

The ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System Standard: Companies' Drivers, Benefits and Barriers to Its Implementation

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study is to evaluate companies' perception of the latest version (2015) of ISO 9001 in terms of motivations that pushed companies to the implementation of a Quality Management System.

Methodology: The research was conducted through a questionnaire proposed to 3,975 ISO 9001 certified companies, making a simple random sampling among the 150,143 Italian companies certified in 2018. Among the companies contacted, 493 participated in the survey and gave shape to the reference sample.

Findings: The results of the study show that the “culture of quality” is rooted in Italy and mainly in the North, which represents the most economically advanced area. With regard to the evolution of the standard from ISO 9001:2008 to 2015, companies seem to have perceived the main changes introduced with the latest revision, that helps to easily adopt its principles in companies.

Research Limitation: The main limitation of the study lies in the fact that the focus of the research was based on Italian companies. It would be important for future research to consider also other European countries, and make a comparison between them, in order to consider if companies of different markets have different motivations for implementing the standard and perceive different benefits and barriers to its implementation.

Value of paper: Few researches have focused on the latest version of the ISO 9001 standard; therefore this study gives a broad vision of how companies that have had to deal with the new standard consider it in relation to the previous version, highlighting the main strengths and weaknesses.

Category: Research paper

Keywords: Quality Management System; ISO 9001; Total Quality Management

1 INTRODUCTION

Quality from a fundamental philosophical perspective can be defined as the summary of entity property manifestation in surrounding and time their characteristic functions (Zgodavová et al., 2002). Therefore the implementation of a Quality Management System (QMS), and its subsequent certification, is a voluntary process, supported by the motivations, objectives and policies of the organisation. Jones, Arndt and Kustin (1997), identified two types of organizations, based on the main purpose for which they decide to certify themselves, that is, the “non-developmental companies”, which tend to implement a quality system only to obtain a certificate and the “developmental companies”, which adopt the standard, because they believe they can get internal benefits from its implementation.

Based on a survey conducted in 2016 by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) it emerges that, with 150,143 certified companies, Italy is at the top of the European classification of Quality Management System (QMS) certifications according to the ISO 9001 standard, and it is second in the world after China, which, for the year under review, presents 350,631 certified companies (www.accredia.it).

This research reported a total of 1,105,356 certificates valid for the ISO 9001 standard worldwide (including 80,596 issued for the 2015 version), with an increase of 7% compared to the previous year (2015). The first four industrial sectors by number of ISO 9001 certifications in 2016, based on the data, are the metal and metal products sector, with 116,457 valid certificates, followed by Electrical and optical equipment (88,482), construction (87,605) and wholesale & retail trade, repairs of motor vehicles (79,492) (www.iso.org).

Currently, the globalisation has changed the way of doing business; customer's expectations have increased and are more articulated, and the ease of access to information by all stakeholders has lead companies to operate in a supply chain that is more complex than it was in the past. Therefore the ISO 9001 standard, in order to keep up with market changes began a review process in 2012 to make it compatible with the ongoing evolution of the market and with the standards related to other management systems. The path that led to the publication of the UNI EN ISO 9001:2015 standard began with a preliminary phase through the creation of a web survey aimed at identifying the weak points of the standard and then improving them within the process of reviewing.

The revision of the ISO 9001:2015 standard has introduced significant differences compared to the 2008 edition, which can be summarised in 9 points (Gigante and Ziantoni, 2015):

- the adoption of the High-Level Structure (HLS), a structure that is common to The ISO standards related to management systems and defined in Annex SL of the ISO Directives – Part I.

- An explicit requirement that requires the adoption of Risk-Based Thinking to support and improve the understanding and application of the process approach.
- Less prescriptive requirements.
- Greater flexibility in relation to documentation.
- Better applicability to services.
- The requirement to define the boundaries of the QMS.
- Increased emphasis on the organizational context.
- Increased leadership requirements.
- Increased emphasis on achieving process results to increase customer satisfaction.

Considered the above, the study aims to evaluate companies' perception of the latest version (2015) of ISO 9001 in terms of motivations that led companies to the implementation of a Quality Management System, and the subsequent benefits and barriers obtained from the adoption of the standard.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Main Drivers to ISO 9001:2015 Adoption and Benefits and Barriers to Its Implementation

Making a historical overview of the reasons cited in the literature, regarding the implementation of ISO 9001, the motivations can be classified according to two main categories: internal and external (Santos et al., 1996; Murmura and Bravi, 2017). With regard to internal motivations, these are linked to the objective of achieving an internal management improvement; while external motivations are mainly related to promotional and marketing issues, customer pressures and the improvement of market share (Santos and Barbosa, 2006; Prates and Caraschi, 2014; Santos and Milan, 2013).

