

Systems and Processes

To the Editor Quality World magazine

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I hope that you have been overwhelmed with expressions of thanks for publishing David Hoyle's explanation of "Systems and Processes" (QW Feb 2010) from the many organisations that still struggle to identify and define their processes. Especially in the current economic climate which has seen cutbacks in all sectors, it is vital that a clear understanding of an organisation's fundamental operations is established and communicated, so why is there still such confusion?

Doubts remain about the value of an ISO9001 certificate because of the way it can be achieved, and one prime cause of the problem is the wording, interpretation and application of some fundamental concepts in the standard itself. Unfortunately, the fact that it is "an international standard" is enough to make some managers shy away from criticising it, and this remains one of the main obstacles to resolving what is an area of real concern. Worryingly, the problem is neither acknowledged by the authors of this and related standards, nor by those responsible for their promotion and use, who often exhibit a cavalier approach to some of the basic principles.

For example, ISO9001's trivial and flawed "model of a process based management system" (which is copied unthinkingly by so many managers), and the illogical, inconsistent definition of basic terms such as "product" and "customer" in terms of the narrow and inappropriate "transformational" definition of a process, demand a radical change in thinking - and in future versions of ISO9001 itself. The standard should not be seen (or even described) as a "model" for a management system - it is merely a way to assess what should already exist.

I am sure that David's next article(s) will stress the need to recognise the Objective(s) of a process. I can only hope that he has now triggered a process which will lead to a radical improvement in understanding how process management is basic to "meeting objectives" and "getting the job done" - and that a management system is how this is achieved. At least the CQI's Body of Quality Knowledge (see modules 1.2, 4.1, 6.3, 6.4 et al) has already addressed these issues - it is vital that they are explained and understood clearly so that "quality" can re-connect effectively with the management of business performance. This must be a key objective for the CQI.

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