

# Difficulties and Problems Encountered in ISO 9001:2015 implementation in the Philippines

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**Keywords—** ISO 9001:2015, Quality  
Management System, QMS, Difficulties,  
Problems Encountered

**Abstract—** A period of great transformation is under way in higher education. The study described difficulties and problems encountered before, during and after the implantation of ISO 9001:2015 of state universities in Region 3. The study used qualitative thematic analysis. A total of 3 State University and Colleges (SUCs) or 25 respondents were surveyed. The researcher utilized a written open-ended questionnaire through online. All transcripts were saved, recorded and analyzed. Results show that before the implementation of ISO 9001:2015, the following difficulties and problems encountered were the planning phase requirements, unpleasant feeling during preparation work management for document and procedures and difficulty in communication. Additionally, during the implementation of ISO 9001:2015, the following difficulties and problems encountered were the compliance requirements, response to change, task management, and insufficient resources. Lastly, results show that after the implementation of ISO 9001:2015, the following difficulties and problems encountered were still recurring difficulties and problems. Overall, the researcher concluded that all SUCs had experienced difficulties or challenges before, during, and after the implementation of ISO 9001:2015. Before a state university or college implement the ISO 9001:2015 certification, the Quality Assurance management should give a thorough orientation to all the persons in-charge like Document Control Officers, Document Control Coordinators, and all Program Heads. Orientation should not only end with information dissemination but also preparation of required documents and processes. During the implementation, it also recommended to have capacity building to all persons-in-charge to take their responsibility will full acceptance of the changes that are happening especially when encountering difficulties or problems. After the ISO 9001:2015 implementation, it is recommended that program evaluation must be utilized proactively to be able to address risk and opportunities of the implementation so that recurring difficulties and problems will be lessened.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A period of great transformation is under way in higher education. More in particular, Perellon (2005) further stated that the emergence of accreditation as the dominant objective of national policies for quality assurance in higher education can be understood as a crucial moment in the process of commercialization. Rezgui et al. (2017) stated that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are

attempting to ensure a high level of quality by using a sophisticated quality management system (QMS) as part of their academic tradition, following standards and guidelines. Stefanovic et al. (2009) concluded that it is clear that applying QMS and Quality Policy will lead to substantial improvements on relatively low costs.

The intricate make-up of change system requires the interplaying of prevailing approaches of change

management strategies and transformational leadership, which are eventually used as significant predictors (Gamboa, 2017).

With memorandum circular no. 2016-1 dated May 12, 2016 that was issued by the Philippine Administrative Order (AO) No. 25 Inter-Agency Task Force, establishing a Quality Management System (QMS) to adopt the ISO 9001:2015, had been mandatory to government agencies. In relation, ISO 9001:2015 certification serves as a requirement for the grant of the Performance-based Bonus (PBB). Organizations use the ISO 9001:2015 to show an ability to consistently offer customer- and regulatory-compliant products and services and demonstrate continuous improvement.

The researcher was interested in the topic because of his involvement in the implementation of ISO 9001:2015. As an auditor, the researcher experienced difficulty in certification and re-certification of ISO 9001:2015. Further, with these local studies, there is a scarcity of researches pertaining to ISO 9001:2015. There is a gap of studies on knowing the difficulties and problems encountered in the implementation of ISO 9001:2015 among academic institutions.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored to the Kurt Lewin's Change Theory developed by Kurt Lewin in 1950s. According to this theory, the changes happening on the organizations should be categorized into unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. ISO 9001:2015 is a standard which will mostly change the organization in terms of processes, policies and procedures. Further, the objective of this study is to determine the difficulties or problems brought by the ISO 9001:2015 changes.

## III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study described difficulties and problems encountered before, during and after the implantation of ISO 9001:2015 of state universities in Region 3.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative thematic analysis. This describes how the researcher have identified and abstracted themes during data analysis beyond stating that they have been developed through reading and immersion in data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). A total of 3 State University and Colleges (SUCs) or 25 respondents were surveyed. The researcher utilized a written open-ended questionnaire through online. All transcripts were saved, recorded and analyzed.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Difficulties and Problems encountered before the implementation of ISO 9001:2015

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency	Rank
1. Planning phase requirements	1.1. Unorganized documents	1	1
	1.2. Unstandardized process and procedures	9	
	1.3. Irrelevant procedures	1	
	Total	11	
2. Unpleasant feeling during preparation.	2.1. Ambiguous feeling towards processes and procedures	4	2
	2.2 Low confidence on maintaining processes and procedures	2	
	Total	6	
3. Work management for documents and procedures.	3.1. Increased workload	3	3
	3.2. Task scheduling	2	
	Total	5	
4. Difficulty in communication		3	4

Table 1 shows the difficulties and problems encountered in terms of process and procedures before the implementation of ISO 9001:2015. Based on the gathered data, the difficulties and problems they encountered can be divided into four major themes such as planning phase requirements, unpleasant feelings during preparation, work management for documents and procedures, and difficulty in communication. Among these themes, planning phase requirements was the major difficulty and problem they encountered before the ISO 9001:2015 implementation.

