

**“ISO 9000 QMS: A STRATEGIC BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT AGENT OR A
PRODUCTION QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
MARKETING TOOL:
THE GREEK AGRO-COOPS’ EXPERIENCE”**

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ABSTRACT

A serious business issue, recurring in the public debate held in Greece and concerning the future of the Agricultural sector, is the stated need of the Agro-coops' sector's organisational and operational reform and improvement (Karamichas, 2008; Tolios, 2003). This identified and/or suggested required strategic business development and change is considered to be a product and at the same time the source of the agro-coops' required organisational performance improvement, as Kamenidis (2008), Arvanitoyiannis (2001) and Parnell (2000) suggest. Furthermore, they relate this strategic business development and change, and performance improvement process with the agro-coops' business processes' reconfiguration and resulting improvement.

According to the majority of the proposed economic and business models, the major mechanism to accomplish the aforementioned aim - that is the strategic choice of the Agro-coops' sector for operating effectively and efficiently - is and/or should be the adoption of the privately owned businesses' sector organisational framework (Karamichas, 2008; Parnell, 2000). Furthermore, the agro-coops have to combine these adopted elements and practices with the particularities of the agricultural business sector, as Ian McPherson (1995) emphatically states. On the other hand, the distinct ownership structure of the agro-coops which is more democratic than hierarchical makes the implementation of change more difficult.

In the Greek business environment, many authors (Karaiskaki, 2003; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002) relate this required organisational performance improvement with the effective implementation and efficient use of the adopted and developed by the agro-coops ISO 9000 QMS, which is the particular focus of this final thesis' document. According to them, this model represents one of the best business practices for the Greek agro-Unions achieving improved business processes and product quality. These, by their turn, may lead the agro-Unions enjoying improved organisational performance and consequently business and financial state.

On the other hand, as Kokkinos (2009) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001) state, the Greek agro-Unions' business sector has been suffering the last two to three decades from:

1. outdated managerial practices and business behaviour,
2. insufficient “investment” in human resources due to inappropriate recruitment and development of them by the required educational and training programmes,
3. competitive relations between the Board of Directors’ elected members and the professional managers, as well as among the members of these two groups,
4. undermined business status and endangered financial position,
5. inappropriate and not clearly defined operational (actual management and strategic decision-making process) framework as far as authority, responsibility and accountability issues are concerned,
6. interference of external parties aiming at serving their own interests.

Based on these aforementioned identified weaknesses, required reform actions and proposed business models of organisational change and strategic business development, the researcher decided to focus his entire DBA research project and this final thesis research study on the critical investigation, analysis and evaluation of the ISO 9000 QMS’ business status and manner of implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-Unions’ business sector. The main research question was and is: what are the driving and restraining forces that influence how efficiently and effectively the Greek agro-Unions have been implementing and using ISO 9000 QMS.

During 2005-2006, the researcher conducted a series of case studies research, including both a qualitative research based on in-depth interviews and a quantitative research based on a large scale, cross-sectional survey in a fair number of Greek agro-coops for critically investigating, analysing and evaluating this main research question.

Moreover, he also proceeded to the thorough investigation of these aforementioned major research aims in this final thesis’ qualitative research study, which was conducted from March to September of 2007, by in-depth interviewing 62/sixty two key stakeholders - them being: the Board of Directors’ elected members (especially the Presidents), General Managers and Quality & Production managers - of 21/twenty one agro-Unions and 7/seven Confederations of them, which represent the 30% of the sector’s population.

These main research aims were accomplished by the exploration and critical evaluation

of the researched agro-Unions' key stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes and practices towards ISO 9000 QMS' business nature, and operational and strategic business properties. Because, as Oakland (2003) and Foster (2001) believe, any quality management system's effective implementation process and efficient use purpose are strongly based on and influenced by the corporate stakeholders' "business stance" - that is their attitudes and business practices - towards it.

This final thesis' qualitative research study is mainly empirical in nature, but it also uses the existing literature and theories concerning this research topic, other researches' findings and this DBA research project's previous phases' outcomes. It suggests, in accordance to the entire DBA research project, that ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use could be a competitive model of business practice for the Greek agro-Unions achieving strategic business development and change, through their business processes and consequently organisational performance improvement.

Furthermore, it hypothesises that the Greek agro-Unions and their key stakeholders are using ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic resource-competence for achieving the aforementioned strategic aim, despite these corporations' existing business status, financial position and managerial practices, as well as organisational context and settings, and operational framework.

The research study's main findings are: i) rival relations among the key stakeholders' groups and even between members of the same group, ii) outdated managerial practices and business behaviour related with: iii) inappropriate and inadequate decision making process and actual management, both associated with, iv) the stakeholders exhibiting a paternalistic view and pursuing personal and even external parties' - political interests; v) lack of accountability in terms of the decision making process and outcomes, as far as the elected members of the BoDs is concerned; vi) not clearly defined and used in actual practice lines of authority, responsibility and accountability between the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers; vii) Key stakeholders' groups' (especially the BoDs' members') lack of and/or limited knowledge of and training on business issues in general and ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties in particular; resulting in connection with the previous findings to viii) improper use of these systems' operational properties in a fair number of agro-Unions; , and ix) non-use of the strategic one aiming at the strategic business development through the

improvement of business processes in the majority of them; x) adoption and practice of an externally imposed, breakthrough change process being followed by an incremental one, which in most cases is based on benchmarking and adopting the agro-Union's strategic business partner-private sector's company; xi) business competence based on seniority of years occupancy as member of the BoDs (BoDs' members) versus business competence based on educational knowledge and business experience as professional manager (professional managers).

In relation to and as a result of the aforementioned the researcher's recommendations for change are: a) policy and legal changes concerning the authority, responsibility and accountability issues by: i) a new statute referring to the agro-Unions' ownership shareholding scheme, ii) the use of an independent external agent for auditing the agro-Unions' business operations and financial results, and attributing accountability to the involved stakeholders respectively, iii) clearly defined and established by the PASEGES lines of authority and responsibility between the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers in terms of actual operational and strategic management and decision making process; b) adoption and practice of a "new" scheme concerning the continuous training in business issues, as well as in cooperative issues of all the stakeholders, them being: the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers in order for them acquiring the required business competence for properly deciding and managing the operational and strategic business issues. This training programme could be provided by the PASEGES and/or University schools in the form of educational programmes and business practice of three to six months each time, c) recruitment and advancement of the professional managers based on managerial and business competence and on achievement of objectives, d) audit of ISO 9000 QMS' management and development by an independent external agent in cooperation with state agencies for assuring the systems' actual development and use according to ISO 9000 Guidelines and the agro-Union's quality and corporate business plan.

Based on a conceptual framework of key business factors that are constituting and influencing ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use, the researcher identifies, presents and discusses some of the theoretical, business practice and policy issues, as regards the business status and nature of ISO 9000 QMSystems' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-Unions' sector, by the

critical analysis, interpretation and evaluation of this final thesis' research findings. Since, and as it has been already referred, no previous studies regarding the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose have been conducted in Greece the researcher believes in the originality of this research and the significance of its theoretical and practical contribution to the Agricultural sector and the Agro-coops' sector's business practice in Greece. Moreover, the aforementioned key research findings (a fair of number of which have been inductively identified, examined and critically evaluated) and the resulting by them presented managerial recommendations in terms of the theoretical, business practice and especially policy issues further enhance the originality and contribution of this research study.

The final thesis' research document 5 is divided into eight sections with the Introduction being the first one. In the second section, the research objectives and questions are identified and presented in relation to the used theoretical frameworks. The third section illustrates the conceptual framework, in which the key concepts drawn on this research are presented. The fourth section presents the methodological literature with particular emphasis on the research methodology, qualitative methods, and design. The fifth section offers the research methodology, method and findings of the Qualitative and Quantitative research studies conducted in the preceding phases of the entire DBA research project.

The sixth section reports the results of the research through the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative research findings in comparison to each anchor research theme's relevant updated critical literature review.

The seventh section critically examines and discusses the basic results of the research in reference to the conceptual framework, while it critically compares these outcomes with the ones identified and evaluated in the aforementioned preceding qualitative and quantitative researches.

The eighth section, being the last one, provides some concluding remarks to this qualitative research. More specifically, this research study concludes with policy and managerial recommendations, suggests further research studies and contributes to the debate on what management actions could and should be adopted by the Greek agro-coops' Unions' stakeholders, for their corporate entities achieving improved business processes and consequently organisational performance in the current highly competitive business environment.

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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
NOTTINGHAM BUSINESS SCHOOL

DOCTORATE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

DOCUMENT 1
RESEARCH PROPOSAL
DEFINITION AND MAPPING OF RESEARCH
QUESTIONS

EXARCHOS DIMITROPOULOS

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A. INTRODUCTION

This Document reflects the area of the author's DBA Research, which is the manner of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems' Implementation and use in Greek Agricultural Cooperatives and the identification of the key business factors influencing the QM Systems' effective and efficient practice in the aforementioned business environment.

This area of research is of interest not only to the researcher, but also to the Academic Community, the Agricultural Sector and the Agro-food Industry Stakeholders as well as to the External Professional Bodies and Organizations which are engaged in the Management, Auditing and Accreditation of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems and the Public Policy makers and regulators.

The main reason is the growing global public demand for safer, healthier and quality upgraded products and services. The ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems is the most commonly recognized and accepted family of quality standards, that guarantees and safeguards at the same time all these demands and requirements of the consumers.

The Document commences with the Identification of the Main Issue and Problem. An account of the business field in which the research will be conducted is provided through a brief description of the organisational and managerial context of the research. This acts as an introduction to the research topic and main thesis/objective.

The document then proceeds to the Identification of the Research Aim and Main Objectives of the Research Project and to a number of Specific Research Anchor Questions which specify the direction towards which the whole research process will be oriented and the area in which it will be conducted.

An overview of the literature connected and related to the research project is presented in the next section of the Document.

The Research Questions, Method and Plan are deployed including a detailed description of the methodology and the sub-questions planned to be answered by the DBA Project. The research methodology is influenced by and uses both the Interpretivistic / Phenomenological and the Positivistic approaches and includes qualitative, as well as, quantitative methods for data gathering and analysis and for the research findings evaluation. It is a combination of the Inductive and the Deductive methods and elements of these two approaches will be traced throughout the whole Research process.

The Research Ethical and Political Issues are addressed since the research project is expected to raise such problems and therefore the researcher's personal stand and opinion towards these issues will be analyzed in this section of Document 1.

Finally, the Report concludes with a description of the potential outcomes - realized by the research process at the academic and the professional level - for the researcher and the communities involved in the research project and topic.

B. MAIN ISSUE AND PROBLEM / RESEARCH AIM AND MAIN OBJECTIVES

This Document identifies the Main Issue and Problem and consequently the Research Aim and Main Objectives, Questions, Plan, Method and Strategy of the researcher's selected D.B.A. Research Topic.

The application of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems' implementation process and use purpose in the Agricultural Cooperatives' sub-sector in Greece is the broad and general Topic of my Doctorate Research. It is mainly connected with two current issues:

- On one hand with the reanimation of the ongoing dialogue and debate concerning the perspectives of the Agricultural Cooperatives in Greece and the future status of the 15-18% of the country's active population which is occupied in the broader agricultural sector (Bank of Greece, 2002), and
- on the other hand with the increasing public concern, interest and demand for safer, healthier and quality enhanced food products and services all over the world (ICAP, 2002).

The Researcher has a keen and continuing professional and academic interest in both business studies and practice (since 1989) and in the Agricultural Cooperatives sector's issues and matters (since 2000, as he is employed in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia – Greece).

The study of the Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 - Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Agro-food industry in general and in the Agricultural Cooperatives in particular, as well as research on these systems' roles and degrees of contribution to the achievement of Improved Corporate Performance and Business Operations has been the subject of increasing interest and attention over the last decade.

It is expected that this interest will continue and be extended as several factors contribute to the strengthening of this interest. The most crucial factor is consumers' growing demand for safer food products with upgraded quality and more value for money. This demand tends to become an operating prerequisite for all the corporations

in the Food Industry as it has already been institutionalized through the European Union Directives referring to and concerning food safety and consumers' health protection. Furthermore, these directives have already been embodied in the national legislation of the state members and in the national legislation of other states – i.e. U.S.A., Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, South Africa and so on -, thus affecting the legal as well as the business status of all food industry companies on a national, European and global level and scale (Arvanitoyiannis, 2001).

On the other hand as many researchers identify there exists a gap between the will and the ability of the greek agro-coops to implement effectively and use efficiently the ISO 9000 QMSystems. According to Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002) this inability is an outcome of the inefficient organizational operation of the agro-coops, therefore as Ageletopoulos and Yiannatos (1995) state a researcher should first examine if - a company in the food industry is and consequently - the greek agro-coops are ready to adopt such systems. Further on, as they continue, he/she should conduct a thorough investigation of their organizational, behavioural and operational settings and arrangements that impair the effective implementation and the efficient use of these systems and consequently influence their business performance.

As a conclusion of the aforementioned analysis, the researcher has defined the following aims for the DBA project:

- to analyze and critically evaluate the current status of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems in Greek Agro-coops in relation to the agro-coops' current business status,
- to evaluate the role and contribution of these Quality management systems to the development of improved business operations and processes by the Greek agro-coops with the final aim of achieving Improved Operational and Organizational Performance and Business Excellence,
- to examine these Quality management systems' role and influence in the Greek agro-coops' business reorientation towards customer- focused and market-oriented business practices, services and operations,

- to identify the driving and restraining forces concerning the implementation, operation and use of ISO 9000-Quality Assurance and Management Systems in Greek Agricultural Cooperatives,
- to investigate the Greek Agro-coops' (Key) Stakeholders attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMSystems and identify their actual behaviours and practices concerning these systems' implementation, operation and use in the Greek agro-coops.

Therefore, a thorough auditing of all the Key Business Factors, that influence the Implementation and development process of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agro-coops, will be a main task of the Research Process. More specifically, a critical examination, analysis and evaluation of all the Critical Success Factors, which will be viewed as the Driving Forces as well as of the Critical Failure Factors which will take the place of the Constraining Forces that affect and influence the Effective Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agro-Coops will be conducted.

The empirical focus of the project will be selected Greek Agro-Coops such as the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia/U.A.C.M. Syn.P.E., SYKIKI Syn.P.E., ALME Syn.P.E., AMYKLES Syn.P.E., U.A.C. of LACONIA Syn.P.E. and some other selected Agro-Coops, e.g : AVIA Agro-coop.

The research topic will enable the researcher's interests and professional and academic knowledge in the agricultural cooperatives issues and in business matters to be developed and improved and consequently to be applied in his workplace environment - the Union of the Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia Prefecture / UACM.

This practical application will be on a subject that is of increasing concern and growing interest for the Agricultural Cooperatives sector, the food industry in general, the business and academic communities and the state regulating organizations and controlling bodies as well (Arvanitoyiannis, 2000).

As a consequence of this research project, there will be a new rationale regarding the approach to the introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek agro-coops.

C. THE NEW ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

1. The Agricultural Cooperatives In Europe

The Agricultural Cooperatives in Europe play a very important and active role in the level of agricultural markets. The fact that the farmers-producers in the European Union states are members in one or more cooperatives, underlines the importance and the role of the agro-coops as professional organizations and unions of the producers with specific economic, business and social objectives.

The degree of the agricultural cooperatives participation in the economic and trading transaction of the agricultural sector varies. Generally speaking it can be claimed that almost the 50% of these transactions are realized in and by the agricultural cooperatives (Koliris, 1992).

They have also contributed considerably to the improvement of the markets' management - in the CAP's framework - and to the maintenance of the small familial agricultural exploitations. However, the drawn new reform of CAP, the agreement of GATT and the new globalised socio-economic environment prompt in changes that can be regarded as challenges for the agricultural cooperatives, to which they should correspond so that they continue constituting a useful institution for the agricultural and local society as well as for the national and regional economy.

The revision of CAP in 1992 occurred at the same time with the initiation of important European Community's quality management and assurance programs - such as the ISO Quality Assurance and Management Systems and the H.A.C.C.P. Systems - which refer to the sustainable development of the agricultural sector and which programs in order to being effectively and efficiently applied, presuppose integrated planning, initiatives of national, regional and local character, well- trained and informed farmers and professionally competent employees and managerial personnel (Korakas,1995).

In the agro-food industry, the economic and business integration worldwide advances through joint ventures, strategic alliances, conglomerates, business takeovers and business clusters. Furthermore, in all private companies of the Food Industry the

introduction and implementation of Quality Assurance and Management Systems – such as the ISO 9000, ISO 14000 and HACCP – is considered an imperative and the only debatable argument is how they can improve the implementation of these Quality systems aiming at the upgrading of their business operations and the improvement of their corporate performance (Giannatos and Ageletopoulos, 1995).

The protagonists of all these processes, the private ownership companies of the agro-industry, are the main competitors of the agricultural cooperatives' sub-sector.

In an environment that will be dominated by the presence of big international private companies, the agricultural cooperatives can survive and grow successfully, only if they operate in the way that their major competitors are operating and acquire the required business and financial magnitude and power that will permit them to face and handle adequately all business challenges.

Because as Ian McPherson states: “The supreme necessity of the Cooperatives is the adaptation of all the useful and acceptable elements of the private companies and their successful marriage with the particularities of the co-operative way of action, in order to create productive and efficient organizations.”

(McPherson, 1995)

A fair number of European Agricultural Cooperatives have advanced in their adaptation to the new international business models and practices, while in Greece only a very small number of Agro-Coops are making their first attempts towards the modernization and rationalization of their business organization and operational practices.

The necessity of the Agricultural cooperatives all over Europe adjusting to the rapidly changing socio-economic and business environment is imposing the configuration and application of strategies of organizational and operational reformation and reorientation towards the adaptation and effective implementation of Quality management systems that are focused to the customer, driven by the market and aiming at the business operational and organizational performance improvement (Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002).

2. The Greek Agricultural Cooperatives

The Intervention and the Position of the Agro-Coops in the Agricultural Sector

The Greek agricultural society used the co-operative institution widely, for acquiring the needed technical, mechanical and financial capital of agriculture, ensuring the supply sufficiency of the agricultural products for the urban cohabitations and providing raw materials that aided the establishment and growth of the Greek industrial capitalism (tobacco, cotton, wine, olive oil, dairy and meat products).

To the degree that Greece did not have expedient access to international sources of raw materials, the modernization of the agricultural sector contributed decisively to the growth of the secondary sector of the national economy.

The infusion of the economic gains-profits from the agricultural sector to the urban sector improved indeed the working and living conditions of the agricultural population, but to a disproportionate degree in comparison to the utility enjoyed by the manufacturing industry and trade.

The abnormal and irregular political situations and the governmental guardianship restricted the Greek agro-coops to a mediatory role between the governmental institutions and organizations on the one side and the producers groups on the other. The agro-coops were prevented to manage themselves the agricultural products under the form of processing, standardization and trading them, so acquiring in this way the additional incomes capable of transforming progressively the Greek agricultural economy (Avdelidis, 1987).

Furthermore, as Mavroyiannis (1986) states the passage from traditional agriculture to advanced forms of business economy was not transformed to a complete level of industrialization and commerce activity, due to the insufficient state and banking sector support on one side and on the other due to lack of the proper managerial and employee force.

During the 1974 and afterwards period the agro-coops' intervention in the agricultural economy is characterized by important developments and changes. The post-dictatorship governments encouraged the creation of co-operative enterprises, which

entered and operated in the whole spectrum of the agro-business activities as well as offering social services to the farmers.

However, the co-current exercising of economic and social policies and activities by the Agro-coops, the intense governmental intervention in the agro-coops affairs, policies and operations, the creation of additional but not productive job positions and the lack of constant criteria for the investment activities have created an unfavorable business operational and organizational environment for the Greek agro-coops.

More specifically, it led to the non-adoption of modern organizational methods and business operating practices, the absence of a continuing training of their human force, the micro-politics phenomena generated mostly by the member of the Board of Directors and the institutional organizations and bodies of the agro-coop sector and the absence of investment in Research and Development.

All these negative business factors coincided with the imports of superior agro-products in terms of quality and value for money and the frequent and inadequate changes in the co-operative legislation and led to the current intense crisis that the Greek agricultural cooperatives experience.

Many of these Agro-Coops are threatened with bankruptcy and nullification of their activities, while in some of them this unwelcome situation has already occurred (Mavroyiannis, 1986).

The Greek agricultural cooperatives are called on today to restructure and manage with success accumulated problems of decades. However, the course of reorganization of the agro-coops becomes more difficult because of the lack of the required business culture and enterprise management infrastructure and in the imminent changes of the CAP, which in substance calls the agro-coops to transform and mutate into autonomous, modern economic and business entities as well as into the more general structural problems of Greek agriculture which undermine the necessary competitiveness of the Greek agricultural economy (Martinou N. et al, 1997).

Today, the intervention of the agricultural cooperatives in the agricultural economy should aim at the increase of products competitiveness, not only with the reduction of

their production cost and the upgrading of their quality, but also with their coordinated and modernized action in the whole spectrum of production - standardization - trade - integrated services to the farmers (Martinos et al, 1997).

The large number of agricultural cooperatives in Greece does not constitute proof or guarantee of effective and efficient business activity, since "*interalia*" the 60% of them are limited to a mediatory role between the Agricultural Bank of Greece (a State Bank) and their members - farmers for supplies and loans, while only the 7% roughly have adopted and applied modern enterprising practices with the result of enjoying a healthy business and financial position in the economic environment (Martinos et al, 1997).

The objective of an essential intervention of the agro-coops in the agricultural economy and society presupposes the upgrading of their socio-economic role and business practice, which can be realized only through the transformation of the agricultural cooperatives to independent, responsible and mature business-wise enterprises.

The adoption and effective implementation of a Quality Management System is capable of leading the Greek Agro-coops to the materialization of improved business operations and organizational performance and consequently to achieve and fulfill their multiple business aims, which are:

1. Economic - Business: Survival, growth, development and profitability.
2. Social: Supporting the small-medium agricultural familial exploitations that constitute the majority of the Greek countryside and agricultural economy.
3. Becoming Institutions of renewal, knowledge, growth and modernization of the local society and the wider agricultural sector (Martinos et al, 1997).

D. THE LOCAL FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

The Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Prefecture of Messinia will be the initial empirical focus of the DBA project. It was founded in 1987 by the unification of the following Unions of the Prefecture regions:

Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Kalamata

Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messini

Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Ano Messinia

Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Filiatra

Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Pylia

Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Gargaliani - Chora

Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Kyparissia

Central Cooperative Union of Messinia (K.S.E.M.).

The UACM is a second degree agricultural cooperative. It has its headquarters in Kalamata - the capital city of the Messinia prefecture and subsidiary offices in the major six cities of the prefecture.

It is consisted by 242 first degree agricultural cooperatives with 20,479 farmers - producers as its natural members.

The Company is specialized in the production, gathering, processing, standardization and trading of strategic (for the regional and national economy) agricultural products such as: extra virgin olive oil, edible "Kalamata" olives and black currants. More specifically the business activities and infrastructure of the UACM are the following:

- An extra virgin olive oil processing, standardization and packaging plant with a production capacity of 15 tons/ 8 hours, where 800-1000 tons of extra virgin olive oil are processed and standardized each year. Moreover, in the same space a modern chemical laboratory is operating.
- An edible - table "Kalamata" olives processing, standardization and packaging plant with a production capacity of 8 tons/ 8 hours, where 400-500 tons of "Kalamata" table olives are processed, standardized and packaged each year.
- A black currant processing and packaging plant with a production capacity of 15 tons/8 hours, where 1000-1500 tons of black currants are processed each year.

- Olive oil stainless tanks of 5000 tons capacity.
- A processing, standardization and packaging plant of animal feeding including stocking tanks with a capacity of 4000 tons.

Furthermore, the UACM is engaged in the management and administrative work of all the E.U. subsidies for the agricultural products and livestock of the Messinia prefecture and which task refers to 62,000 producers approximately (UACM archival data, 2003). The extra virgin olive oil processing plant and the table olives processing plant are operating throughout the year, while the peak periods are Christmas time, Winter months, Easter time and September (thus, the 70-80% of the whole year the processing plant is fully utilized while the remaining period is underutilized).

As it was above mentioned, the UACM processes and standardizes each year approximately 800-1000 tons of extra virgin olive oil whereas the plant capacity is almost triple. The 65% of the standardized production is sold in the internal market, especially in northern Greece, while the remaining 35% is exported mainly to UK, Germany and France. USA, Poland and Switzerland import small quantities.

The prevailing analysis holds true for the edible olives processing and trading statistical data. Furthermore, the UACM does not standardize organic olive oil and table olives (a very promising food sector) as it considers the organization and training of farmers in the cultivation of organic produces a difficult issue.

On the other side, the UACM standardizes and trades extra virgin olive oil - Protected Designation of Origin with the trademark "Kalamata" (a well known generic term for the product all over the world) and plans to do the same with the table olives.

Investments in the mechanical and technological equipment of the production lines and improvements and modifications of the already existing equipment are realized systematically every 4-5 years since the mid eighties (1986 - now).

The UACM runs a quality assurance and control laboratory and has been certified at ISO 9002:1994 and HACCP systems. Furthermore, it has appointed a Quality Management Team (in which the Researcher is a member) for managing the implementation of ISO 9000:1994 Quality Assurance System and the transition period

of the introduction as well as implementation of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality management system.

A major drawback is that Research and Development as a department and/or even process/activity does not exist while at the same time the Quality Management Team is under-operating and functioning and without applying a clear Quality Policy, Strategy, Plan and Communication programs in connection with the other departments and the branch offices.

Another organizational disadvantage is that little emphasis has been given to the adequate staffing of all departments (especially the Commercial department and the Procurement department) while in other departments there exists a lack of specialized personnel.

The human force consists of 120 employees and workers out of which 105 are employees and the fifteen persons are workers. The composition of the personnel appears to be inappropriate as the percentage of the clerical employees in comparison to that of workers seems disproportionate, considering the fact that the UACM has four processing plants and the 60% of its annual turnover of circa 15-20 million Euros comes from the trading of the processed products (olive oil, table olives, currants, animal feeding).

Furthermore, out of 105 employees the 60% is occupied with the management and payment of subsidies of the products to the producers- farmers.

Employees' business training occurs abnormally, inconsistently, accidentally, without any justified need and without any obvious connection and relation to the corporate policy, strategy and business goals.

There exists no training on the Quality issues and the ISO 9000 QM System's requirements and implementation goals and intended outcomes are not stated and/or communicated thoroughly and clearly to the employment force.

It is obvious and mentioned in several meetings of the Board of Directors and of the Team of Directors (in which the researcher was present) that there seems to exist a lack of strategy in the UACM's activities and that restructuring of the organizational and operational activities and processes is required in order for the company to successfully

compete and improve its business and financial position - i.e : 4/four meetings of the Team of Directors in 2002 and 2003 and at least in 8 meetings of the BoD from October 2001 till March 2003.

The same opinion was stated in the interview sessions the researcher had prior to his hiring with the President, the Vice President and some members of the BoD as well as with the Managing Director/General Manager of the UACM. In these sessions there was also a belief in the absence of the appropriate business culture and work mentality to the employees (President and Vice President of BoD), with the contracting view of the Managing Director that the BoD intervenes in work matters inappropriately.

E. ACADEMIC FIELD – LITERATURE OVERVIEW

This section will review the literature relating to agricultural coops and to quality systems.

1. Agricultural Coops

Concerning the one pillar of the research topic - that is the Greek Agricultural Cooperatives sector - the published work refers to the agricultural cooperatives as entities which with their social and business activities - in both past and modern times - constitute a useful and effective institution for the essential transformation of the agricultural sector.

They can and should contribute into the improvement of the quality of production, improvement of offered products and services to the public by the upgrading of their products and services quality as well as their business processes and operations, the guarantee of a better level of life for the farmers who are members in the agricultural cooperatives, the creation of productive employment, the restriction of poverty, the enlargement of social incorporation and cohesion (Papageorgiou, 1987).

The historical retrospection shows that the first cooperatives were organized as an answer to the consequences of industrial revolution in Europe that changed radically the people's life patterns. In the agricultural sector, apart from the reduction of the population, those who remained in the agricultural exploitations resorted in the utilization of co-operative institution in the 1880 decade for their own survival and growth.

All the theoretical discussions were focused on the role and importance of the co-operative institution as an institutional "vehicle" of new economic and social relations. They proposed rational ways of organization of the co-operative groups with the aim to help workers and farmers to survive and improve their economic and social position. This was to be an integrated co-operative system that would permit the change of the capitalistic system and this integrated co-operative system to be positioned as an

alternative form of enterprise practice - neither public nor private enterprise (Papageorgiou, 1987).

Nowadays, the importance of the agricultural cooperatives' presence in the European Union's countries is widely realized and accepted. From each country's report on its economic and social evolutionary course, the predominance of the agricultural cooperative institution as a particular, self-governed mechanism of solidarity and coherence is evident.

With the recent revision of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the GATT agreement, the economic and business environment is characterized by a permanently increasing competition. This development renders absolutely necessary the further development and growth of the European agricultural cooperatives by the improvement of their business operations and corporate performance.

The CAP in relation to and with the other European Union policies constitute a powerful base for a complex and integrated agricultural development and the maintenance of this base should constitute a fundamental objective of the agricultural cooperatives (COGECA, 1998-1999).

Emphasis is given to the examination of the role, importance and enterprising organization and operation of the agricultural cooperatives in Greece. The analytical reference to the structure and operation of the Greek agricultural cooperatives as well as in the characteristics of their intervention in the agricultural sector is owed to the drastic changes that are observed in the economic and social environment of the Greek agricultural cooperatives.

These changes lead to research and approaches of topics and subjects that are connected, on the one side with the current unfavorable position of the Unions of agricultural cooperatives and on the other with the necessary enterprising and operational adaptations that are required for the Unions of Agro-coops to survive and develop.

One of these approaches is the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000-Quality management systems in any corporation active in the Agro-food industry (therefore, for the Greek agro-coops too), as it is stated in the book of Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis L. "ISO 9000:2000" (2002).

A study identifying the strengths and weaknesses characterizing the Greek Agro-coops has been materialized by Kolimvas in 1992 and is confirmed by the Martinos et al in their book of 1997.

As positive factors, there are identified:

- the dense network of the first degree agro-coops which are members of the second degree unions of agro-coops,
- the satisfactory and hopeful degree of operations and activities of the Producers' groups which are also members of the Agro-coops Unions,
- their existing installations and premises and the planned and implemented investments for their business modernization and development, and
- the ability of satisfactory access in the raw materials which are the basic products of their business activity.

Karamichas (1988) the president of PASEGES, the supreme body of the association of the Greek Unions of Agro-coops, as well as, Martinos et al. in their study (1997) have identified the following weaknesses in the Greek agro-coop sector.

- the adoption of anachronistic and out of place management policies, organizational structure and business operations,
- the perception that the Unions of Agro-coops constitute mainly organizations for practicing and exercising social policy in the Agricultural sector,
- the dysfunctions in the subjects of management and administrative work and hierarchy,
- inner-business competition instead of inner-business collaboration between the Directors and the managerial staff,
- the lack of an explicit modern and flexible corporate policy and strategy, as well as, corporate business culture and organizational structure,
- the lack of a clearly defined, updated and flexible Decision making process in terms of operational, administrative strategic and normative management,

- therefore, lack of specified terms of (key) stakeholders' business/job position's business duties, authority, responsibility and accountability
- the marginal financial situation and position of the Unions of Agro-coops,
- the ambiguous relationship that exists between the Unions of Agro-coops and the state organizations.

The Unions of Agricultural Cooperatives are necessary for the many small multi-divided Greek agricultural enterprises. They are necessary for the survival of the small-medium farmer - producer.

The Unions of Agricultural Cooperatives in order to materialize their role in the new business environment are required: firstly, to stabilize their business and economic position in the new socioeconomic environment conditions and secondly to realize and accept the fact that the agro-coop is not an organization for exercising only social policy and servicing personal interests, but to the contrary, is a corporate entity, an enterprise with the primary goal of business excellence and financial success.

Furthermore, they have to reorganize and re-apply their business processes, activities and practices in a way that they become effective, efficient, reliable, competitive, qualitative, market oriented and customer - focused.

However, as Arvanitoyiannis states, the following central issues:

- concentration of forces and programmed action,
- well defined relations between the elected members and the management executives and the rest of the staff, as well as with the state and the other agro-social groups,
- adequate and competent staff hiring, crewing and training – development,
- transparency in business activities and practices,
- priority to effective and efficient organizational structure - business operations - corporate strategy and business culture,
- plus emphasis on standardization and effective trading of high quality products, and
- adoption of mutually fruitful relations between the Agro-coops and their members (natural and legal entities)

constitute challenges that have to be answered, insofar they comprise the hard core of the system in question and consequently the starting line of its operational effectiveness and efficiency, especially in terms of effectively implementing and operating the ISO 9000 Quality Management system, which could be the “vehicle” towards achieving Improved Business Operations and Corporate Performance (Arvanitoyiannis, 2000). Finally, the system of the agro-coops’ business practices has to agree with the cooperative theory and practice, applied internationally with success, as well as, with the system of cooperative values (McPherson, p. 12).

From the preceding analysis, it becomes obvious that the socioeconomic environment in which the agricultural cooperatives are operating - in both Europe and Greece - is currently undergoing a rapid change. Public Policy as demonstrated in the reformed CAP, trade liberalization under the GATT agreement and the E.U. enlargement are to bring more competition and less support to commodity markets.

At the same time, biotechnology, information technology and the rising power of retail chains and MNEs require from the Agro-coops enhanced and improved business operations and corporate performance in the agro-food chain and industry in order to deliver value to customers and all the Agro-coops stakeholders.

The differentiation of demand brings new requirements as food consumption is increasingly related to non-consumption utilities like social referencing, health, product safety and quality, environmental friendliness and product regional origin.

The combined effect is the emerging need for entrepreneurial, adaptive, quality driven business processes and market driven and oriented corporate operations and organizational structures for every type of institution in the agro-food industry and more especially for the agricultural cooperatives, which represent or should represent according to the public view and opinion an organization operating at the edge of business excellence.

This is not a paradox as in public’s mind the Agro-coops are synonymous to social public organizations whose main mission is or should be the general public welfare.

2. Quality Assurance And Management Systems

As an answer to these new demands, the food industry in general and the Agricultural Cooperatives in particular have preferred and adopted the introduction of Quality Assurance and Management Systems in their business operations and processes (Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002).

On the other hand the effective implementation, use and operation of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management system in the Greek Agro-coops - and not only to these but even in corporations in various sectors of the economy and business environment - is under question as there exists a generally held doubt and dispute on the Agro-coops' operational and organizational competencies and capabilities to implement and use these Quality systems effectively and efficiently (Arvanitoyiannis, 2000 ; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001 ; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002).

Quality is often used to signify "excellence" of a product or service according to the sector that the organization is in, therefore, a lot of people give to quality varying definitions. Thus, quality has to be defined in a way that is acceptable by and useful to every one – the professional, managerial and academic communities – engaged in the whole spectrum of economy, business and society.

The only way to achieve it is "to recognize the need to include in the assessment of quality the true requirements, needs and expectations of the customer" (Oakland 2003, p.4). This is a definition very similar to the ones given by the other quality gurus as well as by the ISO Technical Committee.

A range of definitions of quality

1. "Degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills requirements" – ISO (EN) 9000:2000 Quality Management Systems – fundamentals and vocabulary.
2. "The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service, that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs "BS 4748:1987/ ISO 8402, 1986, Quality Vocabulary: Part 1, International Terms.
3. "Fitness for purpose or use" – Juran.

4. “Quality should be aimed at the needs of the consumer, present and future” – Deming.
5. “Conformance to requirements” – Crosby.
6. “The total composite product and service characteristics of marketing, engineering, manufacturing and maintenance through which the product and service in use will meet the expectation by the customer” – Feigenbaum / the first man to write a book with the term “Total Quality” in the title.

On the other hand reliability, that is the ability of the product to meet the customer requirements over a sustainable period of time, is a key factor along with quality to improved corporate performance.

Prominent developments regarding quality issue started in 20th century. This century may have been divided into four prominent eras regarding historical evolution of Quality (Management) Systems.

These can be categorized as:

ERA	Beginning Date
QUALITY INSPECTION (QI)	1910
QUALITY CONTROL (QC)	1924
QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA)	1950
QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (ISO)	1990
TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM)	1980

Here is the basic definition of ISO 9000:2000 based on 1994 revision standards:

“Quality system standards for management of organizations.”, while these QMS are:

“Product independent (applies to all types of industries and service sectors).”

“Used by an organization to develop, implement and improve their quality system.”

“Certification provides confidence to the customer that his requirements will be met consistently.”

The ISO 9000 family of international quality management standards and guidelines has earned a global reputation as the basis for establishing quality management systems. The three standards ISO 9001, ISO 9002 and ISO 9003:1994 have been integrated into the new ISO 9001:2000.

Thus, ISO 9001:2000 specifies requirements for a quality management system for any organization that needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product and/or service that meets customer and applicable regulatory requirements and aims to enhance customer satisfaction.

ISO 9001:2000 has been organized in a user-friendly format with terms that are easily recognized by all business sectors. The standard is used for certification/registration and contractual purposes by organizations seeking recognition of their quality management system.

The greatest value is obtained when an organization uses the entire family of standards in an integrated manner. It is suggested that a company beginning with ISO 9000:2000, adopts ISO 9001:2000 to achieve a first level of performance. The practices described in ISO 9004:2000 may then be implemented to make the company's quality management system increasingly effective in achieving the company's own business goals.

ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 9004:2000 have been formatted as a consistent pair of standards to facilitate their use. Using the standards in this way will also enable the company to relate them to other management systems (e.g. environmental), many sector specific requirements (such as ISO/TS/16949 in the automotive industry) and will assist in gaining recognition through national award programs.

The ISO 9000:2000 applies eight quality management principles on which the quality management system standards of the revised ISO 9000:2000 are based and which are acting as guidelines for the effective and efficient implementation and use of the system:

Principle 1 Customer Focus

Principle 2 Leadership

Principle 3 Involvement of People

Principle 4 Process Approach

Principle 5 System Approach to Management

Principle 6 Continual Improvement

Principle 7 Factual Approach to Decision Making

Principle 8 Mutually Beneficial Supplier Relationships

These principles can be used by senior management as a framework to guide their organizations towards improved performance (they will be also used by the Researcher

as a framework/auditing tool used in the research process for evaluating the effectiveness of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and identifying the under-operating business areas and corporate functions).

In the view of many quality consultants ISO 9000:2000 is the stepping-stone towards TQM. These two quality systems can not be considered as identical in scope, content, operations and the totality of their aims and objectives, although the similarities of the “new” ISO 9000:2000 with the TQM systems is more than evident (a thorough analysis, comparison and critical evaluation of these two quality systems will be presented by the Researcher in the Document 2 – Critical Literature Review section).

ISO 9000:2000 does not itself impose a system on any organization; rather it leaves the company to its own and only obliges it to regularly follow the set procedures and standard operations.

So we can say that ISO 9000:2000 is not itself a technological system, but it provides assistance to design a system to work according to the required standards. This can only be achieved when every member of an organization is determined to follow all those standard operations which are necessary for implementing ISO 9000:2000.

The ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System should apply to and interact with all processes in the organization. As previously depicted, it begins with the identification of the customer requirements and ends with their satisfaction, at every transaction interface. The activities described in ISO 9001:2000 reflect the integration of four major areas:

1. Management Responsibility.
2. Resource Management.
3. Product Realization.
4. Measurement, Analysis and Improvement.

Therefore, a Quality Management System may be defined as an assembly of components, such as the management responsibilities, processes and resources (Oakland 2003).

It is interesting after having analyzed the operation and principles of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System, to bring together the concept of Deming's cycle of continuous improvement - Plan, Do, Check, Act – and the Quality Management

Systems. The analogy is very obvious as the integration of the above mentioned four major areas comply with the Deming's cycle.

In summary, as John S. Oakland states (2003), an appropriate Quality Management System will enable the corporate objectives, set out in the corporate policy, to be accomplished.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000:2000 series set out methods by which a quality system can be implemented to ensure that the specified customer requirements are met. Quality Management Systems should apply to and interact with all processes in the organization.

The activities are generally processing, communicating and controlling. These activities should be documented in the form of a quality manual.

Furthermore, ISO 9000:2000 also makes comments on the relationship between the Quality Management Systems and Excellence Models. The two models are based on the common principles of identifying strengths and weaknesses, evaluation, continuous improvement and external/third party recognition.

Moreover, the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management Systems emphasize customer focus, a process rather procedural approach, continuous improvement and a skills-based approach to people management. Therefore, they are – especially the ISO 9000:2000 QM System – in tune with the EFQM Excellence Model in terms of the direction-process-people-performance alignment.

The most important thing, as it reveals from the comparison between the Quality Management Systems (the ISO 9000 Family of Standards), the Deming's cycle of continuous improvement and the Excellence Models, is that the fulfillment of their basic mission – that is the Improvement of Corporate Performance and the Achievement of Business Excellence – is heavily depended on the Effective Implementation and Development of these Quality Systems.

Therefore, this is a prerequisite for the efficient use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management System and it has also to be continuously measured, because the

Quality System has to follow always the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle through Documentation, Implementation, Audit and Review as Oakland believes (2003).

Also, the Six-Sigma Improvement model can be used as an approach for improving corporate performance in the following process: Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control, in which the evaluation of the Implementation of the ISO 9000 Quality Management System in the Greek Agro-coops can be the “specimen” under examination by this model.

F. RESEARCH QUESTIONS - PLAN AND METHOD**RESEARCH STRATEGY**

The research strategy of the research project will take the form described by Remenyi et al (1998).

- Reviewing the literature.
- Formalizing a research questionnaire.
- Establishing the appropriate methodology.
- Collecting and analyzing the evidence.
- Developing conclusions.
- Understanding the research limitations and producing management recommendations.

The research process is an ongoing situation, which requires both theoretical and empirical work. The theoretical work coincides with the “deskwork” and is associated with “secondary data” set. It will be conducted by researching the current literature relevant to the research topic and the academic and business fields connected and referring to this topic.

The theoretical research work will investigate the theory and the most recent trends and developments in the sub-issues of the nature, introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Agricultural Cooperatives as well as the existing current business situation in the Greek Agro-coops’ sector.

Further on, the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems will be both presented, analyzed and evaluated and a comparative study between these two quality systems will be conducted.

The comparative study will examine and investigate the theoretical contexts and frameworks of the two systems as well as the different implications, consequences and results that the introduction, implementation and use of the contrasting quality systems

have in the Corporate Performance and Business Operations of the Agro-coops(if implemented and used effectively and efficiently).

The research plan for the DBA will be developed by considering the research questions to be answered in each of the documents and by explaining the methodological approach and research methods that will be adopted for answering those questions.

DOCUMENT 2 – THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The main theoretical work will be conducted in Document 2 – Critical Literature review although as it was already mentioned the research process is an ongoing situation which requires both theoretical and empirical work and therefore, research findings have to be gathered with the use of both approaches - theoretical and empirical - till the last piece of the research process. The theoretical work will help the researcher to construct a viable and valid ongoing research framework.

The first of the research questions will be answered in document 2 as part of a more critical consideration of the literature that has been identified earlier in this document. In particular it will consider:

1. the nature of the ISO 9000:1994 and of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Assurance and Management systems, the outcomes of the comparison between these two quality systems and the perceptions of the Food Industry (in general) and of the Agro-Coops' (in particular) Stakeholders towards the systems, the differences in their implementation and the results of it (as revealed by bibliography and research findings) and
2. the most recent trends and developments in the nature of the ISO Quality Assurance and Management systems and of their introduction in the Agricultural Cooperatives sector having analysing co-currently the existing

In document 2 three analytical tools – force field analysis, the McKinsey seven S's model and stakeholder analysis – will be developed as theoretical constructs for use in analyzing the research material gathered (with the co-current use of the eight guiding quality management principles of ISO 9000 QMS - as presented in p.23) during the DBA project.

The Force Field Analysis Model will be the basic tool for the identification, registration, analysis and critical evaluation of the Convergent Forces / Drivers and the Divergent Forces / Restraints influencing the nature and contributing to the effectiveness of the Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems in the Greek Agro-coops.

The Force field model is based on the book of Kurt Lewin (1958/1997), “Resolving Social Conflicts and Field Theory in Social Science”. It is a technique used to identify the driving/positive forces and the restraining / negative forces that either reinforce or prevent a course of actions that need to be made.

The process begins with the description of the desired course of actions and the definition of the objectives or the solution. Having prepared the basic Force Field diagram, it identifies the driving and the restraining forces by brainstorming and/or research analysis. These forces are placed in opposition on the diagram and, if possible, rated for their potential influence on the ease of the implementation of the course of action.

The results are evaluated and the preparation of an action plans comes with the aim to overcome and decrease some of the restraining forces and reinforce and increase the driving forces.

Furthermore, the McKinsey’s 7Ss Model will be used for the identification and evaluation of the “hard” and “soft” fields of any organization which are influencing its business operations and the overall organizational performance; and consequently examine their contributing and/or restraining role to the continuous improvement of the business operations and corporate performance (The McKinsey 7-S framework in Peters and Waterman (1982) book “In Search of Excellence”).

Peters and Waterman wrote their book while they were working as management consultants for McKinsey. It was there they learned the centrality of Shared Values in a company and that everything else flows from it – Systems, Strategy, Structure, Style, Skills, Staff and consequently business operations and performance are a direct result of these business elements.

The element of continuous improvement of corporate performance is a basic goal and aim of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems and the effectiveness and efficiency of the Quality System’s implementation and operation in any company can be

measured, analyzed and benchmarked against this standard (ISO 9004:2000 / Quality Management Systems – Guidelines for Performance Improvements).

A third model will be used for the identification and placement on the grid of the key Stakeholders' beliefs, assumptions, attitudes and practices towards the ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation, operation and use in the Agro-coop's business environment.

Furthermore, this model will examine and register their degree of commitment towards the effective implementation and efficient use of the Quality management system and consequently it will permit the registration of any discrepancies between espoused opinions and real actions of the key Stakeholders (e.g. Board of Directors, Top Management Team, Quality Management Team, (Employees and Workers)).

The model is based on the Stakeholder Analysis and especially the Stakeholder Mapping (power/dynamism matrix and power/interest matrix) as identified, presented and analyzed in the book of Johnson and Scholes "Exploring Corporate Strategy, Text and Cases" (1993:173-185 with emphasis: pp.175-178).

Empirical work refers to "primary data" which is associated with "fieldwork", as the researcher sets out to gather an original data set (Leeds Metropolitan University 2000) for accomplishing the Research Main Thesis.

Therefore, the main field of the research is the Quality System's Implementation and its effects on the Agro-Coop's internal and external Business Performance considering and evaluating the Driving and Restraining Forces (both internal and external) that require and/or prevent the System's effective introduction and efficient implementation and therefore influence and affect consequently the System's intended use and operating results.

Of paramount importance are the key Stakeholders' opinions, attitudes and behaviours towards the nature of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems and its effective use and implementation.

