

ISO 9000 AND ACCREDITATION - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

The eighties and the nineties can be truly called the quality decades. Especially the nineties. When in 1987, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) brought out Quality Assurance System Standards under the generic ISO 9000 series, the quality movement really got going. Globally the companies and the business houses started preparing for grabbing the relevant certificate before any of their competitors got it. They also put in place various other quality initiatives such as Total Quality Management and interventions for organizational development. ISO 9000 series of standards are generic and could be applied to any organization irrespective of its size, structure or business operations. Thus the standards are equally applicable to large or small, product/service organizations or educational organizations offering courses in any discipline, at any level - post graduate, degree, diploma etc.

Education, though, was slow but not too slow in realizing the need for quality assurance and improvement in professional and other disciplines of studies. National Board of Accreditation was established in 1994 that set out norms against which a technical educational institution would be assessed and given accreditation. The need for accreditation was accentuated due to mushroom growth of engineering institutions, both public and private, offering programmes in various engineering disciplines. Later on it was decided that instead of the institution, each of the programmes that they conduct would be assessed for accreditation separately. By now about fifty institutions have gone in for accreditation of their programmes. A few institutions, notably IIT Madras, have gone in for ISO 9000 registration.

Why do some institutes go in for ISO 9000 rather than for accreditation? What is common and what is different in between the two? What, if any, is the

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advantage one has over the other? This article is a comparative study of accreditation and ISO 9000 in so far as it applies to education.

PURPOSE

ISO 9000

The purpose of ISO standards is to provide a universally applicable conceptual standard framework to enable companies supplying products and services to fashion their quality assurance management systems so as to develop demonstrable ability to provide these products and services of a consistent quality as desired by the customer. The Standard lists twenty 'Quality Elements' as model on which the organizations can base their quality systems. Trained external auditors audit the company's quality system against the quality elements as laid down in the Standard. On satisfactorily demonstrating the ability to deliver quality goods to the customer the organization is given the relevant certificate. The certificate is valid for three years, subject to the company continuing to demonstrate consistent quality performance and adherence to the processes and procedures contained in their quality systems. This is ensured through six-monthly surveillance audits during this three-year tenure of the certificate. The certificate is awarded by any of the many certifying agencies approved by the ISO worldwide. There are several foreign companies in India and Bureau of Indian Standards who authorized to audit and certify a company. Award of the certificate

enhances the credibility of the organization and confidence of its customers, present and future, in the organization's ability to deliver consistent quality. It should be emphasized here that standards in ISO 9000 series are system standards and not 'product' standards. An ISO certificate assures consistent delivery of product or a service of 'a particular quality'. This fact has unfortunately led to the unjustified criticism that the standard does not bring about quality improvement.

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation of an educational programme, likewise, connotes quality assurance that the accredited institution has demonstrated ability to use the available resources optimally in effectively achieving the academic goals and to ensure continued effectiveness during the tenure of the accreditation i.e. three years. Accreditation criteria have been laid down for the guidance of the institution as well as for the auditing team against which to audit the performance of the institution, Like any Third Party certification accreditation is a confidence booster for the institution as much as for its stakeholders. Students can always seek admission to the Educational institution that runs an accredited programme of their choice.

As far as the purpose and the process are concerned, there is similarity in NBA Accreditation and ISO 9000. Although the terminology may be different many of the criteria of the NBA and the 'quality elements' of ISO 9000 are essentially the same in intent and purpose.

COMPARISON

The table gives a comparative representation of the NBA Criteria and ISO Quality Elements. Since there is no corresponding co-relation between the elements and criteria direct comparison cannot be made. The table does give some comparative remarks. There is separate ISO standards for quality system audits as well as for training and qualifying quality system auditors. Only certified auditors/assessors are authorized to carry out these duties and assess the quality systems against ISO standards. There are agencies such as the Confederation of Indian Industries and others who regularly conduct courses for training and certifying the quality system auditors. Also there are companies and individuals available as ISO 9000 consultants to guide the prospective organizations in setting up their quality systems for ISO certification. As pointed out in the Table, ISO has built in regulatory mechanisms, both internal and external form of Management Reviews, Internal Audits etc. and compulsory six monthly Surveillance Audits by the same agency that has awarded the certificate, during the 3-year tenure of the certificate. This helps to prevent laxness and to keep the system from any slippage. Thus the whole process is well systematized, formal and business like in case of ISO. Such is not the case in respect of NBA accreditation.

Further, ISO has international recognition, whereas NBA is valid only in the country. Hence one may go in

for ISO 9000 certification. However, the cost for the certificate alone, not considering the costs involved in preparing, establishing and maintaining the system and the cost of audits, may be prohibitive in case of ISO. Moreover one has to pay the fees in foreign currency, if the certificate is obtained from foreign certifying body. Of course, one could avoid foreign currency payment by going to Bureau of Indian Standards for obtaining the certificate. Another consideration in favour of accreditation is that the norms are straightforward since they relate to education. In case of ISO, however, the 'Quality Elements' have to be interpreted in the context of education for their proper use and application.

