

Quality management consultants: instructions for use

A decision to implement a QMS may be the organization's first real contact with the world of ISO 9000 – especially if it is an SME – and many turn to an external consultant for help. The ISO 9000 family will soon include guidelines for making the right choice and the best possible use of QMS consultant.



by **Giancarlo Colferai**

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When an organization decides to use the services of an external consultant for the realization process of a quality management system, a number of typical questions may arise, for example:

- How can we find a good consultant and how can we distinguish a competent consultant from one who is not?
- How should the contract with the consultant be drawn up to avoid disappointment and unwelcome surprises once the work gets going?
- What is the quality management system realization process and what are the tasks of the consultant and those of the organization's employees?

In order to answer these and other questions, ISO technical committee ISO/TC 176, which is responsible for the ISO 9000 standards, is developing a new guideline that is now being balloted as a Final Draft International Standard (FDIS). It is expected to be published as an International Standard in February 2005.

Work began in 2001 to develop ISO 10019, *Guidelines for the selection of Quality Management System consultants and use of their services* on the basis of the Italian standard UNI 1836. The new work item generated a lot of interest: 41 experts were nominated by 25 ISO member countries to participate in its development.

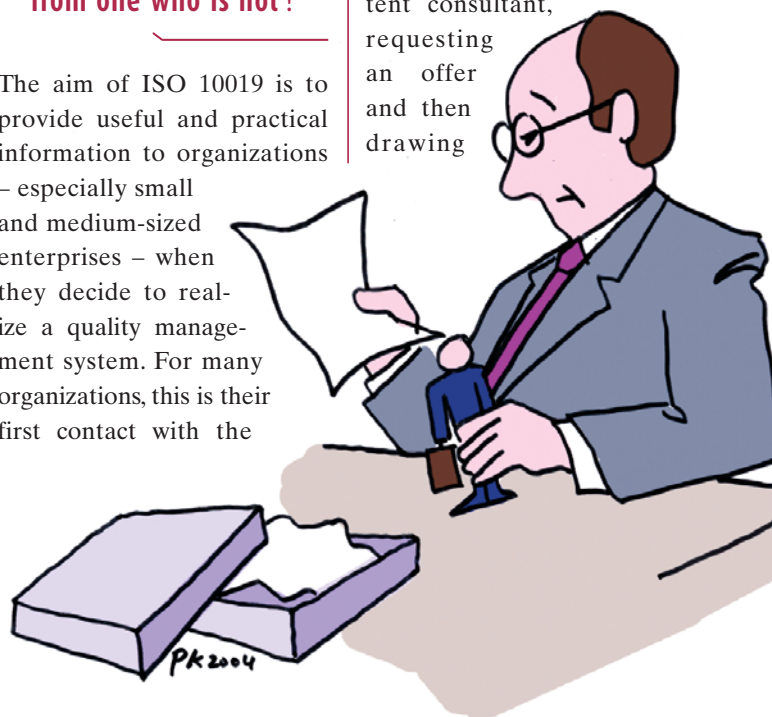
How can we distinguish a competent consultant from one who is not?

The aim of ISO 10019 is to provide useful and practical information to organizations – especially small and medium-sized enterprises – when they decide to realize a quality management system. For many organizations, this is their first contact with the

world of ISO 9000 and consequently they may not be sufficiently informed to make the best decisions regarding the choice of a competent consultant, establishing a sound contract and making effective use of the consultancy services.

Guidance for all stages

To this end, ISO 10019 provides guidance for all stages: from selecting a competent consultant, requesting an offer and then drawing



up a contract, to setting up the quality management system (QMS). However, among its most useful contributions (clause 5.3 of the standard) are to articulate important considerations such as the following:

- Even if the QMS is being implemented in response to contractual or marketing requirements, there is an opportunity to use the realized QMS as an effective and efficient management tool.



- There is a potential for the QMS to provide a basis for continual improvement of the organization's performance.
- The success of the QMS depends mainly on the involvement and commitment of top management and not on the consultant alone.
- Employees must be involved at all levels in order to integrate the quality management system with the organization's overall operations.

- The consultant should be empowered to interact with the organization's employees at all levels in order to gain familiarity with the organization's processes.
- The resulting system should not generate unnecessary administration and documentation.
- The consulting services should be compatible with the organization's culture, competence of its employees, existing processes and/or documentation.

