

Common practice threatens customer confidence in conformity assessment

Accredited registrars are an essential part of the global conformity assessment infrastructure. Customers rely on registrars to be independent of the systems they certify. It is reasonable for conformity assessment customers to expect the registrar's certificate of system conformity not to depend on any other registrar process than auditing.

Auditees and their registrars ruin the independence required by making the registrar's processes an integral part of certified management systems by:

1. The auditee's learning process relying wholly or in part on registrar training in developing and auditing management systems.
2. The auditee's improvement processes relying in part on advice and reports from the auditor on what he or she has seen work elsewhere.

Both of these entrenched practices greatly deepen the dependency of the auditee's management system on their registrar. Giving away client information would not conform to clause 7.5.4 of ISO 9001:2008 as the registrar's management system fails to protect the intellectual property of its customers.

Some auditees seek to sweeten the relationship with their auditor and outsource parts of their certified system to their registrar. A few compromised or "rogue registrars" also advising and training in management systems have caused others to follow suit.

Registrar auditors have yet to use the repeated requests for advice from their auditees as evidence of ineffective corrective action processes. Instead of reporting nonconformity for the auditee's improvement action, registrars succumb to the requests for help. But it is reasonable for the customers of a "certified company" to expect the certificate to signify system conformity without depending on any of the registrar's training or advisory processes.

Registrars occasionally advertise claims of their impartiality but do not sell the value of their independent audit to the customers of their clients. The Arthur Andersen debacle told all not to treat auditing services as a 'loss leader' but some registrars still prefer to sell their non-audit services to "improve the management systems and performance" to their certification clients.

Registrars continue to make their clients' management systems depend on their non-audit processes and this undermines global conformity assessment. Accrediting authorities have yet to turn the ongoing imperative of reliable global system conformity assessment into the daily practice of registrars so they prosper by audit alone.

Protect the integrity of your independent certificate.

Keep your system independent of your registrar.