DOCUMENT 3

Interpretivism takes a nominalist view and more specifically argues that the external world is not knowable since people create their own social world. More specifically, the researcher has chosen an ethnographic approach to research the Introduction and Implementation of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems in the Greek agricultural cooperatives.

Each cooperative represents an entity comprised of many groups of stakeholders each one of which experiences the business world and situations in different forms and ways, all of which must be taken into account during the research process in order to formulate a valid research analysis and synthesis later on.

More specifically, a multi-method form of Ethnography / Case study research will be used. This method will be comprised by observation through participation - both active and passive -, interviews, examination of case studies and critical incidents and content analysis. The focus of the research is also on exploration and insight rather than experiment.

Although the researcher is a member of the top management team and of the Quality Control team in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia and therefore he could exercise his position influence and merit in order to experiment with different approaches in some cases and issues relevant to the Research Topic, this status' advantage will not be exercised.

To the contrary, it will be avoided as the Researcher's professional, managerial and personal ethics do not permit him to apply misuse of his professional position and manipulate situations and persons in favour of his own interest.

Document 3 will cover the following topics and consequently answer the following questions:

1. What are the Agro-coops' Key Stakeholders' opinions, attitudes and beliefs towards the nature of the ISO 9000 – Quality management systems, the manner of the systems' implementation and their influencing role:
 - 1.1. in the development and implementation of improved business operations and

organizational performance.

1.2. in business reorientation towards customer-focused and market-oriented business practices and operations.

2. What is the Key Stakeholders' knowledge towards the nature of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System's and the requirements of the systems' implementation?

More specifically the following sub-questions will be set:

2.1. What difference does the transition to, and the introduction and implementation of, the "new" ISO 9000:2000 QMSystem make in comparison with the implementation of the "old" Quality assurance and management system - the ISO 9000:1994 - in terms of the Agro-coops' business operations

2.2. What are their opinions and beliefs towards the nature and manner of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System's implementation and the anticipated and intended by them results.

2.3. What are the results of the Introduction and Implementation of the ISO 9000:1994 – Quality Assurance and Management System in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia and in the other selected Greek Agro-coops.

3. Furthermore, to investigate the Agro-coops' Key Stakeholders' opinions on the Implementation of the system and register the perceived by them results of its operation in comparison to the intended by them outcomes of the systems' use.

The term "Key Stakeholders" refers to the following:

- Members of the Board of Directors,
- the UACM's and the other Agro-coops' General Manager,
- the Top Managers' Team / Directors of the Divisions and of the Regional Branches,
- the Quality Management Team

A representative set of sub-questions contained in the main questions of Document 3 is the following:

1. How the Agro-coops' key stakeholders perceive the current business situation and position in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in their companies?

2. How do they perceive the current business situation and position of their corporation?
3. Which is their knowledge considering the ISO 9000 QMS nature, manner of implementation, requirements of use, aims and goals, prescribed and intended (according to theory) results ?
4. Why does a Corporation have to introduce and implement the ISO QMS?
5. Is there any difference between the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems? And if yes: in terms of what and which ones?
6. Does and can the implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS lead to improved Business Performance and if not why not?
7. Can the ISO 9000 QMS be considered a corporate-business tool for strategic organizational development and business auditing?
8. Do they believe that the company has to restructure its organization and change its business operations concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS application and development?
9. Will this change lead to the development of customer-focused and market-oriented business processes and activities? Does the Company need to develop such business operations? And if yes: Why?
10. What do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks?
11. What aspects of the ISO 9000 QMS application processes and operations have to change, why, when, how and to which direction?
12. Who should lead the ISO 9000 QMS implementation effort? Is a Quality plan, strategy, communication program necessary and why?
13. What's the opinion, the attitude and the practices of the employees, workers and other third parties regarding the above mentioned topics and themes as perceived by the key stakeholders?
14. Are these key stakeholders aware of other companies' - including competitors - manner of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use in their companies?
15. How do they consider and evaluate this ISO QMS status?

Finally, an in-depth survey with open interviews and formal as well as informal talking will take place with each one of the members of the Board of Directors (as far as it is possible), as their influence and power extortion over the UACM's present operating "paradigm" in terms of the ISO 9000 Quality management system implementation and use is considered substantial and their views and opinions can influence notoriously the

system's future implementation and use orientation, and the research must have an integrated picture of all "players" views of the business world.

The same research technique semi-structured interviews as well as open interviews in some cases will be applied to the UACM's Top Management Team as their power and influence is also considered important and to a degree shaping the company's "life" as well as their professional status and position in the company is considered higher than the ones of the other company's employees and workers.

Furthermore, it is expected that the researcher will be engaged in several formal discussions with work colleagues and their views and beliefs concerning the work and the company will be held in account by the researcher objectively and unbiased (as long as I can, because I am a human being interacting with my environment and thus, having my own prejudices, biases, stereotypes, feelings, beliefs, values and so on, which in some cases are predetermined and shaped by external and prior to the given situation factors and experiences).

Moreover, it is expected (in Employees' Union meetings, Directors meetings, Board of Directors monthly meetings, Quality Management Team meetings) the researcher to participate in Group Meetings and Discussions having to do with the Company's business' current as well as future, operations, goals and position.

All these meetings can be viewed and handled as Panels in the research process, which panels can take mostly a pre-coded manner as their discussion topics are always predetermined by the BoD, the General Manager, the Quality Manager and the Employees' Union BoD.

In Document 3 with the use of case studies based on open interviews and semi-structured interviews the research method will produce qualitative research data but at the same time some sort of quantitative data can be produced through the analysis of the material.

To the contrary, the purpose of document 4 will be to develop a detailed and deep account of the agro-cooperative's other stakeholders (i.e. employees, workers, third parties) attitudes and views towards Quality assurance and management systems.

DOCUMENT 4

As far as Document 4 is concerned it will be a largely positivistic part of the research, producing more quantitative data through the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured questionnaires.

The focus of the work will still be on the main research questions. But in this document the emphasis will be on establishing a representative view of two particular groups of stakeholders:

- the Agro-coops' employees and workers, and
- the Agro-coops' selling and supplying collaborators

through the use of recognised sampling techniques. In particular this document will answer the following questions:

1. What is the view of the U.A.C.M.'s Selling Collaborators regarding its business operations, its presence in the market and the nature and practice of the business cooperation they have with the company?
2. How do they view the UACM's Quality system implementation and use? Does it help their company's operations and selling activities?

This Group consists of the Company's Commercial Representatives and Agents both in the internal market and abroad as well as Independent Customers - Private Companies and Big Retail Chains / Super and Hyper Markets.

3. What is the view of the UACM's Supplying Collaborators regarding its business operations, its presence in the market and the nature and practice of the business cooperation they have with the company?
4. How they consider the UACM's Quality system application and use? Does it need any improvements?

The aforementioned group consists of the agro-coop's product and services suppliers, which are collaborating with the agro-coop a fair number of time.

Regarding the UACM's Supplying and Selling Collaborators the following research methods will be used: first of all a structured questionnaire concerning the Company's operations in relation to the appliance of Quality Performance and Operations Criteria - that the ISO 9002 Quality Questionnaire requires - and how they measure the UACM's compliance to these criteria and secondly semi-structured interviews will be the tool for

a thorough analysis and understanding of their views and attitudes vis-à-vis the UACM's existing business operations.

Referring to the largest group of agro-coops' stakeholders, namely their employees and workers the following research questions will be carried out thoroughly:

- 1.1. What is their knowledge and perception of the ISO 9000 QMSystems?
- 1.2. What are their opinions, attitudes and perceptions towards the nature and the manner of the systems' implementation and its usefulness in terms of the produced results of its application?
 - 2.1. What difference (if any) does the transition to, and the introduction and implementation of, the "new" ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System make in comparison with the implementation of the "old" Quality assurance and management system - the ISO 9000:1994 - in terms of the Agro-coops' business operations?
 - 2.2. According to them which are the intended results of the new system's operation and use and which is the rational of its introduction?
 - 3.1. What are the results of the introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000:1994 – Quality Assurance System in their Agro-coop?
 - 3.2. Have they been informed - prior to the system's introduction - of the rational for the systems' implementation and use? Of the intended results of its operation? Of the systems' specific usefulness for their company? If yes, by whom? If not, why not according to them?

Concerning the largest group of the company, namely the company's employees and workers both pre-coded questionnaires as well as open-unstructured ones concerning some special cases/topics will be used.

It is in the researcher's intention to combine pre-coded questions as well as open question in the same single questionnaires in order to achieve in this way the responders openness, clarity and true expression of their opinions and views (all questionnaires will be returned unsigned in a carton box which will be in the work place for as long as it is required in the absence of the researcher).

The following possible sub-questions may be used in this session of the DBA research:

- How the Agro-coops/UACM's employees and workers perceive the current business situation and position in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use?
- How the Agro-coops/UACM's employees and workers perceive the current business situation and position of their company?
- Which is their knowledge considering the ISO 9000 QMS nature, manner of implementation, requirements of use, aims and goals, intended results?
- Why does a Corporation have to introduce and implement the ISO QMS?
- Is there any difference between the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems? And if yes in terms of what and which ones?
- Do they believe that the company has to restructure its organisation and change its business operations concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS development and implementation?
- What aspects of the ISO 9000 QMS application processes and operations have to change, why, when, how and to which direction?
- Will this change lead to the development of customer-focused and market-oriented business processes and activities? Does the Company need to develop such business operations? And if yes: Why?
- What do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks?
- Who should lead the ISO 9000 QMS implementation effort? Is it the Top Management's responsibility?
- Is a Quality plan, strategy, communication program necessary and why?
- According to them what are the attitudes, behaviour and real practice of the UACM's/Agro-coops' Top Management as well as of the members of the BoD regarding the above mentioned topics and themes?
- How all these stakeholders consider and evaluate the competitors' manner of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use in their companies?

Having come to an in-depth view of stakeholders' attitudes in document 3, document 4 will concentrate on measuring the extent to which the various attitudes identified are shared and distributed amongst the various stakeholders.

DOCUMENT 5

Finally, in Document 5 with the use of the case study method (in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia) and the in depth surveys tool (in the other previously referred Greek Agro-Coops) as the predominant research tool and as a secondary mean the open interviews and the semi-structured interviews in order to explore:

a) The ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management Systems' Introduction and Implementation process in the Greek Agro-coops, and the results of its implementation and use in these agro-coops' businesses and operation:

- Prescribed, intended, actual and perceived Outcomes of the Systems' operation according to all Stakeholders' (including managers of the external professional organizations and accrediting bodies / How they consider and evaluate the manner of ISO 9000 QMSystems' implementation and use in these companies) opinion and the identification of the causes of any observed and registered discrepancy between these different types of outcomes according to them.
- How all these key stakeholders consider and evaluate other companies' manner and rational of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use?

b) Evaluation and measurement of the (Key) Stakeholders' role, degree and size of influence on the ISO 9000 QMS' manner of operation in the Greek Agro-coops.

Which are their levels of commitment (positioning them on the grid) and more specifically:

- whether there exists any difference and gap between their espoused position and their actual behavior towards the implementation and use of the Quality System.
- what is their role and degree of influence & affection on the effectiveness of the system's implementation and the efficiency of its use.

c) Final investigation and concluding results of the Drivers and Restraints of the ISO 9000 QMSystems' efficient introduction and effective use and implementation – Balance of Forces in the Force Field Analysis.

In this way, research method tends to be more qualitative as open questionnaires and the open interviews will provide the required qualitative data as a product of

Phenomenological research, while at the same time some sort of quantitative data can be produced through the use of the semi-structured interviews and the cross-evaluation of the case studies, of the in-depth surveys and of the open interviews.

Because as Bell states (1993) : “the case study approach is an umbrella term which includes a wide range of evidence capture and analysis procedures and due to this flexibility a case study may be an almost entirely positivistic or almost entirely phenomenological study or anything between these two extremes”.

Moreover, the cross-evaluation of all research data produced throughout the research processes held in Documents 3, 4 and 5 can produce the needed quantitative data required for producing the optimum “blending” of research findings which may lead to the formulation of the best practice model concerning the Introduction, Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agricultural Cooperatives.

The selection of the case study as the predominant research tactic in this stage is made for the accomplishment of two research objectives:

Firstly, to confirm, support and reassure all the research findings and their deriving conclusions, and secondly to effectively benchmark the implementation and use as well as the conceptual and operational framework of the ISO 9000 Quality Management systems in various Greek Agro-Coops in order to be able to identify and suggest (throughout and as a research product) a Best Practice model of the Quality System’s Implementation and Use in the Greek Agro-Coops.

Secondly, the use of methodological pluralism throughout the whole research process is an expedient way of ensuring against the uncertainties inherited in research processes. Pragmatism requires the use of methodological pluralism since investigating/researching a “living organisation”, such as a co-operative corporation, the researcher must be able to "jump" from the exploratory to descriptive to explanatory, to hypotheses and then "paradigm" formulation stage of research process at any time, in order to cope effectively and efficiently with the complexities of business phenomena.

DOCUMENT 6

Finally, Document 6 will be a “personal log” maintained during the DBA research project and presenting the incidents, thoughts, views, opinions, experiences, cases and events encountered by the researcher throughout the whole course.

G. RESEARCH ETHICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES

It is in the researcher's intention to avoid any personal biases and manipulation of persons, facts, situations and data arising throughout and from the research process and to try to be as much objective as possible in order not to create any problem and conflicts in the UACM's working environment and jeopardise the company's business operations.

Furthermore, since the researcher is applying the research on his own organisation has and will not get involved in any personal debates and political-interpersonal "battles" of interests for he is not willing to jeopardise and undermine his working position in the company.

Moreover, it is the researcher's aim to produce an objective and valid (as much as it can be) research outcome that will be useful and operative for the company itself and all parties involved in the UACM's business existence and operations.

Therefore, the greatest value will be given to and placed on the:

Respect of all participants in the research process;

Avoidance of personal biases and interests;

Presentation analysis and synthesis of all views, opinions and research findings in a valid and verified manner;

Confidentiality of any source of information;

Avoidance of the researcher's engagement in the company's 'political playing' and in all stakeholders' personal interests and 'games' in order to preserve the independence, plurality and validity of the research.

Because after all, only "truth and justice can save the world" (Odysseas Elytis, Greek poet, Nobel Prize -1979).

H. RESEARCH OUTCOMES

The Union of Agricultural Co-operatives of Messinia / U.A.C.M. is a second degree Agricultural Co-operative which in effect represents, secures and protects the interests of 242 first degree Agricultural co-operatives of the Prefecture of Messinia and the 20.500 farmers of the prefecture who are members of the 242 first degree agricultural co-operatives and consequently of the U.A.C.M..

As cited above the effective and efficient business operation of the agricultural co-operatives is considered as an imperative and prerequisite at the same time step- a "sine qua non" condition- towards the restructuring of the broader agricultural sector in Greece as well as towards stabilizing and upgrading the socio-economic status of all the stakeholders of the sector.

Therefore, the identification of the coherent framework of organisational culture, structure, management practice and business operation that will enable the UACM to exercise effective and efficient business operation, use and implementation of the ISO 9000 Quality Management system that the company has introduced, will permit the company to achieve and fulfil its multiple role, that is :

Economic - Business: survival, growth, development, business excellence.

Social: supporting the plenty agricultural familial exploitations of its co-operated members.

Becoming an Institution/Organisation of business improvement and excellence, and of knowledge transmission and development in the broader local agricultural sector.

The Main Research problem / thesis will be answered by the research project undertaken and as presented in the previews Research Plan Method, Strategy and Process analysis based on the relevant literature, the quantitative and qualitative as well as the benchmarking data and findings collected, analysed, evaluated and inter-connected & inter-related throughout the whole DBA research process.

The perceived outcomes on completion of the research for the researcher are as follows:

a) At personal level the research will provide the opportunity to:

- Exercise my research skills and improve them by applying a wide range of research methods and tactics.
- Develop my personal intellectual and academic abilities.
- Improve and enhance my personal managerial competencies and professional skills.
- Improve my academic status by gaining a recognised qualification.
- Materialise my belief to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivation Theory by accomplishing successfully a step towards Self Actualisation.

b) At organisational and managerial level the research represents an excellent opportunity to:

- Inform and develop business and managerial practice.
- Improve my professional and managerial position.
- Enhance my business and managerial experience and knowledge.
- Provide research findings and outcomes suitable for publication in academic and professional journals and magazines.

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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
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DOCTORATE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

DOCUMENT 2
CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW
AND INITIAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

EXARCHOS DIMITROPOULOS

18 MAY 2005

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1. INTRODUCTION / THE RESEARCH TOPIC

The study of the Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 - Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Agro-food industry in general and in the Agricultural Cooperatives in particular, as well as research on these systems' role and degree of contribution to the achievement of improved business processes and operations and organizational performance, has been the subject of increasing interest and attention over the last decade.

It is expected that this interest will continue and be extended as several factors contribute to the strengthening of this interest. The most crucial factor is consumers' growing demand for safer food products with upgraded quality and more value for money. This demand tends to become an operating prerequisite for all Food Industry corporations, as it has already been institutionalized through the European Union Directives referring to and concerning food safety and consumers' health protection. Furthermore, these directives have already been embodied in the national legislation of the state members and in the national legislation of other states – i.e. U.S.A., Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, South Africa and so on -, thus affecting the legal as well as the business status of all food industry companies on a national, European and global level and scale (Arvanitoyiannis, 2001).

Moreover, the vast majority of the modern - economically developed countries' citizens, especially the European countries' consumers, have developed increasing demands from their countries' farmers these last years.

They are not interested in the assurance of the agricultural products and foods supply, because the difficult pre- and post- two world wars periods, during which they have experienced deficits and shortages of the agro-products and foods supplies, have passed and remain a distant memory; the present days are characterised by a food and agro-products surplus and the uninterrupted growth of international trade followed by the globalization of the international economy – the European Union member states' economy included - and the consequent increase of international commercial inter-states exchanges (imports and exports).

As a result of the aforementioned facts, any country's (especially the developed ones) food supplies may be assured not only by the country's local communities' and regions'

agricultural commodities and food production, as it happened almost exclusively in the past. To the contrary, food supplies may be provided by and imported from any region and/or country of the world, as the last two-three decades practice proves.

As a result, the European society demands more than the already assured food supply in the market. It is not interested in the farmers' jobs and the agrobusinesses' peculiarities and the difficulties the farmers face concerning the agricultural products production and consequently the uncertainty and the danger of assuring their income, as it happened several decades ago, when an important part of the society had practical/professional and emotional ties with the agro-land, the farmers and the agro-societies.

The present days, the European citizens are mostly interested in the food quality and safety and simultaneously they care about the environmental protection, land preservation and the sustainable development of the agricultural areas, society and economy. They express their interest in these matters and issues more openly and fiercely, as they know that a substantial part of the taxes they pay to the state is directed through national and European subsidies and investment plans to the European farmers for protecting and enforcing their income and agro-production, although the European citizens could procure cheaper and to an acceptable quality and safety level agricultural products - standardized or not - from the Third and/or Fourth World countries' farmers.

Consequently they demand from their own countries' farmers and food industries agro-food products of the highest level of quality and health safety according to the standards set by the national and European legislation and more or less fairly competitive in pricing, representing in this way more value for money than the Third world's agro-products represent. Moreover, they press and ask for the farmers and agro-food industry adopting more friendly environmental policies and preserve environment to a good condition.

To conclude, they demand agricultural products - fresh and/or processed and standardized - of the highest quality, safe for the public health and produced under environmentally friendly farming practices, while at the same time they demand from their State and the European Union institutions to safeguard and promote all their above stated demands, which are perceived by the European society communities as prerequisites for any agro-food industry company and/or person involved in the food

production supply chain (“Syneteristiki Poria”, issue 72, October-December 2003, p.p. 219-224).

This is the only way, for the European Union and Western World citizens accepting higher prices paid for their agricultural products and subsidies to their farmers, a fact not in favor of the third world countries farmers (“TO VIMA”, 2/1/2005, p. B10). This expressed need and demand is portrayed in the new Common Agriculture Policy, which is trying to establish a relationship of mutual respect and trustness between the agricultural society, the agri-food industry and the rest of the European society communities.

By setting qualitative and environmental demands to the European farmers especially - and the agro-food industry indirectly - and connecting the agricultural products’ subsidies with these pre-set demands and standards of “Best Farming Practice”, the European Union Agricultural Committee is trying to build a new relationship among society and agricultural products’ “community”.

On the other hand, by acknowledging that the European farmers are facing a fierce competition and in the future will be more exposed to a globalized economy competition forces, while the European Union Committee in the new agreement signed in the WTO in 2001/2002 - and in the continuing negotiations on several products and services that take place in the World Trade Organization/WTO accepted the Union’s markets gradual opening to the Third World countries agricultural and agrofood products, it concluded to the promotion of the agricultural cooperatives and the formation of producers - groups under the agro-coops’ “umbrella” as the best viable means for protecting and promoting the financial, productive and social interests of the european agro-societies and their farmers-members.

For this reason, it has formed a new statute concerning and referring to the European Agricultural Cooperative, as it believes in and enhances cooperation among agro-coops and their businesses being based on a new operational framework and on the private sector companies’ business and financial criteria for performing, operating and “doing business”, since the agro-coops (especially the greek ones) are facing serious problems in their business operations during the last two decades especially, with the result of decreased market presence, competitiveness and profitability, and heavy borrowing from the state banks, all these facts leading them even to bankruptcy (“IMERISIA”, 27-

28/11/2004, p.10; “Syneteristiki Poria”, issue 72, October–December 2003, p.p. 225-228).

As a consequence of all these developments and changes, a new rationale concerning and requiring the effective and efficient introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek agro-coops is emerging; the ultimate goal of this approach is for greek agro-coops achieving improved business processes and organizational performance through the strategic use of these quality management systems, as Arvanitoyiannis states (2000).

On the other hand as many researchers identify, there exists a gap between the will and the ability of the Greek agro-coops to implement effectively and use efficiently the ISO 9000 QMSystems. According to Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002), this inability is an outcome of the inefficient organizational operation of the agro-coops, therefore as Ageletopoulos and Yiannatos (1995) state, a researcher should first examine if - a company in the food industry is and consequently - the Greek agro-coops are ready to adopt such systems. Further on, as they continue, he/she should conduct a thorough investigation of their organizational, behavioral and operational settings and arrangements that impair the effective implementation and the efficient use of these systems and consequently influence their business performance.

The application of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems’ implementation by the Agricultural Cooperatives sector in Greece is the broad and general Topic of my Doctorate Research. It is mainly connected with these two current issues, which were analyzed more extensively in the preceding paragraphs:

- on one hand, with the reanimation of the ongoing dialogue and debate concerning the perspectives of the Agricultural Cooperatives in Greece and the future status of the 15-18% of the country’s active population which is occupied in the broader agricultural sector (Bank of Greece, 2002), and
- on the other hand, with the ever increasing public concern, interest and demand for safer, healthier and quality enhanced food products and services all over the world (ICAP, 2002 and Arvanitoyiannis, 2000).

The principal aim of this research is to: thoroughly examine, analyze and critically evaluate the manner of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems’ implementation and use in the Greek agricultural cooperatives for:

- investigating and critically evaluating the systems’ role and degree of contribution in the development and sustainable application of improved business processes and ultimately organizational performance, and
- examining and critically analyzing the key business factors influencing the Quality Management Systems’ effective and efficient development and practice in the aforementioned business environment.

As a result of the above mentioned main research aim, the following working hypothesis is going to be examined and tested:

ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems are considered by the Greek agro-coops (and their key stakeholders) as an organizational change management tool, that is effectively implemented and efficiently used for achieving improved business processes and organizational performance, despite their existing organizational, behavioral and operational settings and arrangements that might affect and impair their business performance and consequently might influence the effective implementation and the efficient use of these systems.

As a conclusion of the aforementioned analysis, the researcher has defined the following objectives for the DBA project:

1. to analyze and critically evaluate the current status of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems in Greek Agro-coops in relation to the agro-coops’ current business status.
2. to evaluate the role and contribution of these Quality management systems to the development of improved business operations and processes by the Greek agro-coops with the final aim of achieving improved Operational and Organizational Performance and Business Excellence.
3. to examine these Quality management systems’ role and influence in the Greek agro-coops’ business reorientation towards customer- focused and market-oriented business practices, services and operations.

4. to identify the driving and restraining forces concerning the implementation, operation and use of ISO 9000-Quality Assurance and Management Systems in Greek Agricultural Cooperatives.
5. to investigate the Greek Agro-coops' (Key) Stakeholders attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMSystems and identify their actual behaviors and practices concerning these systems' implementation, operation and use in the Greek agro-coops.

Therefore, a thorough auditing of all the Key Business Factors, that influence the implementation and development process of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agro-coops, will be a main task of the Research Process. More specifically, a critical examination, analysis and evaluation of all the Critical Success Factors, which will be viewed as the Driving Forces as well as of the Critical Failure Factors which will take the place of the Constraining Forces that affect and influence the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek Agro-Coops will be conducted.

The structure of this review is based on a number of issues and themes arising from the two pillars of the research:

the Greek agro-coops and the Quality concepts, plus
the inter-connected & -related sub-pillars of business process improvement and organizational change management.

The main parts-sections of the review-document comprise the:

- Greek agro-coops' sector current business status, practice and environment (internal and external one) and key business factors influencing its business operations and practices (key stakeholders included).
- Quality concept and field, its methodological quality management tools - i.e. ISO 9000 QMS, TQM and BPR - their nature, inter-connection & inter-relationship and use and intended benefits, in the
- Business Process management and improvement field.
- Importance and effects of the Quality management systems' implementation and use in the agro-food industry companies – the Greek agro-coops included (research findings' evaluation included).

- Management of change field in relation to the development of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops and the Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues.

Note: The interrelationship and interdependence as well as the influence each theme-concept exercises on another is obvious – e.g. process management & improvement and management of change, therefore analysis and critical evaluation of one concept's elements and features may appear in the section referring in the critical literal review/analysis and evaluation of another concept-theme, throughout this document review and/or the research process of the entire DBA project.

Finally, the above mentioned review of quality and organizational change management themes in relation to the Greek agro-coops sector issues is followed by working definitions of key concepts. It concludes with a proposed conceptual framework that is going to be used in order to investigate, test and finally evaluate the aforementioned working hypothesis.

2. GREEK AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES

The role the Greek agro-coops are called to play is presented and critically examined. For the agricultural cooperatives to correspond to their required role, they have to acquire the necessary and required business infrastructure by adopting internal corrective actions for improving their business operations and practices, which at the same time have to be relevant to their institutional framework.

The presentation, analysis and critical evaluation of these important factors follow in the forthcoming paragraphs in order to point out the required corrective activities, for the Greek agro-coops being able to introduce and implement effectively and efficiently any management system they apply, the ISO 9000 Quality Management System included.

2.1. The environment of the Greek agricultural cooperatives

The agricultural cooperatives constitute private enterprises of a collective form participating in the chain of the agro-productive processes aiming at the protection and support of the interests of the participating farmers. These enterprises, as the conventional enterprises, are compelled to be active within the environment that is created by an abundance of factors and to adapt to the requirements of this environment. As a result, the approach of the agro-coops' future role can be achieved having first outlined the conditions of the environment within which they are expected to operate. This environment is on one hand the wider European environment and on the other hand the Greek agriculture environment.

2.1.1 The external environment

Based on the current data, the estimations on the future configuration of the framework within which the agro-coops will be called to function, indicate a further enlargement of the globalisation of economy, with the consequent result being the competition intensification and the further restriction of the EU state-members' subsidies and support on their agricultural products. The negotiations taking place in the World Trade Organisation resulted to the further reduction of the protective mechanisms (subsidies,

import quotas etc.) that were used for agricultural products in the European Union and consequently these products will be more intensively exposed to international competition in the future.

Such an environment reinforces the advantages of the large and rationally organised enterprises, while at the same time undermines the negotiating power of the isolated farmers-producers, unless they act to increase it by their collective action (Kolymvas, 1990, p.164; UN Resolution, 1994, p.96; Spraos, 1997, p.iv).

At the same time and during the same period of negotiations on the new agreement in the World Trade Organisation, the enlargement of the European Union with the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries was under way. The first enlargement was realised in 2004 and the second is expected during the first decade of the 21st century. These enlargements will bring about threats as well as opportunities for the agricultural sector of the EU state-members. Difficulties and threats are expected to result from the allocation of the given EU budgetary resources to more beneficiaries (given that the budget is not likely to increase); from the potential reorientation of private investments to the new member-states; and from the distribution in the EU area of products with lower cost of production.

On the other hand, the new member-states and the candidate countries are specialised in the agricultural products of the central European countries. Consequently, it is expected that, with the stabilization and growth of their economies, they will constitute additional customers of the Mediterranean products. The various concessions that have been granted to the Mediterranean countries that do not constitute members of the EU are also referring to a variety of Mediterranean agricultural products, which are imported with favourable terms in the European market.

Moreover, the conference of Barcelona (November 1995), in which the foreign affairs ministers of the EU and the other Mediterranean countries (with the exception of Libya) participated, set as an objective the creation, until 2010, of a free trade area that would include all the Mediterranean countries (EU and non-EU).

This prospect should be taken into consideration seriously by those countries, such as Greece, that produce similar products. It becomes obvious that the 1992 CAP's second governing line which promoted the preference on the member states' agricultural

products is progressively undermined. The EU member-states that present a negative balance of payments/income in the EU budget, Germany being the major one, have demanded the improvement of this relation. It is forecasted that this objective sooner or later will be achieved, resulting to the restriction of the available resources for the countries that have a positive index in the EU budgetary inflows-outflows.

Provided that this argumentation will be fully adopted, the “financing solidarity”, the third governing line of the 1992 CAP will be seriously jeopardised. The indirect benefits that the financially and economically more powerful countries of EU will gain through their economic and commercial interrelations with the new member-states are not appraised. As an example, it is reported that Germany, the bigger commercial partner of the Central and Eastern European countries, covering in 1993 the 55% of EU exports to them (Commission, 1994, as reported in Tsoukalis, 1997, p.364).

Corresponding profits also result for the economically powerful countries from the enlargement of the EU internal market. Another element entering the discussion concerning the future conditions that will prevail in the agricultural sector is its relations with those organisations that provide it with agro-supplies and with the organisations that procure and/or promote and distribute its products. These are large organisations; therefore the individual producer constitutes by definition the weak part in all kinds of negotiations (Kolymvas, 1990g, p. 196, Kolymvas, 1995, p.3).

The globalisation of the European - and consequently of the Greek - economy is expected to further decrease the number and increase the size and power of the enterprises that are cooperating with the agricultural sector. The weakening of the negotiating position of the farmers-producers will be an immediate result of these changes. The ultimate effect of all the abovementioned changes is expected to be the decrease of the agricultural income in terms of the products prices side as well as of the agro-supplies prices and the distribution difficulty the products that will not afford this pressure will face.

On the other hand, an extended market for the Mediterranean products will be created and it will be occupied by those that are capable to offer their products in an enhanced

and sustainable quality and with competitive prices and terms or they offer differentiated and/or specialised products.

2.2 The changes in the agricultural sector

Despite the efforts paid and the motives with which the change of the structural conditions prevailing in the Greek agriculture is attempted, time is expected to be the main factor of change. The efforts for enlargement of land properties through EU and national motives have only caused marginal changes. With the gradual retirement of the aged persons from the agricultural production and with the co-current decision of the largest portion of the younger persons not to get involved and employed in the agricultural sector, it is expected that different structural conditions are gradually created in the agricultural sector.

The speculated model will include large (by Greek criteria) agricultural enterprising properties (businesses) and small properties (businesses) for additional employment and additional income (Vakakis, 1994, p.49; Spraos, 1997, p.iv). This model will ensure the viability of the agricultural societies in several regions. Furthermore, the changes towards the enterprising management of agricultural properties (businesses) have a slow pace. The number of young persons that enter the profession is limited.

However, the educational level of those entering the agriculture is certainly improved and the entrepreneurial spirit and attitude increasingly govern their behavioural patterns.

Especially the younger individuals that enter the agricultural sector consciously (instead of not having another choice) as professionals will constitute the starting point of reconstruction.

The rising living standards of the countries to which the Greek agricultural products are directed will have in the future two concrete requirements: First, for conventional products of high quality and second, for biological/holistic and integrated farming agricultural products. The Greek products will have to compete with products of third

countries, in which the operating cost will remain low or with products of EU countries that achieve lower cost through the incorporation of modern technology.

For this reason there will be no other choice than to seek and support advances in modern production methods technologies. Depending on the position that the EU will adopt for the genetically modified foods, a part of these products will probably use the results and advances of biotechnological research. More specifically for the biological products favourable prospects are seen for Greece, with the condition that it will effectively use the controlling mechanisms in order to provide guarantees to the consumer (Papageorgiou, 1997, p.101).

For Greece, the configuration of the agricultural sector objectives is not exempted from the social character of the agricultural activity on which the agricultural communities are mainly based (Martinou et al. 1997, p.88). Furthermore, because the agricultural activity will not suffice in the future so as to maintain an economic growth rate proportional to that of the other sectors of the economy, the combination of agricultural activity with other compatible activities will be constitute a necessity (Spraos, 1997, p.viii). This necessity is more obvious in Greece, whose agriculture is directed to plant production, which does not require, in most sectors, continuous and constant employment. The combination of agriculture with tourism and with environmental protection activities is the most advisable and compatible, as many believe and suggest (Korakas, "TO VIMA", 15/10/2004). The integrated local community growth programs are offered for the exploitation of the particular conditions of each region.

2.3 Agricultural cooperatives and the Common Agricultural Policy

The agricultural cooperatives and generally the cooperatives did not meet special treatment in the Community. The Treaty of Rome mentions the cooperatives only in article 58, where, regarding the right of establishment, the companies are to be treated equal to individual entities. Companies are defined to be companies of civil or merchant law, including the cooperatives and the other legal entities of public or private law, with the exception of the non-profit organisations. With this formulation, the cooperatives are classified in the legal entities that have a profit - financial interest.

The first essential involvement of EEC to the particularity of cooperatives was observed in 1962 and referred to the subjects of competition, to which the articles 85 and 86 of the Treaty of Rome mainly refer.

Article 85 considers collaborations between enterprises that have as result cumbersome practices - that is the hindrance, restriction or contamination of competition - to be incompatible to the common market, and especially those collaborations that aim to direct or indirect fixing of procurement or selling prices - that is, cumbersome prices - or other terms of transaction, to restriction or the control of production, availability, technological growth or investments, to distribution of markets or supply sources, etc. The previous cases, also according to article 85, can be declared inapplicable in agreements, decisions or practices that contribute to the improvement of production or products distribution or the promotion of the technical or economic progress, while at the same time ensuring for the consumers a fair part of the resulting profit.

a) Community Regulations of interest to agricultural cooperatives

With regard to what is defined in article 85, Regulation 26/1962 was established which, in article 2 reports: "Article 85 of the Treaty does not have application in agreements, decisions and practices that are mentioned in the precedent article, provided that they constitute a constitutive element of the organisation of the national market or are necessary for the achievement of objectives of article of 39 of the Treaty".

More specifically, it does not have application in agreements, decisions and practices of farmers, unions of farmers and unions of these unions that belong to the same member-state, which concern the production or sale of agricultural products or the use of joint installations for storage, treatment or transformation of agricultural products and where there is no expressed obligation for establishing uniform prices, unless the Committee considers that in this way the fair competition is excluded or that the objectives of article 39 of the Treaty are being jeopardised.

- When the agricultural businesses collaborate between them (or merge) and submit common plan of improvement (article 6),
- When recognised producers groups are formed with the aim to provide mutual aid between agricultural businesses, a more rational joint use of agricultural equipment or joint exploitation, they can be granted aid of establishment, provided these groups are

- established and recognised after the date that the Regulation comes into force (article 10),
- When collective investments are realised in the underdeveloped regions for the production of forages (their storage and distribution included), for the configuration and the equipment of pasture lands which are jointly exploited and, in the mountainous regions, for places of water supply, the roads for direct access to the flat and mountainous pasture lands and the shelters for the flocks. In the financed and subsidised projects small hydraulic and irrigating projects that do not compromise the protection of the environment can be included,
 - When professional training programs include sub-programs for those who direct or manage teams of producers and cooperatives, provided that these are essential for the improvement of the financial position and work conditions of the producers, as well as the enhancement of the agricultural products transformation, and marketing and distribution in the said region.

These aids were maintained in Regulations 2328/91 and 950/97 that successively replaced the 797/85 Regulation (Kolymvas, 1990a).

b) European Parliament and the cooperatives

Increased mobility in the affairs of cooperatives was noticed in the 1980's in the European Parliament (Kolymvas, 1990a, p.73). During this decade three reports were presented to the European Parliament that took the names of their authors. These were:

- 1) The K. Mihr report, titled "the Co-operative Movement in the European Community", drawn up on behalf of the Economic and Monetary Subjects Committee in 1982.
- 2) The P. Avgerinos report titled "the Contribution of Cooperatives in Regional Growth ", drawn up on behalf of the Regional Policy and Land Planning Committee in 1985, and
- 3) The R. Trivelli report, titled "the Cooperatives and the Co-operative Movement in Developmental Policy ", drawn up on behalf of the Committee for Growth and Collaboration in 1988.

The content of these reports and the resolutions to which they led are of particular importance. Certain from the points that they point out are:

i) The Mihr report:

- That more importance should be given to the cooperatives by the member-states and from the institutional bodies of the Community, given that the cooperatives maintain an important position in the life of the society.
- That the cooperatives are to play an important role in the creation of opportunities of employment and in the improvement of the work conditions of the employees.
- That the social value of the economic and business activities of the cooperatives is undeniable and consequently it is to the interest of the Community to encourage the co-operative form of activity, where there are possibilities of their successful adaptation to the objectives of the Community policy and the healthy and effective competition is not threatened.
- That the Community should probably facilitate the foundation of industrial and craft cooperatives and the transformation of existing enterprises, threatened by crisis, to cooperatives.
- That the committee of EEC should examine the possibility of granting the cooperatives and their Unions material and technical aid for their activities in education, training and promotion, as well as availability of capital for the growth of the small and medium-sized enterprises, the agro-coops included.

ii) The Avgerinos report

- That the cooperatives can play a decisive role particularly in the economically weaker regions, with the creation of employment positions, multi-varied forms of socio-economic infrastructures, secondary and tertiary activities, as well as with the preservation of population and the investment of the social surplus in the place of its production.
- That at the last decade, during which unemployment continues to increase, the cooperatives were the ones to achieve to create new enterprises and offer new employment positions as well as to maintain an significant number of the existed jobs.

- That with the direct participation of the members of the cooperative in the economic activities of the enterprise its productivity increases. This contributes so much to a more essential economic result as well as to a more active and efficient attendance and participation of the population in the common interests of the locality, which constitutes an essential condition for the successful exploitation of the endogenous potentialities and perspectives, particularly of the economically weaker regions.
- That it is asked from the Committee to apply a developmental Community program in the less developed regions aiming at the distribution of the co-operative idea and the foundation of agricultural cooperatives.

iii) The Trivelli report:

- That the co-operative enterprise is a suitable means for guaranteeing an integrated development and growth, able to cover in full the direct needs of the local populations.
- That the interested states (by this referring to the developing countries) should, in the national policies that they work out, precisely define the roles of the government and co-operative movement and that the autonomy of the cooperatives should be recognized completely and be respected.
- That the existing local resources should be mobilised first before resorting to the external business and economic aid, which will be there to supplement and never to substitute the contributions of the members of the cooperatives.
- That the training work should be materialised before the creation of the cooperatives and be a continuous process, which will be provided by specialised institutions.

It is realised, from the reports and the resolutions of the European Parliament, that there is a wider recognition of the role and importance of the cooperatives and at the same time it is required by the EEC Committee to thoroughly exploit the co-operative institution.

c) Directorate of Cooperatives and Advisory Committee in the European Commission

The establishment of the Directorate of Cooperatives and relevant institutions, in the General Directorate of XXIII Committee of EEC could be considered as a most important development in the end of the 1980's. The "Social Economy" Directorate, as it has been named, included the cooperatives, the insurance funds, the unions and the institutions. In the same General Directorate, the enterprise policy, trade and tourism were also incorporated. In 1995 a provisional Advisory Committee for cooperatives, insurance funds, unions and institutions was formed. This committee became permanent in 1998 and its object is to be the advisory body of the European Commission on issues related to the promotion and application of Community policy for Social Economy.

It took certain decades of EEC existence and operation in order for the necessity to be practically recognised by the Community mechanism, of a systematic involvement with the issues of the cooperatives, an institution that influences considerably the economic and social life of the member-states; an institution which, however, has not managed to fully exploit and use its accumulated socio-economic base and power as a means of influencing the practiced policy. The reason of this weakness of cooperatives should be sought mainly in the insufficient collaboration among them. It is noted that, only at the end of the 1980's, a Committee of Collaboration of cooperatives was formed at an EEC level, despite the fact that cooperatives of all types (agricultural, consumers, real estate, etc.) were in existence since the establishment of EEC in 1957 and even before.

2.4 The role of agricultural cooperatives

The future conditions in which farmers will have to develop their activities, will determine their professional orientation and the new characteristics that they will be called to acquire in order to be able to respond to the forthcoming conditions. If we do not take under consideration the choice of individual action as this is expected to be the least beneficial, for each category of farmers, in the forthcoming conditions, farmers will actually have to choose between two options. They will either resort to cultivate their farms after making contracts with the buyers of their products (packers or traders) or they will act as a collective.

The main advantage, that a contract of that kind has, is making sure the production would be bought. So, in this way the uncertainty of the market is faced successfully.

Moreover, it keeps farmers in touch with new technology and development resulting in giving them the opportunity to make products according to the requirements of the buyer.

The main disadvantage, though, is that by doing so, the farmer has a limited negotiation power and hence becomes dependent on the buyer, and sometimes has no power at all. The farmer finds oneself in the same situation that a worker is with the subcontracting production system, still having though to face the uncertainty of production. The farmer's income has a set maximum limit, however not a minimum one.

A collective form of action on the other hand entails the collective uncertainty of production and availability; it creates economies of scale which results in a larger negotiation power over suppliers and buyers. In a collective form of action there is no upper margin concerning income, however neither a secured bottom one, even though in a number of cases farmers themselves take measures of precaution against market risks. In Europe and all over the world agricultural cooperatives constitute the form of action farmers have adopted, an institutionally specific form of collective action. The way that this operates and its effectiveness have been applied successfully. In Greece, agricultural cooperatives have a presence that goes back a whole century, although we cannot claim that this institution has been allowed to put its potential in practice.

The present situation, and the fact that conditions have changed compared to the past and they are about to change more in the future, force the State as well as the farmers to reconsider the prospects that arise and the potential choices for the viable survival of the agricultural sector and the rural areas as well as the results to date of the way they have handled so far the issue of agricultural cooperatives, so that they may decide, even at the last moment, a new policy and strategy (Ilantzis, 1990, p.79; Koliris, 1990, p.205; Nouyrit, 1992, p.21; Martinos et al., 1997, p.89; Spraos, 1997, p.ix). By this consideration, the need will arise for the "instrument" of cooperatives to be used in new roles and in different ways by both the State and the farmers (Tolios, 2003, p.p.225-228; Doutsias, 2003, p.p.241-245; Semos, 2003, p.p.219-224; Karaiskaki, 2003, p.p.79-83).

The goals that the agricultural cooperatives have to achieve in the least time possible are as follows:

Members should reduce their production cost. This may happen only if the largest possible number of agricultural cooperatives would cooperate for achieving collective procurement of agro-supplies.

Cooperatives should obtain better prices for the products of their members by collective actions, negotiations and sales even by creating their own competitive trading infrastructure.

They should support everything that aims at making high quality products by their members.

They should use Logistics at the production chain and availability for the products of their members in order to reduce the cost and increase the competitiveness of these products.

The management of cooperatives which undertake serious business initiatives should be professional such as that of German and other European cooperatives.

A network of binding collaboration between cooperatives should be formed having strict rules and penalties applying to those who might violate the undertaken engagements.

The principle of “subsidiary partnership” should apply regarding the activities each degree of cooperatives undertakes aiming at the concentration of financial activities to the level that appears to have the comparative advantage in management.

Promotion of self-financing of cooperatives by use of motives and rules that would be included in their statutes.

Members should be offered at individual level a variety of services, when the cost that can be achieved is smaller than the equivalent of that of the market (for example at the preparation of plans for the improvement of agricultural land properties).

A fund for mutual insurance and security between many cooperatives in order to cover risky business initiatives or unpredictable target failures.

A collective negotiation on loans terms should be made after they are financially reinforced.

Goals such as these will never result in anything unless members realise the dangers they will have to face if they do not adjust in present conditions and fail to take advantage of opportunities to come. The main issue on which farmers should be informed is the fact that any government will not be in the position to use the budget to support cooperative activities.

In order to understand the large change in cooperatives, which is necessary for them to achieve the goals mentioned, the necessary conditions and characteristics of the present situation should be pointed out.

2.5 The present situation in agricultural cooperatives

Under the present conditions and those expected to come in the future in Europe as well as in Greece the necessity of providing agricultural cooperatives with support is clear beyond any doubt (Seitanidis, 1990, p.27; Kolymvas, 1990a, p.72; Ilantzis, 1990, p.81; Papageorgiou, 1991, p.75; Korakas, 1992, p.46; Argyris, 1993, p.93; Papoutsis, 1995, p.11; Martinos et al., 1997, p. 84; Thaskalou, 1997, p.214, Spraos, 1997, p.ix).

However, the present situation of those cooperatives is all but encouraging. They seem to be near the end of an “adventure” from which is not easy to recover. The main elements of this adventure need to be mentioned not only so that they will not be repeated in the future, but mainly in order to plan the neutralisation of their long term negative effects.

If we wish to give a precise description of agricultural cooperatives, it is useful first to describe the basic elements of their activities, structure and the sector’s population.

2.5.1 Basic elements

Greek agricultural cooperatives are divided in three degrees: the ones of first degree are cooperatives; the second degree consists of the unions of agricultural cooperatives and the third degree consists of the cooperative organisations.

Cooperatives of first degree have members that may be individuals, farmers and even a district, usually a municipality or a community. With their activities certain basic needs of their members are facilitated. For the needs of activities which require more coalition they have made Unions of agricultural cooperatives in larger districts (usually prefectures or provinces), the general assembly of which is composed of representatives of first degree cooperatives. The majority of Unions have multiple aims; however, there exist a limited number of them that specialise in one product or a group of products.

With the coalition of Unions at a national level, third degree cooperative organisations have been formed which are classified by (and therefore specialised in) product or group of products or services. National level organisations, provided they fall into the

legislation for agricultural cooperatives, have the form of Central Unions or Consortiums. For the purposes of business flexibility or of collaboration with third parties, as well as due to legislative restrictions, Cooperative Limited Companies (Cooperative S.A.'s) or other forms of companies have also been established in the past.