Regarding the factors that influence the decision to adopt ISO 9001, various studies have shown the importance of the size of the company (Psomas and Pantouvakis, 2015; Feng, Terziovski and Samson, 2008). Larger companies are associated with more market shares and are more likely to operate in different markets or across different segments of the same market. For large companies, the ability to tackle ISO 9001 is higher, leads to greater customer satisfaction, reduces information asymmetries between customers and other interested parties, allows further market penetration and increases barriers for competitors of smaller size (Boiral, 2011; Ilkay and Aslan, 2012).

As for the benefits that a company can receive developing a QMS, according to Douglas, Coleman and Oddy (2003) and Van der Wiele et al. (2005), these can also be classified into two categories: internal and external. As stated by Santos, Mendes and Barbosa (2011), there is a consensual opinion that the benefits of ISO 9001 are linked to the reasons why the organization achieves the certification; when companies are certified on the basis of internal motivations (productivity improvements, improvements in quality awareness, and internal organization improvements), the resulting benefits have a more global dimension (Douglas, Coleman and Oddy, 2003; Van der Wiele et al., 2005; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2011; Fonseca and Domingues, 2018; Rosa, Silva and Ferreira, 2017; Caridade et al., 2017). On the contrary, when companies are certified on the basis of external motivations (access to new markets, customer satisfaction, and improvement of market share), the improvements obtained are mainly of an external nature (Tari, Heras-Saizarbitoria and Pereira, 2013). Concerning the main barriers associated with the implementation of ISO 9001, these may be linked with various aspects such as lack of resources, or specific technical resources and capabilities, changes in corporate culture (Zgodavová, Hudec and Palfy, 2017), organisational idiosyncrasies, etc. Santos et al. (2016). Other important barriers identified by organisations are: high implementation and maintenance costs (Batista and Santos, 2015) and the bureaucratic management of the standard (Santos and Barbosa, 2006; Rebelo et al., 2016; Boiral, 2011; Ilkay and Aslan, 2012; Rebelo, Santos and Silva, 2015). The last revision of the standard ISO 9001 reviewed in 2015 gives greater importance to the concept of risk management (Rebelo, Santos and Silva, 2017; Ferreira, Santos and Silva, 2019). The implementation of QMS promotes the sustainability (Santos, Mendes and Barbosa, 2011; Barbosa, Oliveira and Santos, 2018) and Corporate Social Responsibility (Santos, Bravi and Murmura, 2018) for a better quality of life (Felix et al., 2018; Bravi, Murmura and Santos, 2018; Santos et al., 2019).

2.2 ISO 9004 Standard: A Guide to Excellence

The ISO 9004 standard provides a guideline for achieving the lasting success of an organisation in a complex, demanding and constantly evolving context. This standard is applicable to any organisation, regardless of the size and type of product or service provided. The ISO 9004 standard has not been designed for certification purposes but includes a self-assessment tool, which allows assessing the degree of maturity of an organisation's Quality Management System, as well as identifying and prioritising potential areas for improvement. If correctly implemented, its application should facilitate the transition to a complete Total Quality Management program, which requires a profound organisational change and a culture in which strong, committed and supportive leadership is present and employees are motivated (Boys, Karapetrovic and Wilcock, 2004; Ribièrè and Khorramshahgol, 2004).

The standard suggests to implement a process of measurement of the organisation as a tool to assess, in relation to all levels of the organisation, the degree of achievement of planned results and performance.

Once the factors that are critical to pursuing the lasting success of the organisation have been identified, they must be subjected to measurement using the most suitable indicators, defined by the same standard as Key Performance Indicators (KPI). These should be quantifiable and should depend on objectives, to identify and predict trends and take corrective and improvement actions.

The tools suggested by ISO 9004:2009 to fully implement the measurement process are represented by internal audits, benchmarking and self-assessment (to which the standard dedicates an entire appendix), which results must be analysed and become an important input of senior management review (Wilcock et al., 2006).

3 METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted through a questionnaire proposed to 3,975 ISO 9001 certified companies, making a simple random sampling among the 150,143 Italian companies certified in 2018. All the information necessary to contact the companies was obtained from the Italian Accreditation Body (ACCREDIA) database through its website (www.accredia.it). Among the companies contacted, 493 participated in the survey and gave shape to the reference sample. The questionnaire, sent using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), began on September, 5th 2018 and the replies were accepted until October, 27th 2018. The questionnaire was administered via e-mail, and exactly 3,834 e-mails were sent, as 141 e-mail addresses were not valid. A second submission was made 15 days after the first submission, as a reminder for those companies that had not previously considered the e-mail. The questionnaire was administered anonymously to encourage the sincerity of the answers.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections: in the first section, interviewees were asked the general questions, in order to obtain basic information necessary to define companies profile, while the second section considered the perception of companies about the ISO 9001 standard, investigating the evolution over time, the reasons that lead companies to obtain certification, the advantages and the barriers to its implementation.

Descriptive analysis was performed to describe the sample profile of respondent ISO 9001 certified companies. A five-point Likert scale (where 1 – “not at all important” and 5 – “A lot important was used to evaluate companies’ motivations that led them to the certification and the main advantages and barriers to its implementation perceived. The coefficient of variation, that allows evaluating the dispersion of values around the average, calculated as the ratio between mean and standard deviation has been performed. It represents good results when it is equal or less than 0.5. The non-response bias was assessed by

verifying that early and late respondents were not significantly different, considering therefore late respondents, who answered the questionnaire only after a reminder as those that refused to participate the first time (Armstrong and Overtyn, 1977). A set of tests compared respondents who answered the questionnaire during the first administration and those who answered when the survey was submitted for the second time. T-test comparisons performed between the means of the two groups showed insignificant differences (p-value <0.1).

4 RESULTS

Tab. 1 shows the profile of the 493 ISO 9001 certified companies. Considering the size of the companies in relation to the markets in which they operate, it can be noted that no large enterprises of the sample operate simultaneously both in Italy and in Europe, most operate only in Italy (15), even if a relevant number also works abroad; the Medium-sized companies operate mostly on the international markets (43); instead the Small and the Microenterprises work mainly on the Italian market only (200), although there are a few that operate on international markets (110).

Concerning the specific location of companies in Italy, most of them, that is 44.6% are located in the northern regions (220). Furthermore, from a further analysis of the data it emerged, that the Large companies are located mostly in the North, and so are the Medium-sized companies, while as regards the Small ones and the Microenterprises these are located almost equally between North and Center, although a relevant number is also concentrated in the South.

Table 1 – Profile of Respondent Companies

Respondents' Profile	N	%
<i>Type of Companies</i>	-	-
Manufacturing	493	44.8
Services	493	55.2
<i>Dimension</i>	-	-
Micro Companies (<10 employees)	493	29.2
Small Companies (10-49 employees)	493	48.1
Medium Companies (50-249 employees)	493	18.3
Large Companies (>250 employees)	493	4.5
<i>Reference Market</i>	-	-
Italy	493	51.3
Italy and Europe	493	16.2
International Markets	493	32.5

After outlining a general picture of the companies that make up the reference sample, the time in which companies adopted ISO 9001 certification was considered, in order to have an opinion from companies certified for many years, on the evolution of the standard from ISO 9001:2008 to the latest version ISO 9001:2015, to which companies, by September 15, 2018, have had to adapt. {avantgarde syntax }

It was found that most companies (355, or 72%) have been certified for over 7 years, (having been certified both with the version of the ISO 9001 standard of 2000 and 2008), thus showing the presence of a quality culture, especially among Medium-sized companies (87.7%), but also in Large companies (77.2%) and Small ones (74.6%). Finally, 56.9% of Micro companies have been certified according to the ISO 9001 standard for a long time. The 23.32% (or 115 companies) has been certified for a period ranging from 2 to 7 years; these companies have therefore been certified only with the ISO 9001:2008 revision of the standard, while 4.66% (23 companies) have been certified for a year or less, and therefore, they have not made any change from previous revisions of the standard, having certified directly according to the latest version of 2015.

Furthermore, it has been established that the companies certified for more than seven years are located mainly between North (144) and Center (126) of Italy. Later, companies that had experimented or were experimenting with the transition from ISO 9001:2008 to ISO 9001:2015 were asked, what was their opinion on the evolution of the Standard.

