

ISO 10015 Quality Standard for Training: a much needed instrument to improve performance of in-service training.

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Market value of training

Rapid technological change, continuous product improvement and relentless competition require companies continuously to upgrade the competence levels of their human resources. As a consequence, considerable amounts of money are spent on training worldwide. For example, US employers in the private sector spent USD 55,3 billion on formal training in 1995, representing USD 569 per employee annually.

In 2001, the figure was USD 677 per employee although this was accompanied by a slowing due of the rate of increase due to the deepening recession¹⁾. Within the context of the international trade in services, the estimated global market for international higher education in 1995 was estimated at USD 27 billion²⁾. These figures would be considerably higher if other subsectors such as primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education were included.

Assuring quality in training

Experts know the difficulties of determining return on investment (ROI) in the field of training and education. Efficient, yet ineffective systems of education and in-service training exist in many countries (Saner, Strehl, Yiu, 1997)³⁾. It would be misleading to look at the education and training sector as if it were a beauty contest. What matters are the results: acquisition of skills and know-how, improved company performance and productivity, and increased behavioural competencies of students and trainees – not simple output figures such as the number of employees trained.

In the end, it is the outcome measures that determine whether or not a given education and training system is effective or ineffective – reflected or not in the increase of economic and social development at national level, or increased productivity at enterprise level.

Faced with increasingly scarce training budgets and growing demands for training and retraining, it appears evident to employers, employees and providers of training and educational services that the quality of training needs to be assured in order to achieve the highest possible ROI from training programmes and activities and, in turn, a higher certainty of business sustainability.

The Swiss authorities have undertaken a fundamental reassessment of Swiss vocational and professional education and training

Sensing that the current education and training is no longer sufficient to meet the challenges of globalization, the Swiss authorities have undertaken a fundamental reassessment of Swiss vocational and professional education and training, leading to the principal initiatives described here.

All polytechnics (*Fachhochschulen*), considered key elements of the Swiss apprenticeship system, were visited by peer review teams, comprising both Swiss and foreign experts, who assessed the quality of the schools. This fundamental assessment took one year and involved more than 300 experts. It is the largest peer review of higher vocational schools ever undertaken in Europe.

Most polytechnics were found to use the EFQM Model, and a minority ISO 9000 or total quality management (TQM). After completion of the analysis, the polytechnics will be reorganized and the Swiss Government will establish a new, mandatory, sector-specific accreditation in the course of 2002 (www.swiss-science.org).

The Swiss Association of Swiss Universities, regrouping all such establishments, decided on 15 June 2000 to create an accreditation and quality assurance unit whose task it is to prepare accreditation and quality control of all Swiss universities. The accreditation criteria and procedures will be sector specific, and not based on ISO 9000 (www.shk.ch).

Swiss vocational high schools have been offered non-mandatory opportunities to obtain ISO 9000 certification based on a one-off subsidy by the Federal Office of Vocational Training as a means of encouraging them to improve the quality of their teaching. Judging from field visits by the author, sustainability of ISO 9000 is not certain on account of reported cost concerns, perceived bureaucratic approach and resistance by teaching faculties, especially since this subsidized support in favour of ISO 9001:2000 was discontinued by the Swiss Government in December 2001.

Swiss training providers (independent companies or in-house training departments) can apply for quality certification offered by EduQua, which is a private, non-ISO 9000-based certification organization operating nationwide since January 2001. The competent Swiss authorities have accredited EduQua to conduct this certification. It offers a quality certification based on criteria encompassing pedagogical requirements and the professional qualifications of trainers corresponding to Swiss training market considerations (www.eduqua.ch).

ISO 10015: an initiative within the ISO 9000 family

The crucial question is, “What quality system could best support a company or government organization in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of training: should it be based on ISO 9000, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Model, or others?” Taking into account the various quality systems and their strengths and weaknesses, a new initiative within the ISO quality family came about in the mid-1990s to define specific quality standards for in-service training.

The result of this initiative was the drafting of a new standard called ISO 10015 which became the official standard in December 1999 and was adopted by the Swiss Association for Standardization on 1 September 2001.

The new ISO quality standard offers the most succinct quality criteria of training so far and is available for use by private and public organisations interested in ensuring high quality standards and high return on training investment. On February 19th, 2003, CSEND became the first organisation to be fully accredited by the Swiss Accreditation Agency (SAS) as a certification body for training systems, of training programmes and of training providers in the private and public sector.⁴

1) American Society for Training & Development (ASTD), Washington, www.astd.org

2) Educational Services, background note by WTO secretariat, Geneva, September 1998.

3) Saner, Raymond; Strehl, Franz; Yiu, Lichia; “In-Service Training as an instrument for Organisational Change in Public Administration”, International Institute of Administrative Sciences, Brussels, 1997.

4) For more information on certification, please contact the authors at : info@csend.org