Integrated Management Community

Certification Body Selection and Management

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Executive Summary

Selecting and managing a management system certification body from the perspective of the organisation has strategic, tactical, and operational implications. The purpose of this paper is to assist organisations in deciding if certification is appropriate and to optimise the value gained from the certification process.

A certification body should receive the same management attention as any other important supplier and ensure it is selected and performs appropriately to meet the ongoing evolving needs of the organisation and its stakeholders as appropriate.

This paper looks at:
- ➢ What certifying a management system means?
- ➢ How an organisation can gain benefits from certifying its management system.
- ➢ How to select a management system certification body and the benefits of using an accredited certificated body over a non-accredited certificated body.
- ➢ The issues surrounding the certification of an integrated management system.

A checklist has been included in Appendix A to help organisations improve their management of the certification of their management system.

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The Chartered Quality Institute formally relinquished all interests in the assets of the CQI Integrated Management Special Interest Group (IMSIG) in 2020 when it was dissolved and became the Integrated Management Community established as an independent entity.

Revisions

Issue	Date	Changes	Participants
1	10/06/2017	Original issue.	Keith Ridgeway, Ian Dalling, Anthony Stephenson
1.1	31/12/2022	Reformatting and adding executive summary	Ian Dalling

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1   Introduction

Selecting and managing a management system certification body from the perspective of the organisation has strategic, tactical and operational implications. The purpose of this paper is to assist organisations decide if certification is appropriate and to optimise the value gained from the certification process.

This paper looks at:
- What certifying a management system means?
- How an organisation can gain benefits from certifying its management system.
- How to select a management system certification body and the benefits of using an accredited certificated body over a non-accredited certificated body.
- The issues surrounding the certification of an integrated management system.

It should be noted that organisations tend to grow and evolve and the management system and certification, if appropriate, needs to be optimally supportive and add the maximum value. A checklist has been included in Appendix A to help organisations improve their management of the certification of their management system.

2   What is Certification and Accreditation?

Before we look at what are the benefits of certifying the management system, we first need to be clear about what is meant by certification and accreditation processes. The purpose of both processes is to provide confidence to stakeholders by providing an independent assessment and ongoing monitoring which is universally respected and can be relied upon.

The confidence obtained through certification and accreditation processes permits a stakeholder to avoid directly auditing the organisation unless a higher level of confidence is required than that provided by certification and accreditation processes. Organisations often supplement the certification or accreditation of the supplier's management system within external audit of the supplier using their own auditors.

It should be noted that certification can be applied to things other than management systems such as people, products, and services.

2.1 Certification

Certification is the procedure by which a third party gives written assurance that a product, process, system or person conforms to specified requirements.

2.2 Accreditation

Accreditation is the formal recognition by an 'accreditation authority' to the technical and organisational competence of a conformity assessment body, to carry out a 'specific service' in accordance to the standards and technical regulations, as described in their 'scope of accreditation'. It provides a means to identify a proven, competent evaluator so that the selection of a laboratory, inspection or certification body is an informed choice.

2.3 National and International Accreditation Framework

Certification at the local level is assured by a national and international framework of governance with the purpose of delivering uniformity of performance across the globe. At the global level, accreditation is divided into two governing groups:

➢ International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

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➢ International Laboratory Accreditation Co-operation (ILAC).

These two international bodies provide a framework for coordinating the performance of the regional and national accreditation bodies and are described in the following subsections:
    2.3.1 International Accreditation Forum
    2.3.2 International Laboratory Accreditation Co-operation (ILAC)

2.3.1 International Accreditation Forum

The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) is the world association of Conformity Assessment Accreditation Bodies and other bodies interested in conformity assessment in the fields of management systems, products, services, personnel and other similar programs of conformity assessment. Its primary function is to develop a single worldwide program of conformity assessment which reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring them that accredited certificates may be relied upon. Accreditation assures users of the competence and impartiality of the body accredited.

