



Journalist's eye view of certification in Japan

by Yusaku Nakao

Japan ranks 2nd and 3rd respectively among the world's top 10 countries for ISO 14000 and ISO 9000 certifications, according to *The ISO Survey – 2007* (see **Figures 1** and **2**, page 6).

With a total of 73 176 ISO 9001 certificates and 27 955 ISO 14001 certificates, it is clear that ISO quality (QMS) and environmental (EMS) management system implementation is widespread in Japan. This has significantly empowered Japanese organizations when communicating with other domestic or foreign entities, and has served as the basis for creating competitive and environmentally-friendly products of high quality.

However, the growth in certification will not continue for ever. **Figure 3** (see page 7) shows the annual number of ISO 9000*/ISO 14001 certifications in Japan, and indicates a decrease in ISO 9000 certificates following the transition from the 1994 to the 2000 edi-



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tions of the standard. Similarly, the number of ISO 14001 certificates began to decrease after the transition from the 1996 to the 2004 edition.

The growth in certification will not continue for ever

In the case of ISO 14001, annual certifications have not significantly increased or decreased over the past few years, and may rise again after 2009. At the same time, ISO 9000 certifications have decreased considerably, and the possibility of recovery after 2009 seems low.

If the annual growth in certification falls below the number of certificates with-

drawn each year, it is highly likely that the vitality of QMS/EMS certification will fall too. Such a leveling-off in the number of certificates has already taken place in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA, and the same phenomenon is now taking place in Japan.

So how can we revitalize the implementation and certification of ISO management system standards (MSS)? To help in this endeavour, I would like to make some observations and suggestions concerning the activities of ISO 9001/ISO 14001-certified

* ISO 9001:2000 became the sole certification standard in the ISO 9000 series. Previously, certification was carried out against three standards, ISO 9001, ISO 9002 and ISO 9003. "ISO 9000 certification" is used in this article as a catch-all phrase to cover certification irrespective of the edition.



ISOS staff members hold copies of recent ISOS magazine issues, and (right) Yubiki, a handbook on ISO management system standards.

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organizations and certification bodies in Japan.

The changing nature of audits

When ISO 14001 was introduced in 1996, major Japanese organizations were quick to adopt the new standard. The reason was that when the ISO 9000 series was published in

Figure 1 - Top 10 countries for ISO 9001 certificates, December 1998 to December 2007 (adapted from The ISO Survey - 2007).

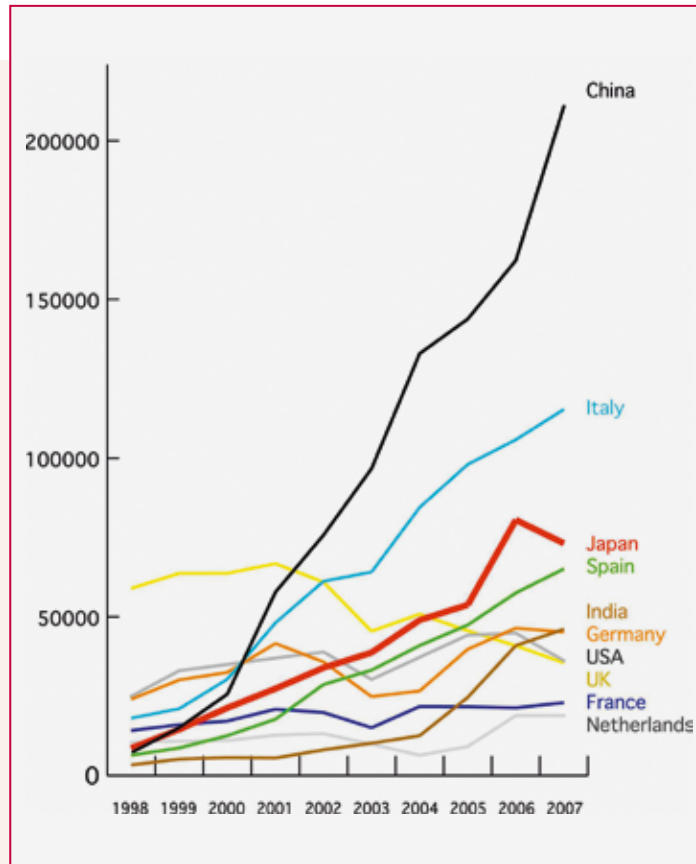
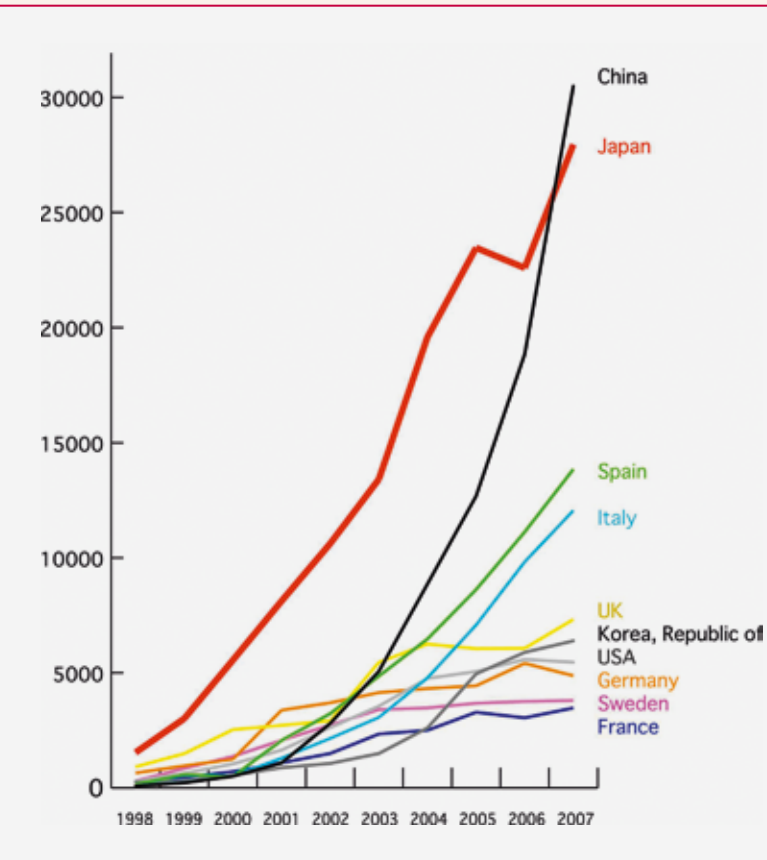