The description in numbers of the present situation of agricultural cooperatives is not possible, however intriguing this may sound. The most recent data on the number of cooperatives refer back to 1991 and, as far as their financial activities are concerned, to 1990. The reason is that the publication of the annual report by the Department for Cooperatives of the ATE (Agricultural Bank of Greece) has ceased since 1991. This report has been the only source of information concerning the description on a national level of the situation and the activities of agricultural cooperatives based on the reliable audits by the supervisors and inspectors of the bank.

Note: The most recent relevant data, obtained from PASEGES' (Greek Confederation of agricultural co-operatives) and ICAP's annual reports (2002) on Greek Food Industry and Greek agricultural sector, reaffirm the below stated data, although it is mentioned in these reports, that the number of Greek agro-coops as well as their business and financial activities are decreasing each year, and the final data will be published in 2007-2008 based on a PASEGES' research on the Greek agro-coops.

Based on the data for years 1990 and 1991, a general total description of the situation and activities of agricultural cooperatives is presented in the following table 1:

Note: 1 Euro = 340.75 Greek Drachmae.

Number of operating cooperatives of first degree:	6.873
Number of Unions of agricultural cooperatives:	122
Number of Central Unions:	7
Number of Union Consortiums:	4
Number of agricultural enterprises (S.A., Ltd, etc.):	88
Leading Organization:	1
Number of members of first degree agro-coops:	851.487
Number of employees (both for those working on a regular basis and not):	12.261
Value of supplies (agricultural and domestic) (millions of drachmas):	114.863
Value of agricultural products sold (millions of drachmae):	405.524
Value of agricultural products exported (millions of drachmae):	67.667

Table 1: Basic elements of agricultural cooperatives

2.6 The State and the agricultural cooperatives

The way the State affects the changing conditions in the agricultural cooperatives is not limited only in the exercise of social policy through them resulting to a huge business cost for them, or in the “untidiness” of the legislative framework. There had been certain cases where a blatant violation of fundamental rules of the cooperative “spirit” and/or a very clear hindrance of their business activities have been the outcome of the Greek State’s intervention in the Greek agricultural cooperatives sector, as it is presented in the following paragraphs.

An essential suppression of the democratic character and self-government of agricultural (only) cooperatives took place, in the most recent period, during the dictatorship of the 1967-1974 period, when under the Obligatory Law 31/1967 the service of Administrative and Supervisory Councils of PASEGES (Greek Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives), Central Unions, Consortiums, Unions of Agricultural Cooperatives and Cooperative Enterprises was ceased. Managing Directors, senior and middle level managers and legal and technical advisors of those cooperative organisations were fired under the same law.

The democratic character of the Greek cooperatives was dealt a heavy blow by law 1257/1982 (article 12) voted by the Greek parliament, under which the term of service of all administrations of cooperative organizations was ceased and the election of officers was ordered under the new electoral system (that of combinations). With the same law, the service of the cooperatives' administrations, which was to expire before the new election of officers, was extended. A similar violation of cooperative rules took place two more times, in 1985 and 1993, when the service of administrations was extended while in the meantime the new legislative adjustments, that governments wanted, could come into act. It is inevitable that internal disorder created by such interventions cannot let business results of cooperatives without effect.

In other cases the State had obstructed in various ways the activities of the cooperatives by means of legislation, procedural obstacles or acts of government institutions. From the great number of cases reference is hereby made to the obstructions caused to the establishment by cooperatives of the first SA/PLC company - the SEKE S.A. - (Ilantzis, 1990, p.62), the long lasting prohibition to cooperatives to establish insurance companies or participate in them (Ilantzis, 1990, p.74) and the contractual commitment of cooperative organisations getting bank loans by ATE to have the acquired assets insured by the insurance company of ATE, while the law stated that only recommendation should be made to the borrower of a bank loan (Ilantzis, 1990, p.75).

The long term State intervention in the "arrangement" of issues concerning cooperatives has caused a relation of dependence of cooperatives on the State and it seems that both cooperatives and the State keep it going through their actions. Cooperatives request the help of the State when they face difficulties and the State usually responds positively. As a result, the State considers natural to have the right to decide for cooperatives and their future. Under that "spirit" the Minister of Agriculture declared that "any cooperative organisations of third degree that have no object and reason for their existence will be shut down" (Express, 24-9-1998). It is important to mention that the cooperative organisations of third degree to which the Minister was referring are among those whose establishment had been forced by the law 1541/85.

The mutually suitable relationship of dependence of cooperatives by the State constitutes a powerful obstacle regarding the effort to change the attitude of the administrations and the members of cooperatives. It is characteristic that one of the

aforementioned limited studies shows that, even for the increase of cooperative capitals, a substantial percentage (26%) seeks for governmental funding (Kola, 1998, p. 68).

2.7 Internal problems

Although the distinction between internal and external problems is not always easy, since the cause may be external and the effect internal, internal problems are called those for the existence of which responsible are the legal persons of the cooperatives themselves, their administrations or their members, all of who also have to deal with them. The root-cause of internal problems is the failure to see the cooperative as a private enterprise and whatever this entails. The long term addiction, either to secondary roles they were given or the role of the recipient of mandates and allowances, has corroded the entrepreneurship and responsibility which are both necessary to this type of enterprise (appropriate organisational structure and personnel, undertaking of initiatives etc.).

The overall view, which does not include certain significant exceptions, consists of cooperative organisations of administrative character. The Board of Directors, elected through support of political parties, manages the affairs of the cooperative even if it does not have the adequate knowledge and experience to do so. In most cases, the line that separates the roles of elected administration from those of official management is vague and, most of the times, the elected administrations, although they do not have the necessary qualifications, do not grant the official management all responsibilities and powers required.

The powerful position of the elected administration, in combination with political connections and the governmental “protection”, limit the role of members even if all sorts of democratic procedures are followed. Meanwhile, the interest of the members is repressed, as well as their restlessness about the future of their business, since even in the case of negative financial results the members are not required to cover any financial loss and damage. The tendency of each member to serve his or her own interest becomes a primary priority, while the cooperation with the cooperative is rendered secondary. The cooperative is seen as a refuge when difficulties arise, without demanding any serious commitments or risks.

As far as the members are concerned, the cooperative is one more supplier and one more possible buyer of products at a given price. General assemblies have no meaning unless there are elections. Internal inspection either has no power for effective control or acts under the rule of coalition of groups of the same political party. The information supplied and the conversation in front of huge assemblies simply cannot be sufficient and debate is not free of influence by specific interests. External control has been weakened.

The work and business environment created due to this situation does not attract capable and ambitious executives and makes all executives and managers, that do not accept this situation, leave and this result to this environment being maintained and reproduced. The educational programs of professional or cooperative content are minimal and their attendance by elected or clerical executives is low.

The strict economic criteria that should prevail in the operation as well as in the investments are weakened due to the absence of any consequence to the members, while it is not possible to persuade the members to extend their financial participation, in terms of capital, in an activity that gives them the impression that there is no difference if they participate or not, with more or less capital, and no essential difference can be demonstrated by being registered with the cooperative or not.

From the presentation of just these present weaknesses of cooperatives, it is clear that the starting point is negative, not even at zero datum. Due to this, the effort of reconstruction will be more toilsome than simple adjustment to the new conditions. However, it is expected that the pressure applied by the circumstances will leave no choice other than to accelerate the processes of comprehension of the need for radical changes, provided the existence of the necessary conditions (Doutsias, 2003, p.98).

2.8 The future of agricultural cooperatives

Factors that will shape the future of cooperatives

The above analysis presents the elements that determine the current situation and describes the changes that are expected to happen and which will constitute the framework in which the agricultural cooperatives will have to take business actions. The factors that will influence the shape of the future conditions may be divided into external ones, which cannot be influenced decisively by Greece, and internal ones. In any case they create difficulties or dangers and at the same time provide with opportunities or ways out. These factors create pressure for the adaptation of the agro-coops and in order to make their composition easier we will classify them as follows:

Pressures for adaptation I: external developments

Difficulties - Dangers

- Reduction of protectionism of agricultural products, as specified by the new round of negotiations in the frames of World Trade Organisation and Agenda 2000.
- Intensification of competition due to the above and the Mediterranean policy,.
- Restrictions on resources made available to agriculture, especially during this first decade of the 21st century
- Enlargement and strengthening of inflow business.
- Enhancement of the role of supermarket and hypermarket chains and their expansion to the standardisation of agricultural products through contracts with the producers (Spraos, 1997, p. iii).

Ways out - Opportunities

- Acquisition of advantages of size through the collective action of producers and the application of the rules of Groups of Producers, regardless of recognition (obligatory delivery of production, improvement of quality, penalties, etc.).
- Penetration in the markets of Central and Eastern European countries by initially offering “value for money” products, and retaining those markets by improving quality henceforth.

- Making use of the European Union Regulations 950/97, 951/97 and 952/97 (improvement of agricultural farmlands, encouragement of the populations of rural areas and of areas that have disadvantages concerning development to remain in these areas, complementary employment, investments in transformation and trading, Groups of Producers).
- Making use of the possibilities that “Santer’s parcel” - the European Union’s 3rd economic & funding program for the underdeveloped regions of the E.U. - offers.
- Taking advantage of the favourable conditions for the institutions of social economy.

Pressures for adaptation II: developments in Greece

Difficulties - dangers

- Slow pace of creation of business units of agricultural production
- Difficulty in the adaptation of farmers to new conditions, because of high age average and low educational level.
- Slow disengagement from political influence.
- Difficulties caused by legislation and inefficiency of governmental mechanisms.
- Addiction to governmental intervention.

Ways out - opportunities

- Wide and honest informing of farmers about the necessity of changes.
- Encouragement, reinforcement and making use of the initiatives of new and young farmers in order to propel a more general change of the present situation.
- Clear parliamentary policy and legislation for the cooperatives.
- Support of sober-sided cooperative efforts during the stages of recovery and reform.
- Making use of the opportunities for multi-activity that each region can offer.

- Establishment of a consultation mechanism for the farmers through cooperative organisations, based on contractual agreement with the Greek State, which will subsidise the best part of the expenses.
- Simplification of the processes and terms for farmland rental.

3. Root-cause reasons of the agricultural cooperatives problems

The reasons of the agro-coops' adventure are fair enough and also interrelated in such a way, that it is difficult to identify the major - fundamental one. Therefore, the most important of them are pointed out, classified in four categories (Tolios, 2003, p.p.225-228; Doutsias, 2003, p.p.241-245).

a) Politics – Internal conflicts

The agricultural cooperatives, while they constitute worldwide enterprises activated and operating in the wider business market and therefore their survival is depending on their organizational performance and business operations and processes effectiveness and efficiency, at the same time they are organizations that apply democratic processes for the appointment of their elected administration/members of the Board of Directors.

In Greece, the discrimination between internal political parties teams/groups, led to internal competition, rivalries and adversities at the expense of the common effort and moreover to the close interconnection or even heavy dependence of these groups/teams on and by the political parties of Greece (Ilantzis, 1990, p.79; Argyris, 1993, p.94; Kassavetis, 1995, p.60; Labropoulou-Dimitriadou, 1995, p.106; Martinos et al., 1997, p.89; Papageorgiou, 1997, p.240).

The inappropriateness of group combinations' system for the elections of the agro-coops was realised by the effects that it had in their operation. However, even 18 years after the system's adoption, an effort of adopting an intermediary system with single ballot and limited number of voting crosses, was reversed with the modification of a relative law, in as far as the system of group combinations was judged that it served the political parties interests and objectives as well as those of the agro-coops administration and leadership that had been elected under this system.

It should be noted that a lot of agro-coops' executives (elected members and workforce), that had been attracted by the qualitative and humanitarian elements of the co-operative rules, distanced themselves from the agricultural cooperatives, denying their participation in this obvious political parties' competition that served very obviously only non-cooperative interests and aims.

b) The exercising of social policy and practice via the cooperatives

The cooperatives of each category constitute economic institutions/organizations that are based on and serve rules of social sensitivity and interest (Papageorgiou, 1989, p.225). This last characteristic of the agro-coops has been misunderstood by a large part of the Greek agro-coops' leaders being insufficiently informed, professionally incompetent and of a "loudly" proclaimed political descendant and origin.

They considered the agro-coops as institutions of Social Care and Security, which had to intervene in any existed problem that the agricultural sector was facing (Spraos, 1997, p. ix). The utilisation of the agro-coops as institutions of social care, constituted an applied policy for an important time period in the past.

The agro-coops' administrations' orientation towards and dependence on political parties orientation facilitated the exercise of this policy, which in any way was pandering, since it was serving very obviously only the short-term needs and interests of the farmers.

Thus, in any case the producer's price of the agricultural products were not satisfactory, the relevant political leadership ordered the agro-coops to offer and pay prices superior than the ones experienced in the real market. These agro-coops' payments to the producers were made through bank loans from the state owned Agricultural Bank of Greece (Sellianakis, 1992).

In most of these cases a relative written command or agreement did not exist. The same tactic was also applied in the case of the extensive damage that was caused by the explosion in the nuclear factory of Chernobyl (1986), when the agricultural production had been almost completely contaminated and destroyed.

The 'dulling' agro-coops' leaderships and administration being assured that these debts to the ABG will be covered by the State and the short-term horizon of each responsible

political leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture left in suspense these loans of the agro-coops for a fair number of years (1983-1990).

Meanwhile, the important rise of the interest rates from 1985 and on led the owed sums to increase substantially, while the promises for their arrangement by state regulation were repeated over time and time again. It should be marked that these promises for arranging the agro-coops debts and loans it removed any concern and interest of the agro-coops administration (both elected and clerical) about the business and economic performance and results of their organizations. There existed also cases of asserting a theory of social offer by considering these huge debts as proof of their social offering and policy (Sahanidis, 1987).

Another cause of the agro-coops debts accumulation was the policy of supporting cooperative investment initiatives, aiming at the production vertical integration, the standardization and the adoption of advanced forms of marketing and promotion of the producers formed groups, an objective with a wide acceptance by the interested parties. High and important loans were granted for investment programs that did not justify sufficiently their viability and in institutions that did not have the necessary competent human resources and the entrepreneurial attitude and mentality. In many cases the ATE acted jointly with the cooperatives in common investments, from which it sought its withdrawal by the beginning of the 1990's decade (Labropoulou-Dimitriadou, 1991, p.9; Papageorgiou, 1991, p.17; Trihos, 1991, p.133; Sifniotis, 1992, p.22; Papageorgiou, 1992, p.191).

The substantial increase of the agro-coops debts and loans during the 1980's resulted to: problems for the Agricultural Bank of Greece/ATE, which based on the Community's banking rules (banking directives) could not ascribe bank interest in loans that are not served for a lot of years; problems for the agro-coops which did not have and could not use any more the element of solvency for their further borrowing; and in problems in the governmental budget, due to their substantial accumulated sums.

The regulation - arrangement that was selected was the issuing and offering of governmental bonds to the ATE, a process that was followed in 1992, in 1994 and in 1997 (laws 2008/92, 2093/92, 2198/94, 2237/94, 2538/97).

Furthermore, for debts for which it did not result any responsibility and accountability of the state, a process of regulation-arrangement by the ATE with a parallel process of economic cleansing was followed (Christou, 1995; Fragialoudakis, 2003, p.97).

The perception and use of the agro-coops as institutions of social care and policy had also another effect: the hiring of supernumerary spare personnel and the readjustment of employees wages and fringe benefits without considering their business performance and economic/financial results.

During a five-year period (1983-88) the agro-coops workforce increased by 50% and this constituted a permanent burden and expense for the agro-coops due to the special state regulation (that is still in effect) providing employment permanence to its staff (Greek Agricultural Cooperatives' Internal Organizational Rules and Regulations, PASEGES, 1991).

The repercussions-bad effects of this social policy that was practiced via and by the agro-coops can be summarised in the following:

- i) Economic damage-financial losses of the agro-coops, which were deprived of the possibility of being borrowed due to their debts and consequently they were forced to interrupt their presence in the market.
- ii) Creation in the agro-coops members (administration, workforce and members) of the impression that the agro-coops are agents of the powerful state, which have the power to solve all kinds of problems, independently from forces of market.
- iii) Creation in the society of the impression that the cooperatives are synonymous with business failure and financial bankruptcy, even after the undertaking by the state of the responsibility and accountability for their debts, which was presented as a “donation” to the agro-coops.
- iv) Greek society's discontent toward the agro-coops and searching, even by the Ministry of Agriculture, of ways of separate enactment of the Producers groups. This climate that “burdens” the existing operations of the agro-coops has a particular importance for the realistic estimation of their future perspectives, because it is connected with impressions that have become convictions to the entire society.

c) The legal framework

The legislative framework, that refers and is applied to the agro-coops, presents a characteristic instability (Labropoulou-Dimitriadou, 1995, p.96; Mavroyiannis, 1997, p.222). During the last 20 years were four basic laws were voted and enacted for the agro-coops. When each next law replaces the precedent and since these laws refer roughly to 7500 first degree, 126 secondary and an important number of third degree co-operative organizations and entities, the enormous work of the agro-coops statutes adaptation as well as briefing and informing 750,000 farmers that are called to apply them, becomes enormous and time and energy consuming.

Even these people dealing specifically with the Greek agro-coops have to retrench each time to their personal or informal coding due to the subsequent modifications. So much frequent alternation of legislation is not observed in any other form of enterprising activity (e.g. Plc. or Ltd. etc.) or in other countries - in Germany the 1889 law was modified only in 1973 - (Ministry of Agriculture - Economic and Social Consultative Assembly, 1986, p.305).

The Greek agricultural cooperatives, even only because the frequent alternations of the legislation that refers to them (and independently of this legislation's content), are placed in a more unfavourable position, comparing with their competitors in Europe and other countries. Up to 1982, the elections for the appointment of the agro-coops administration followed the rule that is applied in all other countries cooperatives, that is to say the single list of candidates in which each member can put so many electorate crosses as the number of the members of the body for which the election voting is done. From 1982 and following (laws 1257/82, 1541/85 and 2169/93 as was modified by the law 2181/94) the system of elections with separately ballots of candidates combinations was chosen and established, which, as it was expected, led to the discrimination of and rivalry among the political parties groups in the agro-coops.

The elections, as it is fixed, are carried out the same period for each degree of agro-coops, therefore each political party's mechanism is mobilized and the candidates are nominated and publicly supported by the relevant political parties. This relation prevails from the first degree level agro-coops up to the leading organization of agricultural

cooperatives, the Greek Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives and their Unions/PASEGES.

Law 602/1915, which was based on the German law of 1889, was referring to each category of cooperatives and initially its content (before its following modifications) had been commented positively by many researchers. However, during its enactment, it suffered a lot of modifications, so that “re-establishment to its initial liberal form” is sought (Tzortzakis, 1973, p.288).

3. QUALITY - QUALITY MANAGEMENT – ISO 9000 QMS

3.1 Quality Issue

According to ISO 9000:2000 definition, Quality “is the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills requirements”.

Quality is often used to signify “excellence” of a product or service according to the sector that the organization is in, therefore, a lot of people give to quality varying definitions. Thus, quality has to be defined in a way that is acceptable by and useful to every one – the professional, managerial and academic communities – engaged in the whole spectrum of economy, business and society. The only way to achieve it “is to recognize the need to include in the assessment of quality the true requirements of the ‘customer’ – the needs and expectations” (Oakland 2003, p.4), a definition very similar to the ones given by the other quality gurus as well as to the aforementioned given by the ISO Technical Committee.

A range of definitions of quality

1. “Degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills requirements” – ISO (EN) 9000:2000 Quality Management Systems – fundamentals and vocabulary.
2. “The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs” BS 4748:1987/ ISO 8402, (1986), Quality Vocabulary: Part 1, International Terms.
3. “Fitness for purpose or use” – Juran (1988).
4. “Quality should be aimed at the needs of the consumer, present and future” – Deming (1982).
5. “Conformance to requirements” – Crosby (1979).
6. “The total composite product and service characteristics of marketing, engineering, manufacturing and maintenance through which the product and service in use will meet the expectation by the customer” – Feigenbaum (1983) / the first man to write a book with the term “Total Quality” in the title.

On the other hand, reliability, that is the ability of the product to meet the customer requirements over a sustainable period of time, is a key factor along with quality to improved corporate performance.

Prominent developments regarding quality started in 20th century. This century may have been divided into four prominent eras regarding historical evolution of Quality (Management) Systems. These can be categorized as:

ERA	Beginning Date
QUALITY INSPECTION (QI)	1910
QUALITY CONTROL (QC)	1924
QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA)	1950
QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (ISO)	1990
TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM)	1980

Here is the basic definition of ISO 9000:2000 based on 1994 revision standards:

- Quality system standards for management of organizations.
- Product independent (applies to all types of industries and service sectors).
- Used by an organization to develop, implement and improve their quality system.
- Certification provides confidence to the customer that his requirements will be met consistently.

However, we have to acknowledge that there exist many definitions and dimensions of quality, as Foster states (2001, p.p. 4-25):

“A company’s employees very usually perceive quality in many different ways, as their perceptions are quite different, considering its functions, features, attributes and intended results out of its introduction and implementation in the company’s business operations.

So anyone could claim that perceptions affect and influence any aspect of the business world including the quality issue. Therefore, managers have firstly to recognize that different perspectives in perceptions of quality exist, for dealing and communicating more easily and precisely with the issue. Although, this remark seems logical, in practice has been proven difficult to be accepted, as managers have their own perceptions, bias and even self-interests to serve concerning the issue of quality.

Their own perceptions, beliefs and practices concerning quality may even be in contrast with these of customers, suppliers, workers, employees, members of the Board of Directors and other corporate stakeholders groups. Of course, this fact will have negative results on the firm’s competitiveness, organizational performance and market image and position”. This variety of perceptions towards quality leads anyone - the document’s author included - to try to give an aspect of the different quality definitions and/or dimensions.

One of the most known, accepted and frequently used set of quality dimensions has been provided by the work of Garvin (Fall 1984, pp.25-43) as referred in Foster (2001, p.5). In this article Garvin gave the following five definitions of (product) quality:

- Transcendent: Quality is something that is intuitively understood but nearly impossible to communicate clearly, precisely and on a common basis.
- Product-based: Quality is found in the components and attributes of a product.
- User-based: If the customer is satisfied, the product has good quality.
- Manufacturing-based: If the product conforms to design specifications, it has good quality.
- Value-based: If the product is perceived as providing good value for the price, it has good quality.

Then, based on these five definitions, Garvin developed a list of eight quality dimensions, the following:

- Performance: refers to the efficiency with which a product achieves its intended purpose.
- Feature: are attributes of a product that supplement the product's basic performance.
- Reliability: refers to the propensity for a product to perform consistently over its useful design life.
- Conformance: the most traditional definition of quality. When a product is designed, certain numeric dimensions for the product's performance will be established, such as capacity, speed, size, durability, or the like. These numeric product dimensions are referred to as specifications. Specifications typically are allowed to vary a small amount called tolerance. If a particular dimension of a product is within the allowable range of tolerance of the specification, it conforms. The advantage of the conformance definition of quality for products is that it is easily quantified and measurable. The disadvantage is, that it is often difficult for a service to conform to numeric specifications, thus conformance can not cover services as they can not be measured.
- Durability: is the degree to which a product tolerates stress or trauma without failing.
- Serviceability: is the ease of repair of a product. A product is very serviceable if it can be repaired easily and cheaply.

- Aesthetics: are subjective sensory characteristics such as taste, feel, sound, look, and smell. In terms of aesthetics, we measure quality as the degree to which product attributes are matched to consumers' preferences.
- Perceived quality: is based on customer opinion. Quality is as the customer (internal and/or external) perceives it. Customers estimate products and services with their understanding of their goodness. This is perceived quality.

An important remark here is that these above stated different quality dimensions are not mutually exclusive. To the contrary, they can and should be combined for acquiring an integrated and holistic perception and understanding of quality. Secondly, as it is stated in Foster (2001, pp. 6-7), it should be understood that Garvin's list is not exhaustive, as other quality authors have given other lists of additional quality dimensions, such as: Carol King's (1987) - responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, and understanding - and Parasuraman, Zeithamel and Berry's (1984) dimensions of service quality - tangibles, service reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy.

As it has been previously referred, the real problem with having multiple definitions and dimensions of quality rests on making communication and common understanding of the issue very difficult. The solution for any company's senior management may be found in acknowledging that these quality multiple and different definitions and dimensions do exist, thus, a common understanding of quality should be developed and agreed, for sharing a common goal on quality deployment and implementation.

In this way, the company may match its customers' stated requirements and needs by offering them consistently qualitative products and/or services and therefore aiming continuously at achieving improved organizational performance.

As Foster (2001) states, different quality perceptions emerge from the different functional roles that have to be fulfilled by the employees in anyone organization. These functional differences create different perspectives on the quality issue. A solution in this problem can be achieved by adopting the organic view of the organizations, as Foster (2001) suggests.

The organic view of the organization helps to see the organization as an entity of interrelated and interconnected functions, processes, systems, methods and departments

and by this way it may help anyone overcome the differing perceptions on quality held by the different parts of the organization.

The emergence of the process approach may help more in this issue, as communications issues find resolution easier, Foster (2001) believes, as organizational processes become more cross-functional. However, many organizations have found difficult operating effectively cross-functional teams, because poor communication skills among the team members still existed, as aforementioned author refers.

As it was previously referred, there exist different perceptions of quality due to the different functions existing in anyone organization. As Foster (2001) mentions, these different functional perspectives on quality can be categorized as follows:

An Engineering perspective, an Operations perspective, a Strategic Management perspective, a Marketing perspective, a Financial perspective, the Human Resources perspective, the Value-added perspective and the Cultural perspectives on quality.

The interesting point, according to this document's author, is that as there exist so many differing perspectives on quality, the same exist for the businesses too.

Because, as Foster (2001) states in page 25: "businesses differ in key areas such as mission, core competence, customer attributes, target markets, technology deployment, employee knowledge, management style, culture and a myriad of other environmental variables. Contingency theory presupposes that there is no theory or method for operating a business that can be applied in all instances. A coherent quality strategy will need to address these key environmental variables".

And continuing, he stresses the fact that "the contingency approach to quality also helps to settle the different perceptions concerning the definition of quality. By adopting a contingency philosophy, we find that the definitions and dimensions of quality applied within organizations will, and should, vary".

Furthermore, "In an organization that adopts the contingency approach, the dimensions of quality will depend on the environment in which the company operates. This approach provides useful flexibility to managers in pursuing quality".

In concluding in pages 52-53, he advocates that on the quality issue "the successful firms adopt aspects of each of the various approaches that help them improve. This is called the *contingency perspective*. The keys to the contingency approach are an understanding of quality approaches, an understanding of the business, and the creative

application of these approaches to the business. Thus, the optimal strategy will apply quality philosophies and approaches to business on a contingency basis”.

This analysis and his statements may be proven very useful and functional in analyzing and critically evaluating the approach the Greek agro-coops sub-sector adopts in implementing and using the ISO 9000 QMS, which is the main theme of my DBA research project.

Adopting the Contingency approach, as it has been analyzed previously, may help for better perceiving and analyzing the different perspectives, the agro-coops stakeholder groups may have on the issue of my DBA main theme and on the relevant issues posed by the research aims and questions.

Because, as it has been already mentioned (in sections 1 and 2 of the document) the agro-coops’ (key) stakeholders attitudes, beliefs, espoused opinions and real practice are of paramount importance for the effective and efficient use of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops and therefore, may be proven out of the research to constitute a key business factor (either a driver and/or restraint) in the system’s implementation and use in the agro-coops (the identification of those key business factors is a main aim of the research process).

Furthermore, the adoption of the adoption of the Contingency approach in my DBA research process, helps distinguish between the private sector companies of the agro-food industry and the agro-coops, which constitute two separate and different sub-sectors of the agro-food industry, operating under different conditions, in different situations and by having different business “infrastructure”.

The second important feature of the preceding analysis, according to this document’s author, is the mentioning of the Operations perspective on quality. As Foster (2001) refers in page 10, “The operations management view of quality is rooted in the engineering approach”, however, “Operations was the first functional field of management to adopt quality as its own”.

The interesting point, he makes in page 11, is that “Operations management (OM) uses the systems view”, which “systems view involves the understanding that product quality is the result of the interactions of several variables, such as machines, labor, procedures, planning, and management.

Further on, he stresses that: “This systems view focuses on interactions between the various components (i.e., people, policies, machines, processes, and products) that combine to produce a product or service. As he points: “The systems view also focuses management on the system as the cause of quality problems”, which is an important remark, as the document’s author believes.

Because, any system itself is not perfect and understanding this fact may lead to the realization of the necessity of changing current perceptions, attitudes and/or practices toward a quality issue (i.e. the existing practice of the ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation in and use by the Greek agro-coops) and this system’s operation is influenced and affected by a number of internal and external business factors, which have to be identified, analyzed and evaluated during and as an output of my DBA research process. For all these aforementioned reasons, the author of this document considers the adoption of the Open Systems theory approach and its combination with the Contingency theory approach as the most appropriate for the well-progressing of his DBA research theme and project.

3.2 Quality Management System - Quality Control - Quality Assurance

According to ISO 9000:2000 definition, Quality “is the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills requirements”.

One then, could very well ask:

What kind of requirements? And being set by whom?

What do we mean by the term “a set of inherent characteristics”? And to what it refers?

Further to this definition, quality refers to products and services - being such even the organizational processes - that are used for transforming inputs to outputs that is: end products and/or services encompassing the interrelated processes required for this transformation or the end processes that can be seen as an end product and/or service, as Goetch and Davis (2002) and Oakland (2003) state.

This end product/process/service is supposed to be delivered to and “consumed” by customers. Therefore, the requirements are set by them. Moreover by setting their requirements they also define the set of inherent characteristics that fulfills these set

requirements. This set of characteristics refers to the quality of the product/service/process which can be defined, as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) state in page 8 in figure 2.4, as: “the totality of features and characteristics of a product that bear on its ability to satisfy a given need” and this product’s ability can be measured in terms of conformity (function, appearance, other sensory effects, variability) and general reliability (percentage of defectives, stability, mean life, characteristic reliability, failure rate, mean time between failure) and consistency, measures that considered as capable for an organization’s offering a quality product.

If an organization achieves that, then it may claim that it is able to offer products/services:

- That satisfy a customer’s expectations;
- Agrees with the relevant standards and specifications of a contract;
- Is available at competitive prices;
- Is (able to supply products or services) offered at a cost that will bring a profit to that organization.

However, for an organization being able to operate such a “production line” a firm requirement for establishing a management system managing and controlling such a “production process” emerges. This need is fulfilled by the introduction of a Quality management system in the organization’s operational structure.

According to the definition provided by ISO 9000:2000 a Quality Management System is: “a management system to direct and control an organization with regard to quality”. Based on this definition one could claim that an organization’s QMS is, therefore, the organizational structure of responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources for carrying out quality management as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) state.

Therefore, a Quality Management System may be defined as: “an assembly of components, such as the management responsibilities, processes and resources”, as Oakland (2003) defines it.

Further on, an organization having a carefully structured QMS aims to achieve its ultimate goals for Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Control (QC). After achieving these two goals the organization may claim that it is capable of consistently producing

the product/service to the customer's satisfaction and complete fulfillment of his/her requirements.

However, as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) claim in page 6: "to be effective the QMS must be structured to the organization's own particular type of business and should consider all functions such as customer liaison, design, purchasing, subcontracting, manufacturing, training, installation, updating of quality control techniques and the accumulation of quality records. The type of QMS chosen and applied will, of course, vary between one organization and/or business sector and another, depending on the business sector, scope, size, organizational structure and business activities and goals".

This is a clear indication for the need of approaching the Quality and Quality management issues with the use of Contingency Theory.

Furthermore, in addition of being able to produce and offer such a qualitative competitive product, the organization has to be able to prove it to its markets/customers/purchasers. And this fact can only be achieved by getting registered under the ISO 9000 Quality management system which is an internationally acknowledged, recognized and accepted set of quality standards.

As Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) state, registration and certification under ISO 9000 QMS implies and is perceived by customers that an organization applies Quality Control, Internal Quality Assurance and External Quality Control in all its business functions and operations. Then, building on this proof, it may gain confidence in the product, confidence in the supplier and confidence in the purchaser which constitute the (valuable) benefits of an organization for implementing a quality management system.

It is obvious from the preceding analysis that both Quality Control: "part of quality management focused on fulfilling quality requirements" and Quality Assurance: "part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled" - both definitions are derived from ISO 9000:2000 guidelines - are constituting and incorporate elements of a Quality management system aiming at providing confidence in an organization's ability in meeting specified requirements and in satisfying stated needs.

Costs and Benefits of having a Quality Management System

“An effective Quality Management System should be designed to satisfy the purchaser’s conditions, requirements and expectations whilst serving to protect the needs of interested parties (ISO 9004:2000, source: Tricker & Sherring-Lucas, 2001, p.13).

Costs are incurred by implementing quality but they are offset by the saving gained by reduction in scrapped material, rework, defects and the resulting loss of existed and potential customers due to these costs of poor quality/of not having quality.

The main benefits of quality and of the application of a quality management system according to Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001, p.14) are:

- An increased capability to provide a product which consistently conforms to an agreed specification;
- A reduction in administration, manufacturing and production costs because of less wastage and fewer rejects;
- A greater involvement and motivation within an organization workforce;
- Improved customer relationships through fewer complaints, thus increasing sales potential.

Of course, as many quality authors - such as Oakland (2003), Goetch and Davis (2002), Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001), Bank (2000), Foster (2001), Arvanitoyiannis (2001) - believe (and the document’s author agree), all these benefits can be achieved only with the active involvement and participation of all the employees/the workforce in its totality who have to be well informed, trained and educated on quality as well as stimulated, motivated and encouraged to participate actively in every aspect of the organization’s quality system implementation (this is a management of change element, according to this document’s author’s opinion). A deeper analysis of the above mentioned view will be presented in the proceeding paragraphs and sections of the document.

3.3 ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems

This research topic is about the implementation and use of ISO 9000 - an international standard for quality management systems - in the Greek agro-coops.

Webster's II (1988, p.1131) dictionary defines standard as: "something established by authority, custom, or general consent as a model or example" and "something set up and established by authority as a rule for the measure of quality, weight, extent, value, or quality...". Further, Webster's dictionary (1988, p.1131) defines the term standardize as "to compare with a standard, to bring into conformity, to cause to be in agreement with a standard".

We use standards all the time without giving them so much as a thought; in fact, life would be difficult without them. In the business world, standardization is imperative so that any manufacturer in any country can sell its products and/or services without requiring hundreds of location - specific models. The more standard the standard is, that is the more widely accepted and utilized, the better. Widely accepted standards lead to more efficient use of resources for products, more equitable international competition and lower cost to consumers.

On this issue, Goetch and Davis (2002) use the words of W. Edwards Demming (1982 and 1986), stating that the high degree of standardization has made life simpler for all of us, has given us the free national market and to consumers has given lower prices and better quality, more safety, greater availability, prompter exchange and repair service and all the other material advantages of mass production.

All of these, of course, are not to be taken for granted, as they are subject to the proper development and application of any standard under implementation and use.

The most common kind of standard relates to some type of measurement. Another kind of standard has to do with process, how things are done. The most known example is a quality management system conforming to the ISO 9000 standard. Another is an environmental management system conforming to ISO 14000.

These standards deal not with absolutes, but with how the quality or environmental management system is established and introduced and implemented. Unlike the far more common absolute metric standards, ISO 9000 is a generic standard usable by

virtually any organization, large or small, public or private, regardless of product or service provided.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO), a non-governmental organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, has been the standard board since 1947; it was established this year for promoting standards in international trade, communications and manufacturing.

Furthermore, as Goetch and Davis (2002) state, in response to the need to harmonize dozens of national and international quality standards that existed throughout the world in the 1970s and 1980s, ISO formed Technical Committee 176 (TC176), whose objective was to develop a universally accepted set of quality standards.

This became the ISO 9000 series of standards, first released in 1987. ISO 9000 was subsequently given a mild update by TC 176 and was released in 1994. The term “family of standards” was attached to the 1994 version. All organizations certified to ISO 9000 until December 2000 were certified to the 1994 version. After the December 2000 publication of ISO 9000:2000, certifications gradually switched to the new standard.

The rationale of this process is given by ISO info stated in Goetch and Davis (2002):

“A three-year transition period went into effect with the December 2000 publication of ISO 9000:2000. Although, the intent was for organizations to “upgrade” to the new standard as quickly as possible, ISO permitted new registrations to the 1994 standard during the transition period to accommodate organizations which were nearing readiness for certification. Existing (pre-December 2000) ISO 9000:1994 certification retain validity until their next recertification date, no later than December 2003. ISO 9000:1994 certifications issued any time after December 2000 expire on December 31 of 2003. Thereafter, all certifications have to be to ISO 9001:2000”.

Background to the ISO 9001:2000 standard

As many researchers and book authors on the quality issue state (Tricker & Sherring-Lucas, 2001; Goetch and Davis, 2002, included) - there were a lot of gaps in the ISO 9000 first release in 1987, since the standards set was incomplete. The first revision of ISO 9000 in 1994 corrected many of these problems, although the main problem

remained, that is enabling organizations to comply with the systems requirements using the quality certification as a tool but without having to improve their products and/or services and process quality.

Many managers also felt inappropriate to commit an excessive amount of effort, resources-both financial and manpower - and systems to the continuous development of the ISO 9000 quality system. They also believed that the benefits were not repeatable over time, so they sought to avoid re-certification and the accompanying fees and costs (BSI research, presented in Tricker & Sherring-Lucas, 2001).

On the other hand, according to this BSI survey, a growing number of organizations appeared that sought ISO 9000 registration and certification because it was a set requirement by their customers to continue business with them and in turn required their suppliers to register and get certified under ISO 9000 quality standards. At the same time, these organizations besides recognizing and seeking the ISO 9000 registration and certification benefits were able to identify and recognize the system's pitfalls and limitations. Some of these identified drawbacks are (source: Tricker & Sherring-Lucas, 2001, p.97):

- Some organizations did not need to carry out all of the 20 elements making up ISO 9000:1994 in order to be (considered) a quality (certified) organization.
- The standard was too biased towards manufacturing industries and made it difficult for service industries to use.
- ISO 9000:1994 requirements were repeated in other management systems resulting in duplication of effort (e.g. ISO 14001:1998 environmental management and BS 8800:1996 for the management of health and safety).
- according to this document's author's view, in this stated drawback, there exists a hint for seeking possible harmonization and interoperability between quality management, environmental management and health & safety standards - .

The primary objective of this research survey was to produce useful suggestions for making the system's planned new release – that is ISO 9000:2000:

- More compatible with the other management systems.
- More closely associated to business process.
- More easily understood.

- Capable of being used by all organizations, no matter their size, structure, business scope and business industry they are in.
- Capable of used by all types of industries and professions, including both manufacturers and services providers.
- A means of continually improving quality.
- Future proof.

As a matter of fact, the ISO Technical Committee during the revision process considered all these suggestions and included them in a proposed set of draft standards which included:

- Problems found with ISO 9001:1994's 20 element model and its bias towards manufacturing organizations.
- The increased use of the ISO 9000 standards by regulated industries (e.g. telecommunications, aircraft and automotive industries) and the subsequent need for change.
- The proliferation of guideline standards in the current ISO 9000:1994 family (most of which were not fully used!).
- Change user requirements with more emphasis now being on meeting customer requirements.
- The difficulties small businesses were having in trying to meet the requirements of the standards.
- The need to be more compatible with other management system standards such as ISO 14001 for environmental management.
- Incorporation of the ISO 9000 standards into specific sector requirement standards or documents; (a hint of Contingency theory, according to this document's author);
- The adoption of process-oriented management systems and the need to assist organizations in improving their business performance.

(Source: Tricker & Sherring-Lucas, 2001, p.100).

Many users of ISO 9000 shown interest in improving the system and responded to the questionnaires sent to them by the TC 176 ISO with the result of having over 6000 comments on each of the first and second committee drafts, as a TC paper admits.

The results of the survey clearly showed the need for a revised ISO 9000 version, which would/should (source: Tricker & Sherring-Lucas, 2001, p.100):

- Be split, so that one standard (i.e. ISO 9001:2000) should address requirements, whilst another (ISO 9004:2000) would address the gradual improvement of an organization's overall quality performance.
- Be simple to use, easy to understand.
- Only use clear language and terminology (a definite plus for most users of the new version).
- Have a common structure based on a "process model".
- Be capable of being "tailored" to fit all product and service sectors and all sizes of organizations (and not just the manufacturing sector).
- Be capable of demonstrating continuous improvement and prevention of non-conformity.
- Provide a natural stepping stone towards performance improvement.
- Be more oriented towards continual improvement and customer satisfaction.
- Have an increased compatibility with other management system (e.g. ISO 14001).
- Provide a basis for addressing the primary needs and interests of organizations in specific sectors such as aerospace, automotive, medical devices, telecommunications and others.

The survey also showed that the majority of the organizations were finding it difficult to do business in the world marketplace without being ISO 9000 certified. However, at the same it was confusing and stressful for them having three quality standards available for certification and thus the TC ISO decided to include the ISO 9001:1994, 9002:1994 and 1993:1994 into one overall standard (ISO 9001:2000).

They pointed out that the major change was from a "system based" to a more "process based" quality management system, which could improve organizational performance by improving business process, as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) state.

Moreover, besides the adoption of all the aforementioned remarks and results of the survey the new ISO 9000:2000 version is a quality management system and not only a quality assurance and/or control system, but to the contrary as a management system encompasses quality assurance and control and covers more topics.

ISO 9000:2000 represents a fundamental change in approach, and is a major, and needed improvement over the two earlier versions as many quality authors - like Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001); Goetch and Davis (2002); Oakland (2003) - admit.

ISO 9000's evolution has aligned it more closely with the Total Quality Management philosophy. It seemed to many observers, as Goetch and Davis (2002) refer, that the 1987 and 1994 versions deliberately shied away from association with TQM or from even acknowledging it, for avoiding any misunderstandings or false associations by the corporations. Even in the 2000 version, which borrows heavily from TQM, there is no specific mentioning of it.

It is obvious that TC 176 borrowed some elements of TQM for ISO 9000:1987, most notably its documentation requirement, ISO 9000:1994 moved a bit closer to TQM, at least mentioning though not requiring continual improvement. In comparison to these two earlier versions ISO 9000:2000 has made a giant step/leap especially in the area of continual improvement, which has gone from just cursory treatment to being a firm requirement. In addition, the standard now incorporates eight quality management principles that come directly from TQM as Oakland (2003), acknowledges.

These are (adapted from ISO 9000:2000 Guidelines, as referred in Goetch and Davis, 2002):

1. Customer focus - understanding their needs, striving to exceed their expectations
2. Leadership - establishing direction, unity of purpose, and a supporting work environment.
3. Involvement of people - ensuring that all employees, at all business levels and managerial layers, are able to fully use their abilities for the organization's benefit.
4. Process approach - recognizing that all work is done through processes and managed accordingly
5. System approach to management - expands on the previous principle in that achieving any objective requires a system of interrelated processes.
6. Continual improvement - as a permanent organizational objective, recognizing and acting on the fact that no process is so good that further improvement is impossible.

7. Factual approach to decision making - acknowledging that sound decisions must be based on analysis of factual data and information.
8. Mutually beneficial supplier relationship - system can be found in such relationship.

Five of these principles (1, 2, 3, 6 and 7) are also principles listed in the primary eleven TQM principles as shown in Table 2 (see Chapter 13, p.145), where a comparison between the ISO 9000:2000 QMS principles, TQM principles and Deming's 14 points is been presented (source: Goetch and Davis, 2002).

The other three (4, 5 and 8) are also part of the TQM philosophy, the whole of which is now embedded to some degree in ISO 9000:2000.

ISO considers the major changes in the revised standard to be, as Goetch and Davis (2002) refer:

- Increased focus on top management commitment
- Customer satisfaction
- Emphasis on processes
- Continual improvement

All of these are fundamental to Total Quality Management. However, everybody has to understand that an organization can be certified to ISO 9000 QMS without fully adopting TQM. But for those departments of the organization subject to the standard, the TQM alignment will now be clear, especially if ISO 9004:2000 features (which are close to the TQM philosophy), are truly followed and applied.

As a result of ISO 9000, TC 176 and many authors - like Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001); Goetch and Davis (2002); Oakland (2003); Arvanitoyiannis (2000); Arvanitoyiannis (2001) - believe that any organization supplying products or services is able to develop and employ a quality management system that is recognized by customers worldwide. Customers around the world who deal with ISO 9000 QMS registered organizations can expect that purchased goods and services will conform to a set of standards they recognize.

OBJECTIVE OF ISO 9000 QMS

Originally, as it was mentioned before, the reason for creating ISO 9000 was to replace ‘dozens’ of national and international quality standard with one family of standards universally recognized and accepted and therefore use worldwide as ISO guidelines state. The objective of the original ISO 9000 standards was to enable organizations to consistently produce products and services that met the requirements of customers and lived up to the organization’s stated intentions.

Since its initial release in 1987, however and as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001); Goetch and Davis (2002) recognize, the objectives have been broadened to the point that with the 2000 release, the objectives include consistence in products meeting customers and regulatory requirements, and having systems that address customers’ satisfaction, continual improvement and prevention of nonconformity.

All these are in contrast to the post reacting objective of correction of nonconformity practice that the earlier ISO 9000 versions addressed and the suggestive nature of continual improvement that the earlier versions had adopted.

The emphasis on customer satisfaction, continual improvement and prevention of nonconformity are new with ISO 9000:2000 and the aims of ISO 9000:2000 also include the adoption, by its registered organizations, of a quality management system that is approaching Total Quality Management.

In ISO’s own words, as presented in Goetch and Davis (2002): “The primary aim of the “consistent pair [ISO 9001 and ISO 9004] is to relate modern quality management to the process and activities of an organization, including the promotion of continual improvement and achievement of customer satisfaction”.

Also, ISO lists an ISO 9000 objective as being a “natural stepping stone toward Total Quality Management” (Goetch and Davis, (2002)).

Ultimately the objective of ISO 9000 is that any organization, whether large or small, public or private, regardless of what it does, can (by using the management practices set by the standard): 1) deliver consistently products and services that meet the requirements of its customers and (2) improve continually the processes that affect its product and/or service quality.

SCOPE OF ISO 9000 QMS

ISO describes the scope of ISO 9000, as referred by Goetch and Davis (2002), as follows: "...ISO 9001 specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organization: a) needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable regulatory requirements, and b) aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable regulatory requirements".

The scope of ISO 9000 includes any organization wishing to be certified to the standard. Within the certified organization, the scope extends to any department or activity that can have an impact on the quality of the product and/or service.

In a practical sense this includes all departments and activities, a fact that aligns ISO 9000:2000 QMS closer to TQM philosophy and practice, as it requires the cross-functional and cross-departmental interrelation of all business processes of an organization and subsequently dictates indirectly that these processes should be constantly and continually improved, for the quality management system to be and maintained always effective and efficient and therefore useful for the organization applying it, as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) and Goetch and Davis (2002) believe.