In other words, if the top management of an organization fully understands and firmly believes in the above principles, then they will decide to find a competent QMS consultant, selecting him or her from the best consultants available on the market. They can use ISO 10019 as a guideline not only to select a competent QMS consultant, but also to establish a good contract and to use his/her services in an effective and efficient way.

The typical approach we presently see will change: selection of the consultant will no longer be made based simply on the lowest price and the certainty of obtaining ISO 9001:2000 certification merely as a label. Instead, it will be based on the ability of the consultant to help the organization in the realization of a QMS that provides a true

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added value to the organization, increasing its competitiveness.

Is it not the case that when an organization decides to buy a new machine

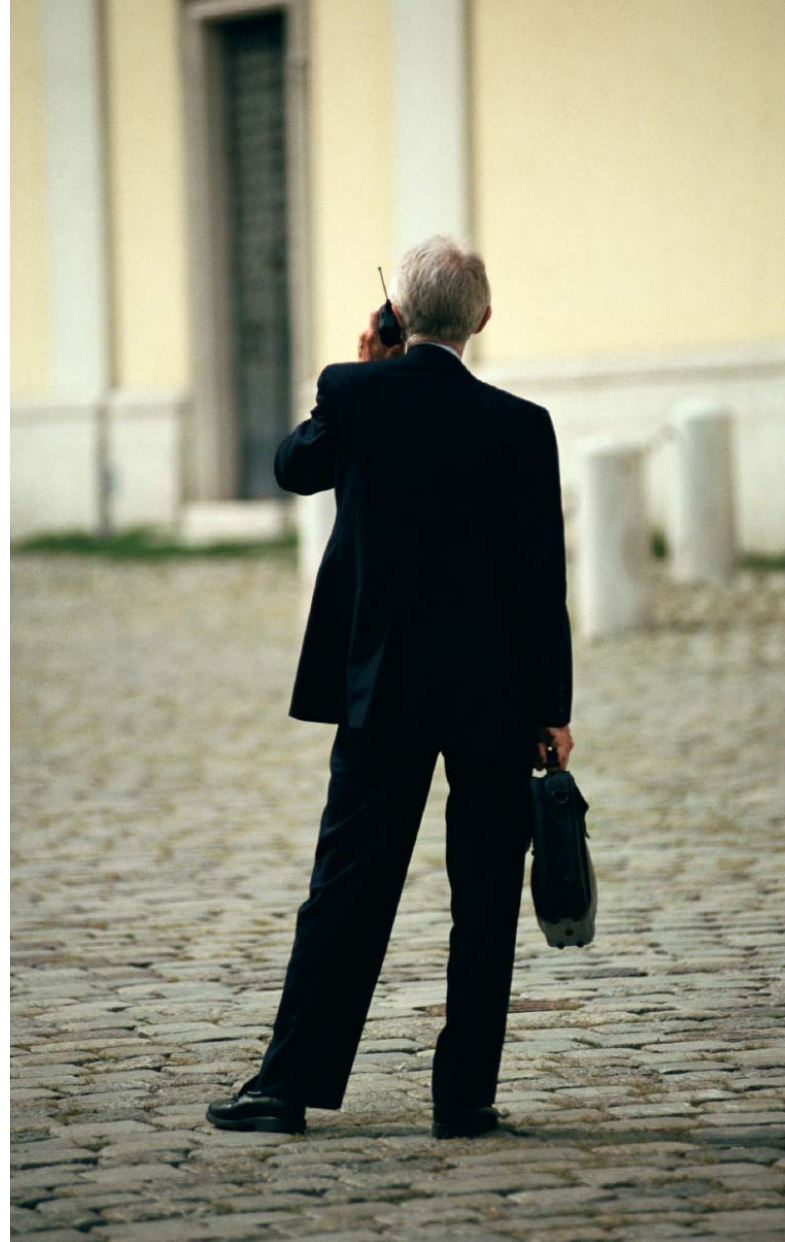
(or plant, or system) in order to obtain an improvement in productivity, it looks at several good machines and selects the one that will assure the most cost-effective performance for the intended use?

