

Quality management in training generic or sector-specific?

This article includes several country reports on the use – or lack of it – made of ISO 10015, *Quality management – Guidelines for training*. It is not restricted to description alone, since the principal author argues against “the party line” which defends generic standards and advocates a sector-specific approach to training quality standards without which, he maintains, the customer may no longer shop at ISO.

Market value of training

Rapid technological change, continuous product improvement and relentless competition require companies continuously to upgrade the competence levels of their human resources. As a consequence, considerable amounts of money are spent on training worldwide. For example, US employers in the private sector spent USD 55,3 billion on formal training in 1995, representing USD 569 per employee annually. In 2001, the figure was USD 677 per employee¹⁾.

Within the context of the international trade in services, the estimated global market for international higher education in 1995 was estimated at USD 27 billion²⁾. These figures would be considerably higher if other sub-sectors such as primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education were included.

Assuring quality in training

Experts know the difficulties of determining return on investment (ROI) in the field of training and education. Efficient, yet ineffective systems of education and in-service training exist in many countries (Saner, Strehl, Yiu, 1997)³⁾. It would be misleading to look at the education and training sector as if it were a beauty contest. What matters are the



results: acquisition of skills and know-how, improved company performance and productivity, and increased behavioural competencies of students and trainees – not simple output figures, e.g. the number of employees trained.

In the end, it is the outcome measures which determine whether or not a given education and training system is effective or ineffective – reflected or not in the increase of economic and social development at national level, or the increase of productivity at enterprise level.

Faced with increasingly scarce training budgets and growing demands for training and retraining, it appears evident to employers, employees and providers of training and educational services that the quality of training needs to be assured in order to achieve the highest possible ROI from training programmes and activities and, in

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1) American Society for Training & Development (ASTD), Washington, www.astd.org

2) Educational Services, background note by WTO Secretariat, Geneva, September 1998.

3) Saner, Raymond; Strehl, Franz; Yiu, Lichia; “In-Service Training as an instrument for Organisational Change in Public Administration”, International Institute of Administrative Sciences, Brussels, 1997.

turn, a higher certainty of business sustainability.



Each country has its own historical development with regard to quality standards and this is especially true in the training and education sectors.

ISO 10015: an initiative within the ISO 9000 family

In early 1992, the South African delegation put a proposal to ISO technical committee ISO/TC 176, which is responsible for the ISO 9000 family of quality management standards, on “continuing education and training”, pointing out the difficulties of understanding how to fulfil the requirements of ISO 9001:1987 clause 4.18 relating to training. At the proposal stage, a simple majority of the national delegations participating in the committee is required – in the event, South Africa got 86 % in favour. The new work item was allocated to Subcommittee (SC) 3, *Supporting technologies*, and the Working Group (WG) 4 subsequently formed began operating as ISO/TC 176/SC 3/WG 4 at the September 1993 meeting of ISO/TC 176 in Budapest, Hungary, with representatives from 20 countries.

After several drafts which, despite many comments won increasingly favourable votes, the work culminated at the September 1999 meeting of ISO/TC 176 in San Francisco, USA, where an overwhelming majority voted in favour of publishing the resulting document as the International Standard, ISO 10015, *Quality management – Guidelines for training*⁴⁾.

Customer preferences?

The crucial question is, “What quality system could best support a company or government organization in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of training: should it be based on ISO 9000, the European

Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Model, or others?”

Each country has its own historical development with regard to quality standards and this is especially true in the training and education sector. Still, the following two questions need to be put to public debate, namely: “Is ISO 9001:2000 the best standard to ensure the quality of training?” and, related to this, “Is the current ISO 10015 a sufficiently developed standard to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the training market and its customers?”

To provide the elements of answers to these questions, some of the experts who participated in the development of ISO 10015 have contributed the following country reports describing quality systems and standards used in training in their respective countries.

The reports show great diversity in the current use of quality standards for training. However, a movement can be discerned away from generic ISO 9000 standards towards sector-specific ones.

