Managing Records for ISO Compliance: record keeping at the Botswana Meat Commission

Effective management of quality control records is essential for Third World companies wishing to compete in world markets.

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INTRODUCTION

For a long time the management of records, especially in companies and smaller organizations, has not received maximum support from senior management. Today, the situation is changing fast. Trade barriers are being broken and a new economic order is being established. However, the opening of new markets, and especially Western markets, has come with new demands for quality assurance and customer satisfaction. To meet these requirements, manufacturers and suppliers have had to seek some form of independent certification that their products and services are of the highest standards. Virtually all Western countries are now insisting on doing business with International Organization for Standardization (ISO) accredited companies. The accreditation process is no mean task. Several requirements have to be met. One of these is evidence of proper record keeping for all the processes associated with the production of goods and provision of services. This paper looks at ISO 9000 series and especially those clauses that relate to the management of quality records. It discusses the sections of ISO 9000 series that relate to the management of quality records. Using the Botswana Meat Commission as a case study, the article shows the steps taken by the company to develop effective record keeping practices in support of its quality management programme.

RECORDS AND ISO STANDARDS

When well managed, records can be relied upon to provide the best evidence of an activity or transaction and can be used for corrective action where mistakes have been made. A standard may be defined as a 'set of characteristics or qualities that describes features of a product, process, service, interface or material'[1]. The International Organization for Standardization has established different sets of standards for use in the manufacturing and service sector. One major recognized set of standards which companies and organizations seeking ISO accreditation very often rely upon is the ISO 9000 series. ISO 9000 is divided into different parts which provide details of all the essential elements for quality assurance during the design, manu-

facture and acceptance stages of a product Most of these ISO standards are not mandatory, but rather voluntary. Producers and providers of services may choose to conform with these standards to prove that their products conform to the essential requirements of ISO. One of the most important aspect of standards is that they convey information about a product in a consistent and understandable manner.

This article examines various clauses within the ISO 9000 series, which requires the creation and maintenance of quality of records. ISO documents make a clear distinction between documents and records. Under ISO terminology, a document is defined as a written or graphical description of a policy, procedure or instruction that acts as a control supervisor of an activity. A record, on the other hand, has been defined simply as 'any information captured in a reproducible form that is required for conducting business'.[2]

The importance of records to ISO Standards cannot be overstated. As Eugene Brumm has rightly pointed out

> organizations today are finding that successful assessment for ISO 9000 compliance often depends on how well their records are managed and whether or not components of records management are included in their quality operations.[3]

The need to maintain quality standards stems from the fact that, increasingly, customers are not just demanding that quality products be provided, but that evidence be available to show that companies are capable of producing quality products or providing quality service. The provision of this proof is normally in the form of certification from a recognized body. However, the only way to verify that products have been produced in conformity with acceptable standards is through an examination of the relevant records. Records therefore constitute a crucial element of a quality management programme. It is imperative that each organization should establish a system for identifying the types of records to be created and at what stage of the production process they should be captured, who should capture them, how and where they should be stored and for how long. It is not only important that records be created and stored, but effective procedures should be put in place for their retrieval, and their disposal when no longer needed. Under ISO requirements, these procedures must be documented in an approved records procedures manual.

The importance of maintaining quality records cannot be overstated. Ray Tricker in his book *ISO 9000 for Small Businesses: a guide to cost effective compliance* came to the conclusion that:

> Records are very important, not only from a historical point of view, but also as a means of settling disputes about bad workmanship, identifying faults and settling production problems whether these may be internally by the supplier, or externally, by the customer.[4]

Records emanating from audit reports, calibration of test and measuring equipment, inspections, tests, approvals, concessions, etc. ensure that a company is capable of proving the effectiveness of their quality management system. References to

ISO Section and Activity		Type of Document Generated
4.1.3	Management Review	Records of Management Reviews
4.3.4	Contract Review	Records of Contract Reviews
4.4.6	Design Review	Records of Design Reviews
4.4.7	Design Verification	Measures taken for verification of design: calculations, tests, benchmarking, etc.
4.6.2	Subcontractor evaluation	Quality records of acceptable subcontractors
4.7	Customer-supplied product	Records of lost, damaged or unsuitable product provided by the customer
4.8	Product ID and traceability	Identification of product or batches required by specification to be traced
4.9	Qualified process	Records of special processes
4.10.3	Receiving inspection	Purchased product released for urgent use
4.10.5	Inspection and test	Inspection and test results
4.11	Measurement equipment	Calibration records
4.13	Non-conforming product	Records of repair and acceptance by concession
4.14	Corrective action	Results of investigation
4.17	Internal Quality Audits	Audit results
4.18	Training	Training Records

Table 1. Activities performed by organizations and types of records to be generated and maintained. (Adopted from: Stimson, W.A. (1998) *Beyond ISO 9000: how to sustain quality in a dynamic world.* New York, Amacon p.198.)

the management of quality records are to be found scattered throughout all the ISO 9000 series. For instance, under ISO 9001 there are no less fifteen references to record keeping practices. Table 1 shows the section under which each management activity is performed and the type of record generated by such activities.

The need to maintain records is made more explicit in Section 4:16 of ISO 9002, where it is clearly stated that:

> The supplier shall establish and maintain documented procedures for identification, collection, indexing, access, filing, and storage. maintenance and disposition of quality records.

> Quality records shall be maintained to demonstrate conformance to specified requirements and the effective operation of the quality system. Pertinent quality records from the subcontractor shall be an element of these data.

> All quality records shall be legible and shall be stored in such a way that they are readily retrievable in facilities that provide a suitable environment to prevent damage or deterioration and to prevent loss. Retention times of quality records shall be established and recorded. Where agreed contractually, quality records shall be made available for evaluation by the customer or the customer's representative for an agreed period.[5]

As can be seen from the above statement, the creation, maintenance, storage and use constitutes a crucial element in any given quality system. Eugene Brumm argues that, irrespective of the medium in which quality records are captured and stored, they still have common interests and characteristics. He goes further to state that

> all quality records are sources of information, all quality records document authority and actions that have been taken or are to be taken, all quality records are involved in proving the effectiveness of the quality system and all quality records are subject to scrutiny during audits.[6]

The ISO 9000 series acknowledges that records may be created and maintained in different formats and media; hard copy or electronic format. The most important factor is that they should readable, identifiable, retrievable and stored in facilities that prevent loss or damage. Neither does ISO prescribe the retention periods for each category of record. Each organization is free to determine the retention periods for its records, but this period must be stated. Moreover, each organization must name the officer responsible for the management of the records and must provide secure and environmentally sound storage for them. The main reason for retaining such records is for decision-making and as future evidence if needed in tracing the causes of non-conformance. As defined in ISO 9002 Section 4.10.5, quality records demonstrate the conformance of the quality system with specified requirements and they verify the effective operation of the quality system. It can therefore be argued that quality records, when kept for purposes of future analysis, provide an important input for corrective action and improvement.[7] The organization's filing system should enable identification of the different types of records.

In summary, therefore, it can be said that any company seeking ISO accreditation must undertake a systematic programme which requires it to:

- Develop and document procedures showing how records are to be created, maintained and disposed of.
- Develop and maintain an index of its records. The file index must be up-to-date and must be available t all times to indicate the location and status of records.
- Develop records retention schedules, which show the duration for which the records must be maintained either in active storage or in semi-active storage.
- Specify the form in which records should be kept (e.g. paper, microfilm or disk)
- Define liability, storage, retrievability, disposition and confidentiality.

THE BOTSWANA MEAT COMMISSION

The Botswana Meat Commission was established by an Act of Parliament No. 22 of 1965 as a non-making profit body whose main function is the buying of cattle, sheep and goats, and the slaughtering, processing and marketing of beef and beef products locally and internationally. An abattoir was first opened in Lobatse in 1934, but its activities remained relatively small until 1954 when, as a result of the increase in livestock production in the country, the then Colonial Government requested the Commonwealth Development Corporation to assist in the erection of a new abattoir at Lobatse. As a result, an abattoir was established under the name of Bechuanaland Protectorate Abattoirs Ltd. At this time, 50 percent of the share capital of the abattoir was held by the Colonial Development Corporation (which was also the managing agency of the abattoir), while the Bechuanaland Government and the Livestock Producers' Trust each held 25 percent. The Livestock Producers Trust had been formed with the view of ultimately acquiring the interests of the Colonial Development Corporation and the Bechuanaland Government. A subsidiary company, the Export and Canning Co. Ltd. (ECCO) was also formed around this time to handle the company's marketing overseas.

In 1963 a Commission of Inquiry recommended that Bechuanaland Abattoirs Ltd be converted into a statutory corporation. As a result of the negotiations that followed between the government and the Colonial Development Corporation, the Bechuanaland Meat Commission was established.

