How to Write A Quality Policy

that is compatible with ISO9000

by Mickey Jawa, CEO, SatiStar Management Consulting

The ISO9000 standard requires that your organization creates and deploys a quality policy. Something as seemingly simple as drafting your company's quality policy can often cause considerable hassle, consume huge amounts of time and effort, and require substantial rework.

Your quality policy should be a brief statement that shows a commitment by top management to the quality management system.

In a study of roughly 200 companies in 2006, it was found that quality policies vary widely. Some companies write quality policy statements that would make Tolstoy proud, whereas others are much more succinct – with a surprising number of companies that have drafted quality policy statements that have only a single sentence. The median number of sentences in the quality policy was three.

One reason for creating and deploying a quality policy for your organization is to ensure that all personnel are aware of, aligned with and supporting your intent with regard to quality management.

Another reason is because it is a requirement of ISO9001:2000.

While it might appear that a short, concise statement would be preferred, the companies with the shorter quality policy statements reported that they had encountered more difficulty convincing their external auditors that their quality policies were suitable. Not many Quality Managers enjoy having this type of discussion with their external auditors.

Quality Policy, Mission Statementand Vision Statement

A common mistake is to confuse the quality policy with a mission or vision statement.

A vision statement outlines what a company wants to be. It defines a future identity for the organization, and should be a source of inspiration. Your company's vision can evolve over time, but should be set far enough into the future so that you don't have to revisit it every year.

The mission statement is a definition of the purpose for the existence of your business. It describes why your business exists today, and what the business is trying to achieve.

Not to be confused with either of these two statements, the quality policy is a statement that shows the intent of the top management team with regard to the management of quality.

The ISO9001:2000 Standard

ISO9001:2000 provides a clear framework for the establishment of your quality policy. Section 5.3 of the ISO9001:2000 standard has the following requirements:

"Top management shall ensure that the quality policy

- a) is appropriate to the purpose of the organization,
- b) includes a commitment to comply with requirements and continually improve the effectiveness of the quality management system,
- c) provides a framework for establishing and reviewing quality objectives,
- d) is communicated and understood within the organization, and
- e) is reviewed for continuing suitability."



A Simplified Approach

Many organizations struggle with the creation of their quality policy. Some companies assemble their entire leadership team and attempt to draft their quality policy statements as a committee. Others delegate this task to someone – typically their Quality Manager.

We recommend a blended approach to this activity that starts with a single person creating the first draft of the quality policy, then critically examining it with input from the entire leadership team, and finally refining the language while verifying that it meets the requirements, including ISO9000.

If you're interested in meeting the requirements of ISO9000, the simplest approach is to write at least one sentence for each of the requirements in ISO9001:2000 Section 5.3 a) through e).

- a) Describe the nature and purpose of your business.
- b) State that you will meet all defined requirements, including those defined by your customers, statutory and regulatory requirements, industry associations, ISO9001:2000, etc. Also, you should state that you are committed to continually improve the effectiveness of your quality management system.
- c) Describe who and how often you establish, review and revise your quality objectives.
- d) State that your quality policy will be communicated to all employees within your organization, and that you will take steps to ensure that it is understood by everyone.
- e) Finally, state who and how often the quality policy will be reviewed for continuing suitability.

This can usually be written in a maximum of 6 sentences. Also, in order to really simplify your overall quality policy statement, items c) through e) can often easily be handled in a preamble or a postscript to the quality policy statement. This allows your statement to focus on the really important issues covered by items a) and b).

Reviewing Existing Quality Policies

You may have an existing quality policy that you'd like to examine for suitability.

- We recommend that you critically examine it and identify the specific sentences within your quality policy that cover each of the requirements listed above.
- Identify any gaps that exist.
- Develop new statements that address the identified gaps.
- Highlight extraneous statements that are not required by ISO9001:2000 and consider removing them.
- Clarify ambiguous or vague language auditors love clarity. If an auditor thinks it's unclear, she'll assume that your people will too.
- Avoid using words such as "exceed". These lofty, marketing-oriented words commit your organization to actions that might not represent reality. Your auditor should be questioning these.
- Remember that your policy states your intent, it doesn't need to state "how" you will achieve your intent.

Above all, the quality policy statement should be one for which your top management takes full ownership – it should be theirs!

Mickey Jawa is the CEO of SatiStar Management Consulting, and has over 25 years of experience in a wide range of industries. He has assisted companies worldwide in implementing Business Performance Improvement, especially in the area of cycle time reduction.

