Best practice framework

The Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu wrote in the 5th century BC, “in difficult ground, keep steadily on the march, on desperate ground, fight”. Whether you view the current economic times as difficult or desperate, it is important to keep a cool head and adjust your business tactics according to the terrain.

Restructuring may be necessary to improve efficiency and profitability, either to survive harder market conditions, or as a result of a buyout, merger or take-over, where different systems have to be blended. Either way, the management processes, the way you do things by custom and practice, can be under pressure. There is the added danger of an important skill or knowledge base “walking out the door with Fred”, whether the decision to go is his choice, or yours.

Customers too want their suppliers to demonstrate stability and reliability, and maintain an on-going relationship. Long terms relationships, the most profitable, need to be robust, so that any changes you make are fully communicated, at the right time, and do not unsettle your customers to the point that they start to look for alternative suppliers.

A best practice framework, such as ISO9001, can help you ensure you have covered all the gaps, and vital company knowledge is recorded. It provides a management benchmark against which to check you are delivering your business proposition effectively to valuable customers in changing economic conditions. If it is kept up-to date and reviewed regularly, such documentation can provide guidance and consistency.

However, although these measures play an important part in Quality Management, they are reactive. You may wish to act pre-emptively. This can pay big dividends and reveal strategies for market opportunities your competitors will miss. Pre-emptive action in response to change is one of the most powerful returns from an effective ISO 9001 system.

When you have to adjust your systems to staff changes, keeping a close eye on complaints and returns can be rewarding. It will certainly help in terms of time and materials saved in re-working the order, but also through developing your reputation for value with quality. Business reputations, which are so hard won, can also be lost very easily.

“Desperate ground” can prompt new ways of thinking, and new potential markets to explore, which may have been overlooked in the complacency of better times. Alexander the Great outwitted his enemies by turning his leather tents into rafts,
and using them to cross the Danube, which his enemies had relied on to arrest
the invasion. If sound management systems are in place, applying new methods
to existing procedures is relatively simple.

Internationally recognized standards can be a major help when entering new
markets. They show that a business is a reputable and certified supplier, and can
demonstrate a track record of working to internationally recognized standards.
Within the organization, working to a management system like ISO 9001 helps
the whole team to re-focus on efficiency and cost-savings, in a structured and
practical manner. Continuous improvement ensures the answer, “we’ve always
done it that way” is rigorously questioned and evaluated, with unnecessary tasks
being eliminated. Staff are involved and develop resourcefulness, - just what
businesses need when times are tough.

Effective quality management systems are vital if an organisation is to
successfully cope with the world economic pressures. Applying the principles of
ISO standards- Plan, Do, Check, Act- can help managers move their businesses
forward with increased confidence.

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