On 1st February 1966, with financial assistance from the government, the Botswana Meat Commission purchased the Colonial Development Corporation portion of the share capital in the Bechuanaland Protectorate Abattoirs Ltd.[8]

Today, the Botswana Meat Commission (BMC) owns three abattoirs. Lobatse Abattoir, which also serves as the headquarters of the Commission, has the capacity to slaughter 1200 cattle per day, Francistown Abattoir has a capacity of 800 cattle per day and Maun Abattoir can slaughter 200 cattle per day.

The BMC is run by a Board of Commissioners, headed by a Chairman who is also the Chief Executive. The State President appoints the Board and its members represent different interest groups such as the government, producers, agencies and warehouses. Internally, Botswana Meat Commission is divided into the following departments: Administration, Cannery, Engineering, Finance, Human Resource, Livestock, Marketing, Production, Quality Assurance, Stores and Supplies and Tannery.

The major Departments concerned with beef production are: the Livestock Department, which is responsible for the purchase and collection of cattle from farmers and their delivery to the abattoir; the Production Department, which is responsible for the slaughter of cattle, de-boning, storage and packaging of beef and beef products; the Quality Assurance Department which is responsible for ensuring that quality products are marketed and sold; and the Marketing Department, which is responsible for marketing BMC products locally and internationally.

In addition to the three abattoirs located at Lobatse, Francistown and Maun, the Commission owns two transport companies and other subsidiaries throughout the world – cold stores in Lobatse and Cape Town, marketing offices in the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and South Africa, an insurance company in the Cayman Islands, and warehousing and shipping offices in Cape Town. Until 1998, it also had a 50 percent share in the firm of Klopper and Gluckman in South Africa.

In 1973, Botswana entered into negotiations with the European Economic Community in order to gain access to the European market. As a result of these negotiations, Botswana is able to export its meat products into Europe. However, the opening up of the European market has come along with very stringent requirements including accreditation with a certifying body for ISO compliance.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES AT BMC

As in many other organizations in the Third World, records keeping practices at BMC had received low priority until the Company decided to be accredited to the South African Bureau of Standards. The desire to be an ISO accredited institution stemmed from the fact that

> by being an 'early bird' in adopting standards, Botswana Beef would keep abreast with future market requirements and at the same time place itself in an advantageous position in the present market as opposed from the competition that has not got ISO accreditation.[9]

According to M.M. Mannathoko, the Executive Chairman of BMC, the company embarked on the ISO system because:

> Customers insist that they would only do business with an ISO certified Company. Competition is set to be stronger in the years to come hence BMC is preparing for the future. BMC acknowledges the benefits both internally and externally of a documented quality system and would like to explore them to the fullest.[10]

It can therefore be argued that BMC accepted ISO accreditation for fear of losing its market share in the meat industry.

Introduction of Records Keeping Practices at the BMC

Realizing that proper record keeping is a key element of quality systems, BMC embarked in 1997 on a programme to revitalize its record keeping practices. However, one major limita-

tion that the Commission encountered was lack of qualified staff to develop and implement a records management programme. For this reason, the Commission decided to engage the author and one of his colleagues as consultants. Together with the consultants, the Commission has developed and adopted records retention schedules, introduced a new file classification system based on keywords, established a records centre, provided training to clerical staff and managers, appraised, and arranged and described the vast quantities of records that had hitherto been left unattended in the stores. All this was achieved within a period of three years.

The responsibility to manage quality records effectively and efficiently begins from the time the cattle are in the farms. Under European Union regulations each farmer is required to maintain a record of his cattle. The importance of maintaining cattle records was clearly summarized by Utlwang Mooki, the editor of *Botswana Beef Digest* (a BMC house magazine) when he wrote:

> Once again we would like to revisit the issue of the cattle identification, which would require that by the year 2000 all beef exports to the European union be traceable. In short this requires that all cattle slaughtered at BMC must have a traceable history of where they come from and how they were raised. This requirement is by no means a small task.[11]

Although there is a need to manage cattle records while the animals are still with the farmers, this article will not discuss the details of how the Commission goes about certifying the records for each animal sold to it. This is an area that requires further investigation. Suffice it to say here that the Commission requires that proper records be availed to it for each transaction involving the sale of cattle.

The strategy that was adopted at BMC was to introduce effective and efficient records keeping practices using a phased approach. Phase One involved a review of all records keeping practices. Following the review, which was based on personal observations and interviews conducted with senior management, records clerks and secretaries, a report was submitted outlining areas that needed improvements. The review revealed that:

- There was a lack of a clear policy governing the management of records, both paper and electronic.
- The Commission lacked records retention schedules.
- Storage of closed records was inadequate with each department storing its own closed records.
- Only one member of staff had received some limited training in records management.
- Filing procedures were inadequate.
- File titles did not reflect the contents correctly.
- File covers were poorly designed.
- There was a lack of effective and efficient procedures for monitoring file movements.

