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Charles Loxton
United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan

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Quality Management in Demining Organisations

In this article, the International Standards Organization 9001:2000 Quality Management System is compared to what leading actors in quality management and business management deem to be current best practise. The aim of this paper is to show the universal application of the ISO 9001:2000 system as a quality-management system and that it complies with best practises in business and quality management around the world. This article will highlight a few of the most important ISO clauses and show how they are supported by best practises.

by Charles Loxton [United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan]

The International Mine Action Standards, although not prescribing the ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System, strongly recommend organisations involved in mine action implement such a system. All but a handful of organisations have done so; for reasons that are as yet unclear, some mine-action organisations haven't adopted the ISO 9001:2000 system.

The requirements of the ISO 9001:2000 system are as stated in the Standard: "All requirements of this International Standard are generic and are intended to be applicable to all organizations, regardless of type, size and product provided."[1] Why is it then that organisations are hesitant to utilise ISO as a management tool? If demining organisations are following best practise, then they are automatically practising ISO principles.

The ISO 9001:2000 Standard: General Requirements

The scope of the system is explained in the Standard as follows: "This International Standard specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organization:

- Needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide a product that meets customer and applicable regulatory requirements.
- Aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable regulatory requirements."[1]

The usefulness of these general requirements is reflected in the words of Dr. Masaaki Imai, "The Japanese perception of management boils down to one precept: Maintain and improve standards."[2]

Another supporter of standards is W.E. Deming, considered by many as one of the quality masters. He states, "We must use standards as the liberator that relegates the problems that have already been solved to the field of the routine, and leaves the creative faculties free for the problems that are still unsolved."[3]

Management Responsibility

Leadership and top management responsibilities are singled out by all the literature reviewed as the most important aspects of any attempt to implement or enhance a quality-management system in an organisation, or to even just enhance current quality standards in an organisation. Any attempt to introduce quality into an organisation that is not wholeheartedly and actively supported by the top management team is bound to be short-lived and doomed to failure. In defining the exact role of top managers and their detailed responsibilities in and to a quality-management system, the ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System leaves no hiding place for top management, which may explain why so many organisations are hesitant to fully adopt it.

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Philip B. Crosby, in Quality Without Tears: The Art of Hassle-Free Management,[4] states that the credibility of management commitment is the biggest problem that management faces and that just talking about quality is not enough; managers have to continually reinforce the message of their commitment through actions. Crosby further states that the key to success in making quality improvement lies with the top management team but that management is also the biggest cause of the problem.

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Other masters of quality agree with Crosby on this matter. As noted in Oakland on Quality Management, Deming argues that senior management is responsible for 94 percent of quality problems, whilst Joseph M. Juran is a bit more forgiving and says that workers are responsible for less than 20 percent of quality problems.[5] The author, John S. Oakland, is of the opinion that the CEO of an organisation must really believe in the quality policy as well as accept responsibility for it.[5] This responsibility for quality should then cascade down through all levels of the organisation until an attitude of pride in the job and teamwork has permeated all levels and all departments of the organisation.

The Standard has also identified management commitment and responsibility crucial to quality management; hence the detail on this particular topic. I believe

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that this aspect of ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System alone is enough to generate vast quality improvements in an organisation, purely through the domino effect caused by genuine management commitment.

Operations people must realise that they are responsible for quality—good or bad. Quality-assurance/quality-control personnel are only responsible for reporting on the state of quality, not for generating quality.

Product Realisation

The product realisation process is none other than the core business process of manufacturing its product(s) or service(s). It is self-evident that the best practise dictates that this process should be properly planned and developed to meet the requirements of the product and of the customer. This statement is further supported by Oakland who found in his research that "identifying key-business processes"[5] was one of the best practises found among award-winning companies. In demining, all processes in the minefield are described and guided by standard operating procedures. However, the

stage of the process. It must be measured to ensure that problems do not occur further down the process. Oakland calls these internal customer relationships "quality chains,"[5] and deems them vital in being able to meet customer requirements.

Slater refers to measurement activities as "the feedback loop"[6] and further states that without it, any system that seeks to address process control will fail. People need to know how well they are achieving in order to progress. An organisation needs to know the same in order for it to survive and indeed prosper.

Oakland states that "a good quality management system will not function without adequate audits and reviews."[5] A further advantage of audits is that they automatically review processes and systems and are therefore useful for continual improvement.

The Standard requires organisations to continually improve their processes through a range of activities from reviewing nonconformities to reviewing corrective action. This should be taken further in that organisations should identify potential nonconformities

Oakland[5] contends that any organisation, in essence, competes based on its reputation for quality, reliability and price. Of the three, quality is the most important. It is extremely difficult to change a reputation from bad to good, but very easy to go from good to bad.

The Standard provides transparent proof to customers that an organisation is serious about its business and takes the customers' requirements seriously. In a donor-driven environment, transparency and effectiveness of organisations are the basis on which donors choose to get involved. Organisations wishing to obtain sustainable, long-term donors will find that compliance with the Standard will provide donors with confidence and willingness to engage in lasting partnerships.

The ISO 9001:2000 System is fully compatible with and supported by international best practise. Any demining organisation that seeks to improve its standards and achieve world-class recognition should seriously consider taking a strategic step forward and adopting a quality-management system based on the ISO 9001:2000 standard. ✦

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minefield is only the last stage of the product-realisation process. The process stages before that are very seldom described and audited.

In Integrated Process Management: A Quality Model, Rodger Slater makes the argument that entropy is a "universal force which relentlessly presses all activity in the direction of disorder.[6] He contends further that if discipline (measurement and control) is not applied to key variables, they will move to a state of chaos, even if they are not problematic at the moment.

The Standard encapsulates the essence of those variables in the production/service process and seeks to impose the discipline on them that is required to prevent these aspects from drifting into chaos.

Measurement, Analysis and Improvement

Customer satisfaction not only relates to the end user or external customer, it is also applicable for internal customers, i.e., those various people who develop the product through the different stages of the process. The product must fulfil certain requirements before it can be passed on to the next

and their causes in order to take preventive action. Oakland supports this view and expands it to include a focus on prevention rather than cure. Quality is about prevention—you cannot "inspect" quality into a product. It has to happen before the inspection process.

Conclusion

The ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System requirements are an extremely useful set of tools that cover the full spectrum of management best practise as evidenced currently. The Standard is even more useful for demining organisations in developing countries, as it can be a framework to direct the organisation's activities without having to purchase management expertise from developed countries.

The Standard is a clear way to guide such organisations to world-class status. There is, however, a prerequisite to all these statements, and that is management commitment—if the top management team is not going to be totally committed and accept responsibility for quality improvement, efforts will be short-lived.

Charles Loxton was born in South Africa in 1960 and served in the South African Army for more than 15 years. Building on his strong military and managerial background as Lieutenant Colonel, after serving in the Army, he started a new career in mine action. Between 1999 and 2004 Mr. Loxton worked for commercial demining companies in Kosovo and Iraq before joining UNMACA and the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan in 2004 as Chief of Quality Management. He was certified ISO 9001:2000 in 2001.

Mr. Kerei Ruru
Chief of Staff
United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan
P.O. Box 520
Kabul / Afghanistan
E-mail: kruru@unmaca.org