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Partnerships

The UK is adjusting to a new style of Government – Coalition Government. It just shows that the most unlikely of people can work together for – hopefully – a better future!

If politicians can swallow their words and work together, are there lessons to be learnt for businesses. The traditional relationship between organisations and suppliers is combative – bargaining to get the most for the lowest price – each party hoping to obtain the best deal.

Why develop a relationship with our supplier? What is the point, we only want to drive the price down. We may as well see it as a competition with each supplier competing with each other to achieve the cheapest price and winning the tender process. Many organisations have successfully reduced the price of purchased goods and services in this way but at what cost? Suppliers see this as a competition as well and hope to regain some of their revenue by way of extras or items or services which were not clearly specified in the tender documents and yet will still be required to complete the contract. This gives the supplier the opportunity to gain extra margin on the contract. The obvious problem with this approach is that the price is only one element of cost, and to reduce cost, all of its components must be controlled (delivery time, value for money, quality, through life cost, service support, etc.). Consequently it may be the cheapest but it is not the best solution.

- i) A low price may conceal a high cost
- ii) Cost reduction is best achieved through improved supplier expertise
- iii) Meeting delivery and quality requirements
- iv) Long term relationship based on trust and mutual benefit

Supplier Partnerships have a role to play in developing the organisation’s supplier quality assurance strategy. This is developing relationships with suppliers to ensure that they understand the customer’s specific requirements and needs. Further reducing the number of suppliers provides better control and fosters a mutually beneficial climate of continuous improvement. This climate can be used to prevent defects, reduce variation and waste in the supply chain. Often customers will link this continuous improvement and waste reduction to cost and price reduction, i.e. the customer has actively guided and assisted suppliers in reducing waste and improving efficiency. Now, is it unreasonable for the customer to expect some price benefit? It is this (price reduction) side of partnership sourcing and SQA which is difficult for the suppliers to accept. Customers acting as consultants and telling suppliers what is good for them, under the name of improving quality performance and then asking for a price reduction is sometimes hard for suppliers to accept. Never the less this should not detract from what is a widely accepted and respected approach to supplier quality assurance. So by working together with our suppliers, sharing information and trusting them, we can generate a win-win relationship – if not quite a coalition.

Improved Safety Standards for Toys

A couple of new ISO standards aimed at improving the safety of toys have recently been released. ISO 8124-4:2010, Safety of toys – part 4: Swings, slides and similar activity toys for indoor and outdoor family domestic use. This standard provides requirements and test methods for these outdoor toys and aims to improve safety at playtime. ISO 8124-3:2010, Safety of toys – part 3: Migration of certain elements. This is an update to the 1997 standard and aims to minimise children’s exposure to potentially toxic elements such as arsenic, cadmium, lead, mercury and several other materials that could possibly be found in toys.

Christian Wetterberg, Chair of the ISO technical committee that is responsible for the standards said, “Fears about toy and product safety have run rampant in recent years, with far too many recalls of non-compliant kids’ products. ISO 8124 is a vital safety standard and its use can reduce the risk of harm, reduce access to a hazard and reduce the severity of an injury.”

Further information is available from www.iso.ch

Carbon Neutrality

Many organisations are addressing their environmental impacts and also aiming to reduce their carbon footprints. A specification that will help is the PAS 2060 Specification for the demonstration of carbon neutrality. It provides the general requirements that need to be met by organisations wanting to demonstrate their carbon neutrality. The specification can be used by a wide range of organisations – local government, companies, clubs and even families. It tells you how to measure, reduce and offset greenhouse gas emissions and quantify your carbon footprint.

Graphical Symbols

We all see and use graphical symbols everyday; they help us to find our way out, warn us of dangers and even to identify the right restrooms. Symbols are important especially in communicating across language barriers or illiteracy. The ISO have recently published a booklet to help raise awareness of these symbols. “*The international language of ISO graphical symbols*” aims to teach the public to recognise the different meanings behind their various shapes and colours.

According to Dana Kissinger-Matray, Secretary of the ISO Committee for consumer policy, “The booklet highlights the importance of graphical symbols as a way to communicate without words. No matter where you are in the world, ISO graphical symbols can help you understand important directions, product features and other aspects of daily life, such as where the lifts are for wheelchair users, or what areas to keep away from if you have a pacemaker, as well as helpful services such as where you can rent a car or find a hotel”.

Although aimed at the general public, professionals dealing with public safety and services may also find it useful. The booklet can be downloaded free of charge from the ISO website www.iso.ch

Election Results

It is too early to analyse the impact the new Government in the UK might have on the quality profession but according to a Quality World Express poll taken following the release of the main party manifestos, a third of quality professionals agreed that the Tory party had the policies that most reflected an understanding of quality, closely followed by the Liberal Democrats with 27%, whilst the Labour party trailed in third place with 16.4%. However, quite a number of the respondents believed none of the parties truly understood quality.

Quality World May 2010



Avoiding World Cup Absenteeism

Many companies may be worried about the level of absenteeism that may occur during the Football World Cup that begins on 11th June. Solicitors Charles Russell have prepared a guidance note for firms. They consider what pro-active measures can be taken as well as how to deal with unauthorised absences.

Some of the pro-active measures they suggest are:

- Make sure there are clear rules for dealing with absences and ensure that all staff understand the firm's policy
- Encourage staff to take annual leave as long as minimum staffing levels are maintained
- Consider implementing flexible working practices
- Provide facilities for staff to watch key matches at work

The guidance note can be read in full at http://www.charlesrussell.co.uk/UserFiles/file/pdf/Employment/Article_-_Avoiding_World_Cup_Absenteeism.pdf

People Measurement

The sizes of people differ across the world, for instance the average height and weight of an American man are 1.76m and 80 kg, whilst those of a Thai man are 1.67m and 64 kg. An average Dutch woman measure 1.67m and weighs 72 kg, whereas as an average Japanese woman measures 1.57m and weighs 51 kg. A new report *ISO/TR 7250 – 2:2010, Basic human body measurements for technological design – Part 2: Statistical summaries of body measurements from individual ISO populations*, has been published by ISO and contains up to date anthropomorphic data across the world. It aims to help designers and manufacturers of clothing, workplaces,

transportation match the relevant body sizes. Dr Makiko Kouchi, Project Leader for the standard, said, “Inadequate measures in products and environments compromise our health by putting unnecessary strain on our bodies. Can you imagine what it would be like to have to sit in a chair that is too tight, or to find it difficult to reach the products in a supermarket? Harmonising our surroundings to our body size, shape and capability by applying ergonomic principles is key to ensuring our well-being”.

Further information can be found at www.iso.ch

The EC Digital Agenda

The European Commission launched their Digital Agenda in May 2010. Its' aim is to “maximise the potential of ICT to boost Europe's prosperity and the well being of its citizens” – quite a target!

At present it is difficult for e-commerce to reach its potential in Europe because it is not unified. The seven key aims of the Agenda are:

- Create a digital single market
- Greater interoperability
- Boost internet trust and security
- More investment in research and development
- More investment in research and development
- Enhance digital literacy and inclusion
- Apply information and communication technologies to address challenges facing society like climate change and the ageing population.

For further information visit www.computing.co.uk