Due to its international acknowledgement and business sectors' pervasiveness, more than 350,000 organizations worldwide are registered to ISO 9000 QMS. At least 60 percent of them are in Europe, 10 percent in North America/USA and the majority of the rest can be found in the Far East Countries (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan) and Australia & New Zealand. Organizations from all business sectors are registered and the percentages are as follows:

Manufacturing=70%, Services=15%, Wholesale trade=80%, Transportation=4%, Construction=1% and All others =2% (statistical data from ISO, Geneva, Switzerland as presented by Goetch and Davis (2002)).

RATIONALE FOR ISO 9000 QMS CERTIFICATION

The most often stated rationale for seeking registration and certification of ISO 9000 is “keeping our customers”. No organization is forced to introduce and implement ISO 9000, although customer pressure, the major impetus for certification in developed economies (as research data shows and bibliography indicates on many works on the quality issue), can be sufficient to cause some organization to decide they must conform to the standard.

Despite the fact that developing a conforming and accepted quality management system requires considerable effort and expense, the amount of which depends upon many factors, including the size of the organization and its current quality management status, there seem to emerge a lot of underlying reasons for motivating corporations to seek registration and certification under ISO 9000 QMS.

Some of these reasons may be inappropriate, like the use of ISO 9000 merely to be used in an organization’s advertising campaign; while customer pressure can be justified a hundred percent only if the organization finds itself in a do or die situation like Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001); Goetch and Davis (2002); Oakland (2003); Arvanitoyiannis (2001) emphatically state.

However, as these aforementioned authors continue, for the majority of the organizations, the rationale for introducing and implementing ISO 9000 QMS should include not only the above mentioned reasons but one and/or more of the following reasons, which will be presented, examined, analyzed and critically evaluated in the following sections of the document:

- To improve product and/or service quality and its consistency.
- To improve organizational performance through better management of processes (mainly) and resources.
- To have a quality management system that will be recognized by customers worldwide for reasons of product and/or service quality assurance, safety, reliability and consistency.

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH OF THE ISO 9000:2000 QMS RELEASE

As it has been mentioned before, fundamental philosophical-conceptual changes have been introduced into ISO 9000 with the 2000 release. ISO 9000 is now closely aligned with TQM. The standard is now designed around a “process approach” to management. ISO has stated: “For organizations to function, they have to define and manage numerous inter-linked processes. Often the output from one process will directly form the input of/into the next process. The systematic identification and management of the various processes employed within an organization, and particularly the interactions between such processes, maybe referred to as the “process approach” to management. The revised quality management system standards [2000 release] are based on just such a process approach, in line with the guiding quality principles”, as Goetch and Davis (2002) refer.

This document’s author believes that, as a consequence of this new ISO 9000 version approach, the following elements should be considered as of increased importance for the effective and efficient introduction and implementation of ISO 9000 QMS, as well as for the continuous improvement of the applied quality management system, in any company regardless its size, industry sector, business scope and activities, type of legal entity and geographic location:

Continual improvement of business processes, increased emphasis on the role of the senior management, consideration of legal and regulatory requirements, establishment of measurable objectives for all relevant business functions and managerial levels, monitoring of customers’ satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction as a measure of system performance, increased attention to resource availability, determination of employees’ training effectiveness, measurements extended to system, processes, and product, and analysis of collected data on the performance of the QMS.

QUALITY PROCESS / THE PROCESS APPROACH OF ISO 9000 QMS

According to the definition of ISO 9000:2000, a Quality Process is: “a set of interrelated or interfacing activities which transform inputs into outputs”, as Tricker and Sherring-Lucas (2001, p.63) refer. As a matter of fact this definition holds for the term process too, provided that the word quality is, as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001, p.64) state: “Any activity that receives inputs and converts them to outputs can be considered as a process”.

It is very usually the output from one process to form and represent the input from the very next process. Therefore, a series of interrelated processes form the wholeness of an organization’s business activities and practices. As a consequence, for all organizations to function effectively and efficiently, they (will) have to manage, audit and at the end improve numerous interrelated and interlinked process. This systematic and continuous managing and auditing of the business processes and the resulted interactions between them in any organization is referred to as the “process approach”.

The process model emphasized in ISO 9000:2000 is realized, by anyone organization, by the interactions of the processes taking place between its four major sections - that is: management responsibility, resource management, product realization (through which the customers’ requirements are evaluated by the top management).

These three managerial-operational functions, combined with the resources provided by the top management, form the inputs, which through the applied business processes are transformed to outputs, whose conformity to standards, consistency, reliability and quality (in total) are perceived and evaluated by the customers, and finally collected as feedback by the top management, through the fourth function of measurement, analysis and improvement.

This process model seems similar to the model of quality and (indirectly) process improvement, originally adopted and formulated by Demming (1982): the “Plan, Do, Check, Act” model, which is overwhelmingly adopted by many quality gurus, such as J.S.Oakland (1993, 1994, 2003), who qualifies this model as the best for continuous process improvement and consequently quality improvement.

It seems to be an endless spiral of continuous effort for achieving improved business processes and operations, which ultimately (and normally) may lead to improved business performance as Oakland states in his books “Total Quality Management.” (2003) and “Total Organizational Excellence” (2001).

It should be emphasized here, that in all quality gurus’ books and articles, as well as in ISO 9000:2000 section 5.1 - Management commitment -, is stated that “top management shall provide evidence of the Quality Management System and continually improving its effectiveness”.

Furthermore, Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001); Goetch and Davis (2002); Oakland (2003) are all supporting the view (not wrongly to this document’s authors’ view) that in ISO 9000:2000 QMS, core business - primary and secondary supporting - processes are all used in an identical way to define how resources and business activities - that is inputs - are combined, controlled and ultimately converted/transformed to outputs delivered to the end customers (being internal and/or external ones) at any stage of the continuous “production” process in any organization.

To be more specific, some definitions and explanations of these above mentioned processes will be given, based on the work of Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001, p.p.66-67). The Core Business Process refers to the end to end business activities involved in producing a product/service of finished which is delivered to the final consumer. It commences with the stating of the corporate policy and ends when the product/service is marketed.

This core business process needs to be supported by a number of supporting process (primary and secondary) which are required for providing the infrastructure of activities needed for the successful production/transformation of the whole series from “raw” inputs to “deliverable/finished” outputs.

It is obvious that the only way for any organization to ensure qualitative and useful products and/or services, some sort of quality control and quality assurance should prevail in and around all organizational functions and levels. This leads to the interconnection of all core business processes through the parallel implementation of a series of supporting activities/primary and secondary processes that cross out the

wholeness of the organization (its functions, departments, levels, operations and processes).

For being fully and clearly understood “the what and how” of the process implementation to all stakeholders involved in an organization’s processes implementation, a documentation for each core business process is required stating: its objective - what the process aims to achieve, what it covers/its scope and the person who is responsible as “owner” to implement/execute it, by using the required relevant quality procedures and work instructions that are part of the whole quality program of the organisation.

More specifically, ISO 9000:2000 QMS-Guidelines set for performance improvement provides guidance on the processes that are required and/or continual improvement of them, which is also an element of the Total Quality Management philosophy and ultimately customers’ satisfaction which is another major target of TQM. This set of guidelines is generic and applicable to all organizations regardless of their type, size and product/service produced and is based on the provisions of the ISO 9004:1994 series.

As a consequence of the two common main goals that the two systems - ISO 9000 QMS and TQM - are targeting at, it is obvious that ISO 9004:2000 is aimed at improving an organization’s overall quality and business processes performance for resulting to organizational performance excellence, while at the same time it provides a stepping stone to Total Quality Management (TQM).

The new series ISO 9004:2000 provide that: “ISO 9004:2000 is designed to go beyond quality management requirements and provide organizations with guidelines for performance improvement through sustained customer satisfaction. In doing so it:

- Provides guidance to management on the application and use of a QMS to improve an organization’s overall performance.
- Is recommended as a guide for organizations whose management wishes to move beyond the minimum requirements of ISO 9001, in pursuit of continuous organizational performance improvement. ISO 9004 is not intended as guidance for compliance with ISO 9001.

- Defines the minimum QMS requirements needed to achieve customer satisfaction by meeting specified product requirements.
- Can be also used by an organization to demonstrate its capability to meet customer requirements.

Source: ISO 9004:2000 Guidelines.

It is very obviously stated that ISO 9004:2000 is not a guideline for implementing ISO 9001 and is not intended for certification, regulatory or contractual use. To the contrary, it is intended to serve as a guideline for an organization achieving continual process improvement, which may lead to improved organizational performance if a never-ending improvement spiral, like the Demming's PDCA cycle, is adopted and implemented consistently and effectively, as Goetch and Davis (2002) admit.

However, it is interesting that the ISO 9004:2000 guidelines do not specify or give an indication on the required infrastructure that an organization should possess or acquire for implementing effectively and efficiently / achieving this continual improvement of its business processes. To the contrary, in a Total Quality Management System applied in any one organization these requirements are specified by the system itself in its generic provisions, which will be presented in the following section of the document.

3.4 Continual Improvement as a part of the QMS

One of the cornerstones of Total Quality Management is the concept of continuous improvement. Its evolution as a concept and basic element of quality management can be traced back in the origins of Total Quality management movement after World War Two. It was firstly and very successfully taught to and exercised by the Japanese industry, which, based on Deming's (1950's) and Juran's (1951) ideas alongside with Feigenbaum's (1951) notion of using statistical techniques for improving designs, products and processes, entered in the world market arena in early 1950's and dominated it from the beginnings of 1970s and on with worth noting success. After the 1980s, the western organizations have attributed the root cause of the Japanese industry's business success to the concept of continual improvement (Oakland, 2003).

Today, as world markets and businesses are becoming incorporated in the global economy with an increasing pace and accept through the trade agreements - signed in the World Trade Organization - the consequent removal of many artificial trade barriers and the abandonment by the side of developed countries of many agricultural products' trade subsidies, it becomes a surviving requirement for all companies to increase their business operations and processes' effectiveness and efficiency.

More specifically, all companies are required to produce products upgraded in terms of quality and safety and with fewer costs if they wish to remain competitive and ultimately "alive" in the world business arena.

As Goetch & Davis (2002) suggest, this more-with-less trend is likely to become permanent and dominant in the forthcoming years, therefore continual improvement of business processes and operations with the ultimate goal of improving organizational performance and as a result corporate competitiveness should be considered as the only viable means and approach of doing business / operating in every organization.

In the first version of ISO 9000 in 1987, the continual improvement concept was not addressed and mentioned at all. In the 1994 ISO 9000 version, as a first sign of changing this attitude, one of the guideline documents, ISO 9004-4-1993, consideration, needless to say requirement of the ISO 9000 QMS.

Nevertheless, in the late 2000 version, continual improvement took a focus position in the ISO 9000 QMS and becomes now a required commitment of every organization for claiming, that it adopts and implements effectively and efficiently an ISO 9000 Quality Management System with the ultimate goal of remaining successfully active in the world markets. As Goetch and Davis state (2000, p.604): "Continuous improvement is fundamental to success in the global marketplace. Companies that are just maintaining the status quo in such key areas as quality, new product development, the adoption of new technologies, and process performance are like a runner who is standing still in a race. Competing in the global marketplace is like competing in the Olympics. Last year's records are sure to be broken this year. Athletes who don't improve continually are not likely to remain long in the winner's circle".

The same is true of companies that must compete globally. ISO 9000:2000 has embraced continual improvement and put it in the central stage of the system by stating

in the quality policy section (the heart, soul and consciousness of any quality management system) that any organization has to commit itself to just two things: one is to comply with the requirements and the other is to become fully committed to and exercise continual improvement. Moreover, in clause 0.2, ISO 9000:2000 lists the eight quality management principles, one of which is Continual Improvement (clause 5.3).

To be more specific, the ISO 9000 firstly requires the organization firstly to continually improve quality management system/QMS effectiveness (clause 4.1). Then in clause 5.1, the organization's senior management team is required to provide evidence of its commitment to continual improvement of the QMS. The last section of the standard requirements, clause 8.5, requires the organization to continually improve the QMS that it applies (clause 8.5.1). In addition to all the above mentioned, clause of the ISO 9000 set of standards, the Introduction clause 0.2 of all three documents, ISO 9000, 9001 and 9004, point out the importance of continual improvement: first in ISO 9000: "Continual improvement of the organization's overall performance should be a permanent objective of the organization"; moreover, in ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 9004:2000: "When used within a quality management system, [the process] approach emphasizes the importance of continual improvement of processes based on objective measurement.

But to be true, although the incorporation of continual improvement of ISO 9000:2000 QMS as a firm requirement is welcomed by many persons involved in the quality business sector - especially the Total Quality Management proponents - it is less enthusiastically accepted by many firms registered under ISO 9000:2000.

The reason for this is that the incorporation of continual improvement and the other TQM principles - such as: customer focus, leadership and top management commitment, process approach and the active involvement of an empowered workforce by training and informing it on all quality issues plus the required use of quality tools (such as the statistical tools) and the proposed, although required by definition, transformation to a knowledge organization for better implementing the requirement(s) of Continual Improvement concept, set by the QMS itself, makes the whole concept of continual improvement to be accepted and embraced very hesitantly and difficult by all organizations registered under ISO 9000:2000 QMS, especially those whose corporate culture does not involve elements of organizational change and development in it.

But, anyone organization that will not really develop and implement the ISO 9004:2000 guidelines for performance improvement will find itself in a very difficult position, as its future prospects of enhancing its competitiveness will erode. In the words of the standard, which is generic and planned with the overall aim of being applicable to all organizations, regardless of the type, size and the product/service provided.

In the words of the standard, “ISO 9004:2000 is designed to go beyond quality management requirements and provide organizations with guidelines for performance improvement through sustained customer satisfaction”, source: ISO 9000:2000 Guidelines, adapted from Goetch and Davis (2002). In doing so it:

- provides guidance to management on the application and use of a QMS to improve an organization’s overall performance;
- is recommended as a guide for organizations whose management wishes to move beyond the minimum requirements of ISO 9001 in pursuit of increased performance improvement ISO 9004 is not intended as guidance for compliance with ISO 9001;
- defines the minimum QMs requirements needed to achieve customer satisfaction by meeting specified product requirements.

The concept of continual improvement becomes an imperative for all organizations, as it aims at offering/providing to anyone organization improved business processes by referring to greater suitability, increased longevity, enhanced reliability production and delivery fastness and even better appearance of a product (Goetch and Davis, 2002).

Process improvements refer by this way to the processes that produce the product and/or service and are making the product better, as it becomes easier to produce, the possibility for errors is eliminated, consistency is ensured and as a consequence of all these mentioned facts production and business costs are reduced, through the avoidance of waste, defective goods and/or services, usefulness and unproductive processes and by replacing corrective action with preventive action, which incurs by it lower cost in comparison to the ones incurred by corrective action.

Because as Deming (1982 & 1986) put it: “Chain reaction Improve quality ,what happens? Your costs go down. That is one of the main lessons that the Japanese learned and that American management doesn’t even know about and couldn’t care less about”, as referred in Walton (1986, p.25).

The fact is that by setting up the processes - people, tools, culture, organization structure and systems - for achieving improved organizational performance on a continual basis becomes easier and more possible, thus permitting to the organization to survive and complete successfully in the present turbulent business times and global world markets

But before we go on the issue of continual process improvement, it is important to define and expand on the term improvement, as well as on the sub-terms continual improvement and breakthrough improvement - which will be presented in subsequent paragraphs and sub-sections referring to Total Quality Management, Business Process Reengineering, and Process Management and Improvement, as well as in the Management of Change section - and compare all of them with and distinguish them from the term maintenance. Because, all these terms and issues are very inter-related with the issue of management of change, in which, quality issues authors (Foster, 2001; Goetch and Davis, 2002; Oakland, 2003) incorporate any business process improvement - small or big, planned and incremental or emergent and breakthrough, a product of voluntarism or a product of determinism - and refer to it as a product and natural consequence of the change management process in anyone organization.

First of all, the term maintenance occurs when a process has merely been returned to its normal performance. More specifically, when a process's performance deteriorates and is then restored to its historic performance level, no improvement has occurred in the process's capability. Maintenance is very important and is an essential element of any organization and in a sense it is the ancestor of continual improvement, as it was and still is a basic element of Quality Control and Quality Assurance systems.

Because as Juran said (attributed to Juran by Deming (1982 and 1986) in Walton (1986, p. 67)): "Putting out fires is not improvement. Finding a point out of control, finding the special cause and removing it, is only putting the process back where it was in the first place. It is not improvement of the process". Source: Goetch and Davis (2002).

But in this way, anyone can expect that these processes will experience the same problems in the future, since nothing was done to eliminate the root causes of the problems, the only tested safe way of not experiencing poor process performance in any business activity any organization and/or even a person is engaged in.

4. ISO 9000 QMS IMPLEMENTATION AND USE – RESEARCH STUDIES AND SURVEYS AND ELEMENTS OF THEORY

4.1 ISO Research Surveys and Theory

As ISO reports, the number of registered firms worldwide approaches the number of 400,000. One of the principal factors driving companies' registration and certification under ISO 9000 QMS is customer pressure. As the majority of the larger corporations are registered and certified, they then demand from their suppliers to become certified. As these supplier firms become, by need or will, certified in turn press their own suppliers to seek ISO 9000 registration and this leads to a non-end cycle a very common in business environment as Foster (2001), and Goetch and Davis (2002) believe.

Not all the pressure comes from the private sector corporations. Seemingly, the public sector requires the ISO 9000 registration and certificate as an absolute prerequisite and proof for allowing organizations participating in public contracts contests.

The global market place is rapidly becoming obsessed with the requirement of any company having a certified and internationally recognized quality management system for being permitted to do business worldwide and locally as well. This fact proves that ISO 9000 QMS is considered as a management tool "bearing in its baggages" the potentiality for the continuous enhancement of competitiveness by firstly improving business processes.

As Goetch and Davis (2002) present, a survey of North American (USA and Canada) firms registered to ISO 9000:1994, conducted by Quality System Update and the management consulting firm Deloitte and Touche, found that the investment costs required for the firm's registration under ISO 9000:1994 is typically repair in three years, a very short payback time for any kind of investment incurred by any company.

Furthermore, the respondents to the survey listed the following factors / issues as the major internal business benefits of ISO 9000 registration: Better documentation which leads to process improvement, positive cultural change, greater quality awareness and higher perceived quality of product and/or service by all customers (internal and external) which was listed as the most important and valuable benefit.

On the other hand, many organizations reported that the decision to become an ISO 9000 certified company was a difficult one, as they considered ISO registration too costly and too much work requiring, while the anticipated benefits were not assured and well known due to a lack of understanding and knowledge about the system and its proclaimed benefits, besides of using it as an advertising/marketing tool and as a requirement for participating in public works / projects contests.

Nevertheless, as time goes by, it is becoming an imperative in any company's knowledge of the business environment, that no other quality management system can provide a universally recognized and accepted accreditation such as the ISO 9000 QMS certificate.

The point is, that if any company decides to become registered and certified under ISO 9000 QMS, for gaining the anticipated benefits that the above mentioned survey showed - process improvement, cultural change and organizational development - the unwavering commitment of the top management is required as a prerequisite for the successful introduction of the QMS and the following and anticipated effective and efficient development, implementation and use of it.

In any book on Total Quality Management, it is stressed by all authors that the main thing required for the successful implementation and development of the system is the absolute and undoubtable commitment of top management and the other key stakeholders, therefore leadership is required for its effective and efficient development. This holds true for ISO 9000 QMS, as the same business factors are involved: money, labor, training, appropriate systems and corporate culture combined with the impetus for becoming an ever improving organization by becoming a learning organization.

Only the highest levels of any company's management (including all the key stakeholder groups) can make the necessary commitments on these matters guided by the personal will and example of an organization's resources - financial, systems, human, machines & materials, methods, structure, culture - to the common corporate objective, that is the effective and efficient introduction and implementation of any quality management system.

4.2 Greek and International Research Studies and Surveys

Beyond the certification under ISO 9000: on the introduction and implementation of ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems and their results

Summary

It is accepted by many specialists that the ISO 9000 standards are and/or could be used as an appropriate set of “management tools” for helping the improvement of the effectiveness and efficiency of a company’s business operation.

These standards also incorporate the basic elements for exercising an effective & efficient operational control inside the company. Unfortunately however, there are a lot of cases in both the Greek as well as in the international business environments, where companies use the ISO 9000 standards just and absolutely as a “marketing tool” by emphasizing on the registration process solely rather than on implementing the basic elements that the ISO 9000 standards involve and contain.

For achieving this short-term and short-minded aim, these companies are trying to cooperate very often with these external consultants or registration agencies/bodies that will facilitate by any means the process of registration and certification under ISO 9000 QMS of these companies.

Nevertheless, there exists another body of quality specialists who do not agree with neither of the above stated beliefs, that the ISO 9000 standards may be used as best “management tools” or “marketing tools”. This team supports the view that the ISO 9000 standards is a fad with a “best before” date which has fascinated the business world, but in real terms it only contributes to the operating income growth of the registration bodies - agencies and consulting companies. According to their view, the ISO 9000 standards are nothing more than “the required necessary documentation/registration/certification of the existence in the company of the required processes, (required) plans and (required) systems for having quality”.

What are really the ISO 9000 standards? And, what have they really offered to the quality issue? Is the ISO 9000 QMS a modern “management tool” or is it just an excuse for the certification bodies and the external consultants in their effort for proving “old” production processes wrong? What are the real benefits, problems, advantages and

disadvantages experienced by the corporations introducing and implementing the ISO 9000 QMS? What are the drivers and constraints - internal and/or external - affecting the system's effective implementation and efficient use by the certified companies?

All these questions were tried to be answered by international and Greek research studies concerning the ISO 9000 QMS use and implementation in registered and certified companies - mainly under ISO 9000:1994 QMS, since the new version's/ISO 9000:2000 started in 2000 and companies were left to get registered till the end of 2003, therefore it does not exist yet the appropriate time for conducting any research on the system's new version implementation and the experienced by the companies relative results - and their stakeholders' views, beliefs, attitudes, practices and experiences toward and from the quality system implementation and use in their companies.

Some findings of such research studies will be presented in this section of the document. The source of these research studies and surveys' data and findings, are the Proceedings of the International Quality Forum of 1998 and the Proceedings of the 2nd Conference of 1998 on Competitiveness and Quality of the Food Industry, both held in Athens, while this document's author's opinion on these research studies and surveys' findings is expressed throughout the deployment of this section of the document.

According to this document's author, the presented positive as well as negative results of the ISO 9000 Quality Management System's implementation, as experienced, ratified and justified by the research findings may be considered a rational outcome of the systems' use; for unanimously positive feelings, attitudes, behaviors, practices and experiences are not and have never been encountered in any management system's introduction and deployment in the business environment and world.

Moreover, these identified research outcomes – both positive and negative – seem to relate to the ones referred in the bibliography as presented in the previous pages 43 and 44, as well as in other pages of this document, e.g. pages: 30, Section 5/pages 54-57.

Furthermore, as these research findings refer to corporations of the private sector of different countries, they could be used also as a good benchmarking basis for comparison with and critical evaluation of the findings that will emanate from my own Research project, since all these research projects (including my DBA one, too) refer to

the investigation and critical analysis and evaluation of the implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS in various sectors' enterprises.

The point is that they refer to different sub-sectors, i.e. private sector enterprises and agricultural cooperatives sector. In this way, it is intended and hoped by this DBA project researcher, that an indirect and not completely accurate (taken into consideration the different settings of the researches) - but nevertheless, fair enough - estimation and evaluation of the influence that the differing business frameworks and settings may or may not have on the implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS (see the Working Hypothesis of this Document – Section 1) may be achieved by comparing the results of my DBA project research with that of the researches under reference.

Generally

In recent years/time almost all business and technical magazines and newspapers publish extensive articles on the ISO 9000 standards. In a way, it seems that these quality standards represent the key word of the last decade. The compliance with the standard represents an internationally accepted system for the establishment and maintenance of strict methods and processes concerning/referring to the quality assurance issue. Enterprises of any size and industry sector, both of public and private ownership, are using these quality standards/ISO 9000 as the basic elements and guiding principles for the development, improvement and auditing of the quality (management) system they are applying.

Moreover, in many European countries and Far East countries (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan) as well as in USA, Canada and Australia the registration of the applied quality system, that is the ISO 9000, has been established by many customers- corporations as well as persons - as an estimating and auditing tool/proof of the quality level of their prospect suppliers. In other cases, the registration is accepted as an alternative method for the various field audits that a supplier customer should have realized/made for assuring its customers of its products and/or services level of quality.

Since 1989, a growing interest for the ISO 9000 standards has been observed. From the early nineties (1990s), the companies have begun to evaluate the real value of their conformance to the standards. From the mid nineties the results of research studies,

conducted internationally, have begun to shadow the so-proclaimed benefits/advantages of the registration. In 1994 the valid magazine “Industry Week” referred to the forthcoming of the registration.

In recent time, an important number of well-known companies with a tradition in quality issues as well as teams of specialists on quality issues begun to state their objections and doubts concerning the view that the ISO 9000 standards are an optimum “management tool”, which helps to the improvement of the business processes and the effective and efficient implementation of a company’s business operations.

As they argue, registration by itself is not always desirable or necessary. Very recently in Greek bibliography too, there have been some references to the degradation of the registration and certification process under ISO 9000 and to the fact that there have been observed internationally “major deviations” - concerning the ISO 9000 quality standards - in the implementation of the different quality systems, with the result of endangering the validity and the image of the registration processes and procedures and consequently the whole investment program for the introduction, implementation and use of the standards, a fact that should at least be taken seriously by all the parties that are involved in, affected by and using the quality systems.

The ISO-mania

In 1992, there were a lot of people that supported the view that the ISO 9000 registration and certification was the antidote to the exports decline, the low rate of the Greek products competitiveness and (to) the sales and profits decrease experienced by the Greek companies. During the last decade, ISO 9000 was (and still is) considered by many people in Greece as the only valid proof of high quality.

There existed a lot of publications, technical and business ones, referring to the “ISO 9000 quality assurance standards”, “the ISO 9000 safety standards of the European market”, “products been produced under the safety, health and quality standards ISO 9000 approved by the EU” and so on. Some companies started to reprint the ISO 9000 trademark in their products packaging and labeling, marketing it as a quality guarantee and as a proof of implementing continuous and strict control.

Some companies, even before they have started the registration process for the ISO 9000 quality system, have printed the trademark “ISO 9000 pending” on their trucks, other transport means and printed material. All the above mentioned facts point out that the ISO 9000 QMS could be and actually was and still is used as a sales and marketing tool and flag temporarily and occasionally only.

At the same period, in the majority of the Greek economic and business newspapers and magazines, there appeared articles stating the Greek products’ competitiveness is decreasing continuously and only registration and certification under ISO 9000 set of standards could reverse this trend.

This ISO-mania has been sovereign in many developed and developing countries. The ISO 9000 standards have been connected with and related to business power, mighty and international trade sovereign. These standards have been considered as the optimum “management tools”, while the registration and certification process under ISO 9000 has been considered as an “official registration and auditing” that the company operates effectively and efficiently and is managed in a “qualitative way”.

In England, “at least one out of ten employees is operating in the framework of a certified quality system. More than 2,000,000 employees are based on the ISO 9000 set of standards for guidance in their jobs/work tasks, operations and processes”, as it is referred in an article of “Quality Progress” (1998).

Internationally the desire for obtaining an ISO 9000 certification has led many companies to seek the “easy road” for being successfully registered under ISO 9000 QMS; that is not really adopting the requirements needed for passing the certification audit, but instead using external advisors for assuring the certification test even if they do not fulfill the stated requirements of the quality management system. As it has been reported in the ASQ’s 52nd Annual Quality Conference in England (1998), although the number of corporations seeking ISO 9000 QMS registration and certification is increasing every year, there exists a serious inconsistency between the requirements of the system’s use and development and the observed results of its implementation by the researched corporations.

In an article of the “Quality Progress” magazine (1998), it has been referred that this degradation of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and the system’s misunderstanding

and misuse by the interested companies is interrelated with their adoption of the system “soft” elements and the negligence of the “hard” elements like “quantitative methodology”. By the term “soft quality” the article refers to the special emphasis placed on human relations, staff/human resources management, communication processes, customer handling and relations, organizational behavior etc.

The author of the article considers all these elements as important and necessary for the system’s implementation and development. But on the other hand, he criticizes the majority of the companies for having neglected the quantitative methods (e.g. SPC) required for controlling, testing and measuring the quality system’s deployment and improvement process.

It is noteworthy, that the most important factor for any company seeking registration and certification under ISO 9000 QMS is the existing and/or the potential interest for the content of this set of quality standards. This international trend has been confirmed and verified by a recent research survey conducted among the certified under ISO 9000 QMS companies in Greece.

Despite the already existed knowledge and experience on the system’s requirements and implementation needs, there exist a substantial number of misunderstandings concerning the system’s implementation process and its intended and expected outputs.

As the aforementioned International Quality Forum’s participants (1998, Athens, Greece) state, the senior management in many greek companies seems to be oriented and requiring short-term results and the staff concerned and held accountable for the system’s implementation are pursuing very often these short-term benefits; this is in contrast to the prevailing logic existed behind the system’s planning and nature, which emphasizes long-term results through continual incremental process improvement.

It seems that these executives are having and pursuing objectives that the ISO 9000 quality management system, by its nature, is unable to fulfill and satisfy. These forecasted - “superficial” - objectives and goals of the management executives start with the required by them instant production and operating costs reduction, the substantial real production control and expand to corporate products competitiveness improvement, strategic development and organizational restructuring.

These executives seem not comprehending that all these corporate goals can not be achieved instantly and only by the quality system's introduction. It is rather a process of the system's continuous deployment and implementation according to its pre-set requirements which have to be fulfilled by the company's provision. The company itself has to create and provide these operational prerequisites and the required business environment for improving these core business processes needed for fulfilling and satisfying any of its customer's need's and set requirements.

According to the preceding analysis it should be obvious to and understood by all managers and interested parties that the business processes and operations improvement is gradual and continuous. It is not observed instantly and directly, but it develops and evolves/progress with time. Even in such breakthrough change programs, like BPR, an adequate period of time is required for the new set of business processes to get introduced, accepted, adopted, installed and deployed.

Unless, any change program of business processes, operations, practices and organizational behavior and structure becomes incorporated in the corporate mentality and culture and accepted by the company's members in an inadequate time framework and be in a continuous dynamic situation/condition of successive and continuous improvement, it will not have its desired and intended results.

Besides these above stated misunderstandings of senior management executives concerning the ISO 9000 intended use and implementation, there exist enough indications, from research surveys conducted in several countries supporting the fact that the organizations which apply an ISO 9000 quality management system "enjoy" better operational results than these which do not and/or in comparison to their own previous business state. On the other hand, these research surveys confirm the system's implementation drawbacks and misunderstandings identified in the previous paragraph.

In an initial survey conducted in 1995-97 - as it is referred by Petroheilou (1998) in the Proceedings of the 2nd Conference on Competitiveness and Quality of the Food Industry held in Athens, Greece - and concerning the reasons the Greek companies are pursuing the ISO 9000:1994 registration and certification the main reasons were: for Marketing purposes -42%, due to their Customers' pressure and demands -30%-, senior management decision and request -24%-, and other reasons -4%-.

Besides these mainly external and unrelated to the internal organizational operations' goals, the outputs identified and referred as enjoyed benefits of the internal organizational performance after the system's introduction and initial implementation in most certified Greek companies were among others: Standardization of internal business processes and operations -27%-, Operational and Managerial Control -20%- (which to this document's author's view seems a logical consequence and intended result by the senior management of these companies favoring the Standardization of their companies business processes as the prime benefit of the system's implementation), Delegation of management control, responsibility and accountability -10%-, Improvement of Quality inspection and control -10%, Improvement of internal communication -10%-, Production Cost decrease -8%-, and Others -10%-.

Almost identical results/outputs – both positive and negative – are observed and registered in similar research studies conducted and experienced in other countries.

The same conclusions-key remarks, as the above stated by this document's author, can be also considered as valid outputs of these research surveys and studies. Some of these research studies and their key-points are summarized and presented in the following paragraphs. A more extensive presentation of them is given in Section 14-Appendices.

A. International Research on the Implementation of ISO 9000 QMS in UK and Cyprus

One of the three basic elements of the trilogy of Total Quality Management/TQM is the systems. With this international research an effort of investigating and evaluating the results of the implementation of ISO 9000 quality management systems that was carried out in Cyprus and the United Kingdom the first half period of 1998 was undertaken.

The research aimed at examining and analyzing the benefits, difficulties and changes observed during and resulted by the implementation of ISO 9000 QMS in any enterprise under research.

The enterprises' managers were asked to rate the main reasons for which their enterprises were certified. According to these percentages the main factors were: a) management-administration and control benefits, b) marketing advantages and c) quality processes improvement benefits.

The importance that the researched enterprises were placing on the ISO 9000 registration and certification for the choice of their basic suppliers and subcontractors appeared to be large. However, although that the researched enterprises asked for the certification, the majority of the companies stated that the certification country of origin did not play any role, nor did the registration and certification body-organization, even though in the E.U. member-states the approach was different on this issue and they accepted only the Qnet - former EQnet - certificates.

Also almost half of the Cypriot enterprises believed that the ISO 9000 standards should be specialized for each sector and industry. Exactly the opposite was true for the British organizations.

As it is already known, the ISO 9000 QMS has been planned and made in such a way for covering in a very large degree the needs of any enterprise and of all its departments, business processes, functions and operations. In relative questions searching how much the quality management system applied covers the organizational needs of an enterprise they answered that the model covers well the needs with a percentage from 30-80% in both countries.

One of the basic questions was if the ISO 9000 implementation had contributed to the organizational performance improvement of each country's enterprises and to what degree. With the help of performance indicators that were used in similar researches, it appeared, that the results were very encouraging because most of these performance indicators were calculated to be over the 60% in Cyprus and may be lower but still positive in the U.K. (0-60%). Similar international researches (MBS (1995), MORI (1995), UNIDO (1997)) that had been conducted show increases with certain differentiations.

Profitability (profit) and Performance (output) were measured with the costs of quality, as these were defined by the British standard BS6143 part 1 and 2. Based on the four basic quality costs groupings the enterprises managers were asked if these costs had been increased or decreased. Homogeneous results appeared in the research and were precisely as they were expected in these enterprises that were in the first stages of any quality improvement program.

The ultimate aim of an enterprise by implementing ISO 9000 QMS is, besides the quality system and/or product quality improvement, which by many customers are considered as given and/or incorporated, the market share increase and consequently the Return on Investment increase. This aim is consistent with the philosophy of Deming

for chain inter-reactions. The majority of the researched enterprises in both countries answered that they experienced a market share increase due to the ISO 9000 QMS introduction and implementation.

The picture is completed with the question, up to what degree these quality management systems indeed improve the quality of products and services produced, which is also the main aim for which they have been written and are supposed to be used for. The messages here are also encouraging, because few enterprises answered that they did not observe any improvement at all.

Always in any plan that involves transformational changes in an organization, as the implementation of a new management system, there are problems. These are summarised and presented and are compared with the results of two previous researches conducted in the United Kingdom - the MBS (1995) and the MORI (1995) researches - where certain problems appear to be common in all research studies.

It is a fact that the certification under ISO 9000 quality management systems was something new, as far as the certification of products/services was concerned. Naturally, in the relative question concerning the importance of production quality, safety and assurance, the comparison between the two certifications – ISO 9001 and ISO 9002 – was marked with a similar high percentage in both countries, which means that the certification of products quality was perceived and considered as very important by both countries' managers.

The following highlight the research major outputs - as presented in 1998 terms:

- All the organizations that took part in the research were benefited and their business operations were improved.
- Although the number of companies asking for ISO 9001 and ISO 9002 registration is continuously increasing, ISO 9003 remains the standard with the least certifications - in the particular research, no certification.
- Apart from the main ISO standards (9001, 9002, 9003), which are used and implemented, the remaining standards of the ISO set that are related with the quality are almost unknown.

- The majority enterprises in both countries prefer to cooperate with suppliers certified under ISO 9000 and it appears that they recognize these ISO certificates irrespectively of the country of origin.
- The majority of the British enterprises differentiate and rate differently the certificates of ISO that are published by different professional bodies-organizations of registration and certification.
- ISO 9000 covers fairly enough the needs of most of the enterprises in both countries.
- Quality costs follow the normal distribution curve in both countries. The price of the conformity costs (prevention, estimate) was increased, while the price of the non-conformity costs was decreased (internal and external failures due to non-conformance to customers' requirements and set needs).
- Although, during the ISO 9000:1994 registration and certification period, all the investigated companies in both countries faced certain problems (bureaucracy, time-waste), they observed improvement in the quality level of the final product. The majority of the enterprises that participated in the research consider the certification of the product quality assurance as the most important feature of ISO 9000:1994.
- The common forecast of enterprises in both countries is that ISO 9000 can help and contribute positively to the enlargement and growth of international trade.

Finally, the vast majority of both countries' companies trusted their national registration bodies' level of knowledge and professional experience on quality issues.

B. Implementation of ISO 9000 Quality Systems in both Developed and Developing Economies

The international markets become continuously more competitive and this is also in effect for the certification of quality. The ISO9000 is now an international phenomenon that influences the way the companies operate and function. In the developing economies it is usually used for aiding the competitiveness' and quality control levels rising. In the developed economies it is taken into consideration always more in the operational negotiations and transactions and into their companies' objective for better operational effectiveness and administrative control. With regard to ISO 9000 quality system's usefulness, research studies have been carried out from independent

organizations on behalf of the Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance (LRQA), in order to identify the reasons that prompt the enterprises to acquire certification of this quality system and the effects in the operation of the enterprise due to the system's introduction.

The research results showed that the enterprises sought registration and certification under ISO 9000:1994 mainly in order to face real or forecasted external needs and requirements and also that the certification offered important internal corporate benefits beyond those expected. International research studies proved that the market external pressures were the fundamental ones for them entering into the process of certification. Even if the internal factors had been considered of smaller importance, an important percentage of the researched enterprises declared that they advanced in the process of certification in order to achieve bigger effectiveness and productivity in their enterprise. Most benefits that result from the certification can be characterized as external, a fact that keeps pace with the reasons that prompted the enterprises to the initial decision on the certification. The major advantage of ISO 9000 QMS is its ability to "open the path" to new markets.

One of the most important findings of the research conducted was the fact that the internal benefits enjoyed by the companies implementing ISO 9000 are more important than the external ones. Furthermore, these companies have realized that the actual benefits were greater than the forecasted ones.

Besides the fact in most cases the companies registered and certified under ISO 9000 QMS have stated that they are satisfied in one way or another from the system's implementation business results, there exist a number of dissatisfied organizations reporting several problems and drawbacks by not enjoying the intended outputs.

As it has been revealed during the research conducted, the benefits of being registered and certified under ISO 9000 QMS are multiplied with the advancement and the duration of the system's implementation and for this reason the ISO 9000 QMS certification should be considered by any company as a long term investment.

According to this DBA document's author's view, this is a clear indication that Contingency Theory should be used in the introduction and implementation processes of an ISO 9000 QMS in any company for adapting the system to the specific corporate

operating requirements, needs and goals of the company for achieving the desired and planned results and benefits out of the system's development.

The introduction of ISO 9000 QMS granted more than the expected internal organizational benefits to the certified enterprises. The same was also in effect for the external profits. The most important internal organizational performance improvements are considered to be: more efficient administrative control; improvement of business processes and operations effectiveness; and productivity increase.

It should be noted that the certification benefits were increased, as mentioned by the participating parties, with the system's implementation and deployment time duration. Therefore, enterprises and their registration and certification bodies/organizations had to establish more comfortable relations of collaboration, so as to better achieve the continuous improvement of the certified and applied ISO 9000:1994 quality system.

C. Comparison of Results of ISO 9000 Implementation in Small and Large Enterprises

The usefulness of this research study exists in the fact that it has been conducted in differing - in terms of business, economy and culture environment and prevailing conditions - areas of the world, thus it may be considered fairly representative of the existing situation as far as the research questions and aims are concerned.

With a "Small Enterprise" defined as one being up to 50 staff, the advantages/driving forces encountered and observed during the ISO 9000 implementation in small enterprises are: more flexibility in the various stages of the system's implementation; top management active involvement in the system's administration and management; fast development and implementation; greater chance of the external advisor's cooperation with all employees levels; staff training is easier; and fast decision-making. The disadvantages/ restraining forces were: limited degree of availability of the required resources and means/tools for the system's implementation and development; focus and personalization of the enterprise management and decision making process in one individual only - usually the owner.

With a “Large Enterprise” defined as one being over 50 staff, the advantages/driving forces encountered and observed during the ISO 9000 implementation in small enterprises were: possibility of establishing a rational organizational structure; professional management and administrative personnel involvement; higher engagement and involvement of senior management; existence of already operating management systems and in many cases of documented business processes, procedures and activities; and higher availability of skilled employees force in all the key positions. The disadvantages/restraining forces were: in many cases, the existence of more complicated managerial and operational systems than these required by the provisions of ISO 9000; higher degree of difficulty of co-ordination, management and control of the quality system.

There were a series of special, as well as common practical difficulties encountered during the implementation and maintenance period of the quality system.

For small enterprises these were: the difficulty in the application of a rational organisational structure and operation; the existence of difficulty of the personnel to understand, know and perceive the real benefits of an ISO 9000 implementation in their enterprise and that it is intense and usually longer-lasting than in the case of large enterprises, meaning that it requires a continuous and more intense way of education and training for employees; the time available of staff undertaking the system’s administration is usually limited due to all other parallel duties and responsibilities they have; resistance to abandoning traditional and therefore more familiar business processes and operations; in small enterprises the matter of documentation is perceived and treated as unnecessary bureaucracy.

Specifically for processes that are general and horizontal the mistrust is much greater and their proper and effective implementation becomes more problematic.

In the large enterprises, these practical difficulties focused on the proper communication and presentation of the system in all the organizational levels and departments - to all their employees – which is difficult and time-consuming. Also, the decision-making process, especially for important issues, is delayed, postponed and halted due to and by the multiple layers/levels of hierarchy and power.

The disadvantages of an ISO 9000 implementation can be summarised to that the integrated and complete employees’ education and training in all organizational levels

and departments is much more difficult, time consuming and costly and that in a large organisation the cultural and mentality change required for the effective and efficient implementation of the quality system is halted by greater resistance factors.

The most important difficulty encountered in the implementation, but mainly in the maintenance of a quality system is that such systems are applied mechanically.

Most of the today enterprises have failed to understand that such systems are important tools of data and information gathering, processing and analysis. Such data and info should and could be used as management tools for the continuous improvement of a company's business processes, as well as evaluating and developing inner-company motivation. Quality systems like ISO 9000 can be considered to constitute the base for the transformation of a company's business from operating simple functional mechanisms to applying a real quality management system and culture.

According to this document's author's view, the findings of all the aforementioned research surveys show that ISO 9000 can benefit any company's operations and contribute to its business processes improvement and consequently to its entire organizational performance improvement.

Therefore, the ISO 9000 QMS guiding principle of Continuous Improvement (especially proclaimed in ISO 9000:2000 version) can be considered and used as the driver and the prerequisite for attempting to achieve organizational performance continuous improvement and consequently excellence.

5. ISO 9000 & TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

5.1 ISO 9000 as a Stepping Stone to Total Quality Management/A Comparative Analysis of the two Quality Systems

Despite a commonly held view in many organizations and managers to the contrary ISO 9000 and Total Quality Management, although both aspects of the same topic of quality originated independently of each other and for different reasons. As it was previously referred, ISO 9000 series of quality standards emerged out of the need to harmonize dozens of national and international standards that referred to quality issues worldwide. For that purpose after World War II, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) formed Technical Committee 176 for harmonizing and incorporating the dispersed sets of quality standards to a common one firstly launched in 1987.

The two revisions of the set took place in 1994 and 2000 and each time the new, revised and updated ISO 9000 version was aiming at improving the performance of the set and making it more applicable to all business sectors and industries and friendlier and easier to apply by the users of the quality system.

As a result of this standard, suppliers and purchasers of products and services all over the world can learn on a quality system that is recognized by everybody for its ability to help manufacture and deliver products and in the world business and marketplace.

Total Quality Management, on the other hand, is earlier than the ISO 9000 and started in Japan in 1950s when American quality leaders, such as W.E.Deming and Joseph Juran and later on the writings of Walter Shewart, introduced the concept of total quality management in the Japanese industry, aiming at improving its performance. With the contribution of Japanese quality leaders, like Kaoru Ishikawa, Taichi Ohno and Shigeo Shingo and with the contribution of the work of other quality gurus, as Philip Crosby and J.S.Oakland, the TQM system was considered and appreciated in the 1990s as a strategic management tool for improving the business operations of the western corporations and transforming them to more competitive entities in the global marketplace, as Bank (2000) states.

5.2 Aims of ISO 9000 and TQM

The aim of ISO 9000 has historically been to assure that the products and services provided in the marketplace by registered/certified to ISO 9000 organizations are consistently fit for the intended purpose and use. The changes, that the new ISO 9000:2000 version has brought, have raised the quality standard's aims to a new upgraded level.

The new eight quality management principles with special emphasis to continuous improvement, process approach, customer satisfaction and the required top management's full and undisputable commitment for achieving the intended results by the system's implementation, seek to supply all registered and certified organizations with the required improved business processes for upgrading their organizational performance and achieving competitiveness in the world business arena.

This is essentially the same objective that Total Quality Management holds from its very beginning till now and it can be also traced to ISO info statement: "The primary aim of the consistent pair [ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 9004:2000] is to relate modern quality management to the processes and activities of an organization, including the promotion of continual improvement and achievement of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, it is intended that the ISO 9000 standards have global applicability. Therefore, the factors that are driving the [ISO 9000:2000 revision process, among others [include the] provision of a natural stepping stone towards Total Quality Management" (source: Goetch & Davis, 2002, p.312).

This statement can be also identified in Figure 1 and Figure 2 of this Document - see Section: 13. Tables and Figures - where in the first figure (figure13.1) a comparison of the characteristics of the two systems is attempted, while in the second figure (figure 13.2) their quality management principles are also compared in contrast to that of Deming (source: Goetch & Davis, 2002, pp.313-314).

Out of these comparative figures useful conclusions can be drawn on the systems and their interrelationship. First, ISO 9000 and Total Quality Management are not completely interchangeable. As Goetch and Davis (2002) state and the ISO info confirms, ISO 9000 by definition is concerned only with the introduction and development of a quality management system for qualitatively transforming inputs to

outputs/products (which means products, services and processes) by adhering to a set of quality standards stated from the very beginning of the system's development.

On the other hand, by definition Total Quality Management encompasses every function and level of the organization by including all its systems and aspects, such as human resources, finance, sales and marketing, procurement, research and design, production and technical maintenance. Furthermore, it requires the involvement of an empowered and co-operating workforce guided by the top management who sets the strategy and tactics for achieving the business vision by establishing also the guiding principles of the organization. Therefore, TQM is more pervasive and demanding in relation to ISO 9000 QMS, although the 9000:2000 new version aligns closer to TQM.