Most respondents noted that the new revision of the standard gives greater importance to the concept of “Risk management” (value 3, 4 and 5 of the Likert scale) (67.1%; mean value: 3.85), makes it easier to integrate with standards related to other issues (environment , health and safety, ethics...) (60.9%; mean value: 3.63), presents a greater propensity to the aspect of “continuous improvement” (57.4%; mean value: 3.54), allows the implementation of a more quality-oriented system (49.6%; mean value: 3.38) and it adapts more easily to the organizational structure (47.4%; mean value: 3.32). That is in line with what has been found in the literature (Gigante and Ziantoni, 2015).

According to the interviewees the transition to the new version of the Standard does not allow the achievement of a higher profit (56.4%), especially for Medium (53.3%) Small (49%) and Micro enterprises (45.8%), and at the same time the 42.1% says they are indifferent to the increase in the financial cost of implementing the standard (Tab. 2).

Table 2 – Changes Perceived by Companies in the Transition between ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 9001:2015

	N	Mean (μ)	St. Deviation (σ)
It requires less bureaucratization	470	3.13	1.11
It has become easier to understand	470	3.05	1.03
It adapts more easily to the organisational structure	470	3.32	1.06
It allows implementing a more quality-oriented system	470	3.38	0.99
It makes it easier to integrate with standards related to other issues	470	3.63	1.02
It has made conformation to the standard of easier implementation	470	3.22	1.01
The financial cost of implementing the standard has increased	470	2.75	1.03
It allowed the achievement of a greater profit	470	2.25	0.99
It provides guidance to project the company into the future	470	3.12	1.13
It presents a greater propensity to the aspect of “continuous improvement”	470	3.54	1.02
It leads to greater centrality of the leadership	470	3.26	1.11
It gives greater importance to the concept of “Risk management”	470	3.85	1.11

Initially, the survey focused on the reasons that led Italian companies to obtain ISO 9001 certification. Based on what can be observed in Tab. 3, the reasons that led companies to get the certification are mainly: the possibility of improving their own corporate image (89%; mean value: 4.36), obtaining internal organizational improvements (75.2%; mean value: 4.04) and the opportunity to use the standard as a marketing tool (51.3%; mean value: 3.30). The first two reasons are the most important for all companies in the sample, in fact for these items there is an average value higher than 4. Two out of three of the main reasons are linked to external factors and are in line with what was stated in previous research (Prates and Caraschi, 2014; Santos and Milán, 2013; Santos and Barbosa, 2006). Overall, the less important reasons seem to be: the reduction of costs (18.2%; mean value: 2.23), the benefits experienced by other companies (19.5%; mean value: 2.47), the improvement of relations with the communities (26.1%; mean value: 2.82) and, as previously stated, the possibility of avoiding potential obstacles to exports (23%; mean value: 2.23).

Table 3 – Motivations that Pushed Companies to ISO 9001 Standard

	N	Mean (μ)	St. Deviation (σ)	Coefficient of variation (σ/μ)
Reduction of costs	493	2.23	1.24	0.5
Pressures from customers	493	3.03	1.44	0.4
Use of the Standard as a marketing tool	493	3.30	1.19	0.4
Get internal organizational improvements	493	4.04	1.09	0.3
Keep up with its own certified competitors	493	3.17	1.32	0.4
By word of mouth from benefits experienced by other companies	493	2.47	1.17	0.5
Avoid potential export barriers	493	2.23	1.39	0.6
Improve relations with communities	493	2.51	1.33	0.5
Improve relations with government authorities	493	2.82	1.45	0.5
Improve the corporate image	493	4.36	0.86	0.2

Subsequently, the main advantages of implementing an ISO 9001 QMS were considered (Tab. 4). The main benefits perceived include an improvement in corporate image and reputation (77.7%; mean value: 3.98), a greater awareness of corporate opportunities (in terms of continuous improvement) (71.6%; mean value: 3.91) and the reduction of non-conformities (62.5%; mean value: 3.55).

Further perceived benefits are the greater customer satisfaction (58.6%; mean value: 3.52), an increase in corporate efficiency (56.4%; mean value: 3.43), followed by an improvement in customer relations (55.6%; mean value: 3.49), an improvement in internal communication (55.4%; mean value: 3.43), and a reduction in complaints (53.3%; mean value: 3.40).

However, there are also benefits that are not perceived by the companies in the sample, i.e. the 71% do not believe that certification leads to an improvement in delivery times (mean value: 2.78), and 72.6% believe that there is an increase in sales (mean value: 32.79).

Only a small percentage (27.3%) believes that the certification has contributed to the increase in sales, and these are mostly medium and small companies. Therefore this confirms various studies (Bravi, Murmura and Santos, 2018; Caridade et al., 2017) highlighting that for large companies, the possibility of tackling ISO 9001 is higher, thank their dimension.

