Quality beyond ISO 9001

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Currently many organizations are working on implementing the ISO 9001:2015 revision. So why should we think beyond ISO 9001, if we have not even completed the transition?

Our businesses are embedded in a world of continuously higher complexity, challenging technology and accelerated in cycles of development and deployment. What are the issues?

1. The way how some organizations are implementing the standard, that is the methods and processes used.
2. The standard supports some processes better by giving clear requirements than others, e.g. there is more detailed requirements on handling of non-conformities than on change.

There are four repeating and to some extent interrelated problematic approaches in the implementation of the standard:

1) Quality is the responsibility of the quality manager
2) Tools and rules are more important than the effect
3) Roles and functions impede creativity and team-work
4) Plans have priority over market necessities

Now, ISO 9001 does not prevent organizations to act according "agile". However, there are no clauses supporting organizations doing it – e.g. even the word "team" is not mentioned in the standard. On the other hand the need for responsibilities and authorities is covered extensively. It should evaluated if this is a misbalance in favor of stability.

The future of ISO 9001 still lays way ahead and the responsible committee has only started to take on work for developing future concepts to be included into quality management standards. Two mega-trends will certainly influence quality in the future, and already do so. One is the so-called digital revolution. Though longer term consequence and their extent cannot be predicted, todays trends will be rather amplified:

- Complexity increases because of connected and digitalized products and services.
- Acceleration will continue, as advance in computing, data networks and storage, artificial intelligence , life science, etc. give exponentially growing opportunities for innovation.
- Technological advance induces changes in the work-force, as new competence, difficult to obtain is required, and repetitive tasks are automatized.
- The criticality of processes will be differently prioritized, some being better controlled because of technological advance, others becoming key processes for success e.g. such as concerning design, data security).

But lastly one challenge lies ahead, which might need a re-framing of what we understand as "quality". Currently we tend to apply the concept in a narrow fashion, thinking about isolated products, processes or system. This view is supported by ISO 9001, clear focusing on the customer as prime stakeholder. Short sighted gains need to be questioned and sustained success in the long run can only be achieved if the future for our children is preserved.