Accreditation is the independent evaluation of conformity assessment bodies against recognized standards to ensure their impartiality and competence. Through the application of national and international standards, government, procurers and consumers can have confidence in the calibration and test results, inspection reports and certifications provided.

Accreditation bodies are established in many countries with the primary purpose of ensuring that conformity assessment bodies are subject to oversight by an authoritative body.

Accreditation bodies, which have been evaluated by peers as competent, sign arrangements that enhance the acceptance of products and services across national borders, thereby creating a framework to support international trade through the removal of technical barriers.

2.3.2 International Laboratory Accreditation Co-operation (ILAC)

The ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement (ILAC MRA) provides significant technical underpinning to the calibration, testing, medical testing and inspection results of the accredited conformity assessment bodies and in turn delivers confidence in the acceptance of results.

It supports the provision of local or national services, such as providing safe food and clean drinking water, providing energy, delivering health and social care or maintaining an unpolluted environment.

It enhances the acceptance of products across national borders by removing the need for additional calibration, testing, medical testing and/or inspection of imports and exports, technical barriers to trade are reduced. In this way, the ILAC MRA promotes international trade and the free-trade goal of "accredited once, accepted everywhere" can be realized.

It links the existing regional MRAs/MLAs of the Recognised Regional Cooperation Bodies. For the purposes of the ILAC MRA, and based on ILAC's evaluation and recognition of the regional MRAs/MLAs, ILAC delegates authority to its Recognised Regional Cooperation Bodies for the evaluation, surveillance, re-evaluation and associated decision making relating to the signatory status of the accreditation bodies that are ILAC full members (ILAC MRA signatories).

The accreditation bodies that are signatories to the ILAC MRA have been peer evaluated in accordance with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17011 to demonstrate their competence. The ILAC MRA Signatory Search provides a current list of all accreditation bodies that are signatories to the ILAC MRA, including their contact details, the scope of their recognition and the initial date of signing the ILAC MRA.

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The ILAC MRA signatories then assess and accredit conformity assessment bodies according to the relevant international standards including:

> ➢ Calibration laboratories (using ISO/IEC 17025),
> ➢ Testing laboratories (using ISO/IEC 17025),
> ➢ Medical testing laboratories (using ISO 15189),
> ➢ Inspection bodies (using ISO/IEC 17020)

The ILAC MRA signatories agree to accept the results of each other's accredited conformity assessment bodies under the ILAC MRA. Hence, the results from the conformity assessment bodies accredited by the ILAC MRA signatories are able to be recognised internationally. In many cases, a link to the accreditation body's online directory of accredited facilities is also provided in the ILAC MRA Signatory Search.

Using the signatory search and the accredited facilities directories, regulators and consumers can locate laboratories or inspection bodies that are accredited for the specific calibrations, tests or inspections required, as well as the contact details of these facilities, thereby ensuring the results will be accepted under the ILAC MRA. Organisations can also host the ILAC MRA signatory search on their website by copying the code.

The ILAC MRA 2016 Annual Report provides information on the activities carried out as part of the current peer evaluation process to ensure that regulators and consumers of laboratory and inspection data are able to maintain confidence in the results produced under the ILAC MRA.

3   Accredited and Non-Accredited Certification

A critical strategic choice is whether to achieve certification of the management system via an accredited or non-accredited certification body. The meaning of certification and accreditation is addressed in section 2.

IMC believe that significantly more value is obtained from certifying via an accredited certification body because it provides a much higher level of confidence that the management system is fit for purpose and is being complied with. Accredited certifications are also universally recognised by most organisations whereas many large organisations do not recognise non-accredited certifications. A non-accredited certification could prevent an organisation being placed on an approved supplier list or being shortlisted for a contract. While non-accredited certification may be cheaper, it is likely to significantly limit the value that can potentially be gained by the organisation. Ongoing costs of maintaining certification must be borne by the organisation in either case. The cost of changing from a non-accredited to an accredited certification body later are likely to be the same as having selected an accredited certification body to start with.