Total Quality Management could be defined, after this analysis, as a management system approach that tries to transform the entire organization, through the continual improvement of the quality of its internal business processes and functions, products, services and people with the final aim of increasing and ultimately maximizing the organization's competitiveness and improving continuously the organizational performance (combined sources of TQM definition: Oakland (2003); Bank (2000); Logothetis (1992)).

In comparison, the ISO 9000 quality management system is designed "to provide the framework for continual improvement to increase the probability of enhancing customer satisfaction and the satisfaction of all interested parties. It provides confidence to the organization and its customers that it is able to provide products that consistently fulfill requirements as ISO 9000:2000 clause 2.1. - "Rationale for Quality Management Systems" – states, in Goetch and Davis (2002).

ISO claims that, through improved business processes and customer satisfaction and by emphasizing on all its eight management principles, cost and risk benefits also accrue resulting to increased organizational competitiveness - the same as TQM's objective, aligning ISO 9000:2000 QMS closed to TQM.

It is clear from the preceding analysis and evaluation of the two systems that they are not the same thing, although the two systems' management approach to quality is increasingly similar, especially with the new ISO 9000:2000 version.

It becomes now easier for a company already functioning in a TQM environment, to incorporate ISO 9000:2000 QMS in its business operations successfully and more easily, making it a part of its organizational environment. This is because, as Oakland (2003), and Goetch and Davis (2002) believe, a Total Quality Management business environment with its obsession with quality and all the quality characteristics of the system (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 in Section: 13. Figures and Tables of this Document) can easily support the requirements of ISO 9000QMS.

On the other hand, TQM is not a prerequisite for introducing and implementing ISO 9000, therefore, the majority of the existed organizations find it easier to first get registered and certified by ISO 9000 and then if it seems beneficial to them proceed to the adoption of TQM. This fact, of course, proves automatically the redundancy of ISO 9000 in a mature TQM environment, since its requirements are already in place operating for improving the business quality and organizational performance. These organizations may consider that they do not even gain a marketing advantage by ISO 9000 QMS registration, as Goetch and Davis (2002) refer.

However, as the aforementioned authors continue and point, even in this situation registration and certification by ISO 9000 can be proved very useful as the ISO 9000 set of quality standards is the only one well acknowledged and recognized by all potential customers worldwide. Furthermore, ISO 9000QMS will be proved more useful to and required by organizations operating in a traditional old environment without applying any Total Quality Management system.

It will be introduced with the aim of improving organizational performance, but the accomplishment of this goal heavily depends on the organization's reasons for adopting ISO 9000 QMS and the degree of senior management commitment to use it as a (strategic) management tool for improving business processes and operations and hence becoming more competitive and profitable rather than using it only as a marketing ploy. Because, as past experience has showed, as a marketing advantage it will be only a temporary gain, as the other companies have already or will very soon adopt it too (as it was presented in this document's preceding paragraph: Rationale for ISO 9000 QMS certification).

As it was previously stated, the aims of ISO 9000 and TQM are similar that is: business processes improvement resulting to organizational performance improvement with the final aim for the organizations becoming more competitive and profitable in the world business market. The major cause route for achieving these aims is the management motivation for adopting and applying either ISO 9000 QMS or a TQM system.

As it was stated in the preceding lines, seeking ISO 9000 registration only for obtaining a marketing advantage is inappropriate as a motive, since it will become very soon obsolete. Furthermore, applying ISO 9000 for strictly marketing purposes may result to a negative reaction by the workforce for the time and resources devoted to the work required for implementing the quality system and the top management may not offer its unweaving commitment for the successful development and implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS. By definition, the growing negative feelings among workforce and top management always result to employees' resistance and negative attitude and behavior and ultimately as a logical consequence, the QMS introduction, implementation and development will suffer and consequently fail.

Ideally, management should adopt ISO 9000QMS as a means for achieving real improvement in the company's business processes and operations, satisfy its customers by serving them in a more integrated and responsible way and as a result enjoy the opening of new markets and the gaining of larger markets shares in the already existed ones. Moreover, the company will become more competitive and more profitable by saving quality failure and/or quality nonexistence costs, as Oakland (2003) maintains.

This approach requires and assures also at the same time the senior management's unweaving commitment and undisputable participation in the quality system's deployment and implementation, as this document's author believes.

The same reasoning holds true for the introduction and deployment of a TQM system in any organization, as it requires more resources (financial, human, operational etc.) and involves all business levels and aspects of the organization, but an analysis on it will be presented in the proceeding section.

Therefore, as indicative appropriate incentives for adopting both ISO 9000 QMS and TQM and probably achieving the system's effective and efficient introduction and implementation are the following, according to Goetch and Davis (2002, pp.316-317), and also Oakland (2003), Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) and Foster (2001):

To improve operations by satisfying the systems' requirements for management responsibility, resource management, product realization, and measurement analysis and improvement; to create or improve a quality management system that will be recognized by customers worldwide; to improve product or service quality and/or the consistency of quality; to improve customer satisfaction; to improve competitive posture; to conform to the requirements of one or more major customers although adoption would be more and better motivated by internal factors as the preceding five.

The preceding analysis shows that, if ISO 9000 QMS is to have a real and permanent positive effect on a company's business processes and organizational operations, it must be approached and adopted with a positive attitude and understanding of its real business benefits and the unwavering commitment of top management combined with the energetic involvement of all workforce motivated by the top management behavioral example and position toward the quality system.

As it was previously said, the same reasoning holds true for the effective and efficient adoption and deployment of a TQM system, which due to its pervasiveness to all businesses processes systems, operations, functions, levels and departments requires a better understanding and knowledge of the systems' features and requirements.

Interestingly, an important number of many companies adopt TQM (as well as ISO 9000 QMS, but to a lesser degree) out of desperation and as a last means for business survival. Oakland (2003) believes, that as it turns out, having the Japanese industry example in mind, this is the easiest reasoning and way of introduction and implementation of the quality system and most of the times it proves to be successful, although precautions still exist and hold, that this approach is short-term minded and for this reason, in most of the cases, has a short period of success, since management enthusiasm and commitment flows out, as the initial business survival problems of the organization are faced and solved by the system's adoption and deployment.

It is better for managers to adopt and use preventive action and not a corrective one as the last resort. This of course is the message, the new version of ISO 9000:2000 adopts with its emphasis on measurement, analysis and consequently as a result on Continual Improvement in an ever-lasting spiral, like Deming's (1986) and Oakland's (1993 and 1994): Plan - Do - Check - Act/Adjust cycles, as Goetch and Davis believe (2002).

6. BUSINESS PROCESS REENGINEERING / BPR

Organizations face many challenges in today's ever-changing business world.

Almost all industries and businesses have been and are going through major changes – technological, political, financial, new environmental demands and requirements and/or cultural alterations. The emergence of business and economy globalization have put into the business surface new customers' demands and requirements and new business relationships.

As Oakland (2003, p.192) states: “companies are finding leaner competitors encroaching into their market place, increased competition from other countries where costs are lower, and start-up competitors which do not share the same high bureaucracy and formal structures”.

During the 1990s one of the most crucial factors identified for enabling organizations to face successfully and cope with these changes has been the redesigning and/or reengineering of the business processes, especially of the core ones. The method of business process re-engineering or redesign has been nominated as the appropriate tool for radically reassessing business processes, which have been identified as lacking the potential for offering to the organizations the necessary infrastructure for becoming more competitive and productive in an ever demanding and changing business world.

The term “business process re-engineering” has been originally exposed and used in Hammer and Champy's book “Re-engineering the Corporation” (1993), where the authors state their view that the nature of work should be reinvented by starting all over again - reinventing the corporations thoroughly - from top to the bottom.

This statement presupposed that organizations should think again what to do, why they do it and most crucially how they do it in order to cope successfully in the emerging new global business environment.

The proposed BPR solutions have ratified their emerging existence and the rationale of their proposals on IT explosion and offered advances experienced from the decade of '80s. Explosive advances in IT have enabled organizations to restructure and improve manufacturing processes - with the use of statistical process control as the main tool - as well as non-manufacturing processes by enabling the acquiring, dissemination, analysis,

evaluation and use of information from and to customer and suppliers and intra-company. This fact facilitated the automation and documentation of business processes as well as it increased the possibility for critically evaluating the existing ones and planning for the potential/desired ones.

The possibility for assessing the existing business processes indicates that not all processes need redesigning and/or re-engineering. The need for assessing critically all the business processes and especially the core ones indicates that a distinction should be made between those that need radical improvement and those that perform fairly and therefore, their performance requires incremental and continuous improvement.

By understanding this concept, many western companies attempted to initiate business performance improvement programs based mainly on incremental changes in their processes performance accompanied with discontinuous breakthrough improvement whenever they judged it was needed.

Incremental change by improving business processes was associated with the TQM initiatives adopted by many USA companies in the 1980s with the aim to compete successfully with the mighty performance of the Japanese industry. However, in the due process, some companies (as Xerox and Ford) realized that incremental improvement was not enough by its own, as by focusing on internal customer/supplier interfaces improved quality but it also developed high infrastructure costs and bureaucracy, a fact that undermined corporate competitiveness and responsiveness to customer service.

To handle with these emergent problems they championed the solution for attempting breakthrough improvement in their business performance by re-engineering and/or redesigning their business processes in the way that Hammer and Champy (1993) had proposed in their book. That is: to proceed to the fundamental rethinking and radical redesigning of a business process, its structure and associated management systems in order to deliver major or step or breakthrough improvements in performance (which may be in process, customer or business performance terms), as Oakland (2003, p.194) defines BPR.

And continuing, the aforementioned author (p.194) suggests that: "Put into a strategic context, BPR is a means of aligning work processes with customer requirement in a dynamic, flexible way, in order to achieve long-term corporate objectives".

But anyone organization in order to proceed to a successful redesign and re-engineering of its main processes should first have a vision to what and how the potential reengineered processes should be and perform and secondly to involve its customers and suppliers for inspecting and incorporating in its business processes re-engineering planning the future business requirements and needs. Therefore, BPR programs introduce the customer-focused and the market-driven concepts, like its counterparts - the TQM programs and the new ISO 9000:2000 QMS version - do.

In this way, it challenges any organization's, wishing to introduce and implement BPR, traditional structure and business functions and re-orientate organizational performance to be centered on core business processes for achieving improved business performance results. This approach requires an organization to work in cross-functional teams in order to share a horizontal aspect and view of the business, instead of being focused on managing distinct vertical functions.

The interdependence between this cross-functional and cross-departmental teams facilitates the organization's and its staff's re-orientation towards a process approach being mainly customer-focused, not error correcting but error preventing and requiring the active involvement of all employees with their motivation provided by a fully committed top management team.

The ultimate goal of the process-centered approach is the elimination of the organization's mentality and practice of operating in a vertical function approach, an approach which results to: unnecessary work, wasting scarce organizational resources, limited synergy between functions, no cooperation among different departments, no clear understanding of how one department's activities affect the total organization's processes, sub-processes and activities performance, creating barriers to customers' (internal and external) satisfaction and ultimately as a consequence of all the above mentioned by-products to organizational inefficiency and ineffectiveness as Oakland (2003) believes.

In order to be effectively implemented and produce the desired and anticipated results, a BPR program has to be carefully designed and planned. First of all, a thorough understanding of the current business processes is required for identifying the non-value-adding elements of them and removing them. As many experts on the field

suggest - Handy and Champer (1993); Oakland (2003); University of California in Berkeley-Business Administration Department Seminars' handouts (1995) - current processes can be understood and documented by process mapping and flowcharting.

Typically, as BPR requires, the change process has a top-down approach - although it incorporates all staff involved in the processes - and takes the following form which resembles to that of a project, as Oakland (2003, p.198) points:

First: Discover the problem or unacceptable outcome, followed by determining the desired outcome. Then: Establish the redesign team (a critical success factor); Analyze and Document the process(es) for identifying the way work is really done, for providing the basis from which to measure, analyze, test and improve the process(es) under redesigning and re-engineering; Innovate and rebuild the process; Reorganize and retrain by piloting the changes validating their effectiveness and reinforcing the new process structure and operational system while at the same time it is necessary to develop the appropriate metrics/tools and methods for Measuring Performance; and finally the element of Continuous redesign and improvement follows in all BPR projects, as process re-engineering should involve all business processes under-operating in an organization and therefore, it does not end to just one process and/or by just re-engineering once this specific process.

To the contrary, in most of the cases companies will and/or should re-engineer one process after another and secondly, once a process has been re-engineered, continuous improvement of the new process should follow by the process "owners" who are supposed to be trained, well informed and motivated in the new process approach adapted by the company.

This project form of the BPR process resembles to the proposed implementation form of any Quality program (including TQM programs and the new ISO 9000:2000 QSM version), as all programs are evolving from and deployed through similar business needs and phases respectively while the target - process improvement and based on it organizational performance improvement - is the same in all these customer-focused and process-centered Quality programs.

In the document's author's view, more striking is the analogy of the BPR and TQM plus ISO 9000:2000 QMS programs with the Force Field Analysis/FFA theory. All the

phases of these quality programs include elements of the FFA theory and require the use of it for them being implemented successfully. More specifically:

Identifying a problem or the unacceptable outcome of it by assessing the processes involved, clarifying the root causes of the problem particularly those that cross departmental lines and functions and spotting unnecessary work and points of unclear responsibility, while at the same time recognizing the properly executed processes and enhancing them by improving their existing performance, seems very similar to the identification of the business drivers/positive factors and the restraints/negative factors - identified and mapped in each Force Field Analysis process - program.

Establishing quality/redesign teams consisted by well trained, informed and empowered employees/process owners to execute a well designed and set implementation targets of the improvement plan (whether the improvement being planned & incremental and/or emergent & breakthrough) for changing the existing situation in business processes deployment seems similar to the unfreezing phase of FFA.

This stage followed by the rebuilding and re-organizing of the new processes implementation aligns to the refreezing phase, while measuring the performance of the new processes and retraining the process owners both enforces the existing new business operations, resembling to the re-freezing phase of the Force Field Analysis model, while at the same time becomes the baseline for continuously amending and improving the newly established process system, confirming in this way concurrently the validity of Deming's PDCA cycle - an invaluable and inseparable element of the implementation of any quality program (ISO 9000 QMS included).

As it was previously mentioned in this section of the Document, Business Process Reengineering aims at improving business performance by improving core business process through their re-designing and re-engineering. It requires a clear vision of the systems, processes, methods and approaches that will allow achievement of the desired results, while at the same time has profound impacts on all employees and therefore requires also significant changes in organizational design and structure and enterprise culture, a fact that presupposes the unwavering commitment of top management as Oakland (2003) indicates.

The project approach to BRP suggests a one - off approach aiming at radically improving a specific business function in a relatively short period of time.

But to this document's author's opinion, the very fact that in a rapidly changing, even more competitive business environment most companies will re-engineer one core process after another, while continuous improvement of the new (already redesigned) process is constantly a goal of BRP, transforms the BPR programs' effective implementation to a continuous business processes improvement cycle, requiring corporate planning, management commitment, adequately trained staff and an organizational culture oriented towards learning, innovation and continuous change.

Continuing on this expressed belief, in contrast to the BPR's short-term view held by many companies applying BPR programs, TQM and ISO 9000:2000 QMS programs set longer-term goals aiming at establishing the required framework for incrementally changing organizational structure, behavior and culture smoothly but inevitably.

The combination of the intended results of these two alternative quality programs (BPR and TQM/ISO 9000 QMS) is considered by the document's author the most desirable one, and consequently anyone could claim and grant to these quality programs - TQM and/or ISO 9000 QMS - the title of the necessary platform for successfully initiating and implementing any BPR program, since within an already established quality culture and environment a BPR program will find the required trained - in quality and process topic matters - workforce, organizational design and structure and mindset changes needed for its success, as Oakland believes and states (2003).

7. BENCHMARKING

BPR as well as ISO 9000 QMS and TQM programs are complementary under the umbrella of process management, since they all aim to business processes improvement, either by incremental and/or breakthrough change.

By accepting that any business process needs improvement as ISO 9000:2000 QMS and TQM as well as process management advise and promote – irrelevant of it being very good, good, accepted or unaccepted – by definition we are led to the conclusion that in any company a process improvement change program should be implemented.

But before applying such a program, a thorough understanding of the current business processes is required for best planning and scheduling the change/improvement process. For product, service and process improvements and implementation can take place only in relevance to the already pre-established standards (current and/or projected) with the improvements then being planned and incorporated into the projected and intended by the senior management new standards of business practice.

This approach, based on processes baselining for being more effective and efficient, measures and compares continuously an organization's operations products and/or services and processes against those of its industry and sector competitors (even internally by examining other departments and/or affiliate companies' processes and activities) searching for the best practice encountered in order to examine and analyze it.

It is an element of Total Quality Management, originated in Japan and has been termed Benchmarking. Oakland (2003, p.149) defines "Benchmarking" as: "a reference or measurement standard used for comparison, and benchmarking is the continuous process of identifying, understanding and adapting best practice and processes that will lead to superior performance". He continues (p.150) that benchmarking should not be considered as a panacea to cure any organization's problems. It should be seen only as a practical tool for improving organizational performance by understanding the drivers that lead other companies achieving superior performance and results.

Therefore, the reasons for benchmarking could include internal as external ones too, including the following: customers demands, competitors rivalry and excellence in a

specific business area, new legislative demands, new technology introduction, corporate targets and self assessment and adoption of new management systems, such as ISO 9000 QMS, which require a change in business behavior and practice, for fully exploiting their potential and projected business aims and benefits.

In a simple phrase: benchmarking aims at aiding an organization establishing projected business objectives based on best practice observed, for meeting any internal and/or external customers requirement with the ultimate goal of achieving superior/excellent organizational performance. The interrelationship and interconnection of Benchmarking and any Quality Management System (ISO 9000, TQM and BPR) is very obvious, as they are all aiming at business process management and improvement.

Benchmarking, whether it is:

- Internal: the search for best practice of internal operations by comparison.
- Functional: evaluating function best practice cross-industries.
- Generic: comparison of superior processes performance irrespective of industry or function.
- Competitive: specific competitor to competitor comparisons for products, services, functions, operations and most important business processes

Source: J.S.Oakland, "TQM", 2003, p.151,

refers to every aspect of an organizations' operations and it may end on addressing total organizational performance by challenging the current business processes and establishing objectives for their continuous improvement, a requirement for improving organizational performance.

But to achieve this, any company has to adopt a never-ending improvement cycle in all its operating functions and departments by continuously improving its business processes, as many authors on quality issues – like Juran (1988), Deming (1986), Crosby (1979), Oakland (2003), Bank (2000), Arvanitoyiannis (2001) - believe.

Technologies and conditions may vary between different industries and markets, but the basic concepts of measurement, control and benchmarking are of general validity as the basic concepts and principles of quality theory and any quality management system are, although in any company that these systems are applied, external and internal factors and variables influencing their nature's perception and implementation process should be taken into consideration and examined by all interested parties-stakeholders.

This is a clear indication of Contingency and Open Systems Theories' relevance and relation to any Quality management system's introduction and implementation program, applied in any company irrelevant of industry, country, business conditions and economic cycle phase. In this way, benchmarking can be seen as a strategic approach to motivating people and using effectively and efficiently the existing systems, tools and methods for continuously achieving improved - excellent business processes and experiencing superior organizational performance.

Therefore, its main purpose and aim is to challenge the current business practices and processes by changing the relevant perceptions the executives and managers have for them and the intended state of their company's business processes and operations, by comparing their companies business practices with those of other organizations achieving better organizational performance and ultimately lead those executives adopt these enhanced and improved goals and objectives for their organization's practices, processes and total business performance.

As it was previously mentioned, benchmarking is a management tool which may be considered as a managed process for implementing change by using a structured approach to identify what processes - activities have to be changed and then proceeds to the "how" element of this change process by incorporating the projected - intended results/benefits that this change process is planned to bring about.

As Oakland (2003) believes, any organizational practice and/or process can be benchmarked, but the organization's benchmarking process should be focused on these key business processes and/or practices that have the major influence and impact on the organizational performance improvement by satisfying any customer's (internal and/or external) requirement and need.

The benchmarking process has five main stages which are all focused on analyzing, measuring and comparing the current business practices and processes with the ultimate goal to identify the business areas that need to change and improve. Any typical benchmarking program starts with the plan phase in which the team members analyze their own organization to understand its strengths and weaknesses and identify the areas requiring change and improvement.

In the Collect phase data on current performance, based on agreed measures, is collected from the business areas which are chosen to be benchmarked against. This

data is then critically analyzed and evaluated for identifying best practices and their enablers permitting them deliver excellent performance. The conclusions of the findings will then be adapted to the organization which conducts the Benchmarking program through the Adapt Phase. A post-completion Review is the final stage of the program, a phase which enables understanding and boosts continuous organizational learning and testing on what business processes and practices are required to achieve and sustain improved performance.

The analogy of any Benchmarking program with the Force Field Analysis method is obvious, as they both challenge the existing “paradigm” of current practices and processes by changing the stakeholders’ perceptions and perspectives of them and comparing them with those classified as of superior performance and finally creating and setting improved goals for achieving, establishing and continuously implementing improved performance in terms of business processes and practices (a very clear analogy with the FFA model sequence: Unfreezing current situation, examining the driving and restraining forces, setting - testing - implementing the new required situation and then refreezing it).

As a consequence, the role of benchmarking is to enable any organization to examine how well it is performing in comparison with the mean average of the others undertaking the same tasks and activities and most importantly identify the enablers that permit other organizations performing better than them. The gained knowledge will firstly permit the organization to plan and execute small little adaptation and at a minimum cost and disruption as Oakland (2003) states.

This type of change is a quick incremental improvement with low risks and costs but as well lower benefits and may not contribute to a sustainable improvement process gained by the company, as the document’s author believes. For “quick wins” -as these small incremental improvements/changes are called and considered - do not challenge the root causes of any observed / experienced problem and undesired behavior and practice.

Therefore, they simply offer temporary solutions which can be very easily forgotten and not established as a permanent conduct of organizational behavior and “doing things around here”.

It would be clearly to the company's benefits if these small, incremental changes could be followed by more fundamental, breakthrough changes, for their combination is considered to result and produce in most of the cases a sustainable change in the organizational performance - by improving the business processes and practices performance.

But, these breakthrough changes will require more resources and effort invested in their implementation process and of course, they carry higher risk, therefore, for them being implemented successfully, they also require careful planning and systematic management and control. They have to be "implemented systematically as a discrete change project or program of projects", as Oakland (2003, p.156) believes.

Therefore, incremental improvement and breakthrough improvement leading both respectively to incremental and continuous planned change, and breakthrough and emergent change, are or could be both parts of an integrated method of the change process management, which has to encompass and involve both aspects of these two elements of the change process for it being effectively and efficiently managed and developed with the ultimate goal of achieving the optimum results. Moreover, any change management process has to be carefully and professionally planned, managed, implemented and controlled for gaining the best results out of its deployment.

Furthermore, by adopting this approach, it becomes obvious that any quality management system - being it ISO 9000 QMS /TQM and/or BPR , and having the Benchmarking process as a tool - chosen, introduced and applied for achieving the change required, can (and sometimes has to) interrelate and interconnect anyone of these two above mentioned methods (incremental and breakthrough change) with the other for gaining the optimum results out of the change process, that is the business processes improvement which ultimately lead to superior improved organizational performance.

8. PROCESS MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

8.1 Process Management

As it was previously referred, organizations transform inputs to outputs through a series of interrelated activities known as processes. Their final aim is to create value by delivering upgraded products and/or services to their customers. This final aim can be only achieved through the use of a very effective-well performing process management system, as under-performance is primarily caused by poor processes.

This process management system helps management identify the “key or core business processes, which are well – defined and developed sequences of steps with clear rational, add value by producing required and specified by the customers outputs”, from a variety of inputs and are aligned with and incorporated in the overall business strategy. As a result, related business activities are combined and interrelated and the ones that do not add value are being cut out.

Of course, out of this procedure a fundamental change emerges in the way any organization is managed due to the orientation transformation from a function and task-based enterprise to a process-based one, as Oakland (2003, p.167) states.

This fact is also recognized in the EFQM Excellence Model, in which the processes criterion is the central “anchor” box linking the other enablers and the results together. Consequently and as a result of analyzing critically the EFQM Excellence model, it becomes obvious that business performance can be improved by improving or changing the business processes and especially the key ones, “responsible” for the main business functions of any given organization.

Moreover, specific attention should be given to all the dimensions of process management these been:

- Process strategy – particularly deployment
- Operationalizing processes – including definition/design/systems
- Process performance – measurement and improvement
- People and leadership roles – values, beliefs, responsibilities, accountabilities, authorities and rewards

- Information and knowledge – capturing and leveraging through out the supply chains.

Process management main role is to orientate managers towards a process management vision, that is viewing their organizations as their customers would, that is: as a series of interconnected activities and information flows that cut horizontally across the organization and the business, instead of seeing them as isolated and discrete sets of vertical functions.

All these organizational/business processes need managing - planning, measuring and improving, sometimes a continuous incremental improvement and sometimes a discontinuous one, depending on the external and internal factors influencing each organization's processes operation and the business situation that the organization is facing (this document's author sees a clear analogy with Contingency theory and Open Systems Theory approach).

As a result of this approach, many organizations and their top management now base their approach towards organizational performance improvement on the effective management of their key or core business processes. Moreover, Oakland (2003, p.169) identified process management best practice as:

- Identifying the key business processes: prioritizing on the basis of the value chain, customer needs and strategic significance, and using process models and definitions.
- Managing processes systematically: giving process ownership to the most appropriate individual or group and resolving process interface issues through meetings or ownership models.
- Reviewing processes and setting improvement targets: empowering process-owners to set targets and collect data from internal and external customers.
- Using innovation and creativity to improve processes: adopting self-managed teams, business process improvement and idea schemes.
- Changing processes and evaluating the benefits: through process improvement or re-engineering teams, project management and involving customers, and suppliers.

Research on these above mentioned companies has proved that deployment of a common process framework throughout the organization offers many advantages, such as: a common company image to all its customers and suppliers, lower costs and increased flexibility in terms of resource allocation, production operations and supply chain activities.

These required fundamental changes in the way organizations are operating and managing their businesses are the main cause root for many organizations not evolving to a process business but instead remaining “traditional” by focusing on tasks, jobs, people who do them and on structures.

In establishing a core process framework many organizations have been helped by the Process Classification Framework developed and copyrighted by the American Productivity and Quality Center /APQC - International Benchmarking Clearing house - as Oakland (2003, p.p.169-170) refers. The intent was to supply businesses with a generic view of major business processes and sub-processes encountered in multiple industries and sectors in order to help/encourage organizations to understand their inner-workings and activities from a cross – industry, horizontal process viewpoint rather than from a vertical, functional viewpoint.

The ultimate aim and “hope” of APQC was to become a useful tool for the enterprises in understanding and mapping business processes and advancing the role of benchmarking and business process re-engineering and re-design.

By using such models and techniques (including process modeling and process flowcharting) the aim is the systematic planning or detailed and critical examination of any process for finding any gaps between desired and/or required and actual process performance and consequently improving the level of key business process and sub-processes performance and ultimately the level of overall organizational performance.

As Oakland (2003) conveys, there exists a number of top executives who adapt process management orientation and enjoyed - as they admitted- business performance upgrading. Among them, Richard J.Leo/president and general manager of Xerox and Alan Jones /group manager director of TNT express as well as the managing director of Celestica Inc. (previously) suggested that operating a process-focused oriented and driven company provides a logical frame work for any person of his/her role in the business and awareness for his/her obligation to satisfy customer (internal and/or external these maybe) with the ultimate business result of becoming a cost-effective,

competitive organization, which is able to offer and deliver to all its customer upgraded and enhanced organizational performance.

Despite, these proclamations of organizational performance improvement through the adoption of a process orientation by an organization, there still remain a considerable number of enterprises who still remain traditional in operations being more function based and oriented rather than being process driven.

The most common causes for a company remaining function driven and not becoming process driven are the following: - at the same time, these causes could be considered as requirements for successfully adopting and implementing a process management system, while they could also be considered as the resulting profits of an enterprise by having been transformed to a process driven enterprise - :

First of all, initiating and implementing process management can not be a new fad / a quick fix and its results will not come overnight. As many organizations today face a large number of customers' and/or governmental changes in demands and requirements, technology changes, public and private transitions and a turbulent global economic environment, there emerges the need to examine critically and thoroughly these change initiatives for identifying those that are relevant to a process –managed business and those that are not.

Oakland (2003) states, that the most visible difference existing between a process management enterprise and a functional based traditional one is the requirement for appointing process owner(s) to have real responsibility, authority and accountability over the process overall operation and performance - from design to end consumer of its product. Consequently, this fact requires attention to planning and executing the appropriate training programs, setting performance tangible and measurable targets (an indication for the need of using Statistical Process Control and other tools and techniques –statistical and non-statistical), regular, consistent, accurate and reliable communication to all employees, by face to face information to each appropriate team (according to the process under examination) on changing business conditions and customers needs and specified requirements.

In this way, effective and efficient employees' training can be considered as an enabler of and result of proper process management since owners-operators of every process

need to be properly trained and are and/or should be equipped with the appropriate work instructions and the required tools (such as statistical process control), facilities and resources “to perform the process to its optimum capability” (J.S.Oakland, 2003, p.188). Of course, it is obvious that this apply throughout the organization to all business processes and functions and therefore it usually leads to a major fundamental change which represents a major business and cultural challenge for any organization.

Due to this fundamental change, the employees proper assignment and adequate training, their empowerment and knowledge through their required participation and involvement and the top management commitment and awareness of the process approach in any business process management and improvement approach and their understanding of them being part of a continuous supplier - process - customer chain.

Consequently, this fact may lead all employees to the realization, that they constitute an inseparable part of all organizational processes’ interdependent system, are considered a sine qua non condition for effective and efficient implementation and improvement of any process management system adopted by any organization.

In concluding and summarizing, as Oakland (2003, p.188) emphatically puts it: “In many process managed organizations this type of approach has changed the way they assign and train employees, emphasizing the whole process rather than narrowly focused tasks. It has made fundamental changes to cultures, stressing process-based teamwork and customers rather than functionally driven command and control. Creativity and innovation in process improvement are recognized as core competencies and the annual performance reviews and personal development plans are linked to these”. In continuing, he stresses (p.188) that: “The first thing that top management must recognize is that moving to process management requires much more than redrawing the organizational chart or structure. The changes needed are fundamental and they will challenge any company or public service organization.”

In the first of his statements, there is an obvious analogy of the required elements for a company becoming process driven with the adoption by a company of the Total Quality Management and the new ISO 9000:2000 version management principles, as the emphasis on both quality management systems as well as on process management systems is put on process orientation, customer focus, teamwork with all empowered employees participation and involvement, appropriate training and information

processes and top management commitment and active involvement both leading and requiring creativity and innovation.

All these required business principles and factors, common in all the above mentioned management systems, appoint to the process management system the title of being a requirement as well as an integral part of any TQM and/or ISO 9000:2000 QMSystem and make the process management issue and the target of its continual improvement as the required cornerstone of any attempt for implementing effectively and efficiently the ISO 9000:2000 QMS in any organization - the Greek agro-coops included - with the ultimate aim of achieving improved organizational performance through enhanced customer-focused and market-driven business processes (the customer being internal and/or external), as the document's author believes.

Moreover, by recognizing that the process approach orientation produces fundamental changes (including cultural ones too), which represent a major challenge to any organization – private and/or public - the research is led to the examination of the two available management tools which are offered for business process changing and re-orientation - these been: Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Process Re-engineering or redesign (BPR), accomplished already in Section 3 of this document.

Furthermore, the management of Change issue will be examined in relation to these two management systems/tools (TQM and BPR) and their connection with the issues of greek agrocoops, quality management and the main theoretical models present and used in this research: Contingency theory and Open Systems theory.

The Research Principal Aim and its accompanying working hypothesis, as well as the Research objectives (Section 1, page 6) clarify and make obvious the interconnection and interrelation of the above mentioned issues, which are also referred in Section 1, page 6 in the paragraph presenting the structure of this document.

8.2 Continual Process Improvement

To conform to ISO 9000:2000, quality management systems have to in-build systems, philosophy and methods that lead to identifying potential improvement changes and actualize them, as Goetch and Davis (2002) believe.

As ISO 9004:2000, clause 8.5.1 states (as adapted from Goetch and Davis (2002)):

“Management should continually seek to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the processes of the organization, rather than wait for a problem to reveal opportunities for improvement. Improvements can range from small step ongoing continual improvement to strategic breakthrough improvement projects. The organization should have a process in place to identify, manage and control improvement activities. These improvements may result in change to the product or processes and even to the quality management system or to the organization”.

The new version of ISO 900:2000 makes the following points, which were in part also made in earlier versions of the system:

- A quality management system consists of a number of elements;
- The quality management system is carried out by means of processes, existing within and across functions;
- For the quality management system to be effective, these processes and their supporting responsibilities, authorities, procedures and resources have to be defined and deployed in a consistent manner;
- The quality management system needs coordination and compatibility of its processes;
- The quality management system needs definition of the processes interfaces.

After analyzing all these points, it is obvious that the QMS in any organization should be structured and deployed in such a manner to cover all the processes and their cross-functional interfaces and interdepartmental (inter)relationships, lines of authority and responsibility and also the resources required for its successful development.

It is also very clear that ISO recommends that the best approach for setting up the quality management system is one based on processes and goes beyond this recommendation by stating:

“An advantage of the process approach is the ongoing control that it provides over the linkage between the individual processes within the system of processes, as well as their combination and interaction. When used within a quality management system, such an approach emphasizes the importance of:

- a) Understanding and fulfilling the requirements,
- b) The need to consider processes in terms of added value,
- c) Obtaining results of process performance and effectiveness, and,
- d) Continual improvement of processes based on objective measurement.

All these processes’ cross-functional interfaces and interdepartmental relationships should be clearly defined, stated, communicated and documented.

However, this documentation should be kept as simple as possible, as one of the major disadvantages stated by many managers employees and all parties involved in the quality management issues, is the overwhelming bureaucracy resulted from adhering to the point of the system’s provisions and guidelines, following them blindly.

It should be emphasized here, that ISO has also incorporated the PDCA Cycle as engine for processes’ continual improvement in the new 2000 release as well as in the ISO 14000 Environmental Management System. ISO 14000 went so far as to use PDCA as the basis of its EMS model. The relationship in the ISO 9000:2000 QMS model/version is also evident, but is far less perceptible.

Nevertheless, ISO’s TC 176 was recommended for bringing and totally incorporating the benefits of the Shewhart Cycle/Deming Cycle, which is the PDCA cycle, to the future improvements and adjustments that have already occurred to the ISO 9000:2000 new version.

A major comment, the document’s author wants to make, is that according to ISO 9004:2000, clause 8.5.1 statement, business processes improvement can be either a result of a small-step, ongoing continual improvement and/or of a strategic, breakthrough improvement project. This statement, according to the author’s view, is a clear indication and hint from ISO Technical Committee, that a combination of continual improvement and breakthrough improvement may also be applied for gaining the best results out of the improvement process of the quality management system; the choice between planned & incremental improvement/change process and emergent & breakthrough improvement/deterministic change depends strongly on the organization,

its structure, business settings, arrangements and infrastructure, the industry is in and the business situation it faces in the specific period of time.

Furthermore, this leads directly to using Contingency theory to the improvement processes of any quality system and to the accessing of the quality management system itself. It is also an indication of the possible use of the Open Systems Theory, by accepting that anyone organization may be influenced by deterministic conditions of its external environment - as well as its internal one - for developing any business process improvement, a business activity leading to and synonymous at the same time of developing an organizational change process.

To be more specific on this issue of organizational change Wilson (2000, pp. 42-43) states: "The Open Systems approach views any one organization as an independent piece of a much larger hole. Its actions and characteristics are no longer determined just by the aspirations of its managers and founders, but by characteristics of the wider organization-environment linkages. It is the patterning of these linkages and interdependences which enables the deterministic nature of strategic change to be examined". He continues by presenting the major characteristics of the Open Systems perspective, as these have identified in the work of Von Bertalanfly (1956) and Emery and Trist (1960 a, b):

1. Equifinality: Acknowledging that there is no best way of doing things, as there exist multiple, different ways to achieve the same goal. Therefore organizations and their managers have a choice over the design of internal organization. In a sense this characteristic aligns close to the Contingency Theory characteristic of accepting the same thing, as no organization can identically much another one, not even its own self, since organizational settings, behavior and practices differ over time, and differentiated business circumstances, infrastructure and environment.
2. Negative entropy: Organizations may halt the process of disintegration and decay, a characteristic of entropy, as they can import more resources from their external environment. This element is closely connected with the opportunity for an organization using its external environment drivers for adopting an organizational change process in order to reverse a stagnating and/or decreasing business situation. Of course, it should be noted here, that in the same way external environment constraints may be "imported" by/imposed on the organization without its willing and affect its business operations to the worse, as this document's author believe.

3. Steady state: The balance of inputs, outputs and throughputs is seeking to be always in a steady state. In a direct analogy with Lewin's Force Field theory (1951), this means that when the equilibrium is disturbed, then an organizational change process is adopted for recovering and reestablishing it by altering the balance of the exchanges taking place in the "open system" organization.
4. Cycles and patterns: Reciprocal and cyclical patterns can be identified in all the organizational activities and processes. This pattern represents a single-loop cycle, while the organization may be affected by more complex cycles and patterns, when single loops interact or tangent each other, and thus experiencing a double-loop cycle; an element very close to Open Systems Thinking theory, according to this document's author's view and as Senge et al. (1994) advocate in "The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook".

The most interesting thing is that, with the Open Systems theory, the variance occurring in the internal environment of the organization can be explained by external environment factors. In this way as Wilson (2000) believes, it facilitates comparative research on organizational/strategic change issues, as all organizations are claimed to operate in an open system.

Also, as a result of the above mentioned data and stated facts, it makes possible the examination and testing of a combined management of change theory/model, that is a combination of continuous & planned change and breakthrough & emergent change that may well be applicable for improving the performance of a QMS in any Greek agro-coop by achieving the optimum results from this model.

It is also a hint, for the optimum combination of TQM and BPR elements in the implementation of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System.

9. MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

9.1 Management of Change

Organizational change in the sector of Agricultural Cooperatives relates strongly to strategic change observed and experienced in the agricultural sector at a European, National and local level.

Organizational change can be defined as both: Strategic change and restructuring of operational practices and business processes - that is operational change - as these two aspects embrace the wholeness of the corporation and at the same time each one can be the cause and effect of the other in a continuous and successive manner, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) claim.

Organizational Change is a continuous process in modern societies, though not evenly occurring in time and place. It appears both as a threat and as an opportunity to local production systems. Though inevitable, its pace and end results are determined by the ability of the business “player” to anticipate changes and to adapt and reorganize itself.

There are a number of factors/drivers leading to organizational change, which can be seen as either threats and/or opportunities, according to Johnson and Scholes (1993):

- Changes in Product Demand
- Changes in Technology
- Changes in Management Practices
- Changes in Raw Materials
- Changes in Markets
- Changes in governmental policies
- Changes in the Socio-economic environment

Lewin (1951) offered a framework for analyzing and planning organizational change. This framework is called the Force Field Analysis and it applies on planned strategies of change. According to Lewin (1951) and as Wilson (2000) refers, “to energize change requires an ‘unfreezing’ of the status quo, the change to be effected, then a “refreezing” or consolidation of the new state”. In continuing, as Wilson (2000, p.29) refers, Lewin (1951) presented its equilibrium, which is the following:

Lewin's equilibrium: driving and restraining forces for organizational changeDriving forces (forces for change) Restraining forces (forces against change)

New personnel	<i>From individuals</i>
Changing markets	Fear of failure – Loss of status – Loss of friends
Shorter product life cycles	Inertia (habit) – Fear of the unknown
Changing attitudes towards work	<i>From organizations</i>
Internationalization	Strength of culture – Rigidity of structure
Global markets	Sunk costs – Lack of resources
Social transformations	Contractual agreements
Increased competition	Strongly held beliefs and recipes for evaluating
New technology	corporate activities

In the agricultural sector all these factors are present to some degree, underlining the extent of structural transformations that farming and industrial processing of agricultural products face, as exhibited in the agro-coops section of the document – section 2.

Further more, in the following paragraphs a presentation of the interconnection and interrelation between the themes of Quality management systems (ISO 9000 QMS and TQM), BPR and Process continuous improvement issue with the issue of Management of Change will be presented.

9.2 The Synergy of Business Process Reengineering and Continuous Improvement

Business process reengineering has been characterized as everything from the newest business miracle to just another fad to a poor excuse for dumping workers. It is none of these all and it may be everything of these - paradoxically/oxymoron - depending on the view and perception that a company has for it and consequently how uses and implements it.

Mike Hammer, the inventor of the term, says that business process reengineering is “the radical redesign of business processes to achieve major gains in cost, service or time” (Hammer and Champy, 1993).

It is nothing less than the obliteration of old, worn out and broken ways of getting work done. But, research studies has shown that only 30-35% of the companies trying it succeed at reengineering. Why does this happen? Business process reengineering is supposed to achieve vertical leap in productivity and competitiveness by redesigning and redefining the (key) business processes and the way these are executed and implemented. So, what is missing? Which is the crucial factor that will enable success in process improvement?

According to this document’s author’s view, and as it has been already presented in previous pages, the answer lies in the successful and well-planned combination of steady and continuous incremental process improvements accompanied and/or successively combined with major breakthrough process improvements that redefine the rules on how the organization competes and is doing business. For major breakthrough process improvements are more likely to succeed, only when applied on an already established business/organizational quality environment which facilitates the successful implementation of any major quality driven business change imposed to by external drivers and/or internally chosen and planned to be deployed by the organization.

The incremental process improvement can be seen as incremental organizational change, while the breakthrough process improvement can be viewed as breakthrough organizational change.

In the main, organizational change in enterprises is incremental, with the breakthrough change being more occasional. Mintzberg’s (1978) studies on organizations - as referred in Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.35 and p.69) - have verified this statement.

He showed that breakthrough/transformational change did take place but this happened infrequently. To the contrary, it is more common for organizations to change incrementally, during which time organizational features experience a gradual change process; and/or adopt a piecemeal change, during which times some organizational elements changed, while others remained stable.

He also identified periods of organizational continuity, where everything remain unchanged, and also periods of flux, in which organizational change does happen but its orientation and direction are not clear.

Each one of the two major types of organizational change - these been: incremental change and breakthrough change - can succeed the other. The key lies in the realization that incremental, voluntarism change(s) create(s) and shape(s) a business internal environment ready to accept and in a logical period of time plan, implement and develop more successfully deterministic, emergent change even imposed radically and suddenly by external and/or internal factors-forces.

Small step change could become the basement for preparing an organization adapting more easily to and successfully adopting and implementing breakthrough change projects. In so doing the enterprise may build on the skills, routines, beliefs and existing professional knowledge of its personnel for developing a change process smoothly and gradually and by gaining their consensus.

The most dangerous problem here lies to the fact, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) believe, for organizational change being deployed incrementally in such a way and being based on the existing business “paradigm”, with the result leading the organization to neglect and overpass the need for any required breakthrough change and therefore risk experiencing deteriorating organizational performance.

Another problem, according to this document’s author, is the existing danger that internal current business practice, which is proposed by this model of managing change to be used as a driver for organizational change, may block the change process partially and/or completely, if the intended results of the change process are perceived to be in contradiction with the key stakeholders’ and their associated groupings personal and business interests as expressed and promoted by the current business practice and status-quo; therefore, organizational change adopting an incremental process has to be carefully planned and not resting entirely on the already existing current business systems (a Systems view of incremental change, according to Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.388)), as there may exist systems and practices / “loops” that are essential to the organization’s identity and therefore very difficult to change.

On the other hand, attention should and can be given to these systems / “loops” that are not so central and therefore can be changed and transformed. Of course, this point makes obvious the fact that breakthrough change may not be based on such an approach as these central “loops” may have to and will be challenged for the organizational performance to get improved.

First it has to be recognized, that breakthrough/transformational change may be the outcome of either external factors, such as changes in the external socio-economic, technological and political environment of the organization or internal factors such as the organizational strategic business re-orientation due to changed interests of key stakeholders’ groupings, deteriorating business performance and/or anticipation of the forthcoming external changes.

Of course, such an approach requires the unfreezing of the existing business paradigm, which consequently leads to the successive challenging of the current business practices. The use of a model with the analogy of the Force Field Model (Lewin, 1951) may be very useful and productive in deploying the change process: first unfreezing the current business practice, then challenge it by critically evaluating its elements, reinforce the change drivers and minimize the constraints, experiment with the new proposed practice, alter and correct any observed dysfunctions and gaps and finally freeze the new business “paradigm”, that is:

Change Model

Unfreeze and challenge existing business “paradigm” → Introduce Change
→ Make experimentations and corrections → Refreeze new business “paradigm”

As it was previously stated incremental, planned change is more typical and happens more often to organizations. However, there exist circumstances, where this incremental change may not cover satisfactorily the change needs of the situation and/or even emergent change occurs due to external causes and drivers.

Therefore, breakthrough change will be required for facing successfully this strategic drift. Determining always which approach of organizational change should be adopted and used is problematic as the circumstances are not always clear; it is rather at the end a matter of managerial judgement, as Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.388) believe and/or a matter of which approach is perceived to serve better the interests of the dominant

stakeholders' group, as this document's author believes out of his own professional experience.

Nevertheless, it could be considered, that the common and linking element between these two different types of management of change referring to process management is the benchmarking process, which helps anyone organization identify the existing gap between its own implemented (key) business processes and their performance in relation and comparison to these of competing and/or industry sector best companies.

Secondly, by introducing the planning process for its own execution it "shapes the ground" for motivating any organization to approach any planned and/or imposed-emergent, small incremental and/or breakthrough major change with a strategic orientation - regardless the end result of the change process implementation.

The above stated analysis leads to the conclusion, according to the document's author view, that incremental (process) improvement / change is highly desirable in the beginning of a change process for building a more safe and concise ground for attempting the implementation of organizationally planned and/or more easily accepting, adapting and successfully operating in and under externally imposed unplanned, emergent-breakthrough improvement / change.

This approach can be more easily recommended to and successfully adopted by organizations characterized by rigid and bureaucratic hierarchies, closed communication channels, rigid production, customer needs and wants - both internal and external - negligence, paternalistic relationships with the state and political parties, internal groupings' conflict and rivalry and self-interested, incompetent, untrained and uninformed organizational staff and Board of Directors' members, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) state.

The Greek agro-coops are characterized by such phenomena and they are also facing a strategic drift by experiencing a gradual decline in their organizational performance (see section 2 of the Document, on the Greek Agro-coops).

Therefore, as this document's author thinks, the adoption of incremental change process in the beginning of the change process may facilitate the smooth and gradual development of the whole change process, which should be constituted by both incremental/continuous and breakthrough/emergent change processes - each one

succeeding and superimposing each other, depending on the business circumstances and situation the agro-coop is in and facing - for it being effectively and efficiently deployed and successfully implemented and concluded.

