

In Perspective



Judy Reynolds, Senior Manager, Consulting at the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) talks to CONSENSUS magazine about some of the opportunities and challenges of implementing a management system for small and medium-sized businesses.

Consensus: Based on your experience as an ISO management systems consultant, what are some of barriers to small and medium-sized businesses using management systems standards?

JR: There are a number of factors. Number one is cost. That's always a factor with the small businesses, whatever the standard is. Their focus is really on growing their business, and survival in some cases. They lack the understanding of just how implementing a management system will actually help them grow and become more efficient, thereby more profitable. The cost of implementing a system should be viewed as an investment.

Consensus: There are considerably more small and medium-sized businesses certified to ISO 9001 than ISO 14001, why do you think that is?

JR: Small businesses can relate a little better to ISO 9001 than ISO 14001. With ISO 14001 they say, "Well, I don't really do a lot that impacts on the environment, so I won't worry about it." The question a small business is always going to ask when it comes to considering standards is, "Where is my bottom-line benefit on this?"

Consensus: Could you describe what you do to help a client implement a standard such as ISO 9001?

JR: My job as a consultant is to help companies develop a system that suits their business environment. We usually start with a gap analysis to see what a company has informally or formally, and what is already in place that will meet the intent of the standard. From there, we put a work plan together to say this is what still needs to be done. Once the client realizes that they don't have to have this huge four-inch binder of documentation, that a quality management system can be simple while meeting all the requirements of the standard, suddenly it changes their whole focus. It's really great when I see them turn that corner, then we can start talking about their business, their own objectives. Then they're on board; they're seeing the value there.

Consensus: BDC has identified succession planning as one of the most significant issues facing Canadian small and medium-sized businesses. What role do you think management system standards like ISO 9001 have to play in addressing this serious challenge?

JR: Many small and medium-sized businesses are reluctant to address succession planning. Most entrepreneurs see themselves as invincible, and believe they have plenty of time. They don't consider what will happen to their business when they want to retire. ISO 9001 provides a structure for the continuity of the business. Particularly in a family-run business, where the second generation may not have the same skill level as the first generation, the standard can provide the structure they need to manage that business.

Consensus: What advice would you give to a small business looking for a consultant?

JR: It's important to ensure that the person you are working with has consulted on implementation of a management system before and has the necessary training. A good consultant needs to go beyond simply regurgitating the standard to figuring out how to make it relevant and simple to use for the company. ■

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