Table 4 – Benefits Perceived from the Implementation of ISO 9001 Standard

	N	Mean (μ)	St. Deviation (σ)	Coefficient of variation (σ/μ)
Greater customer satisfaction	493	3.52	1.12	0.3
Improved image and reputation	493	3.98	0.89	0.2
Greater awareness of company possibilities	493	3.91	0.97	0.2
Improved relationship with customers	493	3.49	1.08	0.3
Improved delivery times	493	2.78	1.16	0.4
Increase of corporate efficiency	493	3.43	1.08	0.3
Reduction of non-conformities	493	3.55	1.09	0.3
Reduction of complaints	493	3.40	1.17	0.3
Improvement of internal communication	493	3.43	1.09	0.3
Increase in sales	493	2.79	1.12	0.4
Improvement of competitive advantage	493	3.17	1.15	0.4
Greater staff motivation	493	3.03	1.18	0.4

After analyzing the positive aspects related to the certification, the research focused on the analysis of the perceived barriers. The survey highlighted three main disadvantages (Tab. 5): the increase in the bureaucratisation of company activities (3.29); an increase in the complexity of procedures in the company (3.04), and an increase in business costs (2.92). These results are in line with extant literature underlining an increase in maintenance costs and in the bureaucratic management of the standard (Santos and Barbosa, 2006; Boiral, 2011; Ilkay and Aslan, 2012).

Only a small number of Small and Micro companies have found, after the certification process, a reduction in profits.

Table 5 – Barriers Perceived from the Implementation of ISO 9001 Standard

	N	Mean (μ)	St. Deviation (σ)	Coefficient of variation (σ/μ)
Increase in business costs	493	2.92	1.13	0.4
Increase in the complexity of procedures	493	3.04	1.12	0.4
Increase in bureaucratization	493	3.29	1.14	0.3
Reduction in profits	493	1.87	0.97	0.5
Reduction in customer satisfaction	493	1.47	0.78	0.5

Subsequently, considering the perception of the cost of the certification (Tab. 6) in relation to the financial indicators of the company, such as the Return on Investment (ROI), return on Net Capital (CN) and turnover, a relevant number of respondents (161, or 32.7%) considered the costs for the implementation of a Quality Management System acceptable, only a small percentage considered them to be high (15.8%), and unacceptable (5.7%). Investigating the size of companies, it emerged that among those companies that believe that the cost for the certification is high there is the 18% of Large companies, 14.4% of Medium-sized companies, 15.2% of Small businesses and 17.4% of Micro companies. On the contrary, no company considers the costs unacceptable; in fact, the value found for this item, on average, is below 2.

Table 6 – Perceived Costs for the Implementation of ISO 9001 Standard

	N	Mean (μ)	St. Deviation (σ)	Coefficient of variation (σ/μ)
Irrelevant	493	2.46	1.26	0.5
Moderate	493	2.58	1.10	0.4
Acceptable	493	3.00	1.18	0.4
High	493	2.33	1.11	0.5
Unacceptable	493	1.77	1.05	0.6

Later, companies were asked whether they had other certifications, in addition to the ISO 9001, and 45.8% answered positively. Considering the size of the companies, it is mainly the Large (81.8%) and Medium-sized ones (63.3%) that adopt further standards. Among the other certifications held, it appears that 52.2% also has the ISO 14001 (Environmental Management System) standard, 35.3% also has the OHSAS 18001 (Management Systems for Safety and Health of workers) standard, 7.1% has the SA 8000 (Management Systems for Social Responsibility) standard and finally only 3.1% has also EMAS III (European Environmental Management System) standard. Furthermore, it appears that 16% of companies are certified to both ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001 and they manage this standard in an integrated manner, just like in other countries (Ribeiro et al., 2017; Santos, Rebelo and Santos, 2017; Carvalho, Santos and Gonçalves, 2018). The purpose of integration and implementation of management systems by integrating standards and documents is in the achievement of their synergistic action in the Organization. This can promote the appearance of new businesses (Doiro et al., 2017; Bravi, Santos and Murmura, 2018; Santos et al., 2018) even when consumers are more demanding (Bravi, Murmura and Santos, 2017; Santos, Murmura and Bravi, 2019).

