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Best Project Management Practices in the Implementation of an ISO 9001 Quality Management System

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Abstract

The implementation of ISO 9001 quality management systems in 21 organizations was studied through semi-structured interviews with the respective quality managers. In general, the organizations seem to look at the implementation of a quality management system as a project and they employ standard project management tools, albeit to a different extent and in different ways. The commitment and direct participation of management was a key factor for a successful implementation, as well as direct participation of the employees, and good preparation and goal setting. It can be concluded that organizations that planned for their internal cost of implementation, that is the cost of direct participation of the employees, were likely to implement their quality management systems in the time they expected—and their time of implementation was shorter than for organizations that didn't look at this internal cost.

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1. Introduction

Quality management and project management are related disciplines. Project management has long been associated with the term “temporary organization” whereas quality management has been associated with the term

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“permanent organization”. However, project management as a discipline has matured towards the management of permanent organizations. This orientation reflects a modern organization that brings value to its customers through projects and has chosen to organize its activities to a large extent by initiating, executing and delivering projects. This trend is driven by the business environment and the markets, which demand that organizations be increasingly responsive and dynamic.

Project management maturity is rising. PMI's Pulse of the profession in 2012 reported that 20% of participants in the annual global survey of practitioners and project management leaders described their organizations as having high overall project management maturity. The corresponding figure in 2006 was 11% (PMI, 2012). This observation is in line with another large survey by PWC, the Global survey on the status of project management where more than 62% of companies in the 2012 survey were operating in level 4 or level 5 of the maturity scale. The corresponding figure in 2004 was 21.9% (Clack, Fass, Graeber, Honan and Ready, 2012). The PMI report points out a clear correlation between higher maturity levels and on-time and on-budget delivery in projects (PMI, 2012).

Increasing project management maturity reflects a clear trend. Organizations are applying process approaches in their operations, in other words, they are using quality management in their project management. Organizations are increasingly standardizing their project management practices across all or most of their enterprise (PMI, 2012).

One aspect of this synergy is the way organizations implement quality management in their operations. As part of a research project into the perceptions of employees of ISO 9001 certified organizations regarding the quality management systems in their organizations, the way in which organizations had implemented their ISO 9001 quality management systems was assessed. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the implementation as a project and the project management practices that are applied in the implementation of ISO 9001 quality management systems.

2. Theory

Quality management as a management field is rich with research on different aspects and theories, empirical data from the field and theoretical elaborations. For a relatively young discipline, some of its basic aspects are well defined and established through well-known and widely used international management standards such as ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. ISO 9001 is applied in different kinds of organizations all over the world. Priede (2012) discusses the total number of issued ISO 9001 certificates and countries in the world in the period 1993-2010. This has grown from more than 46 thousand certificates in 60 countries in 1993 to 1.1 million certificates in 178 countries in 2010.

The focus in research has not been on the project of implementing a quality management. Sampaio, Saraiva and Rodrigues (2009) did an exhaustive literature review of ISO 9001 studies and analyzed 100 research papers in a quest to create an overview of ISO 9001 certification research. They defined 5 categories as the main themes for research in the area:

- ISO 9001 certification market evolution.
- ISO 9001 certification motivations and benefits, barriers and drawbacks.
- Impacts on organizational performance.
- Impacts on companies' financial performance.
- ISO 9001 and TQM – are they complementary or independent from each other?

Tang and Kam (1999) did a survey of ISO 9001 implementation in engineering consultancies in Hong Kong. Only 42% of the firms in the study employed external quality consultants in developing the management systems but quality consultants were considered helpful. The time it took to achieve certification by 19 firms in this study varies from 9 to 24 months and the average was 14 months.

Poksinka, Eklund and Dahlgaard (2006) studied the implementation of ISO 9001 in small organizations with emphasis on lost opportunities, benefits and influencing factors. This was a case study with three small organizations. They concluded that many opportunities for improvement were lost in the way ISO 9001 was

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