



BY GIANCARLO COLFERAI

Giancarlo Colferai is Project Leader of ISO/TC 176/SC 3 Working Group 9, *Guidelines for the selection and utilization of quality management system consultants*. He is a member of the ISO joint working group for the development of ISO 19011, *Guidelines for quality and/or environmental management systems auditing*, and of the ISO/CASCO, Committee on conformity assessment, working group for ISO 17024, *General requirements for bodies providing certification of persons*. After 38 years' experience in service industries as manager, he is now Director of CEPAS, an Italian body carrying out certification of persons and training courses, which is a member of the International Auditor and Training Certification Association (IATCA). He also writes and lectures on quality management and on the qualification of persons and training courses.

CEPAS, Viale di Val Fiorita, 90,
00144 Rome, Italy.
Tel. + 39 06 5915373.
Fax + 39 06 5915374.
E-mail cepas@tin.it
Web www.cepas.it

How to choose a competent quality management system consultant

ISO technical committee ISO/TC 176, which is responsible for the ISO 9000 standards, has launched the development of a technical specification, ISO/TS 21095, *Guidelines for the selection and utilization of quality management system consultants*, which is expected to be completed in the first half of 2002. This article explains why it is so important for both organization and consultant that such guidelines should exist.

The selection and utilization of a competent quality management system consultant is frequently the first vital step that an organization takes towards implementing a quality management system. The basis of the relationship between the organization, the consultant and the quality management system implemented depends on the clarity and integration of both the needs and objectives of the organization together with the competence and professionalism of the consultant.

The first meeting of ISO/TC 176/SC 3 Working Group 9, which has been given the job of developing the guidelines, was held on 22-24 May at the Milan headquarters of the Italian national standards institute, UNI.

WG 9 was established by ISO/TC 176/SC 3 after the positive result of the ballot on an Italian new work item proposal based on the Italian standard UNI 10836. The Italian proposal envisaged a guidance standard for the *qualification* of quality management system consultants, but during the Milan meeting, WG 9 decided that it was more suitable to specify guidelines enabling organizations – especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) – to *select and*

utilize competent quality management system consultants.

Organizations may choose to rely on their own resources in designing, developing and implementing a quality management system, but many will use the services of external consultants. The selection of a consultant by an organization can be a crucial factor in determining the success of the implementation process, in order to ensure that the quality management system meets the organization's planned objectives in the most efficient and economical manner.

The problem

In the market-place, there exist *self-styled* quality management system consultants, without the appropriate competence and with little experience, who contact organizations offering their services. This can be damaging not only for the organizations, which may waste time and money, but also for the image and reputation of the quality management systems sector as a whole, and especially for competent quality management system consultants.

The moment when an entrepreneur, especially of an SME, who wishes to implement an ISO 9001 quality management system, selects a consultant is crucial. Frequently for the entrepreneur, it is the first time that he or she has contact with the world of ISO 9000 and consequently is not sufficiently informed to be able to make an effective choice of a competent consultant. The entrepreneur is therefore often at the mercy of the first person who claims to be a quality management system consultant.

The guidelines being developed by ISO are therefore intended to provide entrepreneurs and managers with the criteria necessary to make an effective choice.

During the meeting in Milan, the WG 9 prepared a CD 1 (Committee Draft 1) of the guidelines and sent it to ISO/TC 176/SC 3 for approval and, subsequently, for circulation to all

Subcommittee 3 members for comment. The next meeting of WG 9 was scheduled from 8-12 October 2001 in Birmingham, United Kingdom, where all the SC 3 members' comments were to be analyzed and a CD 2, or a Draft International Standard drawn up.

The proposed solution

The CD 1, after introduction, scope, normative references, terms and definition, covers the personal attributes, competencies, and ethical considerations applying to quality management system consultants, and their use by organizations.

According to the guidelines, a competent consultant should be communicative, versatile, practical and perceptive and should have detailed knowledge of relevant standards, certification processes and skills in general quality management methodologies and techniques

The consultant should also have knowledge of the following:

- statutory and regulatory requirements relevant to the organization's activity;
- organizational, methodological and technological situations relevant to the product sector in which the organization operates;
- business administration skills which allow the consultant to understand how the quality management system integrates with the overall management of the organization.

One of the most important factors in the selection of a quality management system consultant is his ability to apply knowledge and skills in real situations, therefore, the consultant should have relevant experience in managerial, professional or technical situations involving the exercise of judgement, problem solving and communication with other people at all levels.

According to the draft ISO guidelines, the quality management consultant should aim to:

- illustrate clearly throughout the organization the concepts of quality management, paying special care to the understanding and adoption of the eight quality management principles described in ISO 9000:2000 and ISO 9004:2000;
- involve actively all relevant personnel in the implementation of the quality management system;
- identify and enhance the organization's strong points and key processes, limiting formal aspects to the minimum required to ensure that the organization's objectives for its quality management system are met;
- assist the organization in achieving a "documented quality management system" – and not a "system based only on documents" – where the documents should be developed in order to add value to the whole process;
- guide and lead the organization in identifying and implementing the appropriate processes needed for its specific quality management system (considering cultural characteristics and business environment);
- evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the quality management system processes and stimulate the organization to look for opportunities to improve them;
- promote continual improvement within the organization through the adoption of self assessment, management review, systematic use of the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle and others suitable methods;



- train employees of the organization to continue the maintenance of the quality management system after the consultant has finished his task, and, where necessary,
- identify and facilitate the integration of the quality management system with any other management system (such as environmental, or occupational health and safety).

Ethical considerations

As far as the ethical considerations are concerned, the guidelines highlight the importance of avoiding the creation of dependency on the services of the quality management system consultant – which would limit the future autonomous development of the organization's quality management system.

The guidelines repeatedly emphasize that organizations should be aware that quality management systems are cost-effective and do not generate excessive bureaucracy. They should, however, be suitable to meet the organization's overall objectives and the needs of the organization, its customers and other interested parties.

Some countries may wish to utilize registration schemes for quality management system consultants. Obviously, local culture and context have an important role in the criteria to be defined in such schemes. While ISO/TS 21095 does not aim to be prescriptive, some guidelines are presented as an Annex, in order to provide basic input for the harmonization of these registration schemes.

Other annexes cover: an example of offer and contract definition; a typical example of the development of a quality management system (with the description of the activities and the related responsibilities); an example of suitable work experience for a quality management system consultant; competence evaluation

methods and evaluation of the consultant's maintenance of his or her competence.

From the above description, it can be seen that ISO/TS 21095 could be used by the following:

- organizations, in order to select a consultant who is able to meet their specific needs and objectives;
- consultants themselves, as a guide to the desirable professional attributes to be developed, and
- consulting organizations, for the selection of personnel.

The guidelines could also be used as a reference for establishing the criteria for the certification/registration of quality management system consultants by third party personnel certification bodies. ■