Because resistance and blockages to incremental process improvement / change will be less and more easily, quickly and successfully handled and overcome, at least in the initial phase of any integral organizational change process, than resistance and blockages expressed when breakthrough process improvement / change is attempted to be introduced and developed.

Change affects people, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) and Oakland (2003) refer, who react negatively and resist because of:

- Loss of security or status
- Inconvenience
- Distrust or uncertainty
- Cognitive dissonance reduction
- Fear of failure

To the contrary, these people may welcome change, if they believe that it affects them positively. Actually, this is rational conduct.

On continuing the aforementioned authors believe, that the answer to people's resistance to change is realizing that once people recognize a problem as their own, it becomes possible to change their behavior. Therefore, focus should be on behavior rather than attitudes. And this can be achieved by a company through the following steps aiming at reducing resistance to change:

1. Create awareness of the need for change.
2. Involve people as much as possible in determining what the change should be.
3. Communicate the changes openly and thoroughly, and explain the reasons for them.
4. Deal forthrightly with people's concerns.
5. Give people a role in introducing the changes.

As it has been already mentioned, Organizational - Strategic change identified at the business level affects, more or less, all business players. It affects the agro-coops' business operations and processes, family farms or distribution channels, employees,

while also affect external business actors whose business activities are either directly or indirectly related to the agribusiness's operations.

On the other hand, enterprises worldwide introduce internally planned and/or accept externally imposed organizational change and consequently advance its implementation and development, in order to increase competitiveness, exploit new markets, or defend their market position and in some cases their very own business presence, survival and corporate existence, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) state.

In order to achieve these objectives they have to:

- Change Management-Organizational structures and restructure departments.
- Change Business Culture and adapt a “winning” - successful one.
- Change Operational Systems and Structures.
- Change Corporate Business Strategy (or for the first time) adapt one.
- Change human resources management, i.e.: Composition of personnel; hiring practices; Empowerment, training and learning; Communication processes and participation.

Recent experience of industrial restructuring (Report paper on “Social Dialogue”, Pro-dialogue program, European Union/Social Policy Directorate, 2001-2004) indicates that such an attempt has considerable consequences to personnel. Most employees are affected because of changes in companies' organizational structure, technology infrastructure, operational systems and management methods and tools.

Some of the changes experienced by the companies' personnel are listed below:

Displacement; new career opportunities; acquisition of new skills; skill enlargement; skill degradation.

Therefore, a number of negative effects on employees due to restructuring can be identified, perceived and experienced by them: loss of jobs and income, increased stress and anxiety, increased workloads and rhythms of work. On the other hand, new technological applications tend to reduce physical effort and transform manual or repetitive work in the handling sophisticated devices.

The presence of business strategy clearly offers a visible vision and definite goals to the employees and the firm's management making easier the selection of optimum business

operations, and the “struggle” for their successful materialisation. So, the behaviour and practice of the enterprise’s stakeholders depend heavily on the perceived and forecasted by them results of the organizational change as well as on the actual results of the organizational change process, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) believe. The impact increases with the magnitude of the undertaken change and its importance for the enterprise’s “welfare”.

The extent, pace and results of an enterprise’s organizational change process depend strongly on the firm’s business culture characteristics. The existence of internal business mechanisms of diffusion and imitation of good industrial practices and the existence of an internal business tradition and culture in healthy industrial and corporate relations and consensus “building”, is essential for eliminating inner-company tensions and stakeholders’ resistance and sabotage, which may increase the negative outcomes experienced during the organizational change and even nullify the change process itself, as identified and presented in the Report paper on “Social Dialogue”, Pro-dialogue program, (E.U./Social Policy Directorate, 2001-2004).

And continuing on this issue, it has been identified in this research paper that, if such mechanisms are not present, then they have to be introduced, developed and preserved, i.e. they have to be proven capable to increase the employee’s trust in their ability to introduce, develop and accommodate organizational change, to foresee negative aspects and to contribute to their elimination.

International experience of organizational change process and practices indicate, that the negative results on the enterprise as a whole are remarkably increased when the change process planning and implementation are left only to the Board of Directors or only to the Managing Director’s managerial will and competence and not on both these two groups, according to the research outputs presented in the aforementioned report (E.U./Social Policy Directorate, 2001-2004). If the BoD’s members do not cooperate with the Managing Director and the senior management team on the organizational change issue and process, then internal conflicts may be experienced; these conflicts, in most of the cases tend to result to the change process alteration and improper implementation, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) reassure. This fact is ultimately leading to more job losses, creation of more inner-company disputes, tensions and conflicts, unequal distribution of the organizational change costs and benefits and the marginalization of employees and other stakeholders’ groupings.

On the other hand, organizational change based on the involvement and participation of all company's stakeholders concerned, may prevent some of such negative developments or lessen their impact, thus increasing the ability of the enterprise to accommodate change and, hence, increase propensity to change successfully, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) and Oakland (2003) believe.

The effectiveness of the "internal business dialogue" in an enterprise, especially in the Greek agro-coops, depends on, according to the aforementioned authors and the EU research report indications and this document's author's personal professional experience:

- Mutual recognition and respect of the relevant and legitimate -company wise-interests of all its Stakeholders.
- Past history of firm's inner-company relations and consensus building between Top Management Team and the Board of Directors.
- Ability to accommodate the basic interests of those who lose.
- Acknowledgement of the socio-economic role that the agricultural co-operative is expected to perform in the local community, while at the same time acknowledgement of the necessity to perform effectively and efficiently – business and financially wise.
- Informing, education and training of all the Stakeholders e.g.: employees, workers, senior management team, even the members of the BoD involved on the change necessity, process and intended results.
- Dissemination of knowledge and information to the sector's Stakeholders (first degree agricultural co-operatives, Farmers' Unions and Producers' Groups, Olive oil mills companies, private sector companies).
- Building of a co-operation climate in the local community.

All the above mentioned facts are to a large degree present in the current business situation and practice experienced in the Greek agro-coops sub-sector, as it has already been presented in the relevant section 2 of this document, concerning the Greek agro-coops present business conditions, practice and behavior. It is important to state here, that in all organizations the – key especially – stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs and

practice towards any organizational change play a very important role in the successful implementation of this change process, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) believe.

The same fact holds true for the introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops, which can be regarded and considered as an organizational change tool – being it incremental and planned, therefore voluntaristic and/or breakthrough and emergent, therefore deterministic – since it challenges the current business practices and status quo of them. It is an unwelcome event according to the majority of the Greek agro-coops stakeholders' view, as it is perceived as a threat to their established interests and the existing configuration of power structures in the agro-coops environment.

This organizational change process “threatens the very bases of the business upon which many on the board had built their authority and power in the organization” as Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.405) state. This statement is very closely aligned to the existing situation in the Greek agro-coops as it was presented and analyzed in the relevant section of the document.

In order to implement effectively and efficiently such an organizational change program, it is required by any change agent to fully and clearly understand, analyze and critically evaluate the political systems existing in the organization. These political mechanisms include: the manipulation of organizational resources; the relationship with powerful groupings and/or elites; activity with regard to subsystems in the organization; and symbolic activity (Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.405)). All of these, as these two authors believe, may become a useful tool for: building a power base; encouraging support-change drivers and/or overcoming resistance-change restraints; and achieving the unweaving commitment and involvement of key stakeholders, considered a prerequisite for attempting any organizational change project.

To be more specific and expand on the above mentioned political mechanisms, existed in any organization – the Greek agro-coops too. The control and manipulation of organizational resources is a source and manifestation, at the same time, of exhibiting and exercising organizational power. Its manifestation is mostly used by the organization's stakeholder powerful groups. Association or confrontation with such groupings will influence respectively the effective development or blockage of the change process.

These powerful individuals and/or groups exert a strong and decisive influence on the business orientation and practice of the organization and are able to blockade and nullify any attempt of organizational change, especially if they consider and perceive it as threatening their personal interests, influence and power networks in the enterprise. These networks of stakeholders are usually called “mafia” and their resistance to change is referred as “concrete ceiling”, as Johnson and Sholes (1993, p.407) inform us.

As it has been mentioned before, communicating and honestly informing all company’s stakeholders on the change process and its effects is considered the only way for gaining their commitment and involvement in the change process implementation. The change agent may be required to use also symbolic mechanisms of change, such as work within the existing paradigm limits and use the organizational rituals, stories and symbols for overcoming expressed resistance to organizational change and enforce its drivers.

Summarizing, these political aspects of management of change are unavoidable during the implementation of any change process and should be handled with care by any manager, since the problems of resistance in the organizational change by the employees, lack of power of the change agents for undertaking this activity, the staff’s perceptions regarding the change itself, its process and its outputs as something minor and temporary and “sabotage” of the change at its wholeness and/or partially by powerful stakeholder groups may very well blockade and nullify the change process, as the aforementioned authors state.

All these stated dangers are important, but the document’s author considers the management of the political networks of the company’s stakeholders, especially of the key ones, as the most serious task for enabling and facilitating any organizational change, being it either an incremental or breakthrough one. Because, these individuals’ groupings may exert significant influence in any company’s business orientation. Few individuals have sufficient power to influence any company’s business practices on their own. They rather prefer to become members of a wider stakeholder group by sharing the same interests, aims, ideals and expectations with others. In this way, the existence of stakeholder groups, being formal and/or informal and being comprised by internal and/or external individuals - stakeholders, is an unavoidable and common phenomenon encountered in any organization.

These stakeholders' groups are seeking to influence the organizational behavior and practice very often, as Johnson and Sholes (1993, p.172) inform us. Even more, the authors believe that these "political" groupings may create temporary alliances with each other on the basis of their common interests on a specific issue and more normally conflict for acquiring the required power for controlling and managing the organization, according to their own interests, regardless of the corporate interest sometimes.

Therefore, the need of mapping these stakeholder groups, understanding their expectations (and if possible their intentions) and weighing their interests in terms of the power they possess and exercise is a crucial element of critically analyzing and evaluating any organizational change process in any corporation; the analogy with the introduction and development of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops, which may be considered and perceived by the agro-coops stakeholders as an organizational change – either a step incremental one or a major, breakthrough one, is very obvious the document's author believe, who also considers any quality system's effective implementation and efficient use in the greek agro-coops as an organizational change, in both reality and in the agro-coops' stakeholders' perceptions.

When analyzing stakeholder groups, it is necessary to examine both the formal and informal groupings formed in the organization. Secondly, it should be acknowledged that these groups may be consisted by both internal and external stakeholders and thirdly, that in the same group different and divided views may exist regarding a specific issue, while on other issues potential alliances between the members of the same group and even between different groups exist in contrast to the conflict experienced in another situation.

Assessing the importance of stakeholder power, resources, expectations and attitudes is a very important part of any organizational analysis, and this will also be an important part of the research undertaken by the document's author. Two methods of mapping stakeholders will be used: the power/dynamism matrix; and the power/interest matrix, as these two models are presented by Johnson and Scholes (1993, pp. 175-178).

Power/dynamism matrix

The following figure shows the power/dynamism matrix on which stakeholders can be plotted. This is a useful way for assessing where the "political efforts" should be

channeled during the introduction and development of any new management system, such as the ISO 9000 QMS is, in any organization, the Greek agro-coops included.

The most difficult group to cope with are those in segment D, since they are in a powerful position to block and/or support any organizational change program, but their stance is difficult to predict. In contrast, stakeholder group in segment C are likely to influence the change process through the process of using other stakeholders by anticipating their stance and then manipulating them in order to serve their own interests. Stakeholder groups in segments A and B have and exhibit less power, nevertheless are not unimportant, as their active support, firstly is required for advancing the change process and secondly it may facilitate the successful implementation and completion of the organizational change process by influencing the attitude, behavior and practice of the other stakeholder groups, which are more powerful.

PREDICTABILITY

High

Low

	A Few problems	B Unpredictable but manageable
	Low	Low
	C Powerful but predictable	D Greatest danger or opportunities
POWER	High	High

Figure 9.1: Stakeholder mapping: power / dynamism matrix

Power / interest matrix

As it is referred by Johnson and Scholes (1993) the power/interest matrix is a valuable development of the power/dynamism matrix, which classifies the stakeholders

according to their power and the extent they exercise it due to their interests’ protection and/or enhancement. The value of of this type of stakeholder mapping is in assessing the following, as Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.177) show:

- Whether the political/cultural situation is likely to undermine the adoption of a particular strategy and/or organizational change decision and process - as this document’s author believes and adds -.
- Who the key blockers and facilitators of change are likely to be.
- The extent to which maintenance activities will be needed to discourage stakeholders from repositioning themselves.

LEVEL OF INTEREST

		Low	High
POWER	Low	A Minimal effort	B Keep informed
	High	C Keep satisfied	D Key players

Figure 9.2: Stakeholder mapping: power/interest matrix

Of course, this stakeholder mapping is conducted for assessing individual stakeholders and their groups’ power. As Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.178) define it: “power is best understood as the extent to which individuals or groups are able to persuade, induce or coerce others into following certain courses of action. This is the mechanism by which one set of expectations will dominate strategic development or seek compromise with others”.

They continue (p.180) with the required analysis of the sources of power, where they present the following figure:

Sources of power:

a) Within organizations

1. Hierarchy (formal power), e.g. autocratic decision making.
2. Influence (informal power), e.g. implementation, charismatic leadership
3. Control of strategic resources, e.g. strategic products (coal)
4. Possession of knowledge/skills, e.g. computer specialists
5. Control of the environment, e.g. negotiating skills
6. Involvement in strategic implementation, e.g. by exercising discretion

b) For external stakeholders

1. Control of strategic resources, e.g. Materials, labour, money
2. Involvement in strategic e.g. distribution outlets, agents
3. Possession of knowledge (skills), e.g. subcontractors
4. Through internal links, e.g. informal influence.

As it is evident from the agro-coops' - section 2 - analysis many of these sources of power are evident in and influence the Greek agro-coops business practice and behavior, therefore as this document's author believes their use will be necessary in the implementation of his DBA Research process.

10. WORKING DEFINITIONS AND KEY CONCEPTS

This section of the research will give valuable insights and explanations on defining concepts, themes and terms that will be used in and encountered throughout the entire research process. According to Fisher (2002), the concepts are: “the building blocks of models and theories and are the working definitions which are used in the particular analysis for which they have been devised and chosen”.

However, before presenting the initial conceptual framework of my research project, it is considered appropriate to present and in this way define indirectly the framework of the key concepts and themes that will be used in the research project. These definitions evolve from the preceding critical literature review analysis and aim at helping me and the reader understand, clarify and explain the subject field of my research.

As it was mentioned in section 1 of this document, the structure of this review is based on a number of issues and themes arising from the two pillars of the research: the Greek agro-coops and the quality concepts, plus the inter-connected & -related sub-pillars of business process improvement and organizational change management.

The main parts-sections of the review-document comprise the:

- Greek agro-coops’ sector current business status and environment (internal and external one) and key business factors influencing its business operations and practices (key stakeholders included).
- Quality concept and field, its quality management tools - i.e. ISO 9000 QMS, TQM and BPR - their nature, inter-connection & inter-relationship and use, and the intended benefits of their development, in the
- Business Process management and improvement field.
- Quality management systems importance, significance and effects to the agro-food industry companies – the Greek agro-coops included (research findings evaluation).
- Management of change field in relation to the development of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops and the Corporate Politics and stakeholders’ issues.

All these themes and concepts are presented and examined more analytically and critically in a sequential format in the following paragraphs.

From the preceding critical literature review analysis (see relevant section on Greek agro-coops) it becomes obvious, that the socioeconomic environment in which the agricultural cooperatives are operating - in both Europe and Greece - is currently undergoing a rapid change. Public Policy as demonstrated in the reformed CAP, trade liberalization under the GATT agreement signed in WTO and the E.U. enlargement are to bring more competition and less support to commodity markets. At the same time, biotechnology, information technology and the rising power of retail chains and MNEs require from the Agro-coops to adopt and adapt enhanced and improved business processes and operations with the final aim of achieving improved organizational performance in the agro-food chain and industry in order to deliver value to their customers and all the Agro-coops stakeholders (Martinou et al, 1997).

As an answer to these new demands, the food industry in general and the Agricultural Cooperatives in particular have preferred and adopted the introduction of Quality Assurance and Management Systems – including ISO 9000 QMS (mostly), TQM and BPR programs - in their business operations and processes (Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002), aiming at improving their business processes with the ultimate goal to improve their organizational performance, a legitimated intention as Oakland (2003) comments. It is also interesting that the same aims are expressed in the research surveys and identified in their findings on the implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS (see section on ISO 9000 research findings) by corporations worldwide.

On the other hand the effective implementation, use and operation of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management system in the Greek Agro-coops - and not only to these but even in corporations in various sectors of the economy and business environment - is under question as there exist a generally held doubt and dispute on the Agro-coops' operational and organizational infrastructure and competencies as well as their corporate culture and willingness to implement and use these Quality systems effectively and efficiently (Arvanitoyiannis, 2000; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002).

Of paramount importance are the Greek Agro-coops' (Key) Stakeholders attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMS systems and their actual behaviors

and practices concerning these systems' implementation, operation and use in the Greek agro-coops, for as Johnson and Scholes (1993) state, the existence of stakeholder groups, being formal and/or informal and being comprised by internal and/or external stakeholders, is an unavoidable and common phenomenon encountered in any organization. These stakeholder groups are seeking to influence the organizational behavior and practice very often, as Johnson and Sholes (1993) inform.

It is important to state here, that in all organizations the – key especially – stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs and practice towards any business process improvement, that is towards organizational change - for business process improvement is considered an organizational change process, according to Oakland (2003) and Banks (2000) - play a very important role in the successful implementation of this change process. The same fact holds true for the introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops, which can be regarded and considered as an organizational change – being it incremental and planned, therefore voluntarist and/or breakthrough and emergent, therefore deterministic – since it challenges the current business practices and organizational “status quo” of them.

It is an unwelcome event according to the majority of the Greek agro-coops stakeholders' view, as it is perceived as a threat to their established interests and the existing configuration of power structures in the agro-coops environment (Karamichas, 1998; Martinos et al, 1997). This organizational change process “threatens the very bases of the business upon which many on the board had built their authority and power in the organization” as Johnson and Sholes (1993, p. 405) state. This statement is very closely aligned to the existing situation in the Greek agro-coops, as it was presented and analyzed in the relevant section of the document, analyzing and examining the current business situation of and in Greek agro-coops.

11. INITIAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A fair number of research studies and surveys have been conducted internationally so far attempting to examine and evaluate the significance and importance of the introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems for the business processes and operations as well as the overall organizational performance - as exhibited internally and externally - of the corporations.

Furthermore, the business factors (external and internal ones) that affect the implementation process of these quality systems in the organizations have been investigated, analyzed and evaluated with equal consideration in these research studies.

The same research aims and objectives have been adopted in this research, which is conducted in the Greek agro-coops sub-sector. Emphasis is given to the examination of the role, importance and enterprising organization and operation of the agricultural cooperatives in Greece. The analytical reference to the structure and operation of the Greek agricultural cooperatives as well as in the characteristics of their intervention in the agricultural sector is owed to the drastic changes that are observed in the economic and social environment of the Greek agricultural cooperatives.

These changes lead to research and approaches of topics and subjects that are connected, on the one side with the current unfavorable position of the Unions of agricultural cooperatives and on the other with the necessary enterprising and operational adaptations that are required for the Unions of Agro-coops to survive and develop. One of these approaches is the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000-Quality management systems in any corporation active in the Agro-food industry (therefore, for the Greek agro-coops too), as it is stated in the book of Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002).

The principal aim of this research is to: thoroughly examine, analyze and critically evaluate the manner of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems’ implementation and use in the Greek agricultural cooperatives for:

- investigating and critically evaluating the systems’ role and degree of contribution in the development and sustainable application of improved business processes and ultimately organizational performance, and

- examining and critically analyzing the key business factors influencing the Quality Management Systems' effective and efficient development and practice in the aforementioned business environment.

The main parts-sections of the review-document, as well as of the research process, comprise the:

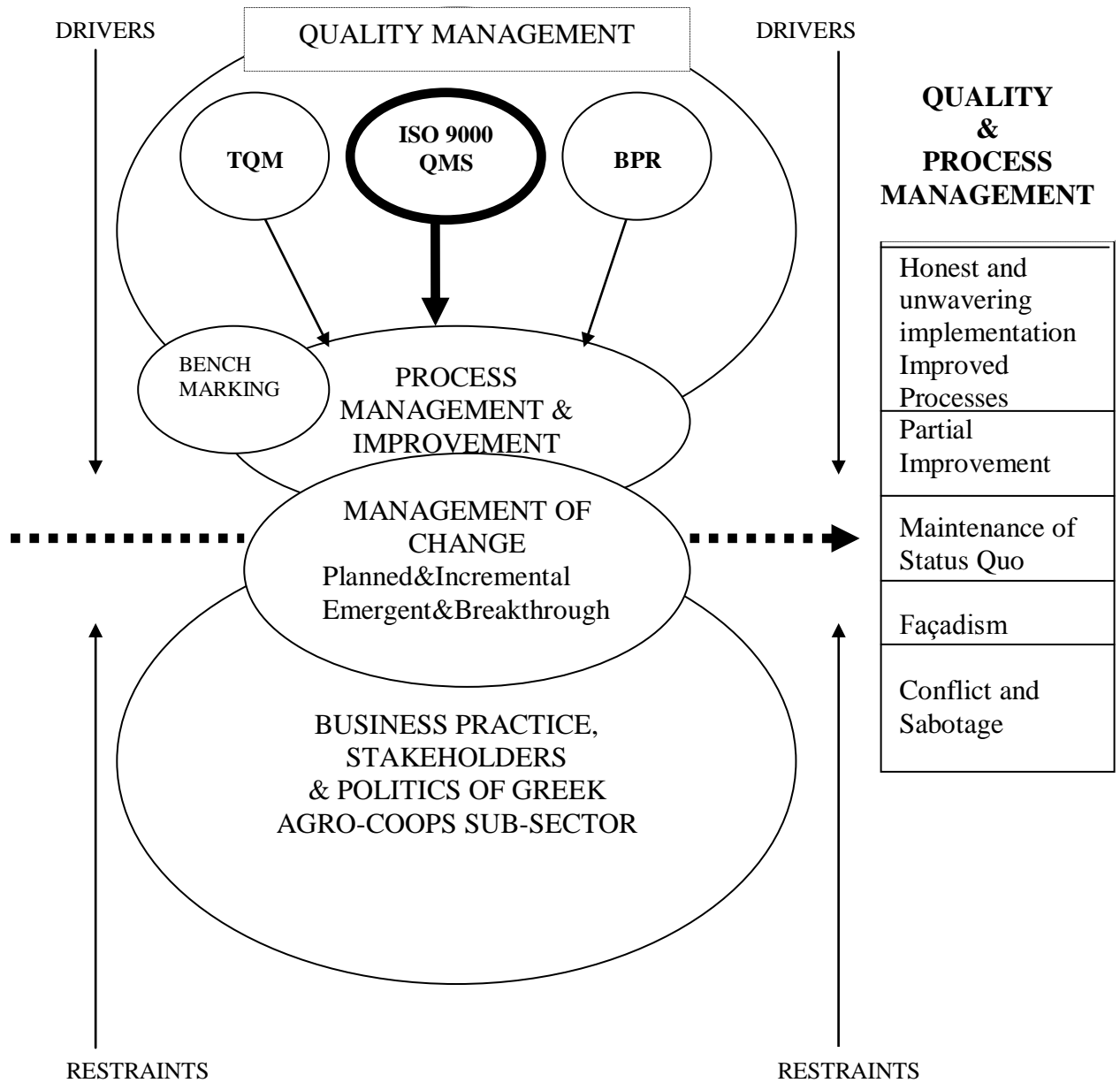
- Greek agro-coops' sector current business status, practice and environment (internal and external one) and key business factors influencing its business operations and practices (key stakeholders included).
- Quality concept and field, its methodological quality management tools - i.e. ISO 9000 QMS, TQM and BPR - their nature, inter-connection & inter-relationship and use, and the intended benefits of their development, in the
- Business Process management and improvement field.
- Importance and effects of the Quality management systems' implementation and use in the agro-food industry companies' organizational performance - the Greek agro-coops included - (research findings' evaluation included).
- Management of change field in relation to the development of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops and the Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues.

As a result of the above mentioned main research aim, the following working hypothesis has been formulated:

ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems are considered by the Greek agro-coops (and their key stakeholders) as an organizational change management tool, that is effectively implemented and efficiently used for achieving improved business processes and organizational performance, despite their existing organizational, behavioral and operational settings and arrangements that might affect and impair their business performance and consequently might influence the effective implementation and the efficient use of these systems.

This working hypothesis is going to be examined and tested by the use of the following initial conceptual framework:

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
ISO 9000 QMS IMPLEMENTATION AND USE
EVIDENCE FROM GREEK AGRO-COOPS**



- Note: a. The research process on the themes of the initial conceptual framework will not strictly follow the sequential form as presented in this figure.
- b. All these themes will be regarded and researched as potential drivers and/or restraints of the effective and efficient implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS by the Greek agro-coops, regardless of their position in the aforementioned conceptual framework figure, which should not mislead the reader.
- c. The interrelationship and interdependence as well as the influence each theme-concept exercises on another is obvious – e.g. process management & improvement and management of change, therefore analysis of one concept's elements may appear in the section referring in the critical literal review/analysis and evaluation of another, throughout this document review and/or the research process of the entire DBA project.

12. CONCLUSIONS

In the agro-food industry, the economic and business integration worldwide advances through joint ventures, strategic alliances, conglomerates, business takeovers and business clusters. Furthermore, in all private companies of the Food Industry the introduction and implementation of Quality Assurance and Management Systems - such as the ISO 9000, ISO 14000 and HACCP , as well as TQM and BPR programs - is considered an imperative and the only debatable argument is how they can improve the implementation of these Quality and Process management systems aiming at the upgrading of their business processes and operations and consequently the improvement of their organizational performance (Oakland, 2003 and Giannatos and Ageletopoulos, 1995). The protagonists of all these processes, the private ownership companies of the agro-industry, are the main competitors of the agricultural cooperatives' sub-sector; a fact that almost forces the Greek agro-coops to adopt the introduction of such quality systems and attempt to implement and use them effectively and efficiently, for remaining competitive in the food industry sector.

The differentiation of demand brings new requirements, as food consumption is increasingly related to non-consumption utilities like social referencing, health, product safety and quality, environmental friendliness and product regional origin. The combined effect is the emerging need for entrepreneurial, adaptive, quality driven business processes and market driven and oriented corporate operations and organizational structures for every type of institution in the agri-food industry and more especially for the agricultural cooperatives, which represent or should represent, according to the public view and opinion, an organization operating at the edge of business excellence ; this is not a paradox as in public's mind the Agro-coops are synonymous to social public organizations whose main mission is or should be the general public welfare.

As a conclusion of the aforementioned analysis, the researcher has defined the following objectives for the DBA project:

- to analyze and critically evaluate the current status of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems in Greek Agro-coops in relation to the agro-coops' current business status.

- to evaluate the role and contribution of these Quality management systems to the development of improved business operations and processes by the Greek agro-coops with the final aim of achieving improved Operational and Organizational Performance and Business Excellence.
- to examine these Quality management systems' role and influence in the Greek agro-coops' business reorientation towards customer-focused and market-oriented business practices, services and operations.
- to identify the driving and restraining forces concerning the implementation, operation and use of ISO 9000-Quality Assurance and Management Systems in Greek Agricultural Cooperatives.
- to investigate the Greek Agro-coops' (Key) Stakeholders attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMSystems and identify their actual behaviors and practices concerning these systems' implementation, operation and use in the Greek agro-coops.

Therefore, a thorough auditing of all the Key Business Factors, that influence the implementation and development process of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agro-coops, will be a main task of the Research Process. More specifically, a critical examination, analysis and evaluation of all the Critical Success Factors, which will be viewed as the Driving Forces as well as of the Critical Failure Factors which will take the place of the Constraining Forces that affect and influence the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek Agro-coops will be conducted.

To pursue the lines of research as presented in the aforementioned conceptual framework, the following research plan is proposed, which intends to show the existing relationship between the research focus and main questions, the required documents of the DBA programme, and the research planned outcomes.

DOCUMENT 3 (CASE/ETHNOGRAPHIC/INTERPRETEVIST RESEARCH)

Interpretivism takes a nominalist view and more specifically argues that the external world is not knowable since people create their own social world. More specifically, the researcher has chosen an ethnographic approach to research the Introduction and Implementation of the ISO 9000 Quality Management systems in the Greek agricultural cooperatives. Each cooperative represents an entity comprised of many groups of stakeholders each one of which experiences the business world and situations in different forms and ways, all of which must be taken into account during the research process in order to formulate a valid research analysis and synthesis later on.

More specifically, a multi-method form of Ethnography / Case study research will be used. This method will be comprised by observation through participation -both active and passive-, interviews, examination of case studies and critical incidents and content analysis. The focus of the research is also on exploration and insight rather than experiment. Although the researcher is a member of the top management team and of the Quality Control team in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia/UACM and therefore he could exercise his position influence and merit in order to experiment with different approaches in some cases and issues relevant to the Research Topic, this status advantage will not be exercised - to the contrary it will be avoided - as the Researcher's professional, managerial and personal ethics do not permit him to apply misuse of his professional position and manipulation of situations and persons in favour of his own interest.

Document 3 will cover the following topics and consequently answer the following questions:

1. What are the Agro-coops' Key Stakeholders' opinions, attitudes and beliefs towards the nature of the ISO 9000 – Quality management systems, the manner of the systems' implementation and their influencing role:
 - 1.1. in the development and implementation of improved business operations and organizational performance.
 - 1.2. in business reorientation towards customer-focused and market-oriented business practices and operations.
 - 1.3. in assessing and changing mismanaged and misused corporate behaviours and

practices by acting as a corporate organizational change tool–strategic competence/resource.

2. What is the Key Stakeholders' knowledge towards the nature of the ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems and the requirements of the system's implementation?

More specifically the following sub-questions will be set:

- 2.1. What difference does the transition to, and the introduction and implementation of the “new” ISO 9000:2000 QMSystem make in comparison with the implementation of the “old” QMS - the ISO 9000:1994 - in terms of the Agro-coops' business operations.
- 2.2. What are their opinions and beliefs towards the nature and manner of the ISO 9000:2000 QMS' implementation, and the intended by them results.
- 2.3. What are the results of the Introduction and Implementation of the ISO 9000:1994 QMSystems in the UACM and in the other selected Greek Agro-coops.
Furthermore, to investigate the Agro-coops' Key Stakeholders' opinions on the implementation of the system and register the perceived by them produced results of its operation in comparison to the intended by them outcomes of its application.

The term “Key Stakeholders” refers to the following:

Members of the Board of Directors; the UACM's and the other Agro-coops' General Manager; the Top Managers' Team / Directors of the Divisions and of the Regional Branches; the Quality Management Team.

A representative set of sub-questions contained in the main questions of Document 3 is the following:

- How the Agro-coops' key stakeholders perceive the current business situation and position in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in their companies?
- How do they perceive the current business situation and position of their corporation?
- Which is their knowledge considering the ISO 9000 QMS nature, manner of implementation, requirements of use, aims and goals, prescribed and intended (according to theory) results ?
- Why does a Corporation have to introduce and implement the ISO QMS?

- Is there any difference between the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 QMS systems? And if yes in terms of what and which ones?
- Does and can the implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS lead to improved Business Performance and if not why not?
- Can the ISO 9000 QMS be considered a corporate-business tool for strategic organizational development and business auditing?
- Do they believe that the company has to restructure its organization and change its business operations concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS application and development?
- Will this change lead to the development of customer-focused and market-oriented business processes and activities? Does the Company need to develop such business operations? And if yes: Why?
- What do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks?
- What aspects of the ISO 9000 QMS application processes and operations have to change, why, when, how and to which direction? Who should decide and who should implement this change process?
- Who should lead and decide the ISO 9000 QMS implementation effort? Is a Quality plan, strategy, communication program necessary and why? Who should implement the ISO 9000 QMS development - and improvement - process?
- What's the opinion, the attitude and the practices of the employees, workers and other third parties regarding the above mentioned topics and themes as perceived by the key stakeholders?
- Are these key stakeholders aware of other companies' - including competitors - manner of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use in their companies? How do they consider and evaluate this ISO QMS status?

Finally, an in-depth survey with open interviews and formal as well as informal talking will take place with each one of the members of the Board of Directors (as far as it is possible), as their influence and power exertion over the UACM's present operating "paradigm" in terms of the ISO 9000 Quality management system implementation and use is considered substantial and their views and opinions can influence notoriously the system's future implementation and use orientation, and the research must have an integrated picture of all "players" views of the business world.

The same research technique semi-structured interviews as well as open interviews in some cases will be applied to the UACM's Top Management Team as their power and influence is also considered important and to a degree shaping the Company's life as well as their professional status and position in the company is considered higher than the ones of the other company's employees and workers.

Furthermore, it is expected that the researcher will be engaged in several formal discussions with work colleagues and their views and beliefs concerning the work and the company will be held in account by the researcher objectively and unbiased (as long as I can, because I am a human being interacting with my environment and thus, having my own prejudices, biases, stereotypes, feelings, beliefs, values and so on, which in some cases are predetermined and shaped by external and prior to the given situation factors and experiences).

Moreover, it is expected (in Employees' Union meetings, Directors meetings, Board of Directors monthly meetings, Quality Management Team meetings) the researcher to participate in Group Meetings and Discussions having to do with the Company's business' current as well as future, operations, goals and position. All these meetings can be viewed and handled as Panels in the research process, which panels can take mostly a precoded manner as their discussion topics are always predetermined by the BoD, the General Manager, the Quality Manager and the Employees' Union BoD.

In Document 3 with the use of case studies based on open interviews and semi-structured interviews the research method will produce qualitative research data but at the same time some sort of quantitative data can be produced through the analysis of the material. Nevertheless, the purpose of document 4 will be to develop a detailed and deep account of the agro-cooperative's other stakeholders (i.e. employees, workers, third parties) attitudes and views towards Quality assurance and management systems.

DOCUMENT 4 (POSITIVIST RESEARCH)

As far as Document 4 is concerned it will be a largely positivistic part of the research, producing more quantitative data through the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured questionnaires. The focus of the work will still be on the main research questions. But in this document the emphasis will be on establishing a representative view of two particular groups of stakeholders:

the Agro-coops' employees and workers and the Agro-coops' selling and supplying collaborators through the use of recognised sampling techniques.

In particular this document will answer the following questions:

-What is the view of the U.A.C.M.'s Selling Collaborators regarding its business operations, its presence in the market and the nature and practice of the business cooperation they have with the company?

-How do they view the UACM's Quality system implementation and use?

-Does it help their company's operations and selling activities?

This Group consists of the Company's Commercial Representatives and Agents both in the internal market and abroad as well as Independent Customers - Private Companies and Big Retail Chains / Super and Hyper Markets.

-What is the view of the UACM's Supplying Collaborators regarding its business operations, its presence in the market and the nature and practice of the business cooperation they have with the company?

-How they consider the UACM's Quality system application and use?

-Does it need any improvement?

The aforementioned group consists of the agro-coop's product and services suppliers, which are collaborating with the agro-coop a fair number of time.

Regarding the UACM's Supplying and Selling Collaborators the following research methods will be used: first of all a structured questionnaire concerning the Company's operations in relation to the appliance of Quality Performance and Operations Criteria - that the ISO 9002 Quality Questionnaire requires - and how they measure the UACM's compliance to these criteria and secondly semi-structured interviews will be the tool for

a thorough analysis and understanding of their views and attitudes vis-à-vis the UACM's existing business operations.

Referring to the largest group of agro-coops' stakeholders, namely their employees and workers the following research questions will be carried out thoroughly:

- 1.1. What is their knowledge and perception of the ISO 9000 QMSystems?
- 1.2. What are their opinions, attitudes and perceptions towards the nature and the manner of the systems' implementation and its usefulness in terms of the produced results of its application?

- 2.1. What difference (if any) does the transition to, and the introduction and implementation of, the "new" ISO 9000:2000 QMS make in comparison with the implementation of the "old" QMS - the ISO 9000:1994 - in terms of the Agro-coops' business operations?
- 2.2. According to them which are the intended results of the new system's operation and use and which is the rational of its introduction?
- 3.1. What are the results of the introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000:1994 QMS in their Agro-coop?
- 3.2. Have they been informed - prior to the system's introduction - of the rational for the Systems' implementation and use? Of the intended results of its operation? Of the System's specific usefulness for their company? If yes, by whom? If not, why not according to them?

Concerning the largest group of the company, namely the company's employees and workers both pre-coded questionnaires as well as open-unstructured ones concerning some special cases/topics will be used.

It is in the researcher's intention to combine pre-coded questions as well as open question in the same single questionnaires in order to achieve in this way the responders openness, clarity and true expression of their opinions and views (all questionnaires will be returned unsigned in a carton box which will be in the work place for as long as it is required in the absence of the researcher).

The following possible sub-questions may be used in this session of the DBA research:

- How the Agro-coops/UACM's employees and workers perceive the current business situation and position in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use?
- How the Agro-coops/UACM's employees and workers perceive the current business situation and position of their company?
- Which is their knowledge considering the ISO 9000 QMS nature, manner of implementation, requirements of use, aims and goals, intended results?
- Why does a Corporation have to introduce and implement the ISO QMS?
- Is there any difference between the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems? And if yes in terms of what and which ones?
- Do they believe that the company has to restructure its organisation and change its business operations concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS development and implementation?
- What aspects of the ISO 9000 QMS application processes and operations have to change, why, when, how and to which direction?
- Will this change lead to the development of customer-focused and market-oriented business processes and activities? Does the Company need to develop such business operations? And if yes: Why?
- What do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks?
- Who should lead the ISO 9000 QMS implementation effort? Is it the Top Management's responsibility? Is a Quality plan, strategy, communication program necessary and why?
- According to them what are the attitudes, behaviour and real practice of the UACM's/Agro-coops' Top Management as well as of the members of the BoD regarding the above mentioned topics and themes?
- How all these stakeholders consider and evaluate the competitors' manner of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use in their companies?

Having come to an in-depth view of stakeholders' attitudes in document 3, document 4 will concentrate on measuring the extent to which the various attitudes identified are shared and distributed amongst the various stakeholders.

DOCUMENT 5 (THESIS)

Finally, in Document 5 with the use of the case study method (in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia) and the in depth surveys tool (in the other previously referred Greek Agro-Coops) as the predominant research tool and as a secondary mean the open interviews and the semi-structured interviews in order to explore:

1. The ISO 9000:2000 – Quality Management System’s Introduction and Implementation in the Greek Agro-coops and the results of its implementation and use in these agro-coops’ businesses and operation. Prescribed, intended, actual and perceived Outcomes of the Systems’ operation according to all Stakeholders’ (including managers of the external professional organizations and accrediting bodies / How they consider and evaluate the manner of ISO 9000 QM systems’ implementation and use in these companies) opinion and the identification of the causes of any observed and registered discrepancy between these different types of outcomes according to them.
2. How all these key stakeholders consider and evaluate other companies' manner and rational of ISO 9000 Quality system’s implementation and use?
3. Evaluation and measurement of the (Key) Stakeholders’ role, degree and size of influence on the ISO 9000 QMS manner of operation in the Greek Agro-coops. What are their levels of commitment (positioning them on the grid) and more specifically:
 - whether there exists any difference and gap between their espoused position and their actual behavior towards the implementation and use of the Quality System.
 - what is their role and degree of influence & affection on the effectiveness of the system’s implementation and the efficiency of its use.
4. Final investigation and concluding results of the Drivers and Restraints of the ISO 9000 QMSystem’s efficient introduction and effective use and implementation – Balance of Forces in the Force Field Analysis.

In this way, research method tends to be more qualitative as open questionnaires and the open interviews will provide the required qualitative data as a product of Phenomenological research, while at the same time some sort of quantitative data can be produced through the use of the semi-structured interviews and the cross-evaluation of the case studies, of the in-depth surveys and of the open interviews. Because as Bell

(1993) states: “the case study approach is an umbrella term which includes a wide range of evidence capture and analysis procedures and due to this flexibility a case study may be an almost entirely positivistic or almost entirely phenomenological study or anything between these two extremes”.

Moreover, the cross-evaluation of all research data produced throughout the research processes held in Documents 3, 4 and 5 can produce the needed quantitative data required for producing the optimum “blending” of research findings which may lead to the formulation of the best practice model concerning the Introduction, Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agricultural Cooperatives.

The selection of the case study as the predominant research tactic in this stage is made for the accomplishment of two research objectives:

Firstly, to confirm, support and reassure all the research findings and their deriving conclusions, and secondly to effectively benchmark the implementation and use as well as the conceptual and operational framework of the ISO 9000 Quality Management systems in various Greek Agro-Coops in order to be able to identify and suggest (throughout and as a research product) a Best Practice model of the Quality System’s Implementation and Use in the Greek Agro-Coops.

The use of methodological pluralism throughout the whole research process is an expedient way of ensuring against the uncertainties inherited in research processes. Pragmatism requires the use of methodological pluralism since investigating / researching a "living organisation", such as a co-operative corporation, the researcher must be able to "jump" from the exploratory to descriptive to explanatory, to hypotheses and then "paradigm" formulation stage of research process at any time, in order to cope effectively and efficiently with the complexities of business phenomena.

13. TABLES AND FIGURES**Table 13.1: Forces That Enhance or Diminish Motivation to Seek ISO Registration****Enhancing Forces / Driving Forces**

- Potential customers demand ISO registration
- Fear of losing established customers
- CEO and head office pressure
- Urge to gain a commercial advantage in the marketplace
- Improving Company morale
- Direct and indirect cost savings through the management of quality
- Re-inspection by external quality assessors

Diminishing Forces / Constraints - Restraints

- Potential customers do not demand ISO 9000 registration
- Full or expanding order book
- Non-supportive higher management
- Satisfaction with status quo
- Industry or service sector indifferent
- Employee resistance
- Cost of introducing and maintaining a quality management system considered excessive
- No requirement to reexamine the quality management system

Source: M.Mc Teer and B.G.Dale, "How to Achieve ISO 9000 Series Registration: "A Model for Small Companies", Quality Management Journal 3, no.1 (1998): 43-55.

From: S.Thomas Foster, "Managing Quality - An Integrative Approach", (2001), p.89, Prentice Hall.

Characteristics of Total Quality Management	ISO 9000:2000	TQM
Customer focus (Internal and external)	X	x
Obsession with quality		x
Scientific approach to problem solving	X	x
Long-term commitment	partial	x
Teamwork		x
Continual process and product improvement	X	x
Education and training intensive	X	x
Freedom through control		x
Unity of purpose	x	x
Employee involvement and empowerment	partial	X

Figure 13.1: Total Quality Management Characteristics Compared with ISO 9000
 Source: David L.Goetch and Stanley B.Davis, “Understanding and Implementing ISO 9000:2000”, p.313, Prentice Hal, 2002.

ISO 9000:2000	Deming's 14 Points	TQM
1. Customer focus		x
2. Leadership	#1, #2, #7	x
3. Involvement of people		x
4. Process approach		x
5. System approach to management		x
6. Continual improvement	#5	x
7. Factual approach to decision making		X
8. Mutually beneficial supplier relationships	#4	X

Figure 13.2: ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management Principle vs. Deming’s Fourteen Points and TQM

Source: David L.Goetch and Stanley B.Davis, “Understanding and Implementing ISO 9000:2000”, p.314, Prentice Hall, 2002.

14. APPENDICES - RESEARCH SURVEYS AND FINDINGS

A. Beyond the Certification under ISO 9000: International Research on the Implementation of ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems

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Introduction

One of the three basic elements of the trilogy of Total Quality Management/TQM are the systems. With this article an effort of investigating and presenting the results of an international research on the implementation of ISO 9000 quality management systems that was carried out in Cyprus and the United Kingdom the first half period of 1998 is presented. The aim of the research was to investigate with the use of questionnaires and interviews the benefits that resulted from the implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS and to what degree. This is achieved with a performance measurement of the enterprise, which in the present case was achieved with the utilisation of performance indicators.

Quality Management Systems

The research aimed at examining and analyzing the benefits, difficulties and changes observed during and resulted by the implementation of ISO 9000 QMS in any enterprise under research.

Methodology and Conduct of the Research

The whole research was conducted under the guidance of the Technological Institute of Cyprus and the Glamorgan University of Wales, in cooperation with the Quality and Standards Organization of Cyprus.

The U.K. certified enterprises that took part in the research emanated from heavy industry sectors (eg automobile industry), while the Cypriot enterprises covered the whole spectrum of the economy as it was aiming to cover nearly the 100% of the registered Cypriot companies. The enterprises' managers were asked to rate the main reasons for which their enterprises were certified. According to these percentages the main factors were: a) management-administration and control benefits, b) marketing advantages and c) quality processes improvement benefits. The whole picture is presented in the following table 1, which is somehow differentiated in comparison with

two other similar researches, which were conducted between July-September 1995 in the United Kingdom and appear in table 2.

Table 1: Main reasons for companies seeking registration and certification to ISO 9000.

% Percentage analogy

Main Reasons	CYPRUS	UK
Management benefits	7	5
Need for a EU / government requirement	7	0
Part of larger strategy	4	10
Competitive pressure	4	0
Regulation/Legislation	4	5
Quality benefits / Improvement	54	30
Direct request from customer	0	25
Marketing advantage	21	25

B) Suppliers / Subcontractors

The importance that the researched enterprises were placing on the ISO 9000 registration and certification for the choice of their basic suppliers and subcontractors appeared to be large, because the 19% of the enterprises are always asking for it. However, although that the researched enterprises ask for the certification, the 63% of the Cypriot ones and the 53% of the British ones state that the certification country of origin does not play any role, nor does the registration and certification body-organization according to the 62% (Cyprus) and 50% (U.K.) of the researched enterprises, even though in the E.U. states members the approach is different on this issue and they accept only the Qnet - former EQnet - certificates.

Also the Cypriot enterprises believed (47%) that the ISO 9000 standards should be specialized for each sector and industry, this been not absolute because the 36% answered negatively and the 17% did not have any opinion. The opposite opinion with reversed percentages respectively was expressed by the British organizations. Naturally, this problem was overcome in big countries, as the U.K. and the U.S.A., where the certification organizations created specialized teams of inspectors depending on the subject (scope) of the certification and the industry the enterprise belongs.