CONCLUSION

We have seen in this short article a comparative study of the ISO 9001 and NBA Accreditation. The study has not covered the related to the interpretation and application of the 'Quality Elements' to education since it would be beyond the scope of this study, and it would be too lengthy and cumbersome for the general reader. But there are consultants available who could be approached by the prospective organizations/ Institutions for this purpose. There are yet only a few institutions that have gone in for accreditation and even fewer for ISO 9000. Quantitative popularity with and qualitative judgements of the institutions as well as their stakeholders will determine which one wins the race. Only time will tell.

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**TABLE SHOWING
COMPARISON BETWEEN NBA ACCREDITATION NORMS
AND ISO 9000 QUALITY ELEMENTS.**

Elements/ Criteria		Remarks
ISO 9000	NBA Accreditaion	
Management Responsibility (4.1)* - Quality Policy - Organization - Management Review Quality (4.2) - General - Quality System Procedures - Quality Planning Contract Review (4.3) - General - Review - Amendment to contract - Records Design Control (4.4) - General - Design & Dev. Planning - Org. & Tech. interfaces - Design Input - Design Output - Design Review - Design Verification - Design Validation - Design Changes Doc. & Data Control (4.5) - General - Doc. Approval & Issue - Doc. & Data Changes Purchasing (4.6) - General - Evaluation of Sub-Contractors	Organizational/Infrastructural Performance Indices : I. Mission, Goals & Organization a) Management; Mission & Goals Commitment, attitude, Planning & monitoring, Incentives, effectiveness b) Organization & Governance: Leadership, Motivation, Transparency Decentralization & Delegation Involvement of faculty, Efficiency II. Financial Resources & their Utilization a) Capital Resources, Operational budgets, Manitenance budgets, Developmemental resources & budgets b) Land, building, hostels, Support Service, Office Equipment, Cateen, Transport Medical Facilities Academic Performance Indices III. Human Resourices : a) Faculty: Nos. Qualifications Recruitment Procedures, Workload, Attitude & Commitment, Faculty Development, Performance Appraisal b) Supporting Staff (Tech./Adm.) : Nos. Qualifications/Skills, Recruitment Procedures,	The ISO and NBA requirements for Mgmt. Are similar in intent. However, ISO has built in self-regulation in the form of 'Mgmt Review'. ISO also requires a documented quality system with documented procedures and clear-cut demarcation of responsibility/authority Though the ISO 9000 is manufacturing company oriented, it is generic & universal in application. ISO has a separate element (4.18) for training & development which requires Training to be a strategic activity. ISO requires Internal Audit as a planned, continual activity for internal control and continuous development/ improvement of the system (4.17) Although, both have tenure of 3 years, ISO requires surveillance audit every six months during this period of three years unlike NBA, which does not have such stipulation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purchasing Data - Verification of purchased product <p>Control of Customer Supplied Product (4.7) Product Identification & Traceability (4.8)</p> <p>Process Control (4.9) Inspection & Testing (4.10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General - Receiving Inspection & Testing - In-process Inspection & Testing - Final Inspection & Testing - Inspection & Test Records <p>Control of Inspection, & Test Equipments (4.11)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General - Control Procedure <p>Inspection & Test Status (4.12) Control of Non-conforming Product (4.13)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General - Review & Disposition of Non-conforming Product <p>Corrective & Preventive Action (4.14)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corrective Action - Preventive Action <p>Handling, Storage, Packaging Preservation & Delivery (4.15) Control of Quality Records (4.16)</p> <p>Internal Quality Audits (4.17) Training (4.18) Servicing (4.19) Statistical Techniques (4.20)</p>	<p>Attitude & Involvement, Skill Upgradation, Appraisal</p> <p>IV. Students :</p> <p>a) Admissions : Central or Institutional, Criteria, Policy for Lateral Entry, if any.</p> <p>b) Academic Results : Performance in competitive Exams, Admission to PG Courses, Employment of graduating students in the past year, Feedback employers, Intake, No of GATE-qualified candidates Dropouts during the past three years.</p> <p>V. Teaching - Learning Process :</p> <p>a) Syllabus, Academic calender Contract hours per week, Evaluation & Feedback Procedures, Labs, Workshops & Equipments (facilities maintenance & Utilization) Computer Facilities, Library, ET Facilities, Instructional Material, Budget for Materials and Consumables, Implementation of Instructuional Programmes, Removal of obsolete experiments & Introduction of contemporary lab experiments.</p> <p>VI. Supplementary Processes :</p> <p>VII. Societal Contribution Indices</p> <p>b) Industry-Institutional Interaction</p> <p>c) Research & development</p>	<p>ISO requires training of all those who manage, perform and/or verify work related to quality. ISO has a separate Standard for audit of quality systems.</p> <p>ISO 9000 requires the Organization to identify use of Statistical Techniques & a documented procedure for the same.</p> <p>ISO certification can be for the whole of the institution with all of its programmes included, whereas NBA is for individual programmes.</p> <p>ISO has provision for generation of records and for their proper indexing, filing etc. These records are to be audited.</p> <p>There is no element-to-criteria correlation. Hence one-to-one comparison cannot be done.</p> <p>ISO has separate provision for Corrective & Preventive Action (4.14)</p> <p>Continual audits, Mgmt Reviews can be the spur for improvement/innovation</p>
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* Quality Element Nos.