7 DEADLY SINS OF ISO

CAVENDISH SCOTT
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THE BIGGEST MISTAKES WITH ISO IMPLEMENTATION

ISO 9000 has a fairly bad reputation among businesses and organizations. This unfavorable view can be correlated with the frequency in which ISO is poorly implemented. ISO 9000 is often criticized for being nonsensical, overly bureaucratic and unsupportive of business goals. Cavendish Scott's mission is to help organizations avoid the following pitfalls to a successful ISO implementation. Now, without further ado, let us take a look at the 7 most deadly sins in ISO implementation.

Picking the Wrong Project Leader

This is a touchy subject because I might be talking about you (as the project leader). However, ISO is all about Quality Management Systems (QMS). Quality success is closely aligned with business success. Thus, the ISO project leader is basically attempting to "run" the company. The president is the ideal candidate since she/he has the authority to mandate change (as opposed to begging for it) and has a focus on achieving business objectives for profitability, growth and success. It also helps when the project leader has the respect of everyone in the organization. This doesn't have to be the president; provided the project leader has management's full support, it is possible for just about anyone to run the project. However, the project will be in trouble from the start if it is delegated to someone without business focus or experience, without the respect of everyone in the organization and if it does not include continuous involvement by management.

Lack of Commitment by Management

Even with a strong project leader, the lack of mangement involvement easily develops an ISO system that is separate from the way the company actually operates. Management is keen to get ISO but often fail to see it as a way to run the company—it is viewed as something that has to be achieved. Such misconceptions lead to a project leader pressured to minimize costs, time commitment and overall resources. This concept of a division between the ISO system and the way the company actually runs is the biggest problem in the QMS world. Minimal resources are allocated (to ensure ongoing certification) but no time is invested in system maintenance and development. Documents quickly become outdated and the systems (originally intended to help and improve) are simply circumvented for priorities dictated by manager preference. The solution: impose mandatory management involvement, compel management understanding, lead the project strongly, and ensure the focus is meaningful for the business.

Getting the Requirements Wrong

You don't know what you don't know. To compound this situation, external ISO auditors often get requirements wrong and give poor advice. Without an expert understanding of the standard, it is likely that you will put in place a preventive action form, an approved supplier list or a supplier questionnaire. Yes, these are valid approaches (sometimes). Without a strong knowledge of what the requirements are asking (and, indeed, not asking), systems develop to meet these misunderstandings and the users quickly dislike seemingly unnecessary activities. Having an expert is generally not an option for most companies. It is too expensive and usually the ISO person has (and should have) many other responsibilities. ISO is not a full time job. Hiring a good consultant is a great idea, although hiring a bad consultant puts you right back in the same situation. Just because someone has done it before--or is even an auditor for a registrar--does not mean he understands the business perspectives essential to ISO implementation. However, consultants brought in even just at the end of a project will bring an independent view. Ensure your consultant presents findings that are detailed objectively against the standard and subjectively for improvement – and ensure they guarantee your certification success (or don't trust them).

"Getting ISO'd"

Many organizations direct the project contact to "get ISO" or "get us certified." The problem: if the goal is to get ISO then that is what you end up with….ISO – not a QMS that is valuable to your organization. Sure, a set of documents that reflect the standard may appear to be an easy solution—but it doesn't reflect our organization and requires some effort to maintain. As above, this is another approach that divides ISO from the way your company operates. It is also often difficult to avoid if there is a lack of commitment by management or project leader issues. The easy solution: throw the standard away. Do NOT look at the standard. Break the organization into processes and write procedures for them. Do not look at the standard until they are complete. This still requires solid, well written management process documentation--but the structure you develop will be yours and not solely ISO.

Poorly Written Procedures and Documentation

What follows is a discussion of just a few of the many problems that can occur with procedures and documentation in ISO projects.

Fantasy

It is a commonly held myth that a system has to be written by the people in it, that only the people involved can write procedures. There will only be buy-in if they write the procedures themselves.

Fact

There is a grain of truth in this, but generally the opposite is true. Most people had a career in mind. They joined the organization to do their job. They are good at it. They did not sign up for extra work (and it is extra work) doing what is often considered a chore. They have no patience or time to do a good job with procedures–after all, it's only ISO. They are rarely given any training to do the writing and often no support.