The sample of country reports is of course non-exhaustive and hence not equal to an objective survey of all countries concerned with the quality assurance of training. It is up to the reader to draw conclusions and to the ISO community to reassess the situation. Despite that, assuming a continuity of the trend described above, it would be damaging to the ISO standards community if remedial actions were not entertained.

Options for the future

The author’s view is that ISO urgently needs to close the “anti-proliferation” chapter (bias towards generic standards) and quickly start with the development of sector-specific standards that can complement and support the ISO 9000:2000

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4) Committed and active membership of WG 4 averaged around 14 participants. Support by Mr. Alexander Gorchkov, a Technical Programme Manager at ISO Central Secretariat was important at crucial development stages of the standard. AFNOR (ISO member for France) provided the Secretariat and Convenor, Mr. Frédéric Séchaud.

generic standards. The paralyzing struggle between “anti-proliferationists” and “sectoralists” forced WG 4 representatives to invest energy in ideological battles leading to unnecessary delays and bad feeling.

For example, representatives from developing and transition economies stated clearly that relegation of ISO 10015 to Technical Report (TR) or Technical Specification (TS) status, instead of having the full International Standard status, does not correspond to their countries’ needs. They need an International Standard in order to strengthen the quality assurance of their training and education. A TR or TS would be too insignificant and too weak for governmental policy-related decisions.

These expressed wishes did not deter some “anti-proliferationists” from trying to kill the standard even though the trends in their own countries show a movement away from ISO 9000, despite the availability of the revised ISO 9000:2000 series.

The reasons for moving away from ISO 9000 and towards sectoral standards are multiple and have been reported elsewhere (e.g. high costs, perceived bureaucratic approach, non-responsiveness to sectoral needs, insecurity about interpretation of 9001:2000 standards).

ISO 10015 offers partial help to stem the haemorrhage – however, it remains insufficiently sector specific. The reason for this is simple: sector-specific text had to be deleted to accommodate the views of the “anti-proliferationists”. To reverse the trend, it might therefore be best to expand ISO 10015 to a full sectoral and requirement standard – as opposed to its current guideline status – at the time of its first review, scheduled for 2005.

Without such an upgrade to a requirements standard, the likelihood increases that more countries and customers will vote with their feet and move to alternative training quality assurance standards outside the ISO 9000 family. ■

COUNTRY REPORTS



BY DR. RAYMOND SANER

Switzerland is a small, landlocked country without significant raw materials. The current competitive advantage of its chemical, banking, insurance, watch and mechanical engineering industries are based on human and social capital accumulated over time and honed through a well organized education and training regime.

Sensing that the current education and training is no longer sufficient to meet the challenges of globalization, the Swiss authorities have undertaken a fundamental reassessment of Swiss vocational and professional education and training, leading to the principal initiatives described here.

All polytechnics (*Fachhochschulen*) considered key elements of the Swiss apprenticeship system have been visited by peer review teams, comprising both Swiss and foreign experts, who assessed the quality of the schools. This fundamental assessment took one year and involved more than 300 experts. It represents the biggest peer review of higher vocational schools ever undertaken in Europe.

Most polytechnics were found to use the EFQM Model, and a minority ISO 9000 or total quality management (TQM). After completion of the analysis, the polytechnics will be reorganized and the Swiss Government will establish a new, mandatory, sector-specific accreditation during 2002 (www.swiss-science.org).

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The Swiss Association of Swiss Universities, regrouping all such establishments, decided on 15 June 2000 to create an accreditation and quality assurance unit whose task is to prepare accreditation and quality control of all Swiss universities. The accreditation criteria and procedures will be sector specific, and not based on ISO 9000 (www.shk.ch).

Swiss vocational high schools have been offered non-mandatory opportunities to obtain ISO 9000 certification based on a one-off subsidy by the Federal Office of Vocational Training as a means of encouraging them to improve the quality of their teaching. Judging from field visits by the author, sustainability of ISO 9000 is not certain due to reported cost concerns, perceived bureaucratic approach and resistance by teaching faculties, especially in light of the fact that this subsidized support in favour

of ISO 9001:2000 was discontinued by the Swiss Government as of December 2001.

