INTRODUCTION

The management methods in some aspects are subject to similar rules as products. They are introduced, promoted and developed. They also have to compete against other methods. Subsequently they obviously get outdated, so after a while their popularity decreases. At times they are modified to make managers want to utilize them again. Quality management system (QMS) in conformity with ISO 9001 standard is one of those methods. In 2013 there were over 1 100 000 organizations which had their QMS certified according to ISO 9001. However, the increase of the number of certificates observed few years ago has recently stopped (see Fig. 2). Some countries (e.g. Japan, Brazil, The Netherlands and Sweden) noticed a strong decrease of the interest in the standard [1]. At the same time there started to appear, especially in expert literature, critical opinions on the quality management systems.

Fig. 1: Evolution of ISO 9001 certificates

A new revision of ISO 9001 is about to be published in 2015 and the changes it announces should eliminate all or at least some of the faults discovered in the current revision of the system. Nevertheless, it is not certain whether the corrected revision will meet the expectations and cause a renewal of the interest in the quality management systems. However, the draft version has already been published so it is possible to perform an initial review. First, it is crucial to indicate the problems connected with the current quality management systems functioning, which is the goal of this article. It attempts to identify and categorize those problems basing on the literature study and the authors’ experience gained in the work of consultants and management representatives.

1. QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ISO 9001

ISO 9001 standard was first announced in 1987. Since its publication it has undergone three amendments. The changes introduced in 1994 focused on a global approach to the product life cycle. The amendments of the 2000 simplified the standard’s structure but most importantly included a number of crucial changes concerning the scope and content of the requirements. The revision also replaced the term “quality system” by “quality management system” [2]. The last review so far took place in 2008. It introduced minor changes meant to clarify some issues and also increase the conformity with ISO 14001 standard. Because of its complexity, it is difficult to define precisely what a quality management system
is. The ISO 9000 standard describes it as a management system used to direct and control organization with regard to quality. To be more precise a QMS could be defined as an entirety of planned and methodically performed activities aiming at meeting the customer’s expectations and ensuring the organization’s development [3]. It is developed on the basis of ISO 9001 requirements. They concern: (1) managing processes and documentation of the quality management system, (2) management commitment, (3) resources management i.e. staff, infrastructure and work environment, (4) product realization i.e. production or service provision and lastly (5) measurement, analysis and improvement.

ISO 9001 standard can be utilized in any organization. Therefore it should not be associated with production corporations only. It is also used by distribution and service companies as well as public institutions (i.e. offices, universities, hospitals, the police etc.). In the past 20 years of ISO 9000 series standards existence, they have reached great popularity. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) have carried out studies which prove that in 2013 as many as 1,129,446 organizations worldwide had a certified system of quality management which meets the requirements of ISO 9001 standard. The biggest number of certificates stating the conformity with ISO 9001 in 2013 was issued in: China, Italy, Germany, Japan, the UK, Spain, India, the USA, France and Brazil [1].

The quality management systems are proved by many surveys to be highly effective. The study of To, Lee and Yu who examined 157 Chinese enterprises showed that the companies improved their performance thanks to the implementation of ISO 9001 and/or ISO 14001 management system [4]. Over 500 Spanish enterprises were surveyed by Casadesús, Giménez and Heras who reached similar conclusions [5]. Also Sampaio, Saraiva and Rodrigues [6] after having surveyed 207 Portuguese companies claimed that implementation of a quality management system is economically beneficial for them [6]. Nevertheless, there have appeared a great number of publications pointing out some problems. They are mostly related to the implementation and maintenance of the quality management systems e.g. Heras-Saizarbitoria, Casadesús and Marimón see the main problems in huge paperwork it involves. They also deny the increase in staff’s involvement and motivation the standard ought to bring about [7]. What is more, Boiral and Amara claim that only 26.6% of organisations certified with ISO standard meet the international standard’s requirements efficiently [8].

2. PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The problems related to the functioning of quality management systems can be divided into three categories. The first one are the weaknesses of the ISO 9001 standard. The second group are practical irregularities which appear at the stages of implementation, improvement and certification of the quality management systems. The last category consists of real or potential threats in company’s surroundings (see Figure 2).

