

I SO DESPAIR!

Letter to the Editor, Quality World, May 2011

I despair when I read statements (QW May 2011) such as "over one million organisations have used the standard to implement a management system, and have voluntarily paid money year after year to be audited against its requirements". Every organisation will already have established and implemented a management system (that is how they "do business"). Only those who "just want a badge" will have defined a system around the sections of the standard. This is widely recognised as one of the failings in how the current standard is often implemented. And many organisations have little option but to maintain certification or risk failing even to get on to a tender list. "Voluntarily paid money..." - I think not!

Surely no-one nowadays is taken in by such claims. Statements such as these highlight some of the key issues facing the quality profession as it seeks to establish a place in 21st century management. I believe that the CQI must address this as a matter of urgency to avoid a further decline in the standing of the profession in the eyes of the average manager.

"ISO9001 continues to grow, develop and produce benefits for around one million users..." Not true. The 2008 revision was a minor tinkering with words, so it will be 15 years before any significant improvement can be made to the 2000 revision, which itself reflected management thinking and practice as it was last century. Many organisations pay no more than lip service to the standard, knowing that they are unlikely to lose their "badge". And in any case, there is not one single way to implement a system which complies with ISO 9001, so any such conclusions are fanciful at best. How can anyone say that ISO 9001 was the cause? The difference in performance could have been the work ethic of employees, the pay and conditions, the education of employees or any number of other variables.

We need every certification body, consultancy, training provider, software supplier and, in particular, custodians of international standards, to stop making such unjustified and misleading claims (which imply that ISO9001 is a starting point rather than a final check after the essentials of modern business management have been understood and applied). This only serves to highlight the task faced by the CQI's SDG (Standards Development Group) as it seeks to address the (less than outstanding) reputation of the current ISO9000 family of standards and of how it is interpreted and applied.