ISO 9001 CERTIFICATION: THE CUSTOMERS’ PERSPECTIVE

Diana Matias, Paulo Sampaio, Ana Cristina Braga
University of Minho, Portugal,
dianamatias27@gmail.com; paulosampaio@dps.uminho.pt; acb@dps.uminho.pt

ABSTRACT

Based on our own experience and on the literature review carried out the ISO 9001 research studies have mostly addressed certification issues from the companies point of view, namely companies certification motivations and benefits, benefits evolution over time, barriers to the quality management system implementation, evolution and diffusion of worldwide ISO 9001 certification, the impact on organizational and financial performance and the relation between ISO 9001 and Total Quality Management. The ISO 9001 customers’ perspective has not yet been deeply analyzed. This paper reflects a pioneer research project conducted in Portugal with the aim of analyzing the customers’ perspective concerning the product/service quality provides by ISO 9001 certified and non-certified companies. In order to address this issue, a questionnaire was sent to 5100 companies. The response rate was of 7%.

Key-words: ISO 9000, certification, customer’s perspective, impact
1. Introduction

In recent years, society and customers, have shown concerns about the performance of products or and services that are achieved. These concerns have forced companies to rethink their strategies assigning more importance to quality standards. The certification according to the ISO 9001 standard is a recognition of products and or services conformity, customer satisfaction and continuous improvement.

The number of certified companies in Portugal has steadily increased, and in 2009 there were 7,110 ISO 9001 certifies companies, which corresponds to approximately, 14% of certified companies with 10 or more employees (Sampaio and Saraiva, 2010).

The quality of service/product had become an important research topic because of its relation to costs, profit, customer satisfaction, customer service, driver marketing, financial performance and strategy (Dick, 2002; Pires, 2004).

Based on literature review carried out we are able to find a unique definition of quality. The concept and its definition vary according to the measurement instruments used and are related to different perspectives. However, a broad definition we agree on is that quality is based on the needs, expectations, perceptions and customer satisfaction (Caro and Garcia, 2009).

Companies that decide to implement and certify their quality management system based on internal motivations get larger and more significant improvements in organization and management. Moreover, when top management is deeply involved and committed, the customer is found to demonstrate greater satisfaction (Poksinska et al., 2006; Sampaio, 2008; Sampaio, et al., 2009; Wahid e Corner, 2009). Thus, companies have started to engage in the evaluation of customer’s satisfaction. This was also influenced by the fact that the ISO 9001 requires methods for measuring and monitoring if the process by which the service is delivered is according to customer specifications (Dick, 2002).

In order to support an ISO 9001 implementation it is necessary to analyze its impact on customer’s, checking the level of satisfaction and confidence in the processes and services provided by the certified companies (Dick, 2002).
Several studies addressed customer satisfaction, including their perception and expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Wisniewski, 2001; Muffatto and Panizzolo, 1995; Bond and Fink, 2003; Hall, 1997). One of the most widespread methodologies related to this issue is the SERVQUAL that can be used by managers in order to improve product/service performance. Moreover, ISO 9001 effects have been analyzed regarding customers perception of management issues, such as benefits of certification and productivity improvements. Nevertheless, customer’s feedback concerning the perceived differences between certified and non-certified firms has not been systematically analyzed.

The present research aims to fill this gap by focusing on the customer's perspective and considering it as a critical factor for the business quality and its benefits.

Therefore, this paper will analyze the impact of ISO 9001 certification in certified companies’ customers. These clients may or may not be companies certified to ISO 9001. More specifically, the paper intends to:

- Identify which requirements of service/product are most valued by customers and if the ISO 9001 certification is crucial to meet those requirements.
- Check if there are differences in the provision of services/products between certified and non-certified companies.
- Analyze if there are significant differences between the level of customer satisfaction of certified and non-certified companies.
- Analyze if the ISO 9001 certification is a key criterion for suppliers selection.

2. Methodology
2.1. Questionnaire

Based on the literature review carried out a questionnaire was developed in order to data gathering.
The questionnaire was composed by two main sections. The first one related to general information about the companies and the second are relates to companies service perception and evaluation.

The instrument was tested in four companies in order to identify possible mistakes, ambiguities and improvements.

It final versions was composed by 9 questions and took around 7 minutes to fill in.

2.2. Preliminary Results

In order to expedite the study and to gather more participants, contacts with national entities and industrial associations were made resulting in a partnership with the AIP (Portuguese Industrial Association) and the APQ (Portuguese Association for Quality). These two associations supported this study through its dissemination in their associates’ network.

Three hundred sixty eight questionnaires were gathered from companies across Portugal, nevertheless the majority of them belong to “Lisboa e Setúbal” region and “Entre Douro e Minho” region (Figure 1). Moreover, around 59% of the companies have more than 50 employees (Figure 2). Seventy six percent of the questionnaires gathered were from certified companies.
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Figure 1 – Data geographic distribution

Figure 2 – Companies dimension, according to number of employees.

Currently data analyses are being performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 19, and the final results will be presented in the conference.
Inferential tests will be done to analyze possible differences in customer’s responses according to the companies sector. Because the sample is composed by client companies from other companies, with and without the ISO 9001 certification, a stratified analysis will be possible.

3– Conclusions

ISO 9001 literature focuses its attention mainly on the advantages of certification for the organization taking into account the improvements in productivity, the motivations that lead to certification, and customer satisfaction analysis (Pires, 2004, Reis et al., 2003, Caro and Garcia, 2009). Generally, the studies analyze certification through the following areas: relationship between the motivations for certification and its benefits, the evolution of the benefits of certification, the certification barriers, the impact on organizational performance and market’s, as well as the relation between ISO 9001 and TQM (total quality management) (Sampaio et al., 2009).

The customer satisfaction have been analyzed regarding customers perception of management issues, such as benefits of certification and productivity improvements (Muffatto and Panizzolo, 1995; Bond and Fink, 2003; Hall, 1997), but their perspectives and expectative from product/services of certified companies are been not systematically analyzed.

Findings of this study are expected to be useful for adjusting future ISO 9001 implementations, to inform companies about specific customer needs, and to establish new standards of quality.
4- References


