

How to choose a competent quality management system consultant

ISO/TC 176, *Quality management and quality assurance*, which is responsible for the ISO 9000 standards, has launched the development of a technical specification, ISO/TS 21095, *Guidelines for the selection and utilization of quality management system consultants*, which is expected to be completed in the first half of 2002.

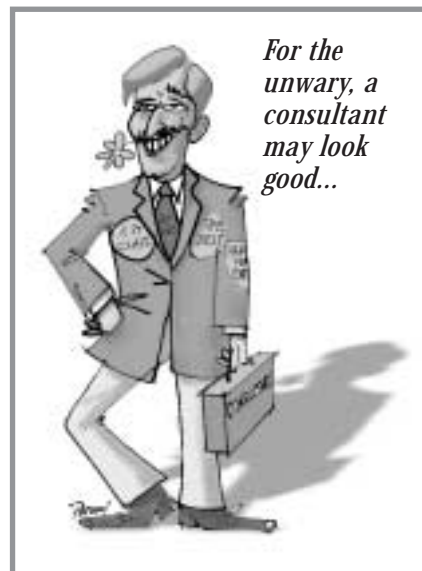
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The selection and utilization of a competent quality management system consultant is frequently the first vital step that an organization takes towards implementing a quality management system. The basis of the relationship between the organization, the consultant and the quality management system implemented depends on the clarity and integration of both the needs and objectives of the organization together with the competence and professionalism of the consultant.

In the market-place, there exist *self-styled* quality management system consultants, without the appropriate competence and with little experience, who contact organizations offering their services. This can be damaging not only for the organizations, which may waste time and money, but also for the image and reputation of the quality management systems sector as a whole, and especially

for competent quality management systems consultants.

The moment when an entrepreneur, especially of an SME, who wishes to implement an ISO 9001 quality management system, selects a consultant is crucial. Frequently for the entrepreneur, it is the first time that he or she has contact with the world of ISO 9000 and consequently is not sufficiently informed to be able to make an effective choice of a



competent consultant. The entrepreneur is therefore often at the mercy of the first person who claims to be a quality management system consultant.

The guidelines being developed by ISO are therefore intended to provide entrepreneurs and managers with the criteria necessary to make an effective choice. After introduction, scope, normative references, terms and definition, the guidelines cover the personal attributes, competencies, and ethical considerations applying to quality management systems consultants, and their use by organizations.

According to the guidelines, a competent consultant should be communicative, versatile, practical and perceptive and should have detailed knowledge of

relevant standards, certification processes and skills in general quality management methodologies and techniques.

The consultant should also have knowledge of the following:

- statutory and regulatory requirements relevant to the organization’s activity;
- organizational, methodological and technological situations relevant to the product sector in which the organization operates;



- business administration skills which allow the consultant to understand how the quality management system integrates with the overall management of the organization.

One of the most important factors in the selection of a quality management system consultant is his ability to apply knowledge and skills in real situations. Therefore, the consultant should have relevant experience in managerial, professional or technical situations involving the exercise of judgement, problem solving and communication with other people at all levels. □

The full text of this abridged article is to be found in the new ISO publication, *ISO Management Systems (IMS)*, December 2001, see page 10.