Swiss training providers (independent companies or in-house training departments) can apply for quality certification offered by EduQua, which is a private, non-ISO 9000-based certification organization operating nationwide since January 2001. The competent Swiss authorities have accredited EduQua to conduct this certification. It offers a quality certification based on criteria encompassing pedagogical requirements and the professional qualifications of trainers corresponding to Swiss training market considerations (www.eduqua.ch).

The Swiss Association for Standardization (SNV – www.snv.ch) adopted ISO 10015 on 1 September 2001. ■



BY TOMMIE J. JOHANSSON

ISO 10015 was translated and a bilingual (Swedish and English) document was published in May 2000 and introduced to the market in Stockholm and Gothenburg. The reception was beyond expectations. During the remaining seven months of the year, ISO 10015 reached a sales figure 10 % higher than that of ISO 9001 during the same period.

To help us bring the standard to the market's attention, one of the major training providers in Scandinavia – STF of Sweden (www.stf.se) – has been running a succession of two-day training programmes to increase

understanding of ISO 10015 and how to link it to the overall business process of an organization.

The Swedish Standards Institute (www.sis.se) has established a new technical committee for “competence management systems” with the task of developing a requirements standard to be published in the third quarter of 2002. This new national standard will have direct links to ISO 10015. The work on the requirements standard is being carried out in close cooperation with the Swedish accreditation body, Swedac (www.swedac.se), to make sure that accreditation will be available for interested certifiers.

Other models are being used in the Sweden besides ISO 9000, as is the case in other OECD countries. There is the Swedish Quality Award (SQA), managed by the Swedish Institute for Quality (www.siq.se), and, to an increasing extent following Sweden's entry into the European Union, the European EFQM Model. Based on the SQA model, there is also a quality award for the national

educational system of local schools, managed by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities.

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Russia's transition to a market economy requires effective labour markets and effective human resource development strategies. However, the corresponding regulation is missing to support this transition and the personnel policy of the majority of Russian enterprises does not conform to the strategy of market reforms.

In order to bridge the gap between the old and the new, a new strategy and complementary programme has been created, the "Programme for a Quality Work Force", which aims at a large-scale reform of Russia's vocational training. This new strategy was launched in the mid-90's with the support of the Russian Government and is now based on the ISO 9000:2000 series and TQM and EFQM tools. In addition, there is a growing participation of enterprises in the Russian Quality Award, which is a counterpart of the European Quality Award.

Parts of the ISO 10015 standard have been used to develop a working tool to ensure the development

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BY DR. NADEJDA VOLKOVA

of personnel at the work-place. An increasing number of Russian enterprises have used parts of the ISO 10015 standard since 1997 (even before its finalization). At the same time, the Russian Federation Ministry of Labour and Social Development has developed an instrument called, "Methods and recommendations for in-house personnel training organizations", based on ISO 10015. The new instrument will be put into practice in 2002 by the Russian national standards institute, GOSSTANDART.

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ISO 10015 is expected to achieve the following objectives:

- improve the quality of Russia's work force;
- serve as a basis for the creation of a foundation for vocational standards;
- guide the government's regulation of vocational education and training, and

- provide support for work-force training leading to greater job mobility.

The potential contribution of ISO 10015 is highly esteemed today by Russian enterprises that consider it an up-to-date tool for training and management development. ■



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Germany has attached significant importance to education and training. However, in the final ballot on ISO 10015, Germany cast the only negative vote of all participating ISO member delegations.

The negative vote was cast by a narrowly composed committee of the German Institute for Standardization, DIN, mostly consisting of engineers, who subsequently decided that the standard should not be published as German standard. They were of the opinion that the content of this document at best merited the status of an ISO Technical Report. In consequence, ISO 10015 is practically unknown in Germany and rarely mentioned even in specialist literature.

