Quality Management

TRANSITION IS NOT A SCARY WORD

GUEST BLOG
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Changes to ISO standards can often be scary, especially when the changes are as significant as the 2015 revisions of ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. But is there really cause to worry? Or should the changes be seen as a prompt to stand back and review management systems that may well have been in place for some time?

As an auditor, I often see management systems that were appropriate, relevant and useful to a business when implemented but slowly they have diverged from dynamic management activities to becoming a static book of rules. All too often I hear senior management teams referring to the quality system as though it is another department or a separate activity, managed by the Quality Manager.

Maybe it is time to take a different approach and to see the management system as just that… the system that manages a business. It could be seen as a tool box full of useful treats, that if used well will not only deliver the organisational strategy but provide the management teams with the information and data to determine the strategy in the first place.

Unfortunately, the longer the management systems have been in place the harder it can be to adopt a new approach and to change the perception of the management system from a quality rule book to a dynamic management system.

So how can change be accomplished? A difficult question to answer in general terms because every business is unique. However, here are some ideas to ponder and maybe try out… remember the ISO standards are requirements which can be addressed in many ways.

USE THE LANGUAGE OF THE BUSINESS

It is worth remembering that the ISO standards are international and as such have to be written in a language that is translatable, without losing the meaning or intent of the clauses. It may not be written in the common language of each country but a more translatable form.

For example, in some languages "senior management" translates into "the old people". Whereas "top management" translates without causing offense to those of us who are "experience enriched".

Non-conformance sounds negative and a softer name may encourage more reporting. Auditors are often told "we have not had any non-conformances since your last visit" when the reality is that issues and concerns are being dealt with on a daily basis. Concern, improvement opportunity, challenge or other names could be used.

Why not be radical and change the name of the Quality Management System? Run a competition to come up with a new name… some examples:

- BMS – Business Management System
- How We Work, WWW – Way We Work
- IBIS – Integrated Business Information System

And I have even come across FRED and no, I cannot repeat what that stands for but it did engage everyone in the system.

CONCERN WITH REGARDS TO CONTEXT

The design of the management system must be appropriate to the business environment in which an organisation operates. So there is the starting point… the context and interested parties of the organisation.

Having completed many transition audits this seems to be the area of greatest concern. Change "Context" to operating environment of the business and the fog begins to clear. It is about having a clear understanding of the operating environment and the forces influencing the direction and success of the business. There are many techniques and tools which can be plucked out of the management tool box to help to define the context. Here are just two…

PESTLE

A guide to help identify the forces acting on a business.

The type of business will determine the importance of each force, e.g. a public body would have a significant number of forces in the social, legal and political areas whereas a business supplying the aerospace industry might place more importance on technological, legal and economic forces.
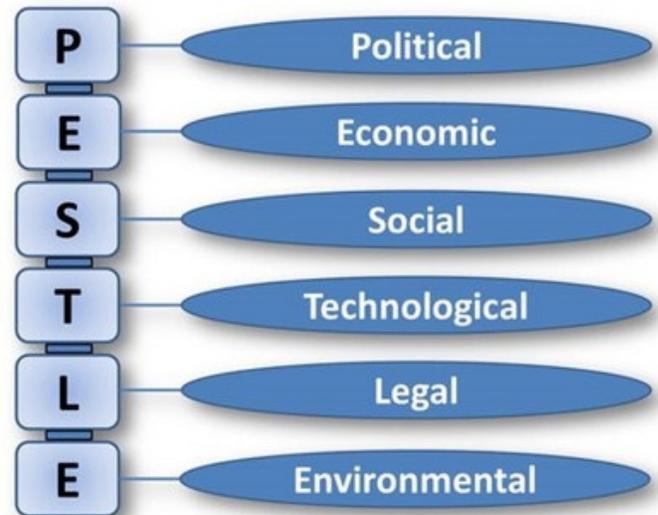
PESTLE

How this is captured will be dependent on the results of the analysis and culture of the business. A multi-page spreadsheet with a scoring methodology may be appropriate but one approach recently presented during a transition audit was based on a dartboard.

The dartboard was segmented into the six PESTLE elements and the rings denoting the level of significance and relevance. The proximity to the bull (the company) denoting the relevance and significance of the force or influence. Post-it notes, an invaluable office tool, being used on the board to highlight current issues or concerns, e.g. Brexit, supplier closure, competitor activity etc.

The message here is that there are many ways to approach the context clause of the standards.

INTERESTED PARTIES

The common problem seen at transition audits is an inward focussed approach. This requires… sorry management speak alert… some blue sky thinking and thinking outside the box.

Interested parties may differ in relevance, importance and influence. The usual interested parties presented during a transition audit are customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders and regulatory bodies.

Those often overlooked are neighbours (both commercial and non-commercial), competitors, local government (e.g. the business is an employer of local residents), local services (e.g. water company, waste collection bodies), environment (there may be SSI considerations), industry associations and end users.

It is impossible to provide an exclusive list or check list but if a team approach is taken to capturing the context and interested parties it is surprising, not only in the outcome but also in how this can speed up the process.

These ramblings are intended to get the brain cells working and are just a few ideas in the hope they trigger some inventive and engaging activities to put you on the path to transition.

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