



In April, Maintenance Technology Reader Panelists offered their views on personal certifications such as CMRP and CLS. Here, they reflect on the value and impact of company certification to standards that address operational management issues, such as those from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and others.

The topic takes on new meaning as ISO develops a new standard based on PAS55, a set of asset-management guidelines prepared by the British Standards Institution and the Institute of Asset Management. Cross-mapped against other ISO standards, this new standard—*likely to be labeled ISO 55000*

—is expected to be of great value to asset-intensive operations. How will it be welcomed? Our Panelists' acceptance and perception of existing standards may provide a clue.

Slow domestic uptake

Manufacturer acceptance of key ISO standards like 9000/9001 (for quality management) and 14000/14001 (for environmental management) has grown steadily in the past decade, but less quickly in the U.S. than in other countries. According to the latest ISO figures, the number of worldwide ISO 9001 certifications is estimated at over one million today among all business types. And while the U.S. just makes the top-10 list of countries with the most ISO 9000 certifications (in the ninth position), it's surpassed by China, in the top position, Italy, Japan, Spain, Germany and the U.K., among others. This may explain our Panelists' divided views.

On the positive side, a facility-transition manager in the South says operational certifications are most definitely worth the effort. "The [facility's] maintenance department now has set guidelines to allow all personnel to function in a set pattern by assigning key personnel to critical maintenance and breakdown areas." He adds that under a former employer, he wrote the plant's ISO 9000 maintenance plan and everything went smoothly. In both operations, he observes, the process "had a very positive effect and improved the administration of maintenance significantly."

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Written by Rick Carter, Executive Editor
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A reliability/maintenance engineer, also working in the South, agrees—*but for a different reason*. “Employers hire people with degrees, not because these people are more intelligent or more capable, but because they demonstrated that they have the discipline and determination to complete a degree program,” he says. “ISO certifications serve a similar purpose in a different way. When manufacturers are looking for suppliers or vendors, the status of a potential partner’s ISO certification can help to quickly identify companies with higher standards of performance.” He adds that at his ISO 9001- and 14001-certified operation, “These certifications have served to raise awareness among employees, with regard to quality and environmental responsibility.”

A maintenance manager in New England recalls his positive ISO 9000 certification experience with a “very progressive” former employer whom he says “has probably moved on to ISO 14000 by now.” Over the last 20 years, he notes, this company also instituted Six Sigma, Kanban and just-in-time, “all of which has made them extremely efficient and competitive.”

Acceptance not universal

Several Panelists working in certified plants report dismay about the long-term results of certification. A production support manager at a company in the Midwest with ISO 9001 and LEED (green-building) certification, notes that “a lot of time is put in to achieve the certification, but after the initial surge of achieving the plaque on the wall, the effort is usually not sustained.” When his company followed ISO procedures to expand operations, he says the asset was built following the same procedures and documentation, but mistakes were copied over and over. “If you have a good process,” he theorizes, “you’ll have a good product, but if you have a bad process, your product won’t be so good,” regardless of certification.

Another Panelist calls the effectiveness of his company’s ISO 9001 certification “mixed.” While he believes that “forcing operations to document procedures is generally beneficial, there is a tendency to not follow the true intent of the certification and to just go through the motions. Like any program,” he says, “if you don’t give it some love on occasion, it tends to wither on the vine.”

Even Panelists without experience in operational certification have opinions about the process. A corporate engineer in New England, for example, has concluded that his company “didn’t need certification,” but that if it did decide to pursue such designation, it would mean “more reporting and more internal audits.”

A maintenance manager in Mexico says, “I don’t believe in them.” The work required to certify,

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he adds, represents a “non-standard model” for his operation, which would force workers “to fulfill documents only to accomplish what’s required [for] the audit.” Likewise, a Panelist in the upper Midwest says simply that taking an active energy-management approach has “no value for our organization.”

Interestingly, several Panelists acknowledge that their companies are certified, but they’re not sure for what. The suggestion here is that their management may have missed the key “communication” steps required in most certification processes.

Enlightened views

Some Panelists (consultants in particular) understand the danger manufacturers face if they fall behind in adherence to internationally accepted operational standards. “They must consider certification if they want to sell products and services in a world-class arena,” states a consultant in the upper Midwest. Naturally, it’s in consultants’ best interest to support certification, but their argument makes sense:

“Certification is very useful in times when our industries are facing so many challenges with global competition,” says the Panelist above. “Those who decide to get ISO 55000-certified, for example, even before any of their customers or vendors may demand it, are in for a series of great achievements. Its purpose is to reduce the risk and breakdowns of critical equipment, mainly through root cause analysis. Two components—*criticality and reliability*—will come together,” he says, “reducing the cost of operations and maintenance, while boosting productivity.”

Will manufacturers warm to 55000, considering that it may be the most manufacturing-specific of ISO standards? An East Coast consultant says no: “I must admit that in my client relationships I am not seeing any real push on newer certifications,” he says. “Most companies have already earned the certifications they need.”

Another sees room for greater acceptance, but believes more education is needed. “Several of my clients have ISO 9000 [and other certifications],” says this Canada-based consultant, “but there is a significant amount of ignorance among maintenance workers about what certification can and cannot do.” When training clients, he says he takes “about an hour” explaining how adherence to the standards their companies have chosen to follow will help them see how “quality performance and reporting the truth are applied” to the overall good for both company and customers. **MT**

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About the MT Reader Panel

The Maintenance Technology Reader Panel is comprised of working maintenance practitioners who have volunteered to answer bimonthly questions prepared by our editorial staff. Panelist identities are purposely not revealed, and their responses are not necessarily projectable. The Panel welcomes new members: Have your comments and observations included in this column by joining the Reader Panel at www.mt-online.com. Click on "Reader Panel" under the "MT Resources" header, and follow the instructions. If accepted, you will automatically be entered into a drawing for a cash prize after one year of active participation.