Table 2: Reasons for seeking ISO 9000 certification

% Percentage analogy of the answers by prioritizing the most important reason and on

MORI 1995	%	MANCHESTER 1995	%
Customers service improvement / Complaints reduction	24	Future-prospect customers will require ISO 9000	78
Efficiency improvement	23	Processes stability increase	65
Existing markets maintenance / New markets gaining	22	Market share maintenance / increase	61
Quality mentality & culture / Quality system improvement	21	Improvement of the quality of services offered	61
Marketing benefits	17	Customers requirement/pressure	58
Customers requirement/pressure	14	ISO 9000 is a marketing and advertising tool	57
Competition pressure	10	Product quality improvement	54
Benchmarking tool for performance measurement	9	ISO 9000 certification as a proof for advancing to TQM	52
Legislation / Regulations	7	Costs reduction	50
Costs reduction	6		
Employees motivation	4		
Defects reduction	4		
Tool for management excellence	3		
Market share increase	1		
Do not know / No answer	10		

C) Needs of the Organization

As it is already known the ISO 9000 QMS has been planned and made in such a way for covering in a very large degree the needs of any enterprise and of all its departments, business processes, functions and operations. In relative questions searching how much the quality management system applied covers the organizational needs of an enterprise they answered that the model covers well the needs with a percentage from 30-80% in both countries. The five organizational needs covered in the biggest degree and in both countries are: Handling/storage/delivery-logistics, control/measurement and testing, processes control, procurement, and planning and design control.

D) Organizational performance

One of the basic questions was if the ISO 9000 implementation has contributed to the organizational performance improvement of each country's enterprises and to what degree. With the help of performance indicators that were used in similar researches, it appears, that the results are very encouraging because most of these performance indicators have been calculated to be over the 60% in Cyprus and may be lower but still positive in the U.K. (0-60%). These performance indicators measured the following organizational performance features: Internal performance improvement - Management control improvement - Local customers' requirements' covering - Foreign customers' requirements' covering - Market share enhancement - Customers service increase - Proof of certification compliance - Information on processes problems - Employees morale enforcement - Easy induction of new employees - Removing of exports obstacles - Managerial authority and control enforcement - Waste, defects and rejects minimization - Quality improvement - Costs reduction - Customers complaints decrease - Safety dangers decrease - Profitability increase.

Similar international researches that have been conducted show increases with certain differentiations. Table 3 presents the concise results three performance indicators that had been increased more in five different researches [Kasinides E., 1998; Angelides P., 1998; UNIDO 1997; MORI 1995; MBS 1995].

Table 3: Performance indicators with the maximum increase amongst 5 research studies.

Performance Indicators	Cyprus (Part A) survey	UK (Part B) survey	UNIDO	MORI	MBS
Quality Improvement	73%	56%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Improvement of internal efficiency	59%	34%	92%	60%	69%
Remove barriers to external trade	42%	43%	85%	24%	N/A
Meet international customers demands	54%	72%	92%	N/A	N/A
Improved management control	75%	51%	N/A	83%	78%
Aware of procedural problems	79%	51%	70%	82%	67%
Improved customer service	86%	78%	N/A	N/A	77%

E) How much ISO 9000 has influenced the quality costs of the organizations

The ability of profit (profitability) and output (performance) are always measured with the costs of quality, as these were defined by the British standard BS6143 part 1 and 2. Based on the four basic quality costs groupings the enterprises managers were asked if these costs had been increased or decreased. Homogeneous results appear in the research and were precisely as they were expected in these enterprises that were in the first stages of any quality improvement program. That is to say, increase of those positive costs (prevention, estimation) that add value to the product (Price of conformity/POC) and decrease of those that are not complying with the customer needs, requirements and/or specifications (Price of non conformity/PONC, internal and exterior failures). Of course, there exist differences in the percentages of the two countries research outputs, but all these results follow the well-known graphic presentation of quality costs.

F) Market Share Increase

The ultimate aim of an enterprise by implementing ISO 9000 QMS is, besides the quality system and/or product quality improvement, which by many customers are considered as given and/or incorporated, the market share increase and consequently the Return on Investment increase. This aim is consistent with the philosophy of Deming for chain inter-reactions. In a relative question, the market share growth, as perceived by the respondents, is presented. In its overwhelming majority it has been increased and sometimes over the 20%. Also in a question concerning the quality system and/or product quality improvement, the answers by both countries' enterprises shape a normal distribution curve shifted towards the positive shares.

The picture is completed with the question, up to what degree these quality management systems indeed improve the quality of products and services produced, which is also the main aim for which they have been written and are supposed to be used for. The messages here are also encouraging, because few enterprises in Cyprus (12%) as well as in the UK (10%) answered that they did not have any improvement at all in the quality of their products and/or services produced and/or offered. All the answers are shown in Table 5, which follows the normal distribution, as happens in other international researches.

G) Problems / Disadvantages

Always in any plan that involves transformational changes in an organization, as the implementation of a new management system, there exist problems. Perhaps the system, by its own nature, has disadvantages due to its implementation manner, especially its "translation" in practice and in the process of its documentation. These are summarised and presented very analytically and are compared with the results of another research conducted in the United Kingdom, that has been reported previously (MBS 1995), where certain problems appear to be common in both research studies.

It has been said, that there exists a big gap between the requirements of quality system and the produced output of the enterprise. The relative question for the risk that an enterprise is credited, knowing the above stated report, shows that for Cyprus and UK the perception of this gap exists as it is verified by a 50% and 62% rate respectively. The 33% and 14% of the Cypriote and British enterprises businessmen respectively answered that they do not aspire this opinion.

Based on the above, they were asked if the external inspections of the ISO 9001 QMS should be incorporated in the examination, approach, development and performance results of the enterprise's quality system. The answers were positive for both countries, with over the 50% (Cyprus 51% - UK 67%) being positive answers, while the 17% from the Cypriot and 5% from the British enterprises did not answer.

H) The importance and future of the ISO standards

It is a fact that the certification under ISO 9000 quality management systems is something new, as far as the certification of products/services is concerned. Naturally, in the relative question concerning the importance of production quality, safety and assurance, the comparison between the two certifications - ISO 9001 and ISO 9002 – in both countries was marked with a similar high percentage in both countries (Cyprus 50 % - UK 48%), which means that the certification of products quality is perceived and considered as very important by both countries' managers.

In the questionnaire a relative question concerning the importance, the future and the problems of the ISO quality standards was posed to the various stakeholders/involved parties (customers, international trade, countries, bodies, producers etc) investigating their beliefs, views, opinions and perceptions on this issue. The questionnaire, under the form of statements, asked the participating groups to declare up to what degree they agree or disagree. The results of this table should be compared with previous researches' findings in order to conclude to more precise and definite conclusions. Future research studies may contribute in analyzing and critically evaluating further the results.

Summary / Conclusions

In the previous pages an attempt was conducted to present certain results of a most recent research, that was conducted in Cyprus and the U.K. and the corporate benefits that result from the ISO 9000 introduction and implementation. It is difficult to present all the results of the 25 questions of the research, while it becomes more difficult to derive complete conclusions by a more in depth analysis and evaluation of the research findings. These appear in the main studies of the research (E. Kasinides-1998, R. Angelides-1998).

The following highlight the research major outputs - as presented in 1998 terms and time:

-
- All the organizations that took part in the research were benefited and their business operations were improved. Specifically the improvements in the Cypriot organizations observed after the certification under ISO 9000 had very high percentages. The three first profits of Cypriot organizations were: a) been aware for problems of business processes (86%), b) increase of customers' service (79%) and c) improvement of managerial control (75%). Equivalently the three most important benefits for the British organizations were: a) been aware for problems of business processes (78%), b) covering the foreigner customers' requirements (72%) and c) covering the local customers' requirements (62%).
 - Although the number of companies asking for ISO 9001 and ISO 9002 registration is continuously increasing, ISO 9003 remains the standard with the less certifications - in the particular research, no certification.
 - Apart from the main ISO standards (9001, 9002, 9003), which are used and implemented, the remaining standards of the ISO set that are related with the quality are almost unknown.
 - The majority of both countries' (Cyprus and UK) enterprises prefer to cooperate with certified under ISO 9000 suppliers and it appears that they recognize these ISO certificates irrespectively of the country of origin.
 - The majority of the British enterprises separate and rate differently the certificates of ISO that are published by different professional bodies- organizations of registration and certification.
 - ISO 9000 covers fair enough the needs of most of the enterprises in both countries.
 - Quality costs follow the normal distribution curve in both countries. The price of the conformity costs (prevention, estimate) was increased, while the price of the non-conformity costs was decreased (internal and external failures due to non-conformance to customers' requirements and set needs). Also, it is remarkable that the 40% of the British enterprises that participated and answered the research survey, stated that the conformity costs (prevention and measurement) remained at the same levels, a fact proving in this way that business activities as measurements and control pre-existed the ISO 9000's introduction.

- Although, during the ISO 9000:1994 registration and certification period, all the investigated companies, in both countries faced certain problems (bureaucracy, time-waste), they observed improvement in the quality level of the final product. The majority of the Cypriot as well as the British enterprises that answered to the research question (50% and 40% respectively) believe the certification of the product quality assurance (ISO 9002:1994) as the most important feature of ISO 9000:1994.
- The common forecast of both countries' enterprises is that ISO 9000 can help and contribute positively to the enlargement and growth of the international trade.

Finally the vast majority of both countries' companies trust their national registration bodies' level of knowledge and professional experience on quality issues. According to the research findings, ISO 9000 can benefit any company's operations and contribute to its business processes improvement and consequently to the organizational performance improvement. ISO 9000 QMS may be used as the cornerstone-basement for building an integrated and more advanced TQM system, enhanced with the required human force element and the appropriate tools. The quality system guiding principle of Continuous Improvement can be considered and used as the driver and the prerequisite for attempting to achieve organizational performance continuous improvement and consequently excellence.

B. ISO 9000 - Apostole Poulouvasilis / Inspector of Ships Quality Systems Lloyd's Register

The international markets become continuously more competitive and this is also in effect for the certification of quality. The ISO9000 is now an international phenomenon that influences the way the companies operate and function. In the developing economies it is usually used for aiding the competitiveness' and quality control levels rising. In the developed economies it is taken into consideration always more in the operational negotiations and transactions and into their companies' objective for better operational effectiveness and administrative control. With regard to ISO 9000 quality system's usefulness, research studies have been carried out from independent organizations on behalf of the Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance (LRQA), in order to

identify the reasons that prompt the enterprises to acquire certification of this quality system and the effects in the operation of the enterprise due to the system's introduction.

The results of research showed that the enterprises sought registration and certification under ISO 9000:1994 mainly in order to face real or forecasted external needs and requirements and also that the certification offered important internal corporate benefits beyond those expected.

The reasons that prompt the enterprises to be certified

International research studies proved (according LRQA), that the market external pressures were the fundamental for them entering into the process of certification. From these pressures more important were:

- the survival and participation in competition bids, that presuppose and require the certification
- the need to forecast the customers' future requirements
- the obligation to improve the provided to the customers services
- the existing market share maintenance and increase
- the acquisition of precedence in the international markets
- the promotion of new products and/or services in the international markets

Even if the internal factors had been considered of smaller importance, an important percentage of the researched enterprises declared that they advanced in the process of certification in order to achieve bigger effectiveness and productivity in their enterprise.

The benefits of certification at ISO 9000

Most benefits that result from the certification can be characterized as external, a fact that keeps pace with the reasons that prompted the enterprises to the initial decision on the certification. The major advantage of ISO9000 is its ability to "open the path" to new markets.

- Possibility of survival and non exclusion from bids-competitions
- Extension and improvement of the market share
- Public relations, publicity, promotion
- Improvement of operational effectiveness and reduction of production losses and waste
- Increase of the customers' satisfaction degree
- Better management control, organizational discipline and order

- Access to the international markets
- Reduction of customers' controls and supplying company's assessments
- The objectivity and validity of the certification external body/organization helps the maintenance of the quality system's integrity, reliability and validity, as this is perceived by the customers.

One of the most important findings of the conducted research was the fact that the internal benefits enjoyed by the companies implementing ISO 9000 are more important than the external ones. Furthermore, these companies have realized that the real benefits were greater than the forecasted/projected ones.

- Improvement to management/administrative planning, organization and control
- Production effectiveness and efficiency and organizational competitiveness
- Production losses, rejections and defects reduction
- Consistency in the organizational operations
- Improvement of customers' service
- Production and operational cost reduction
- Better handling of operating problems
- Improvement of employees' interrelations and motivation

Negative Results/Outputs

Besides the fact in most cases the companies registered and certified under ISO 9000 QMS have stated satisfied in one way or another from the system's implementation business results, there exist a number of dissatisfied organizations referring several problems and drawbacks by not enjoying the planned and intended outputs:

- Lower growth than the projected one and/or reduction in the market share index.
- Continuation of the assessment studies by the customers.
- Low level of professionalism and cooperation willingness, as expressed by the external certification and registration bodies-organizations.
- Bureaucracy – and the relevant business operations and costs due to it - growth experienced.
- Customers requiring their suppliers' ISO 9000 registration and certification are still continuing to do business and cooperate with other not certified supplying companies.

ISO 9000 – A long-term investment

As it has been revealed during the conducted research, the benefits of being registered and certified under ISO 9000 QMS are multiplied with the advancement and the duration of the system's implementation and for this reason the ISO 9000 certification should be considered by any company as a long term investment.

It has been proved in and by many research studies that a time period is required for the implementation of the system producing the desired and projected results (e.g. market share growth, business processes improvement, production costs reduction, improved quality of products/services produced and offered) and for the system being adapted to the needs and requirements of each company applying it and for producing the optimum results out of its deployment.

According to this document author's view, this is a clear indication that Contingency Theory should be used in the introduction and implementation processes of an ISO 9000 QMS in any company, for adapting the system to the specific corporate operating requirements, needs and goals of the company for achieving the desired and planned results and benefits out of the system's development.

The external advising bodies-organizations are in a position to help the registered companies to develop the ISO 9000 quality management system as a strategic business tool through their surveillance visits.

These visits have to be constructive and not having a "police inspecting and punishing" character.

Conclusions

The introduction of ISO9000 caused more than the expected internal organizational benefits to the certified enterprises. The same was also in effect for the external profits.

The following were considered as the more important internal organizational performance improvements: more efficient administrative control, improvement of business processes and operations effectiveness and productivity increase. It should be noticed that the certification benefits are increased with its implementation and deployment time duration. The enterprises and their registration and certification bodies/organizations had to establish more comfortable relations of collaboration, so as to better achieve the continuous improvement of the certified and applied ISO 9000:1994 quality system.

C. Comparison of Results of ISO 9000 Implementation in Small and Large Enterprises

Giannaki A. Mouzouri – Managing Director / ConiCon MS (Cyprus) Ltd

1. Introduction

The below text mentions the opinion and view of the author as these emanate through his experiences as Adviser in the sector of quality management systems during the last 6 years. The information and elements that are mentioned below emanate through research work of companies in Cyprus, and also abroad (Middle East, Arabic Gulf, Europe).

The usefulness of this research study exists in the fact that it has been conducted in differing - in terms of business, economy and culture environment and prevailing conditions - areas of the world, thus it may be considered fairly representative of the existing situation as far as the research questions and aims are concerned.

2. Comparison of the Difficulty Degree of ISO 9000 QMS Implementation in different Industry sectors

<u>Industry Sector</u>	<u>Degree of Difficulty From 1-10</u>
Manufacturing Industry.....	6
Trading Companies.....	5
Tourism & Leisure Industry.....	8
Shipping Industry.....	4
Self Employed and their Associations (Lawyers, Doctors, Engineers, Consultants).....	8
Technical Companies.....	9

3. ISO 9000 QMS Implementation in Small Enterprises

Definition of “Small Enterprise”: Up to 50 individuals of personnel.

There exists a list of advantages/driving forces and disadvantages/restraining forces encountered and observed during the ISO 9000 implementation in small enterprises.

A) Advantages

- Bigger flexibility in the various stages of the system’s implementation.
- Top management active involvement in the system’s administration and management.
- Fast development and implementation.

- Bigger chance of the external advisor's cooperation with all employees' levels.
- Staff training is easier.
- Fast decision-making.

B) Disadvantages

- Limited degree of availability of the required resources and means/tools for the system's implementation and development.
- Focus and personalization of the enterprise management and decision making process in one individual only - usually the owner.

4. ISO 9000 QMS Implementation in Large Enterprises

Definition of "Large Enterprise": 50 individuals of personnel and above.

A) Advantages

- Possibility of establishing a rational organizational structure
- Professional management and administrative personnel involvement
- Higher engagement and involvement of senior management
- Existence of already operating management systems and in many cases of documented business processes, procedures and activities.
- Higher availability of skilled employees force in all the key positions.

B) Disadvantages

- In many cases, the existence of more complicated managerial and operational systems than these required by the provisions of ISO 9000.
- Higher degree of difficulty of co-ordination, management and control of the quality system.

5. Practical Difficulties Encountered during the Implementation and later on during the Maintenance of the Quality System

There exist a series of special as well as common practical difficulties encountered during the implementation and maintenance period of the quality system.

A) Practical difficulties in small enterprises

- There almost always exists and observed a difficulty in the application of a rational organisational structure and operation. This results out of a list of causes:

- Lack of skilled staff
- Personnel in key positions undertakes a list of parallel duties and multiple responsibilities
- Phenomenon of family-owned enterprises
- The existence of difficulty in understanding, knowing and perceiving among the personnel the real profits of the ISO 9000 implementation in their enterprise, is intense and usually longer-lasting than it happens in large enterprises. This requires a continuous and more intense way of education and training for these companies' employees.
- The available time of the individual undertaking the system's administration is usually limited, due to all other parallel duties and responsibilities he/she has.
- Resistance in the abandonment of traditional and accordingly more familiar business processes and operations.
- In small enterprises the subject of documentation is perceived and treated as a non- necessary bureaucracy. Specifically for processes that are general and horizontal the mistrust is much bigger and their proper and effective implementation becomes more problematic.

B) Practical difficulties in large enterprises

- In large enterprises the proper communication and presentation of the system in all the organizational levels and departments - to all their employees - is difficult and time-consuming.

The decision-making process, especially for important cases and issues, is delayed, postponed and halted due to and by the multiple layers/levels of hierarchy and power.

C) Advantages and Disadvantages from the ISO 9000 Implementation

- The integrated and complete employees' education & training in all organizational levels and departments is much more difficult, time consuming and costly.
- In a large organisation the cultural and mentality change required for the effective and efficient implementation of the quality system is halted by greater resistance factors.

6) Major Difficulty and Opportunity for all Enterprises

- The most important difficulty encountered in the implementation, but mainly in the maintenance of a quality system is that such systems are applied mechanically. Most of the today enterprises have failed to understand that such systems are important tools of data and information gathering, processing and analysis. Such data and info should and could be used as management tools for the continuous improvement of a company's business processes, as well as evaluating and developing inner-company motivation.
- Quality systems like ISO 9000 can be considered to constitute the base for the transformation of a company's business from operating simple functional mechanisms to applying a real quality management system and culture.

Source: the Proceedings of the 1998 Quality Forum held in Athens.

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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
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DOCTORATE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

DOCUMENT 3

**AN INTERPRETATIVE REPORT ON A PIECE OF
ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH**

EXARCHOS DIMITROPOULOS

19 December 2005

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1. INTRODUCTION

The planning and management of the ISO 9000 Quality Management System as well as its active implementation and use processes remain a challenge for many organisations in today's increasingly competitive world economy and business.

While companies are facing faster rates of change, greater levels of competition, revolutions in technology and changing customer demands, any corporation's Quality management systems' - the ISO 9000 QMS included - activities and operations are still considered and practiced, by a fair number of corporations and their stakeholders, as a specialised bureaucratic business system and function, which is time and resources consuming and isolated from the other corporate activities, functions and departments (Quality Forums' Proceedings - Athens, 1997 and 1998).

Furthermore, for the majority of the corporations, ISO 9000 QMS is still perceived as a necessary management system and business tool required and used mainly for marketing and legal reasons, as many quality authors, i.e. Oakland (2003), Arvanitoyiannis (2001), Foster (2001), state and not as a corporate resource that could contribute to the organizational change process and corporate strategic development if applied as theory suggests, that is, as an incorporated organic part of the entire corporate strategy and business operation, as Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002) believe.

On the other hand, as Goetch and Davis (2002) refer, any Quality Management System's proper implementation and use require the corporate long-term strategic planning and unwavering commitment and support – especially these of the Key Stakeholders – as well as the provision of the necessary and required resources for the system's successful development and continuous improvement.

This is an approach that is required to be applied in a very short-term oriented business world, while at the same time as theory suggests the corporate activities and intended results of the ISO 9000 implementation and use are supposed to be strategically planned and long-term oriented.

This business situation and fact may be perceived and experienced as contradictory and in a way hardly functional by many managers, who may find themselves not informed, untrained and inexperienced in the system's requirements and proper practice, as it was presented in the Proceedings of the Quality Forums held in Athens, in 1997 and 1998.

Under this attitude and practice any corporation could only use its adopted quality management systems – the ISO 9000 QMS included – as a management tool not for its strategic development and business processes and operations control, assessment and improvement, but rather mainly for its products and services quality assurance upgrading, as it is required by the market needs, the European Union directives and the National legislation on Food safety, as Oakland (2003) considers.

In reality, Arvanitoyiannis (2000) believes that, for a fair number of (Greek) business entities and their stakeholders, this approach remains still the system's main purpose and use, while for an increasing number of other corporations a tendency is identified to utilise the ISO 9000 QMS as a corporate strategic resource aiming at the achievement of organizational change through the improvement of business processes and consequently organizational performance, as the research findings present (Document 2, Appendix 14).

The ultimate goal of any corporate resource/competence, and as it was previously presented any Quality management system such as the ISO 9000 QMS could be considered as such as many authors on quality issues believe, is and/or should be to enhance the achievement of the company's strategic goals, while achieving synergy across lines of business operations and departments and managing the risk of longer-term business activities and operations, as Johnson and Scholes (1992) emphatically state.

However, compared with other corporate resources such as human resources, information systems, marketing research, new product development etc., there is a paucity/lack of research and frameworks to improve corporate attitudes and practices in the field of the quality management systems' - the ISO 9000 QMS included - implementation and use in the Greek Agro-coops with the corporate goal to improve business processes in order to achieve corporate strategic development and organizational performance improvement, as theory suggests and research findings identify, i.e. all the aforementioned authors on quality management issues and Quality Forums Research Findings, held in Athens in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

As has been already pointed out in documents 1 and 2, the study of the role and contribution of ISO 9000 QMS to the corporate strategic development and organisational change and performance improvement of the Greek Agro-coops as well as the identification and analysis of the drivers and constraints of this system's effective

implementation and efficient use has and/or should have been the subject of increased attention in recent times, as the majority of these organisations face increasing financial and business operating problems over the last three decades, as it was identified in a collective work of Papageorgiou et al, published in “Syneteristiki Poreia” (volumes of years 2000-2003) and the re-configuration of their organisational practices and activities, referring to any management system adapted and applied – e.g. the ISO 9000 QMS, is considered a must for their business survival in the words of Arvanitoyiannis (2001).

As a result of the aforementioned facts and due to his present/current professional status, the researcher decided to focus his DBA research on issues relating to the role and contribution of the quality management systems - and more particularly of the ISO 9000 QMS - to the achievement of Greek Agricultural Cooperatives’ corporate strategic goals and organisational performance improvement through the improvement of their business processes.

The critical examination of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems’ implementation process and use purpose by the Agricultural Cooperatives sector in Greece is the broad and general Topic of my Doctorate Research. It is mainly connected with these two current issues, which were analyzed more extensively in the preceding DBA Research documents:

- on one hand, with the reanimation of the ongoing dialogue and debate concerning the perspectives of the Agricultural Cooperatives in Greece and the future status of the 15-18% of the country’s active population which is occupied in the broader agricultural sector (Bank of Greece, 2002), and
- on the other hand, with the ever increasing public concern, interest and demand for safer, healthier and quality enhanced food products and services all over the world (ICAP, 2002 and Arvanitoyiannis, 2000).

The principal aim of this research is to: thoroughly examine, analyze and critically assess/evaluate the manner of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems’ implementation and use in the Greek agricultural cooperatives for:

- investigating and critically evaluating the systems' role and degree of contribution in the development and sustainable application of improved business processes and ultimately organizational performance, and
- examining and critically analyzing the key business factors influencing the Quality Management Systems' effective and efficient development, practice and use in the aforementioned business environment.

As a result of the above mentioned main research aim, the following working hypothesis is going to be examined and tested throughout the whole research process/project:

ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems are considered by the Greek agro-coops (and their key stakeholders) as an organizational change management tool, that is effectively implemented and efficiently used for achieving improved business processes and organizational performance, despite their existing organizational, behavioral and operational settings and arrangements that might affect and impair their business performance and consequently might influence the effective implementation and the efficient use of these systems.

As a conclusion of the aforementioned analysis, the researcher has defined the following objectives for the DBA project:

1. to analyze and critically evaluate the current status of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems in Greek Agro-coops in relation to the agro-coops' current business status,
2. to evaluate the role and contribution of these Quality management systems to the development of improved business operations and processes by the Greek agro-coops with the final aim of achieving improved Operational and Organizational Performance and Business Excellence,
3. to examine these Quality management systems' role and influence in the Greek agro-coops' business reorientation towards customer-focused and market-oriented business practices, services and operations,
4. to identify the driving and restraining forces concerning the implementation, operation and use of ISO 9000-Quality Assurance and Management Systems in Greek Agricultural Cooperatives,

5. to investigate the Greek Agro-coops' (Key) Stakeholders attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMS systems and identify their actual behaviors and practices concerning these systems' implementation, operation and use in the Greek agro-coops,

Therefore, a thorough auditing of all the Key Business Factors, that influence the implementation and development process of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agro-coops, is a main task of the Research Process. More specifically, a critical examination, analysis and evaluation of all the Critical Success Factors, which will be viewed as the Driving Forces as well as of the Critical Failure Factors which will take the place of the Constraining Forces that affect and influence the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek Agro-Coops will be conducted.

The examination of existing literature in document 2 provided useful indications and insights into the extent to and the required manner with which quality management systems - the ISO 9000 QMS included - may contribute to the enterprises' - therefore, the Greek agro-coops' too - improvement of their core and secondary business processes and operations and consequently organizational change and corporate strategic development.

On the other hand several external and internal business and market constraints have been pointed out as possible major cause-root reasons for the ineffective and inefficient implementation and use of any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included - in the Greek agro-coops.

There is evidence to suggest that a change is taking place with regard to the management style and approach adopted as far as the application of ISO 9000 QMS is concerned, as it is identified in the Quality Forums Proceedings of 1997 and 1998.

It was presented that while the dominant view of quality management systems-ISO 9000 QMS continues to be regarded and treated as a management system facilitating mostly the corporate production function, there has been observed a more active quality issues management having as a result the significant growth of quality control & assurance units' operations & activities range, scope and importance leading to their consequent transformation to quality management units/departments.

This change is from a traditional, passive, reactive, and short-term management approach, to a style that has a strategic, proactive and longer-term orientation concerning the corporate management and practice of any quality management system, the ISO 9000 QMS too as Oakland (2003) believes.

As it has been previously referred, there exists a lack of research programs examining the status of ISO 9000 QMS and the nature of the system's implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agricultural co-operatives business sub-sector.

Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct a research project for critically investigating, analysing and evaluating the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use practice in the Greek Agro-coops business environment.

Therefore, the main purpose of the research is to gain insight into the current corporate perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and practices concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' management and business practice in Greek agro-coops, in order to understand better how and why those companies' key stakeholders adopt and utilise this quality management system, what is the organisational structure and business activities of the surveyed companies' quality management & assurance units-departments and what are the key business factors/KBF that may influence the corporate behaviour & practice concerning the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose.

The research is divided into eight sections with the Introduction being the first section. In the second section, the research objectives and questions are identified and presented. The third section illustrates the conceptual framework, in which the key concepts I will be drawing on this research are presented. The fourth and fifth sections present the methodological literature with particular emphasis on the research methodology, qualitative methods, and design. The sixth section reports the results of the research through the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative research findings. The seventh section critically examines and discusses the basic results of the research in reference to the conceptual framework. The eighth section, being the last one, provides some concluding remarks to this qualitative research.

In specific terms, the qualitative research document will contain:

- a. Presentation of the entire DBA Research issue and topic.
- b. Identification of the focus or theme examined by interpretivist / case / ethnographic research methodology.
- c. Discussion of the importance of the specific research question(s) chosen from and interrelated with the general research topic.
- d. Discussion of the methodological issues considering the interpretative and qualitative approach in comparison with the quantitative-positivism approach.
- e. Consideration of possible research methods and discussion of research method(s) adopted which may include in-depth interviews, participant observation, transcripts and documentary techniques.
- f. Analysis and interpretation of the results of the research.
- g. Conclusions of the research and discussion on further recommendations.

Note: In this document, the initials QMS are used to denote the Quality Management System, the initials UAC are used to denote the researched Unions of Agricultural Cooperatives and the initials SYN.P.E. are used to denote the legal status of the Unions of Greek Agricultural Cooperatives meaning Limited Liability Cooperatives.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

As it was previously presented, the principal aim of my entire DBA research is to: thoroughly examine, analyse and critically evaluate the manner of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems’ implementation and use in the Greek agricultural cooperatives for:

- investigating and critically evaluating the systems’ role and degree of contribution in the development and sustainable application of improved business processes and ultimately organizational performance, and
- examining and critically analyzing the key business factors influencing the Quality Management Systems’ effective and efficient development, practice and use in the aforementioned business environment.

As a result, the principal aim of the qualitative part of the DBA research, is to in depth explore issues relating to the current status and nature as well as to the adopted practice of ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-coops sub-sector, by investigating and critically evaluating these Agro-coops’ Key Stakeholders’ knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and practices towards this QMSystems’ implementation process and use purpose.

Thus, the qualitative research process will be held and materialized within an interpretative context aiming at critically examining and evaluating the issue of ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation and use as practiced and experienced in Greek Agro-coops of all three degrees of the agricultural cooperative sector.

Therefore, the researcher has decided to apply his research project in as many as possible third degree Central Unions of Greek Agro-coops, a fair number of second degree Unions of Greek Agro-coops as well as in few indicative first degree Greek Agro-coops, which have a considerable business status and operation as well as a healthy financial position in the market.

Furthermore, the broad aims of the qualitative research are to examine the following issues:

1. What are the Greek agro-coops’ key stakeholders’ knowledge, attitudes and practice towards the Quality and Process Management concepts and issues and

the perceived by them interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS?

2. According to the key Stakeholders' opinion and experience is there any interrelationship and interdependence between the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and nature of its implementation process and use purpose with the current Agro-coops' business status, financial position and management practices?
3. What is the Key Stakeholders' knowledge towards the nature of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System and the reasons, results and requirements of the Systems' implementation and use?

More specifically the following sub-questions will be set:

- 3.1. What difference does the transition to, and the introduction and implementation of the "new" ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems make in comparison with the implementation of the "old" Quality assurance and management system - the ISO 9000:1994 - in terms of the Agro-coops' business operations.
 - 3.2. What are their opinions and beliefs towards the nature and manner of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System's implementation and the anticipated and intended by them results.
 - 3.3. What are the results of the Introduction and Implementation of the ISO 9000:1994 – Quality Assurance and Management System in the UACM and in the other selected Greek Agro-coops. Furthermore, to investigate the Agro- coops' Key Stakeholders' opinions on the Implementation of the system and register the perceived by them produced results of its operation in comparison to the intended by them outcomes of the system's application.
4. What are the Agro-coops' Key Stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards the nature of the ISO 9000 – Quality management system, the manner of the system's implementation and use and its influencing role in the:
 - 4.1. sustainable development of improved business processes and operations with the ultimate aim of achieving improved organizational performance.
 - 4.2 agro-coops' business reorientation towards customer-focused and market-oriented business practices and operations.
 - 4.3. achievement of the corporate strategic goals through its incorporation in and relationship with the corporate strategic plan?

5. Do they believe that the corporate attitudes and practices have to be changed concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS' implementation process and use purpose?
More analytically:
 - 5.1. Who should decide, plan and lead this change management process? And by whom to be deployed and assessed?
 - 5.2. How is this change process perceived and experienced? As an outcome of external and/or internal business factors-forces? Is it a superimposed, breakthrough, deterministic and/or a planned, incremental, voluntaristic business need, action and result?
 - 5.3. Should and/or could this change management process orientate the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose toward an organisational change and strategic development direction?

And as a triangulation method for assessing the validity and reliability of all interviews, the researcher has decided to set two questions relevant to Topic 2 and a question relevant to Topic 1, which are pervasive and related to all the aforementioned Topics of the Qualitative Research, to be asked at the end of all qualitative in depth interviews:

- 2.1. Do internal operating problems and the human relations structure (e.g. micro-politics, groupings, personal interests) as well as external influences (e.g. political parties) affect the effective Implementation and efficient Use of any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included - in Greek Agro-coops?
- 2.2. How do the researched key stakeholders rate and evaluate the decision making system as it is practiced and experienced in the Greek Agro-coops' sector?
Which managing group should be the Decision makers group:?
the managing team/employees or the Board of Directors' members/elected members?
- 1.1. According to their opinion where should the issue of quality management be headed/directed for the Agro-coops enjoying the optimum results out of its implementation and use?

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study of the Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 - Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Agro-food industry in general and in the Agricultural Cooperatives in particular, as well as research on these systems' role and degree of contribution to the achievement of improved business processes and operations and organizational performance, has been the subject of increasing interest and attention over the last decade.

It is expected that this interest will continue and be extended as several factors contribute to the strengthening of this interest. The most crucial factor is consumers' growing demand for safer food products with upgraded quality and more value for money. In relation to that, the differentiation of demand brings new requirements, as food consumption is increasingly related to non-consumption utilities like social referencing, health, product safety and quality, environmental friendliness and product regional origin (EU - New CAP, 2004).

This demand tends to become an operating prerequisite for all Food Industry corporations, as it has already been institutionalized through the European Union Directives referring to and concerning food safety and consumers' health protection. Furthermore, these directives have already been embodied in the national legislation of the state members and in the national legislation of other states - i.e. U.S.A., Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, South Africa and so on -, thus affecting the legal as well as the business status of all food industry companies on a national, European and global level and scale, as Arvanitoyiannis (2001) states.

In the agro-food industry, the economic and business integration worldwide advances through joint ventures, strategic alliances, conglomerates, business takeovers and business clusters. The resulting effect is the emerging need for entrepreneurial, adaptive, quality-driven business processes and market-driven & customer-oriented corporate operations and organizational structures for every type of institution in the agro-food industry, especially the agro-coops, as Parnell (2000) believes.

As a result, in all private companies of the Food Industry, the introduction and implementation of Quality Assurance and Management Systems - such as the ISO 9000,

ISO 14000 and HACCP , as well as TQM and BPR programs - is considered an imperative and the only debatable argument is how they can improve the implementation of these Quality and Process management systems aiming at the upgrading of their business processes and operations and consequently the improvement of their organizational performance, as Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002) refer.

The protagonists of all these processes, the private ownership companies of the agro-industry, are the main competitors of the agricultural cooperatives' sub-sector. This fact almost forces the Greek agro-coops to adopt the introduction and development of such quality systems and attempt to implement and use them effectively and efficiently, for remaining competitive in the food industry sector.

The agricultural cooperatives represent or should represent, according to the public view and opinion, an organisation operating at the edge of business excellence; this is not a paradox as in public's mind the Agro-coops are synonymous to social public organizations, whose main mission is or should be the general public welfare in Parnell's (2000) view.

Nevertheless, the agro-coops (especially the Greek ones) are facing serious problems in their business operations during the last two decades especially, with the result of decreased market presence, competitiveness and profitability, and heavy borrowing from the state banks, all these facts leading them even to bankruptcy ("IMERISIA", 27-28/11/2004, p.10) and ("Syneteristiki Poria", issue 72, October –December 2003, p.p. 225-228).

As a result of this situation, the European Union Agricultural Committee through the issue of a new statute concerning the agricultural cooperatives seems to enhance cooperation among agro-coops and the transformation of their businesses being based on a new operational framework similar to the private sector companies' one.

As a consequence of all these developments and changes, a new rationale concerning and requiring the effective and efficient introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek agro-coops is emerging; the ultimate goal of this approach is for Greek agro-coops achieving improved business processes and organizational performance through the strategic use of these quality management systems, as Arvanitoyiannis states (2000).

This approach is further verified by the Research studies findings presented in the Proceedings of the Quality and Competitiveness International Forums, held in Athens in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

In the studies of Kasinides (1998) and Angelides (1998) on ISO 9000:1994 QMS' implementation and use in British and Cypriot enterprises the three most important benefits for the British organizations were: a) been aware for problems of business processes (78%), b) covering the foreigner customers' requirements (72%) and c) covering the local customers' requirements (62%), and for the Cypriot ones: a) been aware for problems of business processes (86%), b) increase of customers' service (79%) and c) improvement of managerial control (75%).

Almost identical research findings are identified in an initial survey conducted in 1995-97 - as it is referred by Petroheilou (1999) in the Proceedings of the 5th Conference on Competitiveness and Quality held in Athens, Greece in 1999 - and concerning the reasons the Greek companies are pursuing the ISO 9000:1994 registration and certification the main reasons were: for Marketing purposes -42%, due to their Customers' pressure and demands -30%-, senior management decision and request -24%-, and other reasons -4%-.

Besides these mainly external and unrelated to the internal organizational operations' goals, the outputs identified and referred as enjoyed benefits of the internal organizational performance after the system's introduction and initial implementation in most certified Greek companies were among others: Standardization of internal business processes and operations -27%-, Operational and Managerial Control -20%- (which to this document's author's view seems a logical consequence and intended result by the senior management of these companies favouring the Standardization of their companies business processes as the prime benefit of the system's implementation), Delegation of management control, responsibility and accountability -10%-, Improvement of Quality inspection and control -10%, Improvement of internal communication -10%-, Production Cost decrease -8%-, and Others -10%-.

Of course, as many quality authors - such as Oakland (2003), Goetch and Davis (2002), Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001), Bank (2000), Foster (2001), Arvanitoyiannis (2001) - believe (and the document's author agree), all these benefits can be achieved only with the unwavering commitment and support of the corporate top management team.

Furthermore, they state as a prerequisite the active involvement and participation of all the employees/the workforce in its totality, who have to be well informed, trained and educated on quality management issues as well as stimulated, motivated and encouraged to participate actively in every aspect of the organization's quality management system implementation and use (this is a management of change element for the Greek Agro-coops "operating paradigm", according to this document's author's opinion. This fact will be presented in the Research analysis section of this document as well as in Documents 4 and 5).

On the other hand as many researchers identify, there exists a gap between the will and the ability of the Greek agro-coops to implement effectively and use efficiently the ISO 9000 QMSystems. According to Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002), this inability is an outcome of the inefficient organizational operation of the agro-coops, therefore as Ageletopoulos and Yiannatos (1995) state, a researcher should first examine if - a company in the food industry is and consequently - the Greek agro-coops are ready to adopt such systems. Further on, as they continue, he/she should conduct a thorough investigation of their organizational, behavioral and operational settings and arrangements that impair the effective implementation and the efficient use of these systems and consequently influence their business performance.

As a consequence of the aforementioned findings and as it was previously referred, the research will present/display the research objectives within a context of an interpretative/case/ethnographic study critically examining and evaluating the ISO 9000 QMS' current business status and its perceived by the key stakeholders nature as well as the key business factors affecting this system's implementation and use in a fair number Greek Agro-coops from the whole spectrum of Greek Agro-coops sub-sector.

Generally speaking, the main objectives of the study are:

- a) to investigate the current status of ISO 9000 QMS and the nature of its implementation process and use purposes in the Greek Agro-coops sector, and
- b) to identify the key business factors that influence and shape the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purposes in Greek Agro-coops by exploring the key stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and practices towards the aforementioned issues.

More specifically, the research will address a range of questions and issues such as:

- The Greek agro-coops (key) stakeholders' knowledge and attitudes towards the Quality and Process Management issues and their perceived interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS.
- The ISO 9000 QMS' business status and interrelationship with the current Agro-coops' business status, financial position and management practices as perceived and practiced by all the Greek agro-coops' (key) stakeholders.
- The Greek agro-coops' (key) stakeholders' knowledge of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and its implementation process and use purpose importance as perceived and practiced by all the Greek agro-coops (key) stakeholders
- The ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic corporate resource for achieving organisational change and corporate strategic development through business processes improvement and consequently/aiming at organisational performance improvement and the existing relationship between quality management strategy and overall corporate strategy.
- The identification and evaluation of all the Key Business Factors which emanate from the Management of Change field in relation to ISO 9000 QMS' development in the Greek agro-coops and the interrelated Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues, influencing the implementation process and use purpose of the ISO 9000 – QMS in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector, acting as Drivers and/or Constraints for the effective implementation and efficient use of this QMS, i.e.:

Corporate attitudes and practices concerning all the above themes as well as the following issues: Organization and business activities of Quality Management, Control & Assurance unit/department, the Decision Making

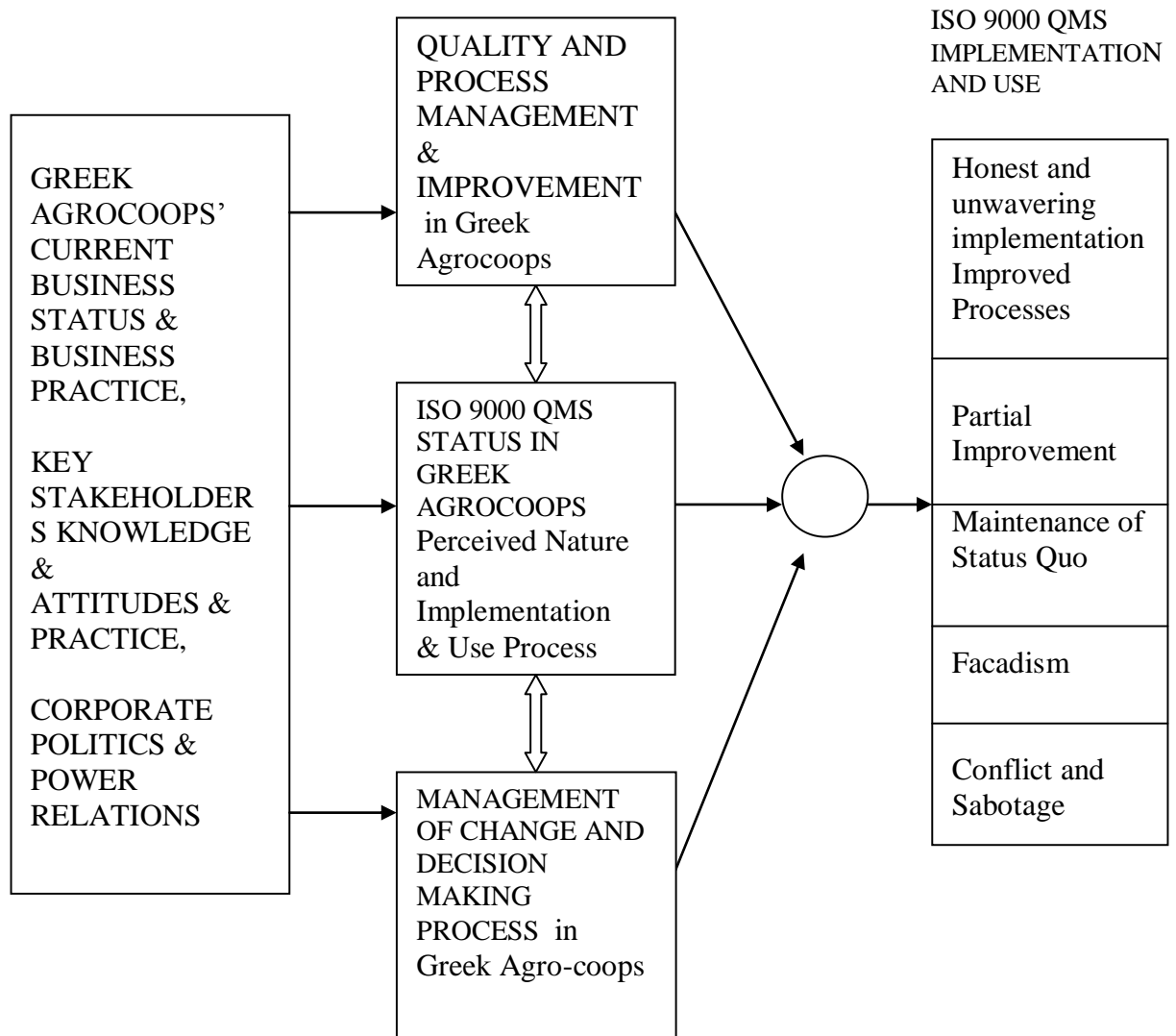
process on Corporate and Quality management issues, the existence of Quality management strategy and its relationship with and contribution to the overall corporate strategy and the aims of the key stakeholders concerning the future development of ISO 9000 in Greek agro-coops.

The qualitative research will present the above objectives within a context of an interpretative/case/ethnographic study critically examining and evaluating the ISO 9000 QMS' current business status and its perceived by the key stakeholders nature as well as the key business factors affecting this system's implementation and use in a fair number Greek Agro-coops from the whole spectrum of Greek Agro-coops sub-sector.

The conceptual framework of the qualitative research is presented in Exhibit 1.

The themes-issues-questions of the Conceptual Framework are interrelated and research findings may be identified in more than one theme.

3.1.Exhibit 1



4. METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

Research into the physical and natural world is predominantly different than research in the social world, according to many late research theorists. They define the former as scientific - quantitative research, while they argue that the latter is non-real science, since it is not based on scientific-quantitative “hard” results-proofs, but rather it is based on qualitative research providing interpretations of the identified observed world.

But are they right? What is social research and is it really different from the “scientific” research? Does qualitative research differ from quantitative research? What do social researchers do and what is the object and aim of their research?

Sociologists answer these questions in many ways. Those answers often reflect deep philosophical differences about the nature of social reality (ontology) and the ways in which one should study it (epistemology). Sociologists who prefer quantitative methodologies tend to argue that, unless researchers use the “so-called” scientific method and follow the same kinds of rules that natural scientists use, it isn’t really social science research.

Other sociologists believe that social science research is fundamentally different from the natural sciences. They argue that social research is primarily a matter of interpretation. Their opinion is that the most important goal of social research is to investigate and illuminate how humans construct and interpret social reality.

According to Tony Watson (2003), the sociologists of work and industry use a variety of investigation techniques, when they undertake empirical research. At one end of a continuum are studies involving the analysis of quantitative information gathered through questionnaire-based surveys, and at the other end of the continuum are studies involving interviewing in-depth a small selection of people. These polarities can be represented along a subjective-objective continuum that mirrors the positivist and non-positivist divide. This is not to imply that these “pure” positions are the predominant ones. Researchers may clearly occupy a position towards the centre of the continuum that are studies in which relatively large numbers of people are interviewed by research teams to gather both quantitative information and qualitative material.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) argue that there are some characteristics that define these different strategies (positivism and non-positivism), which are well illustrated in Table 1:

TABLE 1: Assumptions made by researchers

Ontology	Whether the object of investigation is the product of consciousness (nominalism) or whether it exists independently (realism).
Epistemology	What our grounds of knowledge are.
Human nature	Whether humans interact creatively with the environment (voluntarism) or whether they are passive objects (determinism).
Methodology	Nomothetic or ideographic approaches to evidence collection.