In continuing the investigation, it has been verified how many companies were aware of the ISO 9004:2009 standard, that is the ISO 9001 guidelines which help companies to implement a QMS oriented to excellence. Only 11.2% said they

were aware of the ISO 9004:2009 standard, while 17.2% said they knew it only partially and 71.6% did not know it at all. More than half of large companies do not know it or know it only in part, however considering the total number of Large, Medium, Small and Microenterprises that make up the sample, the percentage of large companies (59%) is the more significant percentage than claims to know it more. Once the companies that were aware of the ISO 9004 guidelines had been identified, it has been tried to understand whether these were based on its principles in business management.

It appears that only 11.8% follow its principles, while 37.7% follow them, but in part, and 50.4% do not refer to its principles at all. Subsequently, respondents who are aware of the ISO 9004 standard, but do not refer to its principles, were taken into consideration their motivations.

A relevant number (68) claims that it already requires much commitment to be ISO 9001 certified, others (51) believe that referring to the principles of ISO 9004 requires excessive time and that excessive training of personnel is necessary (51). These three main obstacles are perceived to a greater extent by Small and Microenterprises. No large company believes that the procedures are too complex and only a small number (3) find that also following the guidelines provided by ISO 9004 requires an excessive commitment.

5 CONCLUSION

The respondent companies that participated in this study are mostly Small and Micro-sized ones, and this reflects the Italian entrepreneurial reality. The majority of them work in the service sector, and mainly in Italy, although a relevant percentage also operates in European markets, and it is the Medium-sized companies, more than the Large ones, that operate internationally.

In Italy, most companies are concentrated in the northern regions, and these seem to be also the most economically developed, and among them, it seems that the Large and Medium-sized ones are mainly located in the North.

A large number of companies, located between North and Center, have been certified for over seven years, overcoming the various revisions of ISO 9001 that have occurred over time. Among these, there are mostly Medium-sized companies.

Considering these first results, it is possible to affirm that the “culture of quality” is by now rooted in Italy for years and mainly in the North, which represents the most economically advanced area.

With regard to the evolution of the standard from ISO 9001:2008 to 2015, companies seem to have perceived the main changes introduced with the latest revision, in fact they believe that ISO 9001:2015 gives greater importance to the concept of Risk management; favours integration with standards related to other issues such as environmental, ethical and health and safety issues (Ribeiro et al.,

2017; Santos, Rebelo and Santos, 2017; Carvalho, Santos and Gonçalves, 2018); presents a greater propensity to the aspect of “continuous improvement”; enables the implementation of a quality-oriented management system; and it adapts more easily to the organizational structure (Marques et al., 2018; Araújo et al., 2019). This is in line with what is highlighted in the literature (Tsiouras, 2015; Gigante and Ziantoni, 2015).

As far as the motivations that led Italian companies to get certified are concerned, these are in line with what was mentioned in the literature (Torre, Adenso-Diaz and González, 2001; Douglas, Coleman and Oddy, 2003; Magd and Curry, 2003; Poksinska, Eklund and Dahlgard, 2006; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2011; Prates and Caraschi, 2014), in fact among the internal motivations there is the interest in achieving an internal organizational improvement, and to improve corporate image, while among the external ones there is, mainly, the opportunity to use the standard as a marketing tool. In contrast with the results of different studies, pressures from customers, the possibility of improving relations with the communities and the possibility of avoiding obstacles to export do not seem to be such important reasons as to encourage companies to adopt certification.

Paying attention to the benefits obtained by the companies after having gained the certification, a correspondence can be noticed between the perceived motivations and benefits.

Therefore there is a link between the benefits of ISO 9001 and the reasons why the organisation achieves the standard, confirming the results found by Santos and Milán (2013).

Finally, it was noted that, for the companies in the sample, the improvement in delivery times and the increase in sales and profits are not among the major benefits. This fact may be because, as stated by Psomas, Pantouvakis and Kafetzopoulos (2013), the impact of the efficiency and quality of the product/service on financial performance is indirect.

Certification, however, also involves disadvantages, including: greater bureaucratisation of company activities, an increase in the complexity of procedures in the company and an increase in costs, perceived above all by Small and Micro Businesses. These are easily conceivable disadvantages, given the Small and Micro dimensions of Italian companies, and in line with the literature considered (Torre, Adenso-Diaz and González, 2001; Magd, 2008; Santos and Milán, 2013).

A positive aspect to highlight is that only a small number of Small and Microenterprises have found, following the certification, a reduction in profits and customer satisfaction, something which, on the contrary, has not been manifested at all in larger companies.

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