The review was followed by the development of a draft records retention schedule proposing retention periods for various categories of records held. All records that had not been active for a period of five years were appraised, arranged, listed, boxed and shelved. Records of an ephemeral nature and those that had outlived their usefulness were listed and permission sought for their disposal. Once the offices and the stores had been cleared of this backlog, it was possible to design a new filing system. The system was first piloted in the Administration and Human Resources Departments before being adopted in the other departments. Training for both senior management and clerical staff was provided at each stage of the project. Regular monitoring was done to ensure that the programme was operating with minimum difficulty. A new store was provided for the storage of records. In each of these stages, procedure manuals were developed and approved to support the system. Consultations between the consultants and users of the systems were held regularly at each stage of development.

CONCLUSION

What then can we say are the lessons learned from working with Botswana Meat Commission? First and foremost, it has become clear that organizations seeking ISO accreditation must be willing to change their records keeping practices. The choice is simple – either implement sound record keeping practices or be pushed out of the new world economic order for failure to comply with all ISO requirements. Secondly, it has become evident that there is no singular formula for achieving ISO certification insofar as records management is concerned. ISO regulations do not indicate how records should be managed, how they should be indexed, how long they should be retained and where they should be stored. It is left to individual companies to develop and document their procedures. Thirdly, the study has revealed that, in future, records management is bound to become an area of growth as more and more organizations strive to obtain ISO accreditation – especially companies operating in the so called Third World. Finally, the study has indicated the need for regular consultation and feedback at each stage of developing and implementing a records management programme.

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Abstract

More and more companies in the developing world are desiring to export their products to the western world. However, in as much as the western world would wish to trade with developing countries, they need some assurance that the products are of the highest possible standards. To date the only standards that are recognized by both western and developing countries are ISO standards. The certification process demands among other things an assurance by the supplier that he (the supplier) has a well documented, effective and efficient procedures for maintaining all records pertaining to its products. This article looks at the case of Botswana Meat Commission, one of the major exporters of beef products in Africa, and shows the procedure it has followed to establish a quality system for managing its records.

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MORE ON MANAGING COMMERCIAL RECORDS

How records management could help Malaysia materialize its Vision 2020.
Z. M. Yusof, R. W. Chell. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 30 (3) Sep 1998, p.169–75. refs.

Demonstrates the role that records management and records managers can play in the process of development in Malaysia with particular reference to Vision 2020: Malaysia's programme designed to bring it to full industrialized status by the year 2020. Discusses the nature of records and the practice of records management in the context of the important role they can play in improving business efficiency and assisting business re-engineering. Concludes that the requirements for record keeping are corporate requirements and hopes that this discussion will act as a catalyst to further discussion and research into records management in Malaysia and will lead to other records management initiatives in the medical, legal and accounting fields. Malaysian businesses should recognize that records management can make a significant difference to their ability to comply with the requirements of the ISO 9000 series of standards and enable them to fulfil the goals of Vision 2020. (The author may be contacted by electronic mail at rwchell@aol.com).

Records management – the business case.
R. McLean. *Records Management Bulletin*, (90) Feb 1999, p.3–9.

Reviews recent information environment changes from the perspective of records management. Traces developments in the 1970s and 1980s which saw data processing holding a reactive role and technical advances which failed to provide access to the corporate memory. Records management software is now emerging which will enable records management to be introduced at the front end of data and document creation with the user. This could help records managers re-position themselves to have greater influence on managing company data. Gives examples of the roles records management can play in: helping facilities departments make better use of office space, and improving disaster recovery and business continuity. Records managers need to embrace outreach and communication so that they can influence the management and utilisation of valuable corporate information.

The role of records management during a recession.
P. C. Mazikana. *Records Management Bulletin*, (85) Apr 1998, p.23–6.

Contribution to a special issue devoted in part to international aspects of records management. Zimbabwe is emerging from a recession which has had profound effects on both private companies and public organizations. Despite being an underpinning function, records management is rarely considered as important in recovering from a recession. Examines some of the reorganizational activities necessitated by recession and shows how they can be enhanced by improvements to records management. Covers: financial records, integrating accounting functions with operational activities, quality control and quality assurance systems, marketing strategies, procurement systems, and retrenchment exercises.

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