Source: Remenyi et al., (1998)

Furthermore, they noted the factors that are represented as polarities across a continuum, enabling basic assumptions about research activity to be distinguished that are shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2: Factors represented as polarities across a continuum

Nominalism	ontology	Realism
Anti-positivism	epistemology	Positivism
Voluntarism	human nature	Determinism
Ideographic	methodology	Nomothetic

Source: Remenyi et al., (1998)

4.2. The Interpretative Approach

One of the most important aspects of research in business and management studies is to decide on an appropriate approach and on the conceptual framework or research methodology within which the evidence will be collected and analysed. Before deciding if the evidence that is collected will be of an essentially qualitative or quantitative nature, and whether a positivistic or a phenomenological approach will be taken, it is useful to define research methodology.

Remenyi et al (2002, p.28) state: “Research methodology refers to the procedural framework within which the research is conducted. It describes an approach to a problem that can be put into practice in a research programme or process, which Leedy (1989) formally defines as an ‘operational framework within which the facts are placed so that their meaning may be seen more clearly.’”

According to David Silverman (2001): “a methodology refers to the choices we make about cases to study, methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis etc. in planning and executing a research study”. So the methodology describes an approach to a problem that can be put into practice in a research programme or process. In social research, methodologies may be defined very broadly (e.g. qualitative or quantitative) or more narrowly (e.g. grounded theory or conversation analysis). Like theories, methodologies cannot be true or false, only more or less useful.

On the other hand, Tony Watson (2003) believes that: “unfortunately, the term methodology is often used simply to mean method”. He argues that methodological assumptions are very important issues that need to be considered before a method, in the sense of an investigative technique, is chosen. He notes that “methodological assumptions are ones about the very nature of the realities that we study about, how we can know these “realities” and how we can make valid or truthful generalisations about the social world”.

On continuing he argues that, it is vital to any social research student to have basic understanding of the main methodological choices that every researcher and theorist has to make. The choice is often taken to be one between positivism and interpretivism (sometimes the latter being labelled phenomenology, which is really only one version of interpretivist thinking). The essential difference between positivists and interpretivists is

that, the latter see the social world as different in nature from the physical world and it therefore needs to be studied in a different way, because human beings, whose actions form the subject matter of social science investigations, are thinking, sense-making, decision - making beings who make interpretations for themselves of what is happening in the world.

Watson (2003) says that there are three possible methodological positions for the researcher to choose from: interpretivism and two variants of methodological realism - positivism and critical realism. The realist methodologies assume that social reality exists independently of how people make sense of it - or investigate it and has two variants, the first is referred to as positivism that devises covering laws about social reality through testing hypotheses, and the second is referred to as critical realism that attempts to identify the structures, processes, and causal mechanisms that operate beneath the surface of social reality and which are a constitutive part of that reality.

The interpretivist methodologies assume that social reality is the outcome of people's interactive and interpretive activities - how they socially and pragmatically construct and negotiate meanings and patterns of relationship. Theoretical approaches that work within these broad assumptions include: Weberian sociology, Symbolic interactionism, and Poststructuralism (2003:15). The writers who have been influenced by these different intellectual traditions share a view that the subject matter of the social sciences - people and their institutions - is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. The study of the social world therefore requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order.

Finally, interpretivism is a term that usually denotes an alternative to the positivist orthodoxy that has held sway for decades, requiring the social scientists to grasp the subjective meaning of social action, (Bryman, 2004).

4.3. Positivism Vs Phenomenology

Traditional approaches to social research are based on a paradigm known as positivism. Being a positivist, implies that the researcher is working with an observable social reality and that the end product of such research can be the derivation of laws or law-like generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists.

The paradigm of positivism assumes that the social world is inherently knowable and that we can all agree on the nature of social reality. Knowledge is created by deductive logic, finding ways to operationalize and then test social theories. That is, you begin with a theory and then deduce logical extensions - called hypotheses - of it that you can test. The process of deductive approach to research consists of several stages that are illustrated below:

Stage 1: Develop theory.

Stage 2: Develop testable hypotheses and choose sample and research design.

Stage 3: Collect and analyse data.

Stage 4: Disseminate results.

The positivist approach to research needs to be contrasted with the phenomenological approach. According to Cohen and Manion (1987): “Phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality.”

Unlike the positivist, the phenomenologist does not consider the world to consist of an objective reality but instead focuses on the primacy of subjective consciousness, and also the researcher is not independent of what is being researched but is a part of it. He believes that the world can be modelled, but not necessarily in mathematical sense.

A verbal, diagrammatic, or descriptive model could be acceptable.

To use a phenomenological approach the researcher has to look beyond the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them. The researcher constructs a meaning in terms of the situation being studied.

Furthermore, the phenomenologist understands that the world is not composed of a single objective reality, but rather is composed of a series of multiple realities, each of

which should be understood and taken into account. It is generally of little interest to the phenomenologist that his work will not lead to law-like generalisations in the same sense as that of the positivist. The phenomenologists believe that the world is socially constructed.

This research paradigm is sometimes described as the interpretative approach and implies that every event studied is a unique incident in its own right. In this school of thought there is nothing other than phenomena and the essence of a phenomenon is understood intuitively.

It is not usually possible or desirable to spell out a priori the steps in a phenomenological study in the same way as one can for a positivist research programme. The approach to phenomenology unfolds as the research proceeds. Early evidence collection suggests how to proceed to the subsequent phase of evidence collection, as does the interpretation of the evidence itself. Rich descriptions are sought, which are the building blocks of the argument that the researcher then develops.

In this research paradigm, researchers typically are less concerned with the deductive kind of theory testing. They often use inductive reasoning that means rather than beginning with a particular theory and then looking at the empirical world to see if the theory is supported by facts, they begin by examining the social world and, in that process, develop a theory consistent with what you are seeing. This approach is often called a “grounded approach” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Many argue that phenomenology is the appropriate strategy for research into people and their organisations. To cope with the problems of people and organisations it is necessary to go beyond positivism and use a phenomenological approach to research. The central premise of non-positivist research is that the researcher should be concerned to understand phenomena in-depth and that this understanding should result from attempting to find tentative answers to questions such as ‘What?’, ‘Why?’, and ‘How?’, whilst positivism is ultimately concerned with answering the questions of ‘How many?’ or ‘How much?’.

Positivism cannot explain why so many people hate their jobs, or why customer service is not effective. It is increasingly accepted among business and management scholars

that phenomenology is better suited to this type of research where the central issues concern people and their behaviours.

The key features of the phenomenological paradigm are the following, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (1994:27):

“The basic beliefs of this paradigm are that the world is socially constructed and subjective, the observer is part of what is observed and the science is driven by human interest focus on meanings. The researchers should try to understand what is happening and develop ideas through induction from evidence. The preferred method for gathering evidence is small samples investigated in-depth or over time.”

Philosophically, in phenomenology people construct their own worlds and give meaning to their own realities. Easterby-Smith et al. (1994), note that it is important to distinguish between phenomenology itself and the range of different research methods that have developed out of this particular world view. The term “phenomenology” essentially describes the philosophical approach that what is directly perceived and felt is considered more reliable than explanations or interpretations in communication. It is search for understanding based on what is apparent in the individual environment rather than on interpretations made by the observer.

Conclusively, phenomenology is merely a philosophical stance or orientation to research and central concern is the fact that people have the ability to think, argue, and experience the world or events in idiosyncratic ways, and that positivistic research strategies are unable to deliver an understanding of these human dimensions.

4.4. The Qualitative type of Research – Advantages and Problems

This section focuses on qualitative approach for social research. Although some have argued that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods is an artificial one (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991) there are some important differences. Most obviously, quantitative research involves enumerating things - that is, using numbers to describe relatively large groups of people. (This doesn't mean that qualitative researchers never count or use numbers; rather, it means that quantifying is not their main strategy). Quantitative researchers might be interested, for example, in studying

the statistically significant differences between men's and women's earnings. But if there are only a small number of cases, quantitative research is of little use. It is not particularly useful in revealing the meanings people give to particular events or activities and in understanding complicated social processes.

In contrast, qualitative researchers try to understand social processes in context. They pay attention to the subjective nature of human life - not only the subjective experiences of those they are studying, but also they try to understand the researcher's own perspectives and points of view.

Martyn Hammersley (1992) argues that qualitative researchers share a set of preferences which are set out in Table 3.

TABLE 3: The preferences of qualitative researchers

-
1. A preference for qualitative data - understand simply as the analysis of words and images rather than numbers.
 2. A preference for naturally occurring data - observation rather than experiment, unstructured versus structured interviews.
 3. A preference for meanings rather than behaviour - attempting 'to document the world from the point of view of the people studied' (Hammersley, 1992:165).
 4. A rejection of natural science as a model.
 5. A preference for inductive, hypothesis-generating research rather than hypothesis testing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).
-

Source: in D. Silverman (2001) adapted from Hammersley, 1992:160-72

Because qualitative research consists of words, many people, especially beginning researchers, think that it is easier than quantitative research, especially since there are no mathematical formulas to remember, no statistics to puzzle over. But this isn't actually so. Qualitative research can actually be more difficult, because it involves complex issues of interpretation. Gathering data typically takes longer in qualitative research, and the researcher has to develop his or her analytical skills and apply them to texts. Qualitative research involves not only developing a set of skills such as interviewing or

doing participant observation, but also learning the art of interpretation, moving from people's everyday activities to an analysis which is a very difficult skill to learn.

The methods used by qualitative researchers exemplify a common belief that they can provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data. However, in many quantitatively oriented social science methodology textbooks, qualitative research is often treated as a relatively minor methodology. As such, it is suggested that it should only be contemplated at early or "exploratory" stages of a study. Viewed from this perspective, qualitative research can be used to familiarize oneself with a setting before the serious sampling and counting begin.

Given the fact that qualitative research is, by definition, stronger on long descriptive narratives than on statistical tables, the problem that then arises is how such a researcher goes about categorizing the events or activities described. This is sometimes known as the problem of reliability. As Hammersley (1992, p.67) puts it: "reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions".

A second criticism of qualitative research relates to how sound its explanations are. This is sometimes known as the problem of anecdotalism, revealed in the way in which research reports sometimes appeal to a few, telling 'examples' of some apparent phenomenon, without any attempt to analyse less clear data. This problem is expressed very clearly by Bryman (1988, p.77):

"There is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of data in relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research. Brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews ... are used to provide evidence of a particular contention. There are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness or generality of these fragments is rarely addressed."

This complaint of anecdotalism questions the validity of much qualitative research. Validity is another word for truth. Sometimes one doubts the validity of an explanation because the researcher has clearly made no attempt to deal with contrary cases.

Despite these common problems, doubts about the reliability and validity of qualitative research have led many quantitative researchers to downplay the value of former. However, these doubts have been balanced by criticisms of quantitative research offered by many qualitative researchers.

In summary, qualitative research can be said to have a number of defining characteristics which include: a focus on interpretation rather than quantification; an emphasis on subjectivity rather than objectivity; flexibility in the process of conducting research; an orientation towards process rather than outcome; a concern with context – regarding behaviour and situation as inextricably linked in forming experience; and finally, an explicit recognition of the impact of the research process on the research situation.

4.5. The Proposed Research Methodology: Qualitative Work into Practice

In terms of this study, taking an interpretative stance means that the researcher's basic belief is that the world is socially constructed and subjective, focusing on meanings and trying to understand what is happening in the field of Quality Management Systems and more especially ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use in the Greek Agro-coops' sector. Since few is written about the development of these systems in Greek Agro-coops, the purpose of this study is exploratory seeking these enterprises' key stakeholders' accounts of how they perceive, behave and act toward these systems' deployment in their corporate entities.

Due to the fact that the world is complex, the researcher tries to map the range and diversity of views and positions that different key stakeholders and/or their groups take on the topic of the research. He approaches the research in as open a manner as he can manage and tries to let theories emerge from the research material, in what is known as the grounded approach to research. Therefore, within a non-positivist paradigm, it is acceptable for the generation of a research topic or question to come from experience, rather than reflection on theory and concepts. In other words, an inductive process is appropriate where involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations and theory is the outcome of the research.

Qualitative research design is commonly associated with more exploratory and descriptive forms of research design, though this need not be the case. Forms of grounded theory, where inductive exploration precedes more deductive forms of testing theories emerging from earlier exploration are also common. Qualitative forms of research have been advocated on the grounds that the more open-ended forms of data collection are ethically (as well as empirically) advantageous, giving those researched a stronger voice and opinion in the direction of the research.

However, qualitative data collection techniques and the data itself also generate greater scope for intrusion upon privacy, non-informed consent and exposure to harm through the revelation of potentially damaging personal information either at the point of data collection or in subsequent publication / presentation.

Conclusively, the overall approach to the study is inductive and cross-case comparison based. The research design is influenced by a sociological research methodology referred to as “grounded theory” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), that emphasises the use of inductive reasoning grounded in the constant comparison of empirical observations. The goal is theory generation about the ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-coops’ sector, not theory testing. Rather than forming the basis for definite conclusions, the grounded theory approach clarifies the relevant questions to be asked and offers insight into possible future trends.

5. RESEARCH METHODS

There does not seem to be an agreed definition of what constitutes a qualitative method. “The label “qualitative methods” has no precise meaning in any of the social sciences. It is at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.”, according to Van Maanen (1979, p.520).

However, as most of the writers seem to agree, qualitative methods are often associated with the collection and analysis of written and/or spoken extracts and/or the direct observation of behaviour. A qualitative research method may include interviews, participant observation / ethnography, and document analysis.

5.1. Interviews

There are several types of interviews, including structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Interviews vary according to the amount of control exerted by the researcher during the interview and to the degree of structure.

At one end of the spectrum are structured interviews, the most formal and the most rigidly controlled type that are more likely to be used in survey research, in telephone interviews, and in market research and political polling.

In structured interviews, the sequence of questions and the pace of the interview tend to be pre-established. Researchers use structured interviews far more often in quantitative than in qualitative research. While some qualitative researchers may incorporate elements of the structured interview in their research, many reject this type of interviewing for philosophical reasons, because they believe that it allows the researcher to retain a great deal of control over the interview process, so the interviewer can overlook issues that may be more important to the interviewee. Therefore, most qualitative researchers choose semi-structured or unstructured, that is open, interviews for the greater depth of insight they give into the lives of their research participants.

Semi-structured or in-depth interviews are much less rigid than structured interviews. The goal here is to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express

their opinions and ideas in their own words. Thus, the researcher interviews the interviewee for understanding what life is like from perspectives other than his/her own. The interviewer tries to move beyond his/her own experiences and ideas and to really understand the other's point of view.

Although the researcher typically begins with some basic ideas about what the interview will cover, the interviewee's responses shape the order and structure of the interview. Each interview is tailored to the research participant allowing for a much freer exchange between interviewer and interviewee. Thus, in depth-interviews are particularly useful for exploring a topic in detail and/or in constructing theory.

Unstructured interviews are the least structured of all and are often conducted in a field setting, in conjunction with an observational study. They tend to be more spontaneous and free-flowing, with topics arising from the situation or behaviour at hand. The interviewer typically does not have a set of questions prepared in advance, and these arise more naturally. For example, if the researcher is conducting a participant observation study in a factory, then he/she might ask questions about the work itself or about the workers' feelings about their work during the course of the observation.

5.2 Participant Observation / Ethnography

Observation - looking in focused way - is identified with qualitative research. Observational studies are very different from surveys or experiments or even interviews. Instead of asking people questions about their thoughts and behaviours or conducting experiments in a laboratory, these researchers go and observe people's behaviour and action in their natural setting, that is in real social , where all interactions occur.

The first who used the term "participant observation" were the sociologists, although an increasing number call it ethnography as well, while anthropologists prefer to call it ethnography. Still others call it field research or studies. This kind of research presupposes and at the same time has as a result the researcher's participation in the social life of the observed group, observing and writing about what he/she sees and lives.

Many of those who have traditionally done ethnography have argued that the study of culture is – or should be – the central concern of this kind of research. Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991) say: "Ethnography is that type of field observation in which a society's

culture is studied.” It is usually necessary for the researcher to become involved with the group that is being studied for a substantial period of months or even years. By participating, ethnographers hope to develop an understanding based on “first-hand/lived” experience. They learn more by participating than they would by other means, such as simply asking others questions, and they can use all of their senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Ethnographic research is essentially phenomenological in nature. It would clearly not be replicable.

Hammersley (1998) suggests five central aspects of ethnography:

- The study of people’s behaviour in everyday contexts.
- Largely based upon informal observation and conversation.
- Being relatively unstructured.
- Using a small number of cases.
- Offering more description than causation.

Also, Brewer (2000) writes: “Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting if not also in the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed”.

5.3 Document Analysis

A researcher can also study human behaviour through people’s written material. This can have the form of written texts in the form of documents and records. These might include letters and diaries, corporate records, and even government documents. These might also include media accounts such as television programs, newspapers, and magazines. In more recent years, they might include electronic texts, such as e-mail lists, and web sites. Most social researchers who do documentary analysis distinguish between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are the original sources like letters or eyewitness accounts of an event. Secondary sources base their originality on the primary sources they have used and may include historians’ or sociologists’ analyses, as well as the accounts of people who were not eyewitnesses and are not scholars.

5.4. The Proposed Research Method: In-Depth Interviews

The interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research. Of course, ethnography usually involves a substantial amount of interviewing and this factor undoubtedly contributes to the widespread use of the interview by qualitative researchers. However, it is the flexibility of the interview that makes it so attractive. Since ethnography entails an extended period of participant observation, which is very disruptive for researchers because of the sustained absences required from work and / or family life, research based more or less exclusively on interviews is a highly attractive alternative for the collection of qualitative data.

Interviewing, the transcription of interviews, and the analysis of transcripts are all very time-consuming, but they can be more readily accommodated into researchers' personal lives.

Therefore, the researcher selects the qualitative semi-structured interviewing for the following reasons:

1. There is an emphasis on greater generality in the formulation of initial research ideas and on interviewees' own perspectives.
2. There is much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view and doesn't reflect the researcher's concerns and views.
3. 'Rambling' is often encouraged and gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important.
4. Interviewers can depart significantly from any schedule or guide that is being used. They can ask new questions that follow up interviewee's replies and can vary the order and even the wording of questions.
5. As a result, the interviewing tends to be flexible, responding to the direction in which interviewees take the interview and perhaps adjusting the emphases in the research as a result of significant issues that emerge in the course of interviews.
6. Finally, in qualitative interviewing, the researcher wants rich, detailed answers and the respondent may be interviewed on more than one and sometimes even several occasions.

6. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS/PROCESS

6.1. Research Design

Document 3 – qualitative / interpretivist research

Case study - ethnographic research

The structure of this review is based on a number of issues and themes arising from the two pillars of the research: the Greek agro-coops and the Quality management - and more specifically the ISO 9000 QMS - concepts and fields, plus the inter-connected and inter-related sub-pillars of business process management & improvement and organizational change management.

The main parts-sections of the qualitative research document comprise the critical examination, analysis and evaluation of the following research topics-themes:

- Greek agro-coops' sector current business status, financial position, and corporate attitudes and practices' influence on/in ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in the sector's corporate entities.
- Quality and Business Process management and improvement concepts and fields' nature, inter-connection & inter-relationship with the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose.
- Key Stakeholders' knowledge and perception of the nature, requirements, reasons and results/effects of the ISO QMS' implementation and use in the Greek agro-coops sector.
- Corporate knowledge and acknowledgement of ISO 9000 QMS' importance in operating and being used as an organizational change and strategic development corporate resource/competence.
- Management of change field in relation to ISO 9000 QMS' development in the Greek agro-coops and the interrelated Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues.

Note: The interrelationship and interdependence as well as the influence each theme-concept exercises on another is obvious – e.g. process management & improvement and management of change, therefore analysis and critical evaluation of one concept's identified research elements and features may appear in the section referring to the critical analysis and evaluation of another concept-theme's research findings, throughout this document review and/or the research process of the entire DBA project.

Interpretivism takes a nominalist view and more specifically argues that the external world is not knowable since people create their own social world. More specifically, the researcher has chosen an Interpretative stance with some elements of the ethnographic research approach for investigating and critically evaluating the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agricultural cooperatives.

Each cooperative represents an entity comprised of many groups of stakeholders each one of which experiences the business world and situations in different forms and ways, all of which must be taken into account during the research process in order to formulate a valid research analysis and synthesis later on.

More specifically, a multi-method form of Ethnography and Case study research will be used. This method will be comprised by observation through participation -both active and passive-, in depth open and semi-structured interviews, examination of case studies and critical incidents and content analysis.

The focus of the research is also on exploration and insight rather than experiment. Although the researcher is a member of the top management team and of the Quality Control team in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia/UACM and therefore he could exercise his position influence and merit in order to experiment with different approaches in some cases and issues relevant to the Research Topic, this status advantage will not be exercised - to the contrary it will be avoided - as the Researcher's professional, managerial and personal ethics do not permit him to apply misuse of his professional position and manipulation of situations and persons in favour of his own interest.

As it was previously presented in pages 8-9, the Qualitative research conducted in Document 3 will cover the following topics and consequently answer the following questions:

1. What are the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes and practice towards the Quality and Process Management concepts and issues and the perceived by them interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS?
2. According to the key Stakeholders' opinion and experience is there any interrelationship and interdependence between the ISO 9000 QMS' business status

and nature of its implementation process and use purpose with the current Agro-coops' business status, financial position and management practices?

3. What is the Key Stakeholders' knowledge towards the nature of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management Systems and the reasons, results and requirements of the Systems' implementation and use?

More specifically the following sub-questions will be set:

- 3.1. What difference does the transition to, and the introduction and implementation of the "new" ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems make in comparison with the implementation of the "old" Quality assurance and management system - the ISO 9000:1994 - in terms of the Agro-coops' business operations.
 - 3.2. What are their opinions and beliefs towards the nature and manner of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System's implementation and the anticipated and intended by them results.
 - 3.3. What are the results of the Introduction and Implementation of the ISO 9000:1994 – Quality Assurance and Management System in the UACM and in the other selected Greek Agro-coops. Furthermore, to investigate the Agro- coops' Key Stakeholders' opinions on the Implementation of the system and register the perceived by them produced results of its operation in comparison to the intended by them outcomes of the system's application.
4. What are the Agro-coops' Key Stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards the nature of the ISO 9000 – Quality management system, the manner of the system's implementation and use and its influencing role in the:
 - 4.1. sustainable development of improved business processes and operations with the ultimate aim of achieving improved organizational performance.
 - 4.2 agro-coops' business reorientation towards customer-focused and market-oriented business practices and operations.
 - 4.3. achievement of the corporate strategic goals through its incorporation in and relationship with the corporate strategic plan?
 5. Do they believe that the corporate attitudes and practices have to be changed concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS' implementation process and use purpose?
More analytically:

- 5.1. Who should decide, plan and lead this change management process? And by whom to be deployed and assessed?
- 5.2. How is this change process perceived and experienced? As an outcome of external and/or internal business factors-forces? Is it a superimposed, breakthrough, deterministic and/or a planned, incremental, voluntaristic business need, action and result?
- 5.3. Should and/or could this change management process orientate the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose toward an organisational change and strategic development direction?

And as a triangulation method for assessing the validity and reliability of all interviews, the researcher has decided two questions relevant to Topic 2 and a question relevant to Topic 1, which are pervasive and related to all the aforementioned Topics of the Qualitative Research, to be asked at the end of all qualitative in depth interviews:

- 2.1. Do internal operating problems and the human relations structure (e.g. micro-politics, groupings, personal interests) as well as external influences (e.g. political parties) affect the effective Implementation and efficient Use of any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included - in Greek Agro-coops?
- 2.2. How do the researched key stakeholders rate and evaluate the decision making system as it is practiced and experienced in the Greek Agro-coops' sector?
Which managing group should be the Decision makers group:?
the managing team/employees or the Board of Directors' members/elected members?
- 1.1. According to their opinion where should the issue of quality management be headed/directed for the Agro-coops enjoying the optimum results out of its implementation and use?

The term "Key Stakeholders" refers to the following:

- Members of the Board of Directors,
- the UACM's and the other Agro-coops' General Manager,
- the Quality Management Team, which in most of the cases is (and/or should be) comprised by the Quality manager, the General Manager and other departments' managers.

A representative set of interrelated sub-questions contained in the main questions of Document 3 is the following:

1. How do the Agro-coops' key stakeholders perceive the terms and issues of quality and process management and their interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS? What is the practice of these issues in their Agro-coop?
2. How the Agro-coops' key stakeholders perceive the current business situation and position in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in their companies?
3. How do they perceive the current business situation, financial position and management practice of their corporation? Is there any interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS development?
4. What is their knowledge and perceptions considering the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and the manner of its implementation and use as well as the system's requirements (according to theory and them) for achieving a proper development?
5. Why does a Corporation - the Agro-coops included - have to introduce and develop the ISO QMS?
6. Which do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks of the system's implementation and use?
7. Which do they consider as being the most important outcomes- benefits of the system's implementation and use?
8. Is there any difference between the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems? And if yes in terms of what and which ones?
9. Could and/or should the implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS lead to improved Business Processes and ultimately Organisational Performance and if not why not?
10. Could and/or should the ISO 9000 QMS be considered and used as a corporate resource-business tool aiming at business operations and management practices auditing and improvement for achieving strategic organizational development and organisational change?
11. Are a Quality strategic plan, policy and communication program necessary and why? Do they have to be incorporated in and interrelated with the corporate strategic plan?
12. What do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks of the system's implementation and use?

13. What do they consider as being the most important outcomes- benefits of the system's implementation and use?
14. Do they believe that the company has to change its organisational structure, operations and practices for improving its business processes concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS development?
15. What specific aspects of the ISO 9000 QMS application processes and operations have to change, why, when, how and to which direction?
16. Will and/or should this change lead to the development of customer-focused and market-oriented business processes and activities? Does the Company need to develop such business operations? And if yes: Why?
17. Who should plan and lead the ISO 9000 QMS implementation effort and decide on its use purpose/goals?
18. Are Quality management policy and strategy as well as a business plan and communication program necessary and why? Do they have to be incorporated in and interrelated with the corporate strategy and business plan?
19. What are the opinion, attitude and practices of the employees, workers and other third parties regarding the aforementioned topics and themes as perceived and experienced by the key stakeholders?
20. Are these key stakeholders aware of other companies' - including competitors - manner of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use in their companies? How do they consider and evaluate this ISO QMS' status/state?
21. Do internal operating problems and the human relations structure (e.g. micro-politics, groupings, personal interests) as well as external influences affect the effective Implementation and efficient Use of any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included - in Greek Agro-coops?
22. How do they rate and evaluate the decision making system as it is practiced and experienced in the Greek Agro-coops' sector?
Which managing group should be the Decision maker group:
the managing team/employees or the Board of Directors' members/elected members?
23. According to their opinion which direction should the issue of quality management be guided to for the Agro-coops enjoying the optimum results out of its implementation and use?

Finally, an in-depth survey with open and semi-structured interviews and formal as well as informal talking will take place with each one of the members of the Board of Directors (as far as this is possible), as their influence and power extortion over the UACM's present operating "paradigm" in terms of the ISO 9000 Quality management system implementation and use is considered substantial and their views and opinions can influence notoriously the system's future implementation and use orientation, and the research must have an integrated picture of all "players" views of the business world.

The same research method/technique, that is semi-structured interviews as well as open interviews in some cases, will be applied to the UACM's Quality Management Team and most specifically: the General manager, the Quality manager, the Production manager and the Commercial manager, as their power and influence is also considered important and to a degree possibly shaping the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use.

Furthermore, it is expected that the researcher will be engaged in several formal and informal discussions with work colleagues and their views and beliefs concerning the corporate attitudes and practices as well as the business activities and behaviours will be held in account by the researcher for critically analysing and evaluating these conversations content objectively and unbiased (as long as I can, because I am a human being interacting with my business environment and thus, having my own prejudices, biases, stereotypes, feelings, beliefs, values and so on, which in some cases are predetermined and shaped by external and prior to the given situation factors and experiences).

Moreover, it is expected (in Employees' Union meetings, Directors meetings, Board of Directors monthly meetings, Quality Management Team meetings) the researcher to participate in Group Meetings and Discussions having to do with the Company's business' current as well as future, operations, goals and position. All these meetings can be viewed and handled as Panels in the research process, which panels can take mostly a pre-coded manner as their discussion topics are always predetermined by the BoDs, the General Manager, the Quality Manager and the Employees' Union BoDs.

As a result of the aforementioned facts and by adopting the interpretative stance/methodology, the qualitative research in Document 3 will be conducted through

the use of cross-sectional case study research approach, while at the same time elements of the ethnographic research approach will be applied, especially in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia, through the use of the participant observation research method.

Furthermore, in Document 3, with the use of case studies based on open-end and semi-structured interviews as well some sort of participant observation in all researched Greek Agro-coops, the research method will produce qualitative research data but at the same time some sort of quantitative data can be produced through the analysis of the material.

For this type of study, in-depth qualitative research is being conducted through a series of interviews. It is generally attempted to obtain detailed in-depth evidence from a relatively small number of informants. For this research, a questionnaire is generally not used, but rather the informant is allowed to speak freely on the subject of interest to the researcher. As a result, in-depth interviews are applied in the present study in order to explore the current manner in which a fair number of major Greek Agro-coops manage their adopted ISO 9000 QMS and investigate the root cause for this system's implementation and use choice.

For this research project/study seven Greek Agro-coops were selected out of all three degrees of the Greek Agro-coops sub-sector. Their selection was based upon size, business location and product-business activities, their relevant importance in the agro-coops sub-sector, active business operations, willingness to submit to a detailed interview process and permit publication of results. A listing of these Greek Agro-coops appears in the following Table 2.

TABLE 2

Second Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia SYN. P.E. / UACM
2. Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Lesvos SYN.P.E. / LESEL
3. ALMME. SYN. P.E.

Third Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. SYKIKI S.A.

2. S.KO.S. S.A.

3. ALMME. SYN. P.E.

First Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. Avia and Mikra Mantinea Agricultural Cooperative/Messinia

2. Dessyla Agricultural Cooperative/Messinia

Interview questions were developed drawing upon the existing literature as it was critically evaluated in Document 2 and the researcher's on-going working experience in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector. The researcher had a prepared list of issues to use during the interview that is referred to as an interview schedule. He used three sources for the topics to be included in an interview guide: the relevant literature; his own personal knowledge and professional experience on the area; and informal preliminary work such as unstructured discussions with people who have personal experience on the research topic, such as quality consultants of external bodies and organisations.

The interviews were not taped, as it was considered an "unwelcome and dangerous" situation by the majority of the interviewed Agro-coops' key stakeholders; this fact will be presented and explained in the Conclusions section of the Document. Therefore, paper and field notes were held and later on they were transcribed in order to analyse these transcripts and to produce appropriate findings. Profiles were developed for each firm and for each informant (see Appendix 1) and the three questions raised are in regards to the job title of the respondent, his/her main activities and responsibilities in the company, and the degree of his/her participation in the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in the Agro-coop. The overall interview outline is reproduced in the Appendix 2.

The key stakeholders - being the President of the Board of Directors, the General Manager and the Quality Manager, plus some other key stakeholders depending on the agro-coop under research - in each of these agro-coops were personally interviewed for an average of 90-120 minutes each time on all the aforementioned topics/themes of the qualitative research, but not all interview questions were answered completely, and some were answered inconsistently or not even at all.

The two first degree agro-coops were selected due to their active business presence in terms of standardizing and selling their products on their own rather than selling their members' produce as raw material, as the majority of first degree agro-coops are doing. The research was conducted through their Presidents – mr. Vasilis Kozobolis and mr. Panayiotis Alevras, who play a multiple role at the same time, being members in the Board of Directors of other Agro-coops.

A written company profile was also requested from each organization and secondary source documents about each company were tried to be reviewed (annual reports, websites, recent business press articles) were tried to be reviewed, provided that such documents existed and the access to them was permitted to the researcher; in most of the cases it was not possible to review these documents for any of the two or even for both of the aforementioned reasons.

It is important to refer here, that the qualitative research process lasted from three to five days in each Agro-coop and it was a multi-site research, as the researcher visited all the required sites and relevant premises - i.e. offices, factory, laboratories, product quality inspection and assurance premises - in all the Agro-coops he researched.

The research was conducted from mid-June to mid-November, because the majority of the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders - the researcher included - were unavailable during the research period, due to their heavy workload as a consequence of the new CAP work requirements concerning the farmers-producers' subsidies' estimation..

More specifically, the research study analysis comprise five major sections and five research variables are shown as the variables-determinants of the ISO 9000 QMS' adopted practice in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector:

1. Quality and Process Management & Improvement fields' knowledge (QPKNi)
2. Greek Agro-coops' and ISO 9000 QMS' business status and interrelationship (BSI)
3. ISO 9000 QMS' development reasons, requirements and results (IURRR)
4. ISO 9000 QMS and corporate strategic development (STRCH)
5. Change Management Key Business Factors (CHKBF)

- Section 1 investigates the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders' knowledge and attitudes towards the Quality and Process Management issues and their perceived interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS / QPKNIR.
- Section 2 tries to identify the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and interrelationship with the current Agro-coops' business status, financial position and management practices as perceived and practiced by all the Greek agro-coops (key) stakeholders / BSIR.
- Section 3 explores the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders' knowledge of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and its implementation process and use purpose's reasons, requirements and results as perceived, practiced and experienced by all the Greek agro-coops key stakeholders / IURRR.
- Section 4 aims to discover whether the ISO 9000 QMS is used in Greek Agro-coops as a strategic corporate resource for achieving organisational change and corporate strategic development through business processes and consequently organisational performance improvement and the existing relationship between quality management strategy and overall corporate strategy / STRCH.
- Section 5 acts as the concluding part of the analysis aiming at identifying and evaluating all the Key Business Factors, which emanate from the Management of Change field in relation to ISO 9000 QMS' development in the Greek agro-coops and the interrelated Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues, influencing the implementation process and use purpose of the ISO 9000 – QMS in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector, acting as Drivers and/or Constraints for the effective implementation and efficient use of this QMS / KBF.

i.e.: Corporate attitudes and practices concerning all the above sections-themes' issues as well as the following issues: Organization and business activities of Quality Management unit/department, the Decision Making Process concerning Quality management issues, the existence of a Quality management strategy and its relationship with and contribution to the overall corporate strategy and the aims of the key stakeholders concerning the future development of ISO 9000 in Greek agro-coops.

6.2. Method of Analysis

To analyse the interview transcripts, the researcher used the method of analysis that is referred to as coding. Coding is analysis of your research data and at the same time it is an attempt to interpret it very broadly.

For in qualitative research analysis, the goal is to begin to focus on the potential meanings of your data. For the qualitative research purposes it is not the words themselves but their meaning that matters. As a matter of fact qualitative coding entails the three basic processes of noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena and analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994): “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to chunks of varying size - words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one (e.g. a metaphor).”

The proposed method of creating codes in this study is that of creating a provisional ‘start list’ of codes prior to fieldwork. That list comes from the conceptual framework, the list of research questions and the preliminary work the researcher has done in relation to the qualitative research.

The start list contains the above five elements and the process was to take a fair number of transcripts from interviews with the key stakeholders of the agro-coops under research, trying to identify the narratives in terms of these five elements.

The use of a tape recorder was not recommended and even accepted in the research conducted in all Greek agro-coops for two reasons:

- i) it was perceived as a means of recording the interviewee’s opinions, attitudes, beliefs and expressed practices. This fact is perceived by the greatest majority as a threat, for it could be used against them in the future and even in the current state by their opponents and rivals, business and politics wise.
- ii) A part of them were ready to refuse to participate in the research out of fear of giving corporate facts and “secrets”, which being taped could be easily used by

competitors and rivals later on. Therefore, they were afraid of being accused of releasing corporate “property”.

Therefore, the researcher feared that taping the interview may generate an attitude and stance against the research in process and the researched could either refuse to participate or give false, partial and misleading answers which would have no validity and reliability.

Nevertheless, they were more eager to participate in a research based on in depth interviews, having both open-ended questions and a scheduled list of semi-structured questions, of which they were aware by communicating them the broad aims of the research and by assuring them that they could refuse to answer any question that would seem to them dangerous and/or peculiar.

This process in itself was interesting and may be more reliable, since the interviewees felt free to speak on the interview themes openly and the researcher was able to conduct an open conversation and take field notes as long as he has to without fearing that the interviewees will stop the interview due to time reasons.

The next part of this document offers the evaluation of the 12 interviews in terms of these five major themes - questions and their connection with the existing literature.

6.3. Analysis and Interpretation of Results

6.3.1. Quality and Process Management & Improvement Fields

According to ISO 9000:2000 definition, Quality “is the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills requirements”.

Quality is often used to signify “excellence” of a product or service according to the sector that the organization is in, therefore, a lot of people give to quality varying definitions. Thus, quality has to be defined in a way that is acceptable by and useful to every one – the professional, managerial and academic communities – engaged in the whole spectrum of economy, business and society. The only way to achieve it “is to

recognize the need to include in the assessment of quality the true requirements of the 'customer' – the needs and expectations (Oakland 2003, p.4).

However, we have to acknowledge that there exist many definitions and dimensions of quality, as Foster states (2001, p.p. 4-25):

“A company’s employees very usually perceive quality in many different ways, as their perceptions are quite different, considering its functions, features, attributes and intended results out of its introduction and implementation in the company’s business operations.”

So anyone could claim that perceptions affect and influence any aspect of the business world including the quality issue. The real problem with having multiple definitions and dimensions of quality rests on making communication and common understanding of the issue very difficult. The solution for any company’s senior management may be found in acknowledging that these quality multiple and different definitions and dimensions do exist, thus, a common understanding of quality should be developed and agreed, for sharing a common goal on quality deployment and implementation.

In this way, the company may match its customers’ stated requirements and needs by offering them consistently qualitative products and/or services and therefore aiming continuously at achieving improved organizational performance.

As Foster (2001) states, different quality perceptions emerge from the different functional roles that have to be fulfilled by the employees in anyone organization. These functional differences create different perspectives on the quality issue. A solution in this problem can be achieved by adopting the organic view of the organizations, as Foster (2001) suggests.

The organic view of the organization helps to see the organization as an entity of interrelated and interconnected functions, processes, systems, methods and departments and by this way it may help anyone overcome the differing perceptions on quality held by the different parts of the organization. The emergence of the process approach may help more in this issue, as communications issues find resolution easier, Foster (2001) believes, as organizational processes become more cross-functional. However, many organizations have found difficult operating effectively cross-functional teams, because

poor communication skills among the team members still existed, as the aforementioned author refers.

According to the definition provided by ISO 9000:2000 a Quality Management System is: “a management system to direct and control an organization with regard to quality”. Based on this definition one could claim that an organization’s QMS is, therefore, the organizational structure of responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources for carrying out quality management as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) state.

Therefore, a Quality Management System may be defined as: “an assembly of components, such as the management responsibilities, processes and resources”, as Oakland (2003) defines it. Further on, an organization having a carefully structured QMS aims to achieve its ultimate goals for Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Control (QC).

The most common kind of standard relates to some type of measurement. Another kind of standard has to do with process, how things are done. The most known example is a quality management system conforming to the ISO 9000 standard first released in 1987, updated in 1994 and revised in 2000.

ISO 9000:2000 represents a fundamental change in approach, and is a major, and needed improvement over the two earlier versions as many quality authors - like Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001); Goetch and Davis (2002); Oakland (2003) - admit.

ISO 9000’s evolution has aligned it more closed with the Total Quality Management philosophy.

They pointed out that the major change was from a “system based” to a more “process based” quality management system, which could improve organizational performance by improving business process, as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) state. Moreover, the new ISO 9000:2000 version is a quality management system and not only a quality assurance and/or control system, but to the contrary as a management system encompasses quality assurance and control and covers more topics.

The most common kind of standard relates to some type of measurement. Another kind of standard has to do with process, how things are done. The most known example is a quality management system conforming to the ISO 9000 standard first released in 1987, updated in 1994 and revised in 2000.

ISO considers the major changes in the revised standard to be, as Goetch and Davis (2002) refer:

- Increased focus on top management commitment
- Customer satisfaction
- Emphasis on processes
- Continual improvement

In ISO's own words, as presented in Goetch and Davis (2002): "The primary aim of the "consistent pair [ISO 9001 and ISO 9004] is to relate modern quality management to the process and activities of an organization, including the promotion of continual improvement and achievement of customer satisfaction".

The scope of ISO 9000 includes any organization wishing to be certified to the standard. Within the certified organization, the scope extends to any department or activity that can have an impact on the quality of the product and/or service.

In a practical sense this includes all departments and activities, a fact that aligns ISO 9000:2000 QMS closer to TQM philosophy and practice, as it requires the cross-functional and cross-departmental interrelation of all business processes of an organization and subsequently dictates indirectly that these processes should be constantly and continually improved, for the quality management system to be and maintained always effective and efficient and therefore useful for the organization applying it, as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) and Goetch and Davis (2002) believe.

As it has been mentioned before, fundamental philosophical-conceptual changes have been introduced into ISO 9000 with the 2000 release. ISO 9000 is now closely aligned with TQM. The standard is now designed around a "process approach" to management. ISO has stated: "For organizations to function, they have to define and manage numerous inter-linked processes. Often the output from one process will directly form the input of/into the next process. The systematic identification and management of the various processes employed within an organization, and particularly the interactions

between such processes, maybe referred to as the “process approach” to management. The revised quality management system standards [2000 release] are based on just such a process approach, in line with the guiding quality principles”, as Goetch and Davis (2002) refer.

This process model seems similar to the model of quality and (indirectly) process improvement, originally adopted and formulated by Demming (1982): the “Plan, Do, Check, Act” model, which is overwhelmingly adopted by many quality gurus, such as J.S.Oakland (1993, 1994, 2003), who qualifies this model as the best for continuous process improvement and consequently quality improvement. It seems to be an endless spiral of continuous effort for achieving improved business processes and operations, which ultimately (and normally) may lead to improved business performance as Oakland states in his books “Total Quality Management.” (2003) and “Total Organizational Excellence” (2001).

It should be emphasized here, that in all quality gurus’ books and articles, as well as in ISO 9000:2000 section 5.1 - Management commitment -, is stated that “top management shall provide evidence of the Quality Management System and continually improving its effectiveness”.

The concept of continual improvement becomes an imperative for all organizations, as it aims at offering/providing to anyone organization improved business processes by referring to greater suitability, increased longevity, enhanced reliability production and delivery fastness and even better appearance of a product as Goetch and Davis (2002) believe.

Process improvements refer by this way to the processes that produce the product and/or service and are making the product better, as it becomes easier to produce, the possibility for errors is eliminated, consistency is ensured and as a consequence of all these mentioned facts production and business costs are reduced, through the avoidance of waste, defective goods and/or services, usefulness and unproductive processes and by replacing corrective action with preventive action, which incurs by it lower cost in comparison to the ones incurred by corrective action.

PROCESS MANAGEMENT

As it was previously referred, organizations transform inputs to outputs through a series of interrelated activities known as processes. Their final aim is to create value by delivering enhanced and upgraded products and/or services to their customers. This final aim can be only achieved through the use of a very effective-well performing process management system, as under-performance is primarily caused by poor processes.

This process management system helps management identify the “key or core business processes, which are well – defined and developed sequences of steps with clear rational, add value by producing required and specified by the customers outputs”, from a variety of inputs and are aligned with and incorporated in the overall business strategy. As a result, related business activities are combined and interrelated and the ones that do not add value are being cut out. Of course, out of this procedure a fundamental change emerges in the way any organization is managed due to the orientation transformation from a function and task- based enterprise to a process-based one, as Oakland (2003, p.167) states.

As Oakland (2003) conveys operating a process-focused oriented and driven company provides a logical framework for any person of his/her role in the business and awareness for his/her obligation to satisfy customer (internal and/or external these maybe) with the ultimate business result of becoming a cost-effective, competitive organization, which is able to offer and deliver to all its customer upgraded and enhanced organizational performance.

Despite, these proclamations of organizational performance improvement through the adoption of a process orientation by an organization, there still remain a considerable number of enterprises who still remain traditional in operations being more function based and oriented rather than being process driven.

The most common causes for a company remaining function driven and not becoming process driven are the following: - at the same time, these causes could be considered as requirements for successfully adopting and implementing a process management

system, while they could also be considered as the resulting profits of an enterprise by having been transformed to a process driven enterprise - :

First of all, initiating and implementing process management cannot be a new fad / a quick fix and its results will not come overnight. As many organizations today face a large number of customers' and/or governmental changes in demands and requirements, technology changes, public and private transitions and a turbulent global economic environment, there emerges the need to examine critically and thoroughly these change initiatives for identifying those that are relevant to a process –managed business and those that are not.

Oakland (2003) states, that the most visible difference existing between a process management enterprise and a functional based traditional one is the requirement for appointing process owner(s) to have real responsibility, authority and accountability over the process overall operation and performance - from design to end consumer of its product.

Consequently, this fact requires attention to planning and executing the appropriate training programs, setting performance tangible and measurable targets (an indication for the need of using Statistical Process Control and other tools and techniques – statistical and non-statistical), regular, consistent, accurate and reliable communication to all employees, by face to face information to each appropriate team (according to the process under examination) on changing business conditions and customers needs and specified requirements.

In this way, effective and efficient employees' training can be considered as an enabler of and result of proper process management since owners-operators of every process need to be properly trained and are and/or should be equipped with the appropriate work instructions and the required tools (such as statistical process control), facilities and resources “to perform the process to its optimum capability” (J.S.Oakland, 2003, p.188). Of course, it is obvious that this apply throughout the organization to all business processes and functions and therefore it usually leads to a major fundamental change which represents a major business and cultural challenge for any organization.

Due to this fundamental change, the employees proper assignment and adequate training, their empowerment and knowledge through their required participation and involvement and the top management commitment and awareness of the process

approach in any business process management and improvement approach and their understanding of them being part of a continuous supplier - process - customer chain. Consequently, this fact may lead all employees to the realization, that they constitute an inseparable part of all organizational processes' interdependent system, are considered a sine qua non condition for effective and efficient implementation and improvement of any process management system adopted by any organization.

In concluding and summarizing, as Oakland (2003, p.188) emphatically puts it: "In many process managed organizations this type of approach has changed the way they assign and train employees, emphasizing the whole process rather than narrowly focused tasks. It has made fundamental changes to cultures, stressing process-based teamwork and customers rather than functionally driven command and control. Creativity and innovation in process improvement are recognized as core competencies and the annual performance reviews and personal development plans are linked to these". In continuing, he stresses (p.188) that: "The first thing that top management must recognize is that moving to process management requires much more than redrawing the organizational chart or structure. The changes needed are fundamental and they will challenge any company or public service organization."

In the first of his statements, there is an obvious analogy of the required elements for a company becoming process driven with the adoption by a company of the Total Quality Management and the new ISO 9000:2000 version management principles, as the emphasis on both quality management systems as well as on process management systems is put on process orientation, customer focus, teamwork with all empowered employees participation and involvement, appropriate training and information processