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What is ISO 9000, and how does it relate to the practice of Organizational Development?

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Introduction

ISO 9000 is a series of “generic management system standards” published by the International Organization for Standardization®, a federation of the standards bodies from over 140 countries. (ISO is not an acronym for the name. Rather it refers to the Greek word iso, meaning same.) While most standards issued by ISO are technical specifications, ISO 9000 describes a process through which an organization can achieve “quality”.

There were three sets of requirements in the ISO 9000:1994 series; ISO 9001, ISO 9002 and ISO 9003. They differed in the scope of work done by the organization adopting the standards. These have now been combined into a single set of requirements, ISO 9001:2000. The revised document contains exceptions for organizations with narrower scope, rendering ISO 9002 and ISO 9003 obsolete.

ISO 9004, Guidance for Performance Improvement also exists under the ISO 9000:2000 rubric and we anticipate the publication of ISO 19011 which will contain guidelines for auditing quality (and environmental) management systems.

International Organization for Standardization® does NOT certify, register, accredit or in any way approve the management systems of any organization. They only create and publish the standards. “Certification” may be conducted by third party organizations.

ISO 9000 - Quality management principles

Quality has been described in many ways by many writers. ISO standards are generic and aim at ensuring that the organization can consistently deliver products or services which meet the client's quality requirements.

ISO 9000:2000 is based on eight quality management principles. Below are the standardized descriptions of the principles as they appear in ISO 9000:2000 and ISO 9004:2000

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“Principle 1 - Customer focus

Organizations depend on their customers and therefore should understand current and future customer needs, should meet customer requirements and strive to exceed customer expectations.

“Principle 2 - Leadership

Leaders establish unity of purpose and direction of the organization. They should create and maintain the internal environment in which people can become fully involved in achieving the organization's objectives.

“Principle 3 - Involvement of people

People at all levels are the essence of an organization and their full involvement enables their abilities to be used for the organization's benefit.

“Principle 4 - Process approach

A desired result is achieved more efficiently when activities and related resources are managed as a process.

“Principle 5 - System approach to management

Identifying, understanding and managing interrelated processes as a system contributes to the organization's effectiveness and efficiency in achieving its objectives.

“Principle 6 - Continual improvement

Continual improvement of the organization's overall performance should be a permanent objective of the organization.

“Principle 7 - Factual approach to decision making

Effective decisions are based on the analysis of data and information

“Principle 8 - Mutually beneficial supplier relationships

An organization and its suppliers are interdependent and a mutually beneficial relationship enhances the ability of both to create value”

“There are many different ways of applying these quality management principles. The nature of the organization and the specific challenges it faces will determine how to implement them. Many organizations will find it beneficial to set up quality management systems based on these principles.” (ISO website)

Relationship to Organizational Development

As one can see from the eight principles, ISO 9000 is not about specific quality control or assurance techniques. It is about creating an organization which is customer centered and which employees sound OD principles to accomplish that goal. Just look at the eight principles. Each one resonates with an OD practitioner. Any organization seeking survival must practice the principles promulgated in the ISO 9000 standards, whether they seek certification or not.

In order to adhere to these practices, one must create or recreate the organization, using leadership and participation to embed customer focused processes into the design and delivery of your products and / or services.

The following links may be helpful for further information on ISO 9000 and other standards:

ISO <http://www.iso.ch/iso/en/iso9000-14000/index.html>

United States <http://www.ansi.org>

Germany <http://www.din.de>

Canada <http://www.scc.ca/>

Other ISO member bodies

<http://www.iso.ch/iso/en/aboutiso/isomembers/MemberCountryList.MemberCountryList>

International Electrotechnical Commission <http://www.iec.ch/>