



A Quick Guide

A Brief Introduction to ISO9001 and Quality Management Systems

Quality is one of the most misused and misunderstood words in business today.

When people, included Senior Managers, talk about quality they generally do so in the context of excellence or perfection. In reality, quality is simply about ensuring a product or service meets its design purpose and satisfies requirements. A Casio is **better quality** than a Rolex if the customer **requires** a watch that's cheap and disposable

Senior managers exposed to quality management systems and ISO9001:2008 often see the design and documentation of processes as an overhead rather than an integral part of day-to-day business. Which means some companies will implement a quality management system to achieve an ISO9001 certificate but don't seriously attempt any kind of cultural change within the business. They pay lip service to continual improvement, the principle that underpins ISO9001 and its main overriding benefit. Designing and implementing an effective quality management system isn't cheap. So if you're going to go to the trouble of doing it then it's worth making sure your business realises serious benefits.

So what is QMS?

In simple terms, a QMS is documented guidance on how the whole of your company should operate. It seeks to continually improve the service to customers through the demonstration of repeatable activities. A well documented quality system will provide an external auditor with evidence of effective processes.

Top management responsibilities

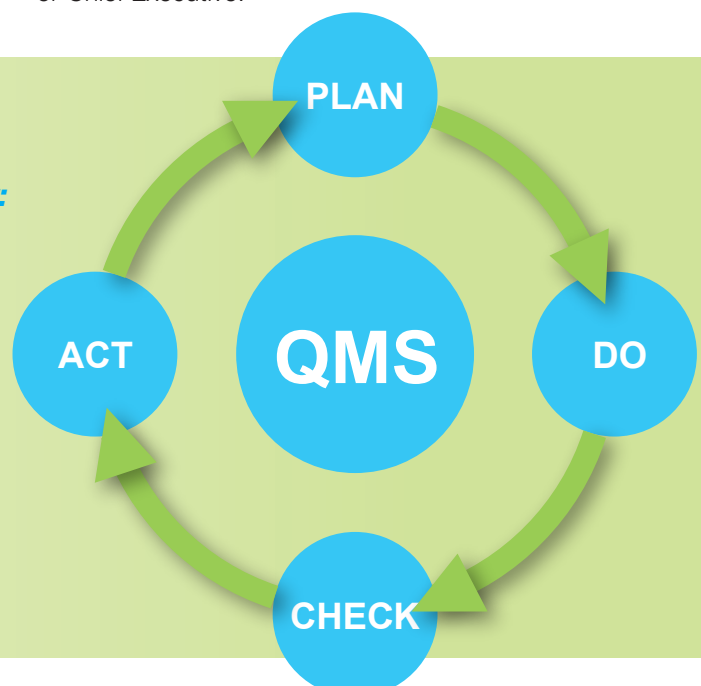
The adoption of a QMS must be a strategic decision made by your company's top management. And top management must demonstrate their commitment to the QMS and continual improvement by:

- Communicating the importance of meeting customer and any regulatory requirements
- Publishing a quality policy
- Ensuring quality objectives have been established
- Performing management reviews
- Providing appropriate resources

Yes, your company can employ a Quality Manager to look after the day-to-day running of the QMS but it does not absolve management from their responsibilities - they must be seen to be directing quality in the company. During external assessments the auditor will want to speak in-depth to the Managing Director or Chief Executive.

Key questions your quality management system must answer:

- 1 What is our policy on quality?
- 2 What level of quality do we want?
- 3 Who will control quality?
- 4 What processes & procedures are needed to control quality?
- 5 How do we guarantee the level of quality?
- 6 How do we check for quality compliance?





Make ISO9001 work for your business - not the other way round

Your QMS must reflect what happens in your company, not what you think should go on or what an auditor would like to see happen. Some Quality Managers have a tendency to design and operate the quality management system purely to satisfy the auditors for certification and auditing purposes. This is understandable given how much pressure the Quality Manager is under. Often, the QMS is over documented as there is a belief that everything needs to be written down just in case something is missed.

It's not uncommon for inexperienced Quality Managers to re-design processes in the mistaken belief that the company's existing working practices will not meet the standard. The ISO9001 standard has to fit your business - don't change the business to meet the standard.

Keep things simple. You need a straightforward, uncomplicated and communicable quality management system that works for your business. There's nothing wrong with keeping documentation to a minimum as the standard gives no guidance on how many pages documents need to be. In fact, there are only six mandatory documents.

Remember, the quality management system should be designed for the benefit of the people in your company not the quality manager, the end customer or an external certification auditor. And just because your quality system receives positive feedback from an auditor or no nonconformities are found it doesn't necessarily mean that the quality system is supporting your company's requirements.

Why are so many audits and reviews needed?

External

External or third party audits are there to add value to your organisation. They tell your customers that an independent assessor has certified that your company's quality management system meets the ISO9001:2008 standard. This means your customers don't need to audit your quality management system, saving you considerable time and effort and minimising disruption to the business.

It's well worth asking auditors for their opinions and using the results of surveillance audits or re-certification audits as an indication of how successful your quality system is. You can then use the input to improve your quality management system

Internal

The spirit of continual improvement permeates through the standard. Continual improvement is a journey and it doesn't really matter where you start from it's where you want to go and how long it's going to take to get there. The 'Plan-Do-Check-Act' model of ISO9001 will help you learn lessons, develop the efficiency of existing processes and avoiding the 'stones in the road' when creating new processes.

And finally, remember...

ISO9001:2008 defines the minimum requirements of **WHAT** your company should do but it is your responsibility to define **HOW** you are going to do it.

Altremis Ltd is an innovative consultancy based in the UK. We integrate proven business improvement techniques into our clients' organisations and use ISO9001:2008 to deliver effective quality management systems that create competitive advantage.

George Forrest - Managing Director of Altremis Ltd