



Integration of management systems: towards a sustained success and development of organizations



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ABSTRACT

Effective environmental management within companies, integrated with other management areas like quality and occupational health and safety, is nowadays assumed to be a strategic way to implement and improve lean and cleaner production. Also, sustainable development (SD) and business sustainability can be achieved through a better coordinated management of processes versus associated resources. This paper presents an in depth discussion regarding the promotion of integrated management systems, their benefits and major contribution towards the sustainable development of cleaner production related features. It addresses issues regarding the contributions resulting from the integration of standardized Management System (MS) from both internal and external perspectives. Complementing the overall review of aspects to the development of integrated management systems a survey was conducted in order to better understand the relevance of the identified success factors. The main findings in this paper are as follows: a contextualization model of sustainable development and integrated management systems considering the Triple Bottom Line: economic, social and environmental; and, a method and associated model to support the development of integrated management systems as well as general guidelines to support integration. It can be concluded that a proactive approach and commitment to cleaner production, supported by an integrated management system, brings relevant savings for organizations as well as providing value to the relevant interested parties.

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1. Introduction

In response to the needs and expectations of the relevant interested parties, and considering internal and external organizational context awareness, organizations are in nowadays planning, or otherwise, implementing different standardized Management Systems (MSs). According to the ISO survey (ISO, 2013) the worldwide number of organizations that are betting on the implementation and certification of MSs has been growing in order to meet the requirements of the different interested parties as well as to improve their efficiency.

Value creation in organizations depends on the ability to potentiate the continuous improvement and innovation of products and processes, supported on lean and clean principles. This

approach can be depicted from the work of Rebelo et al. (2014c) where it is proposed the reduction in the proliferation of individual MSs through integration with the purpose of maximizing added value for the organizations and their interested parties.

According to ISO (2009) meeting the needs and expectations of interested parties contributes to the sustained success of organizations. The development and implementation of management systems standards (MSSs) have increased in an abrupt manner in the last few years and the impact generated by standards such as the environmental management (EM), quality management (QM) and occupational health & safety management (OH&SM), among others, is demonstrated by their worldwide importance (ISO, 2013). The growing level of standardisation fields, in particular within the individual implementation of MSSs and certification of the corresponding MSs, according to each interested parties requirements, considering too the organizational context, both internal and external, might constitute a factor of value reduction in organizations. Consequently organizations lose competitiveness and shareholders, and other relevant parties are penalized. According to

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Sebhatu and Enquist (2007), sustainable value creation requires more than adherence to external standards; rather, it requires a shift in mind-set in order to make a revolutionary leap towards sustainable value.

According to the ISO (2008b) the individual implementation of MSSs is an option that leads to a sub-optimization of MSs. A more effective and efficient option for an organization is to integrate and implement the requirements of multiple MSSs. The main reasons to implement integrated management systems (IMs) in small and medium enterprise (SME) are the external pressures resulting from the context in which they operate. For example, large and multinational companies specify contractual requirements for quality and environment that have to be met by SMEs in order to operate as a qualified supplier, along their supply chain. Hence, most often SMEs are forced to implement environmental management systems (EMS), quality management systems (QMS), occupational health and safety management systems (OH&SMS), social responsibility management systems (SRMS), and risk management (RM), among other MSs. In a balanced and sustainable way, MSSs aim to support organizations achieve sustainability considering the environmental, social and economic needs of the interested parties, internal and external. In particular, and according to ISO 14001 (ISO, 2004), an EMS is a set of processes and practices that enable an organization to reduce its environmental impacts and increase its operating efficiency. In others words, the purpose of an EMS is: (i) to develop an environmental policy; and, (ii) to define objectives and processes to implement it and continually improve its environmental performance, satisfying their – and interested parties – legal requirements. In this context cleaner production, as a preventive strategy to minimize the negative impact of organizations activities, products and services, contributes to the sustainable development of companies.