Fig. 2: Problems related to the quality management system

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Source: own research

The key weaknesses of the ISO 9001 standard are:

1. Poor connection of the quality management system to the targets and strategy of an organization. It may be noticed that the requirements included in ISO 9001 do not put enough emphasis on the business context of an organization’s activities i.e. for example issues related to effectiveness.
claim is proved by the results of the study carried out among 700 Polish companies. They reveal that only half of the organizations which had implemented a system of quality management, felt it contributed to achieving the company’s targets effectively. Better results were noticed in areas of e.g. improving the company’s image, introducing clear performance standards, improving the relations with customers, and making production processes safer [9].

2. Little concentration on an organization’s improvement mechanisms. A number of studies have demonstrated that, in practice, ISO 9001 certified organizations devote much more attention to stabilizing their performance than to improvement. One of the main reasons for this is that the requirements for improvement are scattered through the ISO 9001 standard and there is a clear focus only on selected activities i.e. corrective and preventive measures [10].

3. Omitting issues related to risk analysis. ISO 9001 standard lacks the requirements concerning the need for identifying dangerous situations which are a threat for both the system and the organization as a whole in relation to e.g.: a) accomplishment of the accepted strategy, b) ensuring the continuity of products and services supply, c) establishing cooperation with contracting parties [11].

4. Superficial approach to the production process management. The area requirements were synthetically included in a few short points. Therefore a lot of significant issues were not taken into consideration. For example the issue of the responsibility of the process owners was omitted.

5. Incomprehensible and imprecise style of ISO 9001 standard. The document includes many phrases which are difficult to interpret especially for small companies and public offices. It causes major problems with understanding the requirements and leads to misunderstandings among consultants, management representatives, auditors and organization’s employees.

6. Insufficient cohesion between certain documents included in the ISO 9000 series, ISO 9004 standard and the standards containing requirements for other management systems such as: ISO 14001, ISO 22000, ISO 27001 etc. The key irregularities of the QMS practical functioning concern implementation, maintenance, improvement and certification of the system. They are among others:

1. Wrong motives underlying the decision of implementing QMS. Organizations implementing QMS usually claim they aim their actions at improving their activity and satisfying the customer’s requirements. However, in practice the real reasons to implement a system are quite different. They concern, among others, strong clients’ pressure (e.g. sales network), market requirements (e.g. the prerequisite to join a tender is having the certificate), or the will to copy other co-workers or competitors (the situation often takes place in public administration). These issues are the main reason or at least one of many constituents of a big number of other irregularities described in this article. It may lead to insufficient engagement of company’s employees – especially the management – in designing and proper implementation of a management system.

2. Improperly conducted process of designing and implementing a system of quality management. Designing and implementing QMS requires from an organization an appropriate level of knowledge of the topic. Therefore they often take advantage of external consultants’ help. Although it is estimated that there are currently 1 000 firms providing such services in Poland, one might doubt if all of them possess proper potential and approach to their activities. For example J. Kowalczyk drew attention to a very frequent mistake made by consultants, i.e. offering or even imposing ready-made solutions, while the main goal of a consultant should be looking for solutions adjusted to individual characteristics of the organization [12]. The effects of improper consultant’s work may be e.g.: excessive documentation, instructions which are vague and not adjusted to the characteristics of an organization, wrongly identified key processes [13]. Nevertheless it must be mentioned that implementing QMS without consultants’ help or properly trained and experienced employees also leads to negative results. This approach creates systems which do not meet the needs and capabilities of an organization with unnecessary solutions which with time are perceived in the categories of “myths and ceremonies” [14].

3. Limited knowledge and skills of the quality management area (it also concerns the knowledge of the requirements included in ISO 9001 standard) among people having certain responsibilities in QMS, i.e. internal auditors, process owners and also the representatives of the top management. Such knowledge and skills are required to secure the effectiveness of QMS in the context of business conditions the organization operates in.

4. Depreciation of certificates. It has recently been noticed that the importance of ISO 9001 certificate is decreasing. Among the reasons J. Zymonik pointed out among others (a) increasing competition in the market of certification services which lowers the costs of certification. As a result the
certification bodies do not only look for rational sources of costs reduction but also undertake actions which reduce the value of the audits, (b) strong pressure exerted on the certification bodies by organizations wishing to receive the certificate quickly without sufficient fulfilment of the ISO 9001 requirements. The certification bodies yield under pressure as they do not want to lose their clients, (c) insufficient number of well trained and qualified auditors, (d) unsatisfactory supervision of accreditation authorities over the certification bodies [15]. Accredited certification bodies must compete with cheaper and not so demanding bodies with no accreditation. As a result, many organizations have ISO 9001 certificate which does not provide an adequate level of trust in the quality of the organization activities. ISO 9001 certificate is becoming less and less positive and reliable characteristic [16].

5. Limited scope of QMS’s influence. Many organizations decide to implement a system of quality management only in chosen departments e.g. department of production, purchases, sales or customer service. Moreover in many cases where the QMS is implemented in whole organization, its requirements in practice do not cover some areas of organization’s activity. The situation usually applies to the accounting department.

The problems in the last group are called threats. This group does not relate directly to the current revision of ISO 9001 standard, nor to the practice of QMS’s functioning. Worth mentioning are:

1. Economic crisis. Implementing and certification of quality management system involves incurring certain expenses. During the crisis period, many organizations search for possibilities to cut down the costs. Some of them decided to suspend certification audits waiting for better circumstances. Therefore the certification bodies try to keep their clients by lowering the prices for their services. However the procedure start a scheme called “the spiral of death”. Reducing the prices leads to lowering the quality of the services (e.g. shortening the audits) which in turn discourages the clients even more and forces the certification bodies to introduce next prices reductions [17].

2. A large and still growing number of formalized systems of quality management (e.g. ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 22000, OHSAS 18001, etc.), and other similar solutions in the market. The situation may weaken the popularity of each of them. For example introducing the “CAF label” distinction, which is being prepared, may cause the drop of QMS popularity in local government offices.

3. Extreme solutions utilized by International Organization for Standardization in revising the content of ISO 9001 standard. ISO standards are revised every few years. As it was mentioned before ISO 9001 standard was updated in 2008. However the scope of the changes was very limited. Most organizations with a certified QMS did not have to introduce any changes to receive the certificate of meeting the requirements of the new standard. On the other hand, the changes announced in the 2015 revision are of a very wide range. They concern many totally new requirements for the system of quality management. It seems that both approaches (i.e. introducing only minor or having numerous and radical changes) are very risky because they may lead to reducing the interest in ISO 9001 standard.

4. Incorrect way of informing about being certified with QMS. Some ISO 9001 certified organizations inform about the certificate suggesting that it guarantees the highest level of products or services provided by the organization. It creates a wrong image of the standard which may lead to disappointment (e.g. among the customers) and an improper, negative assessment of the QMS.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies and categorizes irregularities related to the QMS functioning. The next step will be an attempt to determine the potential of the new revision of the standard to reduce or eliminate those problems. However even at the current stage it may be claimed that changing only the content of ISO 9001 will not make a big part of the problems mitigation since it appears that only some of the irregularities are related directly to the content of ISO 9001. The rest of the problems concern the practice of implementing, improving and certification of the systems of quality management or result from other reasons, not related to the content of the standard. Solving these problems involves other activities which do not only modify the requirements included in the ISO 9001 standard. The activities may relate to e.g. improvement of the accreditation and certification services, introducing the assessment of the QMS maturity level or providing solutions increasing the independence of the certification body from the organization which is being certified (currently the dependence is determined by the finances). It also must be noticed that this article does not cover the relations between certain irregularities. It is doubtless, though, that such relations exist, e.g. some of the identified problems are the reasons for the others. Therefore, future research should provide a map of
problems and relations between them. It would be helpful to differentiate the original problems and secondary ones i.e. those which are the effects of the original irregularities' occurrence.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

[1] www.iso.org


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QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ISO 9001—WEAKNESSES, PRACTICAL IRREGULARITIES AND

Abstract
The paper identifies problems related to the functioning of quality management system ISO 9001. These problems have been divided into three categories. The first one are the weaknesses of the ISO 9001 standard. The second group are practical irregularities which appear at the stages of implementation, improvement and certification of the quality management systems. The last category consists of real or potential threats in company’s surroundings. The next step of study will be an attempt to determine the potential of the new revision of the standard (which will be published in 2015) to reduce or eliminate those problems. However even at the current stage it may be claimed that changing only the content of ISO 9001 will not make a big part of the problems mitigation since it appears that only some of the irregularities are related directly to the content of ISO 9001. The rest of the problems concern the practice of implementing, improving and certification of the systems of quality management or result from other reasons, not related to the content of the standard. Solving these problems involves other activities which do not only modify the requirements included in the ISO 9001 standard. The activities may relate to e.g. improvement of the accreditation and certification services.

Key words
quality management system, ISO 9001

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