

The Five Qualities – an introduction to quality management by David Finney

Imagine you were forming a new company tomorrow. Aside from the practical aspects you'd probably begin by looking at your business objectives and the needs of your clients. How would you ensure that the product or service you provide was of a good quality? For different customers quality may mean different things for it has been said that we each hold a unique 'perception of excellence'. So is it simply a case of doing what the client wants and what if the client's needs are in conflict with your own business values?

Some organisations achieve a quality certificate to provide evidence to a client that they are maintaining a high standard of quality within their organization. The most popular and well-known form of this would be ISO Quality Certification. ISO is relevant to all businesses and even if you are a sole trader, knowledge of ISO is essential if you wish to talk the same language as your clients and achieve a broader understanding and appreciation of the businesses you are dealing with in terms of their issues and concerns.

There are different ISO Certificates for different types of industries and there is one ISO certificate that transcends all businesses, irrespective of the industry you are in and that is ISO 9001. ISO 9001 permeates all aspects of quality and is often the starting point for organizations on their journey to effective quality management. Many organisations hold two or three ISO quality certificates. In order to understand quality it can be useful to break it down into components.

Every business has to provide a **Service** to its customers, whether a product is involved or not. Speed of response, order accuracy, keeping people informed and efficient problem resolution might be the criteria by which we judge quality. Companies and other types of organizations create processes and procedures to provide a robust framework for quality delivery of service. ISO 9001 covers this perfectly and the needs of the client are at the heart of ISO quality certification.

Effective **Communication** of course is essential – both within an organization and between the organization and its clients, partners, prospects and suppliers. Understanding perspective is critical and all corporate messages should be clear, concise and with respect. ISO 9001 auditors look for effective communication and expect change to be managed carefully across the organization.

Business **Output** is any file or document sent from one party to another. Examples might be a product, a set of instructions, informative emails, research tables, financial reports or invoices. In all forms of output, accuracy is paramount in creating a reputation of reliability. ISO 9001 helps organizations gain consistency across their business output whilst ISO 27001 is built upon strong information management principles and what George Pappachen (Chief Privacy Officer at WPP) calls a 'culture of privacy'. Clients need to feel confident that their suppliers have implemented stringent information security procedures. Organizations producing research data look to ISO 20252, a standard specifically designed for market, social and opinion research.

If you are to have a successful business you need to ensure that your **Recruitment** policy and the procedures driven by that policy brings you the very best of talent so that you can deliver on all the above. Once great people are hired then **retention** of good staff is the next challenge. Staff will need to be inspired to perform at their best and will require appropriate training and coaching. ISO 9001 includes a section on all aspects of HR as clients need to be sure that service providers have the necessary competencies to deliver.

Finally, the **Environment** in which people work underpins the quality of everything they do. Cleanliness of work areas, reliability of equipment, efficacy of hardware and software, the locality of utilities and safety procedures can all influence motivation and efficiency. As well as internally, businesses now look to demonstrate their commitment to broader environmental issues. ISO 9001 covers work environment while ISO 14001 & ISO 18001 are quality standards dedicated to the environment and health & safety respectively.

Please see page two for a summary and details of how to apply for free quality self-assessment materials.

The Five Qualities:

Service

Communication

Output

Recruitment & Retention

Environment

Whether you are a new business or an established organization conducting a quality review can be a highly useful and productive process in providing both a status report and a basis for future action. To obtain a free Quality **SCORE** Card, email davidfinney@theenergyofconversation.co.uk