The international community has recognised the wide range of different benefits that can be achieved through cleaner production (CP). According to Fresner (1998), the main players of CP are the companies that control their production processes through the incorporation of sustainable development practices. According to ANZECC (1999), CP provides a way by which countries can protect both the environment and the community, without compromising sustainability of trade and economic development in the future. Cleaner production encompasses the continuous application of an integrated preventive environmental strategy to processes, products and services in order to enhance overall efficiency and therefore decrease risks for the environment. As a result of CP, better environment protection can be obtained as well as improved performance for consumers, collaborators and organizational assets. Simultaneously it potentiates industrial efficiency, profitability, competitiveness and the quality of products and/or services (UNEP, 2007).

This paper gives further evidences of the growing importance of IMs and their role in supporting CP as well as sustainable development (SD) in organizations. This paper is divided in two main parts, the first, sustained in the literature review, provides clear evidences that support the integration of different MSSs and demonstrate their inherent benefits. The second part demonstrates, through a case study conducted in a manufacturing site, the relevance of the previous analysis and the inherent improvements that can be achieved through integration. This paper also addresses issues considering the contributions resulting from the integration of standardized MSs, from both internal and external perspectives, contributing to a clearer understanding on the role of each of the interested parties.

2. The strategic role of integrated management systems

Organizations often operate in turbulent environments characterized by intense competitiveness, constant technological

progress, new market requirements, and scarce natural resources. This scenario imposes the constant need for change in the operation and companies' management. Oliveira (2013) sustains that the integration of certifiable MSs is an effective alternative and proposes guidelines for the integration. According to Bernardo et al. (2012), it is increasing the number of organizations that are betting on the implementation and certification of MSs in order to meet the requirements of the interested parties and achieve maximum efficiency. A cultural shift is underway and the number of companies with more than one certification is increasing (Salomone, 2008) and many are advancing towards integration. There is a growing belief that the integration of multiple MSs with its holistic view of a business context encompasses all management activities, both certifiable and non-certifiable, adds value and, thus, enhances the SD of organizations (Santos et al., 2013). Therefore, several conceptual frameworks have been proposed and the empirical research on the integration attributes have emerged (Gianni and Gotzamani, 2015).

According to Jørgensen (2008), the integration of MSs is not, in itself, a guarantee of more sustainable MSs, this is conditioned by the integration level. The adoption of an IM is nowadays a strategic decision of relevant importance for the competitiveness and sustainability of organizations. The success of the integration of MSs is strongly related to the true motivations that lead organizations to move towards integration (Almeida et al., 2012). According to Mežinska et al. (2013) the starting point in developing an IM is the clear understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability concepts as well as their possible implementation alternatives in coherence with the existing organizational culture. In literature, the integration of MSs has been discussed as a fusion of QMS, EMS, OHSMS, CSRMS, ISM – information security management –, among others, with a special focus on the first three MSs (e.g. Labodova, 2004; Fresner and Engelhardt, 2004; Zeng et al., 2007; Santos et al., 2011; Asif et al., 2013; among others). On the other hand, the integration of MSs, supported by those MSSs in a single system, taking into account the correspondence and the level of compatibility between them and potential tangible and intangible gains resulting from this integration, will be an added value that organizations cannot discard (Rebelo and Santos, 2012). According to Bernardo (2014) organizations are constantly adapting to changes in the economy and those that adapt best have the greatest possibilities of surviving. This author classifies the integration of management systems (MSs) as a type of innovation.

Research conducted by Khanna et al. (2010) concluded that the most compelling reasons to implement an IM are the promotion of synergies among MSs, the use of common objectives for the existing MSs, the avoidance of redundant procedures, the improvement of corporate image, and the reduction of third-party audits that are requested by each MS. A systematic integration conducts to a more holistic, result-driven approach, towards the identification of priority working areas, and according to Zeng et al. (2007) one major problem for enterprises to operate multiple parallel MSs is that it lowers management efficiency, and the implementation of IMs would generate several benefits in the aim of quality, environment, occupational health and safety, and social responsibility. Integration can be understood as a unique process, which requires little extra effort initially, but offers different types of internal and external benefits and a wide range of advantages for the interested parties. Are examples of benefits: elimination of conflicts between independent MSs; optimization of resources; promotion of synergies and cost savings; elimination of several type of organizational waste; empowerment of the Collaborators; reduction on the number of audits; integrated management of sustainability components; reduction in the time spent when managing systems separately (Suditu, 2007; Tarí and Molina-Azorín, 2010; Majstorovic and

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