#### **Theme 1: Planning phase requirements**

Most respondents have identified that their process and procedures were unstandardized, the documents were unorganized, and some irrelevant procedures were also present. One of the respondents shared that “...the implementation of the procedures varies from one delivery unit to another. There were units who were not aware of the different processes. Because of the implementation of and compliance with ISO 9001:2015 standards, these processes are now cascaded down to the grassroots, there ensuring that every member of the organization has some degree of awareness.” This only shows that state universities are aware the even though they have general procedures and process, there were still departments that differ in delivering these procedures. In addition, another respondent said that “... the differences of the implementation depend on the situation...”

The QMS report shall include the documents that the company requires to ensure successful preparation, execution and control if its processes are to be carried out (Bewoor & Pawar, 2010). The quality goals should be clearly defined, measurable and in line with the quality policy (Braun & Surtaeva, 2014).

#### **Theme 2: Unpleasant feeling during preparation**

Some respondents were having ambiguous feelings and were low confidence on maintaining processes and procedures. One of the respondents stated that there are “uncertainties on rules and regulations...” This shows that there is a lacking of information or orientation prior to the implementation, since some of the employees doubted the processes and procedures. In relation, another respondent said that there is a “confusion on how to do certain task.”

Managers of business systems could and must act, thereby enhancing management efficiency (Bobrek & Sokovic, 2005). Managers have to be prepared to function rapidly and

efficiently in the competitive environment, where the tasks are being completed (Gvozdenovic & Perovic, 2007). Staff must be aware of the organization's context, trained, qualified and have the requisite experience to carry out their duties, and the appropriate level included in communications (Pavlovic et al., 2011).

#### **Theme 3: Work management for documents and procedures**

Some respondents were having difficulties and problems in managing the increased workload and task scheduling. One of the respondents shared that “Doing some additional paper works...” This means that the employee's usual tasks were increased and their usual routine should be adjusted. In view of this, another respondent stated that there should be “Adjustments on work processes.”

QMS should not result in undue paperwork complexity, or lack of flexibility (Yirga, 2019). Activities of QMS result in increased workload, rather than a mechanism for improving work (Muturi et al., 2015). In particular, the implementation of ISO 9000 QMS was found to increase the workload due to the dual handling of the administration work in compliance with quality management (Fung et al., 2012).

#### **Theme 4: Difficulty in communication**

Few respondents were having difficulty in communication. One respondent identified that there is “difficulty reviewing the existing process and procedures because people involve should have proper understanding...” This means that there is a problem regarding the dissemination of information as evidenced by another respondent that there is a “miscoordination.”

As evidenced in the study of Taskov, N., & Mitreva, E. (2015), poor communication between management team members and employees, lack of a high degree of trust and respect within the team and their relationship with employees leading to poor results. Further, Neyestani (2016) on his study of QMS on construction projects, found that the highest effect rating of QMS on project completion time is; reducing delay by enhancing communication. Thus, Getachew (2018) found that failure to communicate is also minimized because the companies have developed standard formats for effective communication, updating, and reporting to internal and external project parties that in-turn minimized changes in scope by customers that generally lead to project time savings.

Table 2: Difficulties and Problems encountered during the implementation of ISO 9001:2015

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Frequency	Rank
1. Task Management		2	3
	2.1. Securing of Documents	8	
2. Compliance requirements	2.2. Gathering of pieces of evidences other than documents	3	1
	Total	11	
3. Insufficient Resources		2	3
	4.1. Willingness to accept changes.	4	
4. Response to change	4.2. Resistance is reflected in the actions and mindset of the workers.	6	2
	Total	10	
5. No Problems Encountered		2	3

Table 2 shows the respondents' answers for the question about difficulties and problems encountered during the ISO 9001:2015 implementation. Based on the gathered data, the difficulties and problems they encountered can be divided into four major themes such as task management, compliance requirements, insufficient resource, and response to change. Among these themes, compliance requirements was the major difficulty and problem they encountered during the ISO 9001:2015 implementation.

### **Theme 1: Task Management**

Few respondents answered that during the implementation of ISO 9001:2015, they've had problems regarding task management. One respondent indicated that "*Faculty members are already loaded with teaching, research, and administrative works...*" People involved in the implementation of ISO 9001:2015 had a hard time in task management where different work assigned to them are also needed to accomplish but since this certification is important in their school as state university they should comply to the best it should be. Thus, another respondent stated even with such circumstances "*...compliance with the criteria of ISO 9001:2015 is a major obstacle, but we have always been able to comply.*"

Another challenge was to obtain workforce commitment to implementing QMS, as the successful implementation of the program involves workforce commitment and cooperation (Aggelogiannopoulos et al., 2007). Methods must maximize time management, efficiency, and communication; for example, proactively coordinating workload management with program leadership, streamlining workflows, creating "able" references / job aids, and prioritizing "to do" lists (Dodd et al., 2019) Some

challenges in institutions and certification of quality control systems were shared by the interviewed executive directors and management members such as increased workload (Stoimenova et al., 2014).