Figure 2 - Top 10 countries for ISO 14001 certificates, December 1998 to December 2007 (adapted from The ISO Survey - 2007).



highly valued by Japanese organizations as systems beneficial to management. In 2000, the revised ISO 9001 proved crucial to Japanese management systems.

The 2000 edition dramatically changed the Japanese perception of ISO 9001 and was welcomed by many organizations as an MSS which was at last helpful to management. This was especially so in terms of audit. Now organizations had to voluntarily improve their internal audits, and thus the roles of internal and external audits were separated. The more proactive organizations have adapted their policies based on the following understandings:

The 2000 edition dramatically changed the Japanese perception of ISO 9001

- Certification bodies audit conformity to the fundamentals of the ISO QMS standard, while the organization itself audits the fundamentals plus other aspects, such as root cause analysis
- Certification bodies audit an organization's MSS in general terms. The organization mainly audits priority issues, such as downsides in the system
- Audits by certification bodies are conducted by auditors contracted to those bodies - there is no such restriction on internal audits in organizations. They may employ external personnel such as those experienced in third party audit with auditing

1987, Japan responded slowly and only established its own national equivalent standards in 1991.

The situation caused considerable confusion among organizations manufacturing products for export to Europe. Therefore, when ISO 14001 was issued, Japan responded very quickly to prevent the same situation occurring.

There was another factor. The ISO MS standards requiring continual improvement were



Figure 3 – Annual growth of ISO 9000*/ISO 14001 certificates in Japan, December 1998 to December 2007 (adapted from *The ISO Survey – 2007*, and the Japan Accreditation Board for Conformity Assessment (JAB) report).

qualifications, internal auditors from other organizations, or experts familiar with the business or technology.

Organizations with several years of certification experience and familiarity with management systems should also be more proactive in their requests to certification bodies. For example :

- Organizations may wish to unify certifications achieved by each factory or division into a company-wide certification. For example, factory

managers have traditionally been at the apex of the management system, but by unifying the certification, senior corporate management can assume the lead

- If a certification body provides fewer and fewer observations and the audits become ineffective, the organization should contract with other certification bodies so that the audit is conducted from a fresh viewpoint
- For more effective use of management resources,

The latest cover of ISOS magazine, featuring ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 achievements among Japanese companies.



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organizations can integrate their QMS and EMS, and have both systems assessed together.

Auditing approaches

Of course, certified organizations and certification bodies should both work to ensure that the audit is helpful to management. Certification bodies currently advocate "value-added audits" and "effective audits", and emphasize audit verification to make sure an organization's management system is working effectively.

Organizations that receive little guidance are unlikely to invest further in certification

Sequential auditing, where questions are asked concerning each requirement of the standard in order to check conformity to each, is now regarded as an immature audit method.

Nevertheless, since the beginning of ISO MSS certification in Japan, there have been a few auditors who approach on-site audits by first asking organizations about their work flow and problems, carefully examine conformity to requirements, and point out

nonconformities or areas where the implementation process is incomplete. Such audits are highly valued among certified organizations.

Misconceptions

While some organizations are actively implementing and operating an ISO QMS or EMS, there are still many that operate them inflexibly in the mistaken belief that:

- The internal audit or management review must be conducted once a year on a predetermined day
- The environmental objective should be determined in a medium- to long-term plan, and the environmental target in an annual plan
- Documented procedures must be hard copy paper documents.

Many organizations are taught by consultants to think that way, and as a consequence often do not achieve any effective results for themselves. And if such organizations are not required to be ISO 9001 or ISO 14001-certified by their business partners, it is likely that they will withdraw from certification later on.

Another key reason why some organizations allow their cer-

tifications to lapse is because they do not find any advantage in the process. Organizations that are assessed and receive little effective guidance are unlikely to invest further management resources in prolonging ISO MSS implementation and certification.

Listening to certified organizations

As yet, there is no association of certified organizations in Japan, and therefore nowhere that the needs of such organizations can be heard, or the realities of implementation can be discussed and understood.

We have few committees involved with QMS and EMS implementation in leading organizations from the main business sectors. In practice, even those organizations have difficulty freely expressing their needs to their certification bodies.

Hoshō: "Certification" in the Japanese language, calligraphied here in the Tensho seal style by IMS's artist Pascal Krieger.



To help certification bodies and certified organizations discuss matters on an equal footing, it is necessary to establish a council in Japan to represent their interests. This should cover every business sector, and allow small businesses to participate.

By doing so, the real discussion about the results and effects of certification can begin at last. Yet it appears that only a few countries have such a council for gathering opinions from certified organizations.

From our media perspective as ISOS – a monthly magazine devoted to ISO MSS developments, certified organizations and certification bodies in Japan – we would certainly like to support any moves to establish a council of certified organizations. •