

Environmental management system adoption by Australasian organisations: part 1: reasons, benefits and impediments

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Abstract

The decision to adopt environmental management system (EMS) and to develop effective implementation strategies has engrossed managers at all levels and in all types of organisations in recent years. Some organisations have claimed that environmental issues have been determining their bottom-line and business performance in the market place. This paper is first part in the series focussing on the reasons for EMS implementation and the benefits and impediments associated with the process. Measures commonly practised by organisations to overcome/address the impediments are also presented in this paper. The findings of this paper are based on a questionnaire survey mailed to Australasian organisations on their experiences with ISO 14001 implementation and certification. © 2002 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

The ISO 14000 series of standards or the International Standard for Environment was released in September 1996 and comprises of two main parts: (i) specification with guidance for use and (ii) general guidelines or principles, systems and supporting techniques. Within the series only ISO 14001 (commonly referred to as the environmental management system—EMS) is the specification document, and the only one that organisations can certify themselves with. Other standards in the series such as ISO 14004, ISO 14011 and ISO 14012 are guiding documents, not mandatory for obtaining certification, nonetheless assist the organisations in satisfying the ISO 14001 criteria.

ISO 14000 standard series can be considered as a double-edged tool providing tangible and intangible benefits to both the government/regulatory agencies (such as the environmental protection agency—EPA) and the organisations themselves. This can be stated as the standard aims to assist ISO itself and organisations in procuring

objectives such as to (Sayre, 1996, p. 100; Zuckerman, 1997, p. 94):

- reduce waste, resource depletion and environmental pollution;
- design products for minimising environmental impact in product use and disposal;
- control environmental impact of raw material sourcing and new product development;
- promote environmental awareness among employees and within the community;
- provide a platform for companies to demonstrate their commitment to environmental protection;
- help management pursue continual improvement in environmental performance;
- provide a world-wide focus on environmental management;
- promote a voluntary, consensus standard approach for environmental issues;
- harmonise national environmental rules, labels, and methods;
- demonstrate a commitment to moving beyond regulatory compliance;
- improve global environmental management and promote sustainable development through trade and minimise environmental trade barriers.

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The ISO 14001 standard comprises of five main elements: environmental policy, planning, implementation and operation, checking and corrective action, and management review (Fig. 1). These elements are a prerequisite for an organisation to implement an effective EMS. In views of Hammerschmid and Ulian (1998, p. 5) a fully implemented and certified EMS would effectively:

- manage environmental issues worth millions of dollars;
- determine the organisation's success in maintaining the positive public and shareholder perception concerning the environment;
- reduce the risk of environmental incidents occurring;
- assist in demonstrating due diligence;
- over the long-term, potentially reduce staff numbers by ensuring that only the right work is undertaken.

In this paper we present the results of a questionnaire survey focussing on EMS/ISO14001 adoption by Australasian organisations. More specifically we focus on the drivers, benefits and impediments of EMS adoption. This survey is part of a large research project that is examining the role of employees and suppliers, as organisational stakeholders, during the successful adoption of an EMS. Successful adoption is defined as one being faster in implementation, accompanied with fewer impediments (such as resistance from stakeholders) and with quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits. For this project the stakeholders includes only the organisations top management, employees and suppliers.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section presents a review of the literature relating to drivers or reasons for EMS adoption, its benefits and impediments. This is followed by the section on research methodology. Next, the findings from the survey are presented and discussed. The final sections of the paper presents a summary of the survey findings.

2. Literature review

This section presents an overview of the literature pertaining to the drivers for organisations to implement and obtain certification to an EMS and the benefits received from its implementation. The literature relating to challenges or obstacles encountered during the EMS implementation and the measures taken to address the same are also reviewed.

2.1. Drivers for EMS adoption

With the onset of globalisation, more and more organisations are being compelled to adopt new techniques and technologies to overcome the rigorous competition and issues of 'environmental sustainability'. Besides influencing the political decision making process, environmental issues are also affecting the industrial sector. As noted in Fig. 2, organisations are facing pressure from a number of sources to become 'environment friendly'. These sources can be broadly classified under four main categories: the market (mainly the external forces directly impacting the competitiveness of the

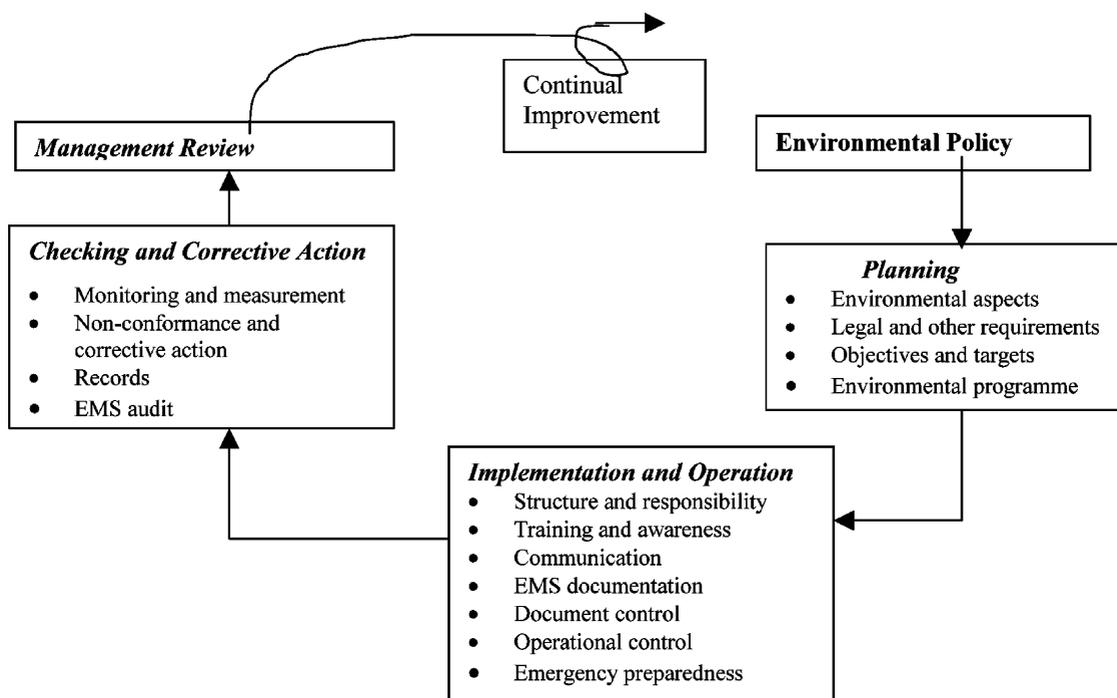


Fig. 1. The five elements of ISO 14001 (AS/NZS, 1996, p. vi; Sadgrone, 1997, p. 174).

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