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> The cost of changing from a non-accredited to an accredited certification body later are likely to be the same as having selected an accredited certification body in the first place.

The following subsections provide views on the value of accredited certification:

- 3.1 What the Certification bodies say.
- 3.2 What the Accreditation bodies say.
- 3.3 What the Organisations say.

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3.1 What the Certification bodies say

Independent European Certification Limited says the main reasons why companies seek ISO certification with an accredited certification body are:

- Improve business's ability to tender for contracts
- Improve business processes
- Improve business's ability to tender for contracts
- Increase the quality of the product or service
- Aid marketing with a worldwide recognised management system certification
- Improve management control
- Improvements to customer services
- Increasing market share

3.2 What the Accreditation bodies say

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

New Opportunities
Certification bodies can bring a wealth of knowledge to a company during the certification process and this can lead to new opportunities and savings that had not been recognised previously.

Save Money
When you use a UKAS accredited certification body you are buying into appropriate technical expertise and knowledge. Use a non-accredited certification body and you run the risk of having systems imposed on your company that are inappropriate and not necessarily cost effective. Whereas, an accredited certification body can provide you and your customers with the assurance that your management systems comply with international standards and in addition there is no risk of having to seek re-certification.

Maximise Success and Minimise Risk
One of the key reasons a company seeks ISO 9001 registration is to increase competitiveness and to secure new orders by demonstrating its systems, processes and capability are fit for purpose. However, if the certificate has been issued by a non-accredited certification body, the tender may still be rejected. The Ministry of Defence, for instance, when it requires its suppliers to be ISO 9001 certificated, prefers that the certification has been undertaken by a certification body accredited by UKAS or a signed signatory to the International Accreditation Forum Multi-Lateral Agreement"

Use a non-accredited certification body and you run the risk of having systems imposed on your company that are inappropriate and not necessarily cost effective. Whereas, an accredited certification body can provide you and your customers with the assurance that your management systems comply with international standards and in addition there is no risk of having to seek re-certification.

One of the key reasons a company seeks ISO 9001 registration is to increase competitiveness and to secure new orders by demonstrating its capability and fitness for purpose. However, if the certificate has been issued by a non-accredited certification body, the tender may still be rejected.

3.3 What the Organisations say

The following is based on the personal research conducted by Keith Ridgeway as a practicing international management systems consultant. He found that much evidence on the benefits were based on self-promotion by the accreditation and certification bodies themselves.

Keith therefore decided to carry out an independent questionnaire survey on what other parties thought the benefits were, if any. The short questionnaire needed no more than 5

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minutes to complete and each question could be answered with a simple YES or NO response.

The independent questionnaire survey was sent out to all his professional contacts around the world and he received over 500 replies. The results of the survey are shown below in Figure 1.
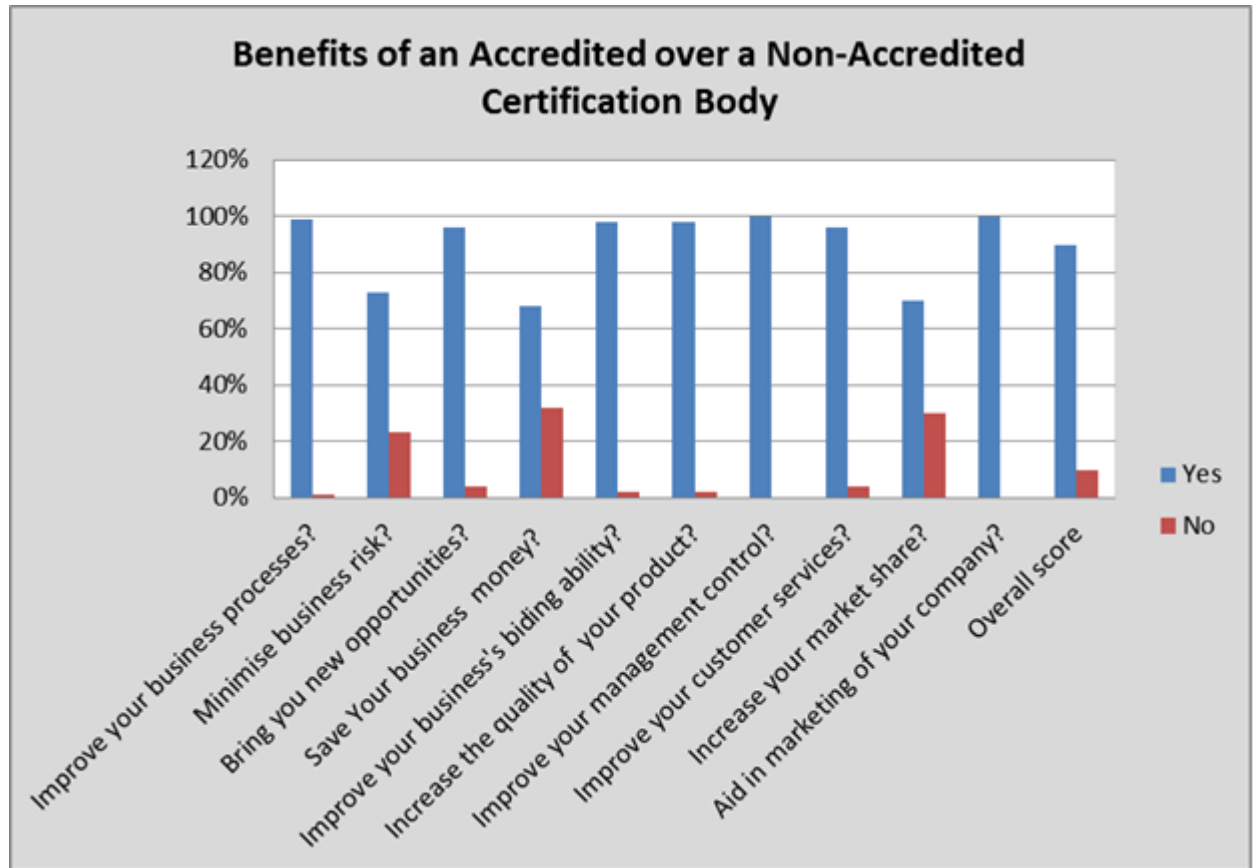

Figure 1: Benefits of Accredited Certification Survey

4   Selecting and Managing a Certification Body

Organisations need to select many different types of suppliers of services and products. The more critical the service or product is to the performance of the organisation; the more attention needs to be paid to ensuring that the supplier is fit for purpose and gives the best value for money within the available market. A key consideration is ensuring that the certification body is properly accredited as discussed in the previous section.

Selecting a management system certification body has similarities with selecting a bank or a supplier of insurance. It pays to do some basic research and if possible seek the views of other organisations. Like the other services, organisations should continually monitor the performance of the certification body and be prepared to switch to obtain more value. This may be necessary as the organisation grows and evolves and when there are changes to the scope of certification or changes to management system standards.

Organisations should always contact their certification body if they are in any way dissatisfied with its performance. Most certification bodies will respond positively and improve the quality of their service. It is good to do this prior to switching to another certification body because certification body performance is generally not homogeneous due to the variability of the competence of the assessors.

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Appendix A provides a checklist of important issues that organisations should address during the selection and ongoing management of the certification body.

5   Certifying an Integrated Management System

Integrated management systems typically covering product/service quality, environmental protection, occupational health and safety, and data security are becoming commonplace in organisations. There are also organisations with full scope integrated management systems addressing the totality of the management of the organisation and these are expected to become more widespread over the next decade.

