ABSTRACT

Quality assurance and quality management systems are subjects that have been talked about by contractors, professionals and the authorities for some years already. Many contractors are already registered with the certification bodies to develop formal quality management systems and to seek third party certification to the SS ISO 9000 quality standards. Even though the first organisation that achieved accreditation in the construction industry hailed from a professional quantity surveying firm, the quantity surveying profession as a whole has not shown much enthusiasm in its adoption as compared to the other professions, in particular the contracting firms.

This study showed that the level of formal quality management practice among the professional quantity surveying firms in Singapore is very low. Only two out of the fifteen firms surveyed are currently in the process of being assessed to meet the SS ISO 9000 quality standards. All other firms, apart from the only one firm who has achieved accreditation, are not pursuing any form of formal quality management system and to be accredited to any quality assessment bodies. Larger practices tend to give prominence to the anticipated benefits of certification. Some quantity surveyors felt that the SS ISO 9000 standards are not relevant to professional practices such as quantity surveying firms and urged the authorities or professional institutions to develop more relevant quality standards before they would seriously think of adopting the concept in their organisations.

The case study on a local professional quantity surveying firm revealed that it is not going to be easy or cheap to implement formal quality management system in an organisation. This is aggravated by the increase in construction workload due to the buoyancy in the construction industry during the last 3 - 5 years.
In such a market condition, clear purpose and strong commitment are essential to see that the firm objective of achieving third party certification can be accomplished.

Through the survey, the problems encountered by the case study firm were found to be similarly faced by other firms that are currently pursuing or had achieved third party certification. The experiences and actions taken by those organisations that are implementing formal quality management system will prove useful to firms that are considering adopting the SS ISO 9000 quality standards.

It is generally felt that the contracting firms and other professionals are moving so rapidly ahead of the quantity surveyors in the pursuit for quality-certification that there is a fear that this profession is going to be left behind in this competitive market place. More can be done to clarify the misconception held by some professionals on SS ISO 9000 and firms should be encouraged to adopt and implement formal quality management systems in their organisations.