Realistically, most people do not know how to write a procedure and probably haven't written anything of significance for 10 plus years (if ever). They have never been told what to include,

what is important or what level of detail should be supplied. The result is poorly written procedures in as many varieties as people you ask to be involved. One person will condense their procedure to five bullet points. Another will write a 22 page novel (without punctuation and in ALL CAPS). Another will never get around to writing anything and one more will be submitted in such poor English that it will be incomprehensible. You end up rewriting them anyway.

The simple solution is to delegate a single person to write all procedures. The designated writer will interview people and produce a consistent writing style and level of detail. If she/he is also an ISO expert, then ISO requirements can be surreptitiously spread into the procedures in appropriate places. If he/she is not an ISO expert, then ISO can (and should) only be considered later.

Fantasy
There has been a theory that because ISO mandates only six requirements are documented as procedures, that as few documents should be produced as possible.

Fact
This is simply wrong. The amount of documentation you produce should not be decided by what it says in a standard (and the standard states this!). Rather, you should produce documentation that is actually useful to you. This means that your full QMS should be documented so that it can be understood, communicated/trained and verified/audited. Without a documented procedure describing your key processes and how they meet the ISO requirements, you will be unable to make explanations to an auditor should the original ISO system designer be unavailable. Basically, you need to document the management level of all processes in your organization or your QMS does not provide a reliable, repeatable process to assure customer satisfaction (by design and not by luck).

Fantasy
Flowcharts are the best way to document processes--textual procedures are too fussy.

Fact
The truth is that flowcharts and procedures do different things. Flowcharts visually illustrate relationships but are not very good at showing detail. Procedures also describe flow and relationships (although not as easily). Additionally, procedures describe the flexibility and detail of processes that a flowchart cannot (without adding the procedural verbiage on the chart). A good solution to consider is the use of a general overview flowchart on the front of an appropriately detailed and flexible procedure. Ultimately, this situation will determine the best tool to use—and there is nothing wrong with using both!

Hiring the Wrong Certification Body/Auditor

Assuming you have a good QMS, you need an auditor who is going to challenge you. Partly, this is about writing nonconformances where the system has issues but it can also be achieved with an encouraging and a supportive approach. A good auditor is going to insist on

- participation commitment by management,
- a meaningful process-based system and
- tangible, valuable improvements in the system.

If your auditor provides unimportant or irrelevant findings while there are systemic issues or if there are things you know they have missed--you have the wrong auditor. Possibly even the wrong certification body. The goal is not to do as little as possible with you ISO system. The goal is to constantly improve performance by finding and fixing issues and deliberately looking for and causing improvements. If your auditor does not subscribe to this notion, then consider getting a new auditor. Keep asking for a new auditor until you are being challenged.

Ineffective Internal Auditors

After you have had a good one for a few years--get a different one.

The internal audit process is your system of checks and balances. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find qualified people to do internal audits. Qualified candidates tend to be given important roles and responsibilities in the organization and rarely have time to help out with audits. Audits fall on those who have fewer responsibilities and who tend to not understand the organization as thoroughly. These less-qualified candidates are generally unable to identify meaningful and substantive issues and are rarely expert enough in the standard to spot issues before the external auditor comes. These internal auditors also generally lack respect, are often overcautious about raising concerns, can be slow and might be generally disruptive. If your external auditor has any findings at all, ask yourself why your internal auditors didn't spot them first…and what else are they missing–and what else is problematic with your QMS!

Finally, as a bonus "sin" . . .

consider the total investment in your ISO system. Many organizations send personnel to off-site training in Lean or Six Sigma for many weeks. Some of this training costs tens of thousands of dollars. Upon return, trainees are given teams of employee time and, rightly, they are expected to find improvements. How much did you really invest in ISO? Have you considered that ISO is QMS? Are you prepared to invest to ensure your organization operates correctly and effectively? Rest assured, you do not need to spend tens of thousands of dollars on training--but if you want a satisfactory system you have to provide resources and time. Commitment is the key investment to optimize your return.

Cavendish Scott . . . has been designing and implementing process-based management systems based on ISO standards for over 25 years. Thousands of organizations have achieved ISO certification with our assistance. We have learned how to do it quickly, easily and in a cost-effective manner. We are non-intrusive and provide the best value-driven, business-focused systems that are non-bureaucratic, low maintenance and cause the organization to operate deliberately and successfully. Over the years, we have seen and addressed all the problems ISO can create. We can help you address any or all of these. To learn more about how we can help with your ISO system, start by telling us about your situation.

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