wait long to find-out if your company can be great, or even just good, because the marketplace will mercilessly bury any business that does not perform. Companies cannot kid themselves they are good if there is no cash flow from customers. If a business cannot create customers it will not survive, and customers will not support a business that does not help them to get what they want.

To help companies be great the ISO 9001 quality system requirements were invented by business and industry. In the mistaken belief that it would force suppliers to improve their performance governments and corporations world-wide designated that their vendors had to be ISO9001 certified. We have all now learnt that ISO9001 certification does nothing to improve quality.

¹ As of 3 January 2011 Javier Sotomayor (Cuba) is the men's record holder with a jump of 2.45 meters.

The problem is obvious when you read any clause in ISO 9001. Take for example clause 5.4.1 Quality Objectives: *“Top management shall ensure that quality objectives, including those needed to meet requirements for product [see 7.1 a)], are established at relevant functions and levels within the organization. The quality objectives shall be measurable and consistent with the quality policy.”*

How exactly do you do that well? Ask a thousand people to explain how to satisfy the clause and you could get a thousand different answers. Yet only one answer will produce the best result out of the thousand. If you run a business you would want to use the best answer. But ISO9001 does not give you that answer and so every company makes a guess—they leave it to luck to find the best way; mostly they just replicate what they already have. They do not use the hidden power in ISO 9001 to intentionally make their business better and better.

To turn the clauses of ISO 9001 into truly useful advice you need to set performance benchmarks for the clauses. As an example, Table 1 shows how clause 5.4.1 is developed into a series of benchmarks that give clear direction to its User and will improve the company that meets them.

ISO 9001 Clause 5.4.1 Requirements	Description	Minimum Benchmark
Quality objectives	Something sort or aimed for	SMART goals for customer satisfaction and business performance
Requirements of product	Need or expectation that is stated, generally implied or obligatory	Meet ACE 3T criteria and optimise Taguchi Loss Function
Established at relevant functions and levels	Set into the job performance of those in the organisational hierarchy	Every activity that impacts a product or service has clear instructions of how to do it correctly
Measurable	Determine the value of a quantity	Effects of an activity’s performance are detected and clearly observed
Consistent with quality policy	In harmony with the intentions and directions of an organisation	Clear and direct connection to achieving business, product or service performance

Table 1 Turning ISO 9001 Clauses into Quality System Specifications

Once you have performance quality targets you can then design the business processes to achieve them. How does your business get from where it is today and reach world class results in three years? Clearly the method you chose to reach the targets is vital to your success. You use ISO 9001 to record your method and to clearly explain to the people in your company how they use the method correctly. That is the proper use of a ISO 9001 quality system—to provide the map and directions of exactly how your business will reach its quality targets (not its profit target—profit is a result of satisfied customers; quality product and service comes first).

The ISO 9001 Quality System Requirements is a wonderful standard because it collects together the important factors that you need to work on to improve your businesses. But it cannot improve your business because it sets no performance targets to meet and does not tell you how to reach them. Until you first decide the performance standard you will reach and what path you will take to get there ISO 9001 cannot help you to create a great business.

My best regards to you,

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