

Management System Integration

By Terry Westerhoff

It was 10 years ago this month. The guy from HR called me to tell me that our company was merging three divisions into one. I had been selected to lead the merger of three quality systems and departments into a single unit. I remember my first question was "I'm the Director of Quality for Functional Products. What about the other two directors?" The answer was that I would have to figure that out.

Thus began a journey which was difficult, but in the end, extremely beneficial to the company. We started with an uncomfortable meeting between myself and the other quality directors, and ended with vastly improved systems, along with significant cost savings.

Of course, as I set out to integrate the quality organizations, all other departments across the company were doing the same thing. Quality is a unique department in that it touches most other departments in some way. I was able to learn greatly through the success and failures of others. As one might expect, some were successful and some were not.

Pitfalls. Yes, there are many pitfalls as one embarks on a task as complex as the integration of management systems. Aside from the obvious people issues, there are mistakes in method of approach which can have serious detrimental effects. There are two methods in particular which were very tempting. The first was to operate as three divisions all mashed together as one. This of course is the least disruptive to the people involved, but does not achieve anything. The second is for the strongest division (and there will usually be one) to force the other divisions to do things "our way". This creates resentment, and does nothing to capture best practices.

What is the correct approach that will lead to vastly improved efficiency and performance? Borrowing from the Six Sigma strategy of Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control, one can develop a successful integration implementation.

- **Define** the existing organizations and develop a communication plan.
- **Measure** who does what, when and how.
- **Analyze** the data.
- **Improve** the organization, focusing on synergy and best practices.
- **Control** the new organization. Implement the changes identified in the previous steps.

To learn more about management system integration strategy, contact Charles Loew at Charles.Loew@masetllc.com