The content of the standard

After the introduction, scope and normative references,

ISO 10019 covers two important topics:

- *firstly*, the selection of a QMS consultant, indicating criteria for the selection process and judging the consultant's competence, how the consultant should be required to demonstrate that he or she maintains and improves competence, and ethical considerations, and
- *secondly*, the use of the QMS consultant's services, defining what they are, how the contract should be established (Annex A 1 provides very useful and detailed elements regarding this topic on how avoid unpleasant surprises in progress).



Selection of a competent consultant

According to the guidelines a competent consultant should be ethical, perceptive, versatile, decisive, communicative, practical, accountable and facilitative and should have detailed knowledge of relevant standards, certification processes and skills in general quality management principles, methodologies and techniques.

The QMS consultant should also have knowledge of the statutory and regulatory requirements relevant to the organization's activities, as well as reasonable knowledge of the organization's products, processes and customer expectations prior to initiating the consulting services. The consultant should understand the key factors relevant to the product sector in which the organization operates.

Competence in management practices is very important for the consultant in order to understand how the quality management system integrates and interacts with the overall management system of the organization.

One of the most important factors in the selection of a QMS consultant is his or her ability to apply knowledge and skills in real situations. Therefore, the consultant should have relevant experience

in managerial, professional or technical aspects of the consultant services to be provided involving the exercise of judgment, problem-solving and communication with all interested parties.

According to ISO 10019, the role of the QMS consultant during the various stages of quality management system realization (as detailed in Annex A of the guidelines) includes the following actions:

1. Illustrate the concepts concerning quality management paying special attention to the understanding and adoption of quality management principles, ensuring that the design and implementation of the QMS is suited to the organization's culture and specific business environment.
2. Involve all relevant individuals in the QMS realization, advising and supporting the organization in identifying the appropriate processes needed for its QMS, define the relative importance and interaction of those processes and assist the organization in identifying documentation essential to ensure the effective planning, operation and control of its processes.
3. Once the processes have been identified, evaluate their effectiveness and

efficiency to stimulate the organization to look for opportunities for improvement and assist in promoting a process approach and continual improvement of the QMS within the organization.

4. Assist in identifying the training needs to enable the organization to maintain the QMS.
5. Where applicable, assist the organization in identifying the relationship between its QMS and any other relevant management system (e.g. environmental, or occupational health and safety) and facilitate the integration of such systems.

Participants in the 27-29 April 2004 meeting in Delft, The Netherlands, of working group WG 9 of ISO/TC 176 subcommittee SC 3, to put the finishing touches to the ISO 10019 guidelines before release as a Final Draft International Standard.



Ethical considerations

As far as ethical considerations are concerned, ISO 10019 highlights the importance for the QMS consultant to avoid or declare any conflict of interest, maintain the confidentiality of information acquired from the clients, avoid creating unnecessary dependence on his or her services, not to offer services for which he or her does not have the necessary competence, maintain independence from certification bodies and impartiality in the organization's selection of the certification body.

The guidelines repeatedly emphasize that the consultant should provide realistic cost estimates for the consulting services rendered and that the organization should be aware of this critical item.

Use of the consultant's services

The guidelines define how the consulting services could be applied to the activities of the quality management

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system realization process (detailed in Annex A.2), for example: definition of objectives and requirements, initial evaluation, planning, design and development, training, implementation and improvement.

ISO 10019 then goes on to recommend that the organization establish a complete contract with the QMS consultant, prior to commencing the consulting activity, in order to avoid disappointment and unwelcome surprises. This contract should clearly define the scope of the work (including outputs), have realistic milestones and be cost-effective

for the organization (details are indicated in Annex A.1).

The guidelines also recommend that when entering into a contract, the following activities should be given due importance (more details can be found in Annex A.2):

- a) setting agreed contract objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited;
- b) setting out a detailed contract plan with agreed milestones and outputs and communicating the plan to all interested parties;
- c) identifying the training needs of relevant employees so they can perform