At the time of writing this document, integrated management systems are not generally able to be given a single accredited certification although a non-accredited single certification may be possible. The current practice is to subject the integrated management system to multiple certifications satisfying the various management system performance standards such as product/service quality, environmental protection, occupational health and safety, data security etc. Accredited certification bodies during the last decade have attempted to deliver this process in a more effective and efficient way via concurrent processes to various degrees of proficiency. It is now possible to get assessors that are proficient in the application of multiple management system standards and able to look at the overall performance of the structures and processes of the organisation delivering its purpose.

The ISO high level structure (ISO Annex SL) for structuring management systems standards has helped the certification bodies to focus on some key core issues but the degree that the assessment of the organisation can be optimally streamlined depends on the knowledge, experience and skill of the certification body assessor (or assessor team). This is because the ISO high-level structure only standardises and aligns the main headings of the various ISO management system standards and leaves the content to be integrated by the IMS designers. A lot of the requirements in the ISO management system standards also do not fit this high-level structure and is placed in appendices.

Organisations not wishing to engage in full third-party certification of their integrated management system can as an alternative self-certify to MSS 1000 to bronze level only. This may be a useful value adding exercise for small organisations with limited resources as an alternative to full third-party certification or as an interim improvement initiative. Whether this is appropriate will depend on the size and nature of the organisation and the needs, expectations and aspirations of its stakeholders.

A checklist has been included in Appendix A to help organisations improve their management of the certification of their management system.

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6 Conclusion

Certification can potentially be a very valuable process for providing confidence in an organisation's implementation of a management system that is compliant with adopted management system standards.

It is important that an organisation determines the value that certification processes will bring to the organisation based on the degree that they meet identified needs of stakeholders including customers. The scope of certification should be suitable and sufficient to ensure alignment with stakeholder ongoing needs that are continually evolving. Certification must serve a purpose and contribute to the creation of value.

Certification bodies should be appropriately accredited and monitored to ensure the quality of the services being supplied to the organisation and are value for money. Certification bodies should be competent in assessing a business centric integrated management system against specific standards adopted by the organisation.

Certification should be periodically reviewed as part of overall strategic policy and planning.

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Appendix A: Organisation Certification Checklist

The following checklist has been designed to help organisations improve their management of the certification of their management system:

a) Has the reason for seeking or maintaining certification the organisation's management system been identified and clearly defined?

b) Is the seeking or maintaining of certification part of the organisation's overall strategic planning? Have the benefits to the organisation been evaluated and justified with respect to the internal and external costs of establishing and/or maintaining certification?

c) Has the timing of implementing or changing the scope of certification been aligned with the organisation's other strategic improvement initiatives?

d) Does the certification policy also cover the organisation's critical suppliers? Does the supplier certification policy cover situations where there may be an absence of accreditation of the supplier's management system or when the management system is certified by a non-accredited body?

e) Are the performance and benefits of certification reviewed annually and appropriate management action taken as part of an integrated management review process?

- Is the scope of certification appropriate?

- Does the organisation have the right structures and processes in place to facilitate an effective and efficient certification assessments? This should be a clear plan that defines responsible staff and how the certification body assessor is provided with access to everything that is needed.

- Is the organisation fully exploiting its certification in marketing its products and services and establishing relationships with other organisations?

f) Is the performance of the certification body review annually (or more often if significantly underperforming) and management action taken?

- Is the assessment process streamlined to minimise impact on the organisation?

- Does the assessment process help staff their understanding of the organisations structures and processes and initiate improvements?

- Are the findings of the assessments constructive and adding value?

- Is the certification body able to deliver its services where the organisation conducts its operations in an effective and efficient way?

- Does the organisation deliver continuity of assessors and with knowledge and experience of the organisation's operations?

- Does the certification body help with exploiting the organisation's certification(s)'s

- Is the certification body consistently delivering value for money?

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- How does the performance of the certification body compare with others in the market?