



Article published on December 9th 2011 | [Management](#)

A quality management system (QMS) can be expressed as the organizational structure, procedures, processes and resources needed to implement quality management. The concept of quality as we think of it now first emerged out of the Industrial Revolution. Previously goods had been made from start to finish by the same person or team of people, with handcrafting and tweaking the product to meet 'quality criteria'.

How does ISO determine its standards? "What happens is that the need for a standard is felt by an industry or business sector which communicates the requirement to one of ISO's national members," Varcin said. "The latter then proposes the new work item to ISO as a whole. If accepted, the work item is assigned to an existing technical committee. Proposals may also be made to set up technical committees to cover new scopes of technological activity. In order to use resources most efficiently, ISO only launches the development of new standards for which there is clearly a market requirement."

ISO certification verifies a company's compliance to a set of globally accepted standards for quality management and operational systems. ISO refers to both the Greek word for equal, and the International Organization for Standardization, a worldwide federation established in 1947 with a mission to facilitate the international exchange of goods and services. More than 90 countries use the ISO standard.

According to Anke Varcin, head of public relations for ISO, the organization's function is to develop the standards that auditors use to evaluate companies seeking certification. "ISO ... does not audit organizations and does not issue certificates attesting to the fact that they conform to ISO standards," Varcin explained. "Certification is carried out independently of ISO by some 750 certification bodies around the world. ISO does not control their activities."

There are many different types of certification, depending on the company's function and the year in which certification was issued. "Previously, 'ISO 9000-certified' organizations were actually certified to one of the three standards in the 1994 version of the ISO 9000 series: ISO 9001, ISO 9002 and ISO 9003," Varcin said. "The scope of these standards differed, but they were of equal rank."

In 2000, the revised and improved ISO 9001:2000 standard was introduced to replace the 1994 versions. Organizations certified to the 1994 versions were given until Dec. 15, 2003, to upgrade to ISO 9001:2000. Both ISO 9000 and ISO 14001 certification concern the way a company goes about its work--but not directly the result of this work. However, the way in which a company manages its processes will obviously affect its final product.

So why seek ISO certification? "Deciding to have an independent audit of a management system is a decision to be taken on business grounds," Varcin said. Companies may decide to seek ISO certification for any number of reasons, including market requirements, customer preferences or staff motivation. Companies that adhere to ISO standards may benefit from increased demand for their products, more positive customer feedback and a reduction in costs. On the subject of cost, there is no set price for certification. According to Varcin, it varies depending on such factors as the company's current quality management system, the size and complexity of the organization and the attitude and commitment of the top management.

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Abhijeet is working as business consultant in Pune. Provide solution for a [ISO 14001 certification](#) and Consultant in ISO implementation for various companies. I hope the above article will help you in getting an overview of ISO.

Article Keywords:

ISO 14001 certification, ISO 14001 training

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