### **Theme 2: Compliance Requirement**

Most respondents were having difficulties and problems in securing documents and gathering pieces of evidence other than documents as compliance requirements during the ISO 9001:2015 implementation. One respondent stated that "*...one of the most common problems I encountered is in the area of feedback management. There were units which were unable to regularly collect client feedback...*" This means that departments of state universities should give more emphasis on non-conformities as these were compliance requirements for ISO 9001:2015 certification. In support to this statement, another respondent stated that "*...are not able to comply with certain requirements, so the department is given Non Conformity measures.*" In ISO 9001:2015, non-conformity measures should be collected and properly addressed to maintain the certification grant to their school.

QMS helps organizations detect the triggers of non-conforming products and/or services, feedback and the underlying means of fixing the issues (Ibrahim, 2019). There is an urgent need for good documentation of all activities providing objective evidence of proper process implementation and product (services) conformity with the requirements set out (Shvets & Lebedynets, 2018). An important part of the non-compliance management process is a step of creating a corrective action plan to address the causes of non-compliance (Nikolay, 2016).

### **Theme 3: Insufficient Resources**

During the ISO 9001:2015 implementation, few respondents were having problems due to insufficient resources. When asked, respondents answered that there is a lacking in “supply” and “manpower.” This means that the administration of state universities should address these problems in the shortest possible time in order for them to maintain the certification. In ISO 9001:2015, supply means resources that are essential to an organization as stated in their procedures and processes.

Financial and human resources, and also infrastructures were issues that produced many problems to the organization to deal with (Bobrek & Sokovic, 2005). In order to ensure the best possible quality standards, consideration should be given to all suppliers and persons involved (Seljan, 2018). Implementing a system depends on employee involvement and is more than just setting out the procedures (Presot et al., 2014).

**Theme 4: Response to change**

Many respondents had difficulty in responding to change as they are dealing with their willingness to accept change as resistance is reflected in the actions and mindset of the workers. One respondent shared that “...the mindset of other employees that changes seem to create more problems

than they solve.” This shows that employees of state universities tend to have different perceptions on standardized procedure and process. In view of this, another respondent stated that “some are hesitant and won’t accept additional workload due to the implementation of the QMS.”

Most of the barriers were organizational factors such as resistance to change, which was prominent in the organizations (Bounabri et al., 2018). Organizational leaders should continue to focus on developing plans for members of the organization, such as awareness of change (Ruiz-Moreno et al., 2015).

**Theme 5: No problems encountered**

Few respondents did not have any difficulties or problems encountered during the ISO 9001:2015 implementation. As one respondent stated “No difficulties and problems experienced...” This means that few departments of state universities complied with the standardized processes and procedures and adjusted given the increased workload of the certification. In support to this, another respondent claimed that “...in fact, last external audit our department is highly commendable.”

Table 3: Difficulties and Problems encountered after the implementation of ISO 9001:2015

	Statement	Frequency	Rank
After the ISO 9001:2015 implementation, were there still recurring difficulties and problems in your department? If so, what are those?	1. There were still recurring difficulties and problems		
	1.1. Sustainability and Maintenance of the process		
	1.2. Full participation of stakeholders	18	1
	1.3. Commitment to the organizations’ quality		
	1.4. Infrastructure requirements		
	1.5. Faculty workload		
	2. None	7	2
	Total	25	

Table 3 shows the respondents’ answers for the question about the recurrence of difficulties and problems after the ISO 9001:2015 implementation. According to them, there were still recurring problem and difficulties. Respondents shared that sustainability and maintenance of the process,

full participation of stakeholders, commitment to the organizations’ quality, infrastructure requirements and faculty workload were the problems and difficulties they had after the implementation. These may suggest that despite of state universities’ QA management preparation

for the implementation there will still be some unexpected scenarios.

However, there were respondents who answered that they did not encounter any recurring difficulties and problems after the ISO 9001-2015 implementation.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results show that before the implementation of ISO 9001:2015, the following difficulties and problems encountered were the planning phase requirements, unpleasant feeling during preparation work management for document and procedures and difficulty in communication. Additionally, during the implementation of ISO 9001:2015, the following difficulties and problems encountered were the compliance requirements, response to change, task management, and insufficient resources. Lastly, results show that after the implementation of ISO 9001:2015, the following difficulties and problems encountered were still recurring difficulties and problems. Overall, the researcher concluded that all SUCs had experienced difficulties or challenges before, during, and after the implementation of ISO 9001:2015. Before a state university or college implement the ISO 9001:2015 certification, the Quality Assurance management should give a thorough orientation to all the persons in-charge like Document Control Officers, Document Control Coordinators, and all Program Heads. Orientation should not only end with information dissemination but also preparation of required documents and processes. During the implementation, it also recommended to have capacity building to all persons-in-charge to take their responsibility will full acceptance of the changes that are happening especially when encountering difficulties or problems. After the ISO 9001:2015 implementation, it is recommended that program evaluation must be utilized proactively to be able to address risk and opportunities of the implementation so that recurring difficulties and problems will be lessened.

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