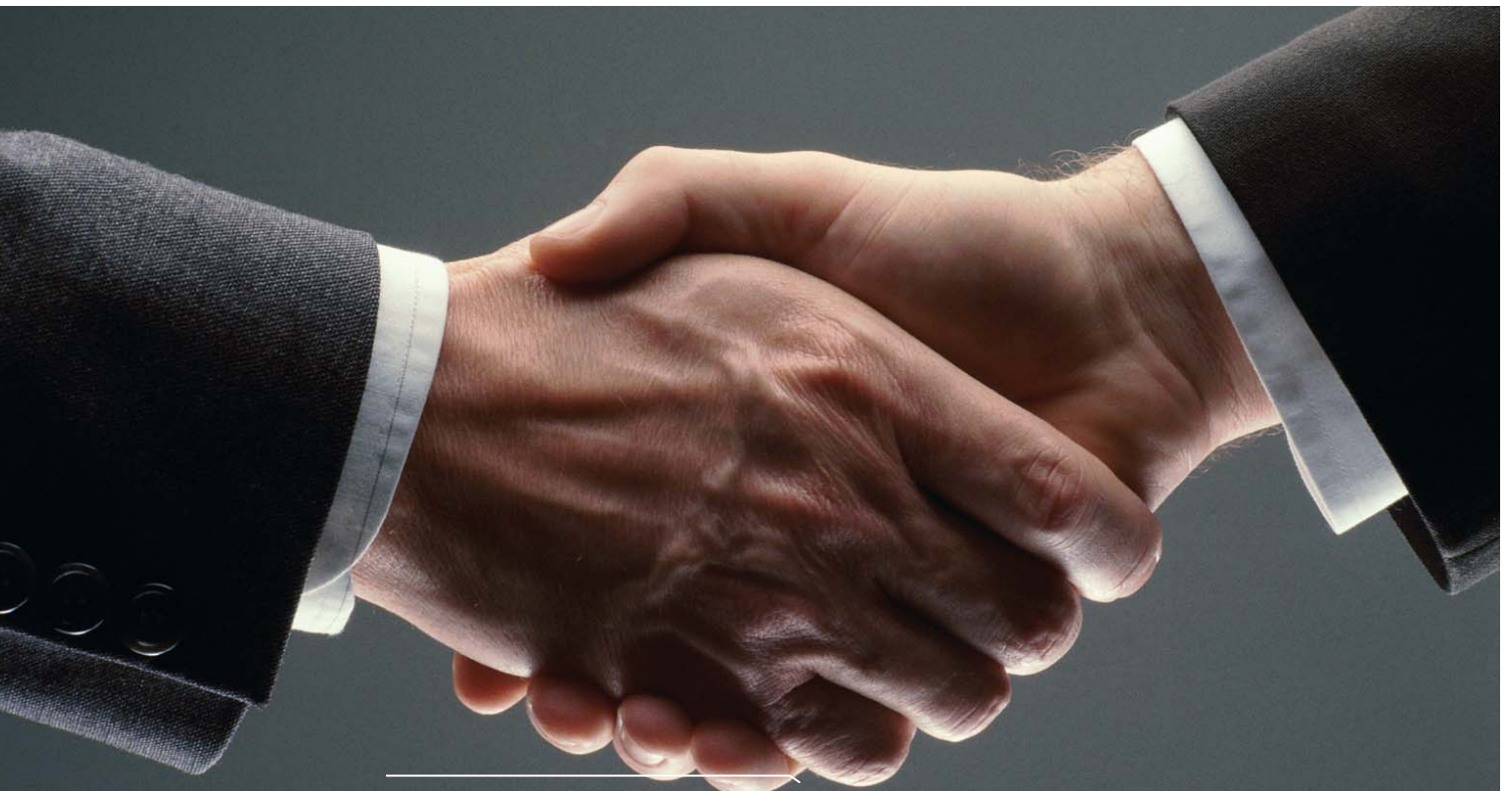
the ongoing evaluation, maintenance and improvement of the QMS;

- d) implementing the plan and consequently monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of such, and implementing contingent actions as appropriate;
- e) ensuring the agreed milestones are met or redefined, and
- f) defining a process to approve the outcomes of the contract.

Annex A.2 illustrates an example of the process for the realization of a quality management system and indicates the responsibility

of the co-actors – consultant, the organization's top management, management representative – for each step of the process.

To sum up, ISO 10019 clarifies once and for all many of the essential aspects that have often been sources of misunderstanding between the organization and the QMS consultant. Above all, it highlights the importance of the involvement and commitment of the top management of the organization and the right choice of a competent consultant as being key factors for the success of the quality management system. •



The commitment of top management and the right choice of a competent consultant are **key factors** for the success of the quality management system.