In contrast to this decision by a specialized committee, Germany, in general, has seen a rapid expansion

of standard-setting in the field of continuous education and training. Many sector-specific standards, guidelines, and projects have been initiated in order to assess and improve the quality both of training providers and of training activities. All these sector-specific documents and projects are independent of the ISO 9000 family. A brief description of some examples follows.

The Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB – www.bibb.de) has published a “Quality Checklist of Vocational Training” in order to offer guidance to potential customers interested in purchasing training that would be appropriate to the trainees’ needs and adequate enough to guarantee high quality. This institute has also developed a catalogue of requirements for training providers and vocational training services. The catalogue is used by the Federal Employment Service to assess training

providers and their courses in order to decide whether or not to offer financial support.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (www.bmbf.de) is at the moment favouring the development and implementation of comparative quality tests in selected fields of

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further education. In addition, a whole host of projects relevant to quality assurance and development are being financed: for example, a feasibility study titled, “Foundation Education (Quality) Test”.



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The Standing Conference of Education Ministers of the German Länder, together with the Standing Conference of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, is currently implementing procedures for the accreditation of schools and universities (www.akkreditierungsrat.de). A core element of this assessment process is the use of peer reviews to evaluate the quality level of teaching courses.

Siemens AG, one of the foremost international companies in the field of electrical and electronics engineering, has developed, implemented, and published a set of sector-specific requirements for training in order to assess and improve the company's in-house courses. The company awards courses which meet the scheme's requirements with a quality label (www.sqt.siemens.de/qib). ■



Since the election of the New Labour Government in 1997 on the slogan, “Education, education, education”, there has been a huge number of initiatives designed to improve the United Kingdom's performance in achieving educational standards, compared to its world competitors.

So far, these initiatives have focussed primarily on setting targets for attainment at age 7, 11, 16, 19 and 21+; and the subsequent publication of “league tables” comparing schools', colleges' and universities' relative success in achieving these targets at each relevant age level, backed up with inspections for all these phases e.g. for schools and colleges under the auspices of OFSTED (the Office for Standards in Education).

One of these targets has also been to encourage a certain proportion of small and large businesses to achieve the “Investors in People” (IiP) standard which originated in Britain and is increasingly adopted worldwide. It is awarded to organizations of all types – public and private sector, voluntary and commercial – which meet the criteria of good practice in determining the mission of the organization, developing an appropriate strategic plan, and identifying the human resource gaps in competence between current capacity and the skills required to achieve organizational purpose.

Where this competence gap can be met through training (as opposed to recruitment), the standard requires

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the organization to demonstrate that it arranges for the training need to be met and its effectiveness evaluated.

The British contribution to the development of ISO 10015 since 1993 consequently focussed on ensuring that as many elements as possible of this good practice were incorporated into ISO 10015 in order to avoid proliferation and duplication. This is the context in which to report that since ISO 10015 was published in December 1999, the British Standards Institution (BSI) has sold only 100 copies to 91 different organizations – only four of which were educational.

In contrast, in June 2001, 45 071 organizations in the United Kingdom had achieved “Commitment to IiP”. Of these, 49 % comprise fewer than 50 people, 32 % 50-199, and 19 % 200+. The smallest, a local church, has two people and the largest, British

Telecom, 127 000 people. A substantial proportion of educational institutions has achieved this standard.

In addition to ISO 10015’s competition from IiP (though the low sales may also be a function of poor marketing by the BSI), public sector education organizations are also encouraged to: achieve the Charter Mark (an award won by public sector organizations meeting relevant criteria focussing on customer satisfaction); benchmark themselves against the Business Excellence/EFQM Model; and achieve ISO 9000 certification.

Finally, at least every four years,

public sector schools, colleges and universities undergo inspection against the standards implied by the inspection framework relative to the primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education phases. ■

There has been a huge number of initiatives designed to improve United Kingdom’s performance in achieving educational standards, compared to its world competitors



BY PETER NOORDHOEK

The Netherlands is a densely populated country with an economy strongly dependent on trade and services. In order to remain competitive, a consensus belief holds that the level of education needs to match that of the best countries. In the Netherlands, many think that not enough is being invested in education

and training – about USD 25 billion of public money and a comparable investment from the private sector. The introduction of formal quality systems is seen as providing a means of improving quality without increasing government intervention.

Dutch universities and polytechnics already have a well functioning quality assurance system based on the use of peer reviews for both education and research, supported by the Dutch Association of Universities (www.vsnu.nl). Even so, in light of the coming master/bachelor structure, an institute for the accreditation of higher education establishments has been announced.

Its criteria will be based on a mix of education-specific quality criteria and those of the EFQM Model. In

basic education and high schools, a few schools are implementing some form of ISO 9001 and ISO 9004 (1994 versions). Many experts see the need for much greater use of the EFQM Model, along with league tables with performance indicators.



In order to remain competitive, a consensus belief holds that the level of education needs to match that of the best countries.

Dutch training providers are very active in the field of quality. For example, there is the Organization of Large Postgraduate Institutes which requires all to be certified, based on established quality systems. There is also the CEDEO institute (www.cedeo.nl), which offers quality tests for all insti-

tutes, including an extensive customer survey. Few institutes can do without an official CEDEO recognition.

ISO 10015 was adopted by the national standards institute, NEN, in April 2000, but it has not been promoted and consequently receives too little attention.

Last but not least, the Organization of Education Professionals (www.nvvo.nl) regularly organizes debates on professional standards. The debate on whether or not there should be a form of certification for professionals has ended in a draw between those in favour and those against.

In the Netherlands, there is a large, independent education inspectorate. This inspectorate used to be involved in all aspects of publicly funded schooling. There is now a shift towards a more results-based form of inspection. This body will also look at the quality system the schools are using. The inspectorate itself is also reviewing its own processes better to carry out its new functions. For this, it is using an adaptation of the ISO 17020 criteria for the operation of inspection bodies. ■

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The People's Republic of China is the world's most populated country with 1 300 million inhabitants, and covers an area of 9, 6 million sq km. China has competitive advantages like significant raw materials (coal, oil, metal etc.), a huge work-force and open policies for foreign investment. Realizing that the current levels of training and education are not too adequate to meet the great challenges of globalization and membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Chinese authorities have initiated a series of fundamental actions, described here, to improve their quality.

The Education Ministry (www.moe.edu.cn) has developed a series of rules for assessment of China's



state universities, colleges, primary and secondary schools etc.. However, these quality standards will not be based either on ISO 9000 or ISO 10015.

The China Training Centre for Senior Personnel Management Officials (CTCSPMO) has developed



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a quality assurance assessment system for civil service training centers. It is currently re-thinking this assessment system, but it is already known that it will not be based on ISO standards.

The State Economic and Trade Commission of CHINA (SETC – www.setc.gov.cn) has established an assessment system for about 30 management training colleges and training centers which belong to it. Part of these quality requirements are based on ISO 9000, others are based on existing training and management practices of these centers.

The State Administration of China for Standardization (SACS – formerly CSBTS – www.csbts.cn.net) has translated ISO 10015 into Chinese and approved it as a national standard in September 2001.

The Chinese authorities have initiated a series of fundamental actions to improve the quality of training and education

The China National Institute of Standardization (CNIS) and the SETC Training Center are preparing a series of joint measures to implement

ISO 10015 in the training departments of large state enterprises and the SETC Training Center is designing a pilot project to apply the standard in the Haier and Zhongyuan industrial groups. The partners have held a

conference on the relevance and application of ISO 10015 in China's enterprises. In addition, the SETC Training Center plans seminars on ISO 10015, including training of trainers seminars aimed at Chinese enterprises. Lastly, Chinese experts in quality management and management training are editing a series of books on ISO 10015. ■

A train the trainers workshop in progress, provided by the SETC Training Center for the Hubei (China) Power Company.

