Chapter 4

The Conversion process

Learning outcomes

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the difference between the 'document what you do' approach and the 'process' approach to system development
- understand the steps to be taken to convert element-based systems to process-based systems
- identify the factors that affect success in the conversion process
- understand how application of the process approach to system conversion differs from the 'document what you do' approach

Change in direction

ISO 9001:1994 required a quality system to be established, documented and maintained and the system and its documented procedures effectively implemented. ISO 9001:2000 requires a quality management system to be established, documented, implemented, maintained and continually improved. While the obvious difference is the inclusion of the requirement for continual improvement, the additional requirements on establishing the QMS go far beyond the notion that a QMS is a set of documents. There are requirements for the processes to be identified, their sequence and interaction determined, criteria and methods for their effective operation determined and process measurement, monitoring, analysis and improvement performed. These requirements signal a fundamental change in direction. They indicate that the

'document what you do' approach would be an inappropriate approach to take. The QMS has to be designed to achieve planned results i.e. business objectives - not simply conformity with procedures. The QMS is still required to be established and documented, but in view of what the QMS is now required to achieve we need to re-examine what 'to establish' and 'documented' really mean.

Previously, 'to establish' was often interpreted as meaning 'putting in place the documented procedures'. In order to establish a 'system' it has to be put in place and putting a 'system' in place (rather than just a collection of procedures) requires several separate actions (assuming that we understand that a system is a collection of concepts, principles, resources, information, people and processes required to achieve defined objectives).

Previously 'documented' was often interpreted as meaning that everything needed to be written down but this caused considerable difficulties in knowing what and how much to document. This was because of a conflict between the business need for documentation and the need to demonstrate conformity to external auditors. The ISO 9000:2000 family of standards recognizes that documentation should exist primarily to achieve business objectives.

The system firstly needs to be designed (to meet the defined objectives) after which it needs to be installed and commissioned before it can be considered operational. The approach is very similar to building any system, be it an airconditioning system, a political system or an education system. However, the system is not in place until it has been integrated into the fabric of the organization so that people do the right things right without being told - then, and only then, can it be claimed the system is in place. This is a different concept, one which requires a new approach to building a QMS. Although many reading this book will work in organizations with existing systems (not necessarily established systems!) the process of converting an existing system is not simply replacing documented procedures with a set of flow charts, as will become apparent from reading this chapter.

Conversion process overview

The conversion of a QMS is a project with the objective of constructing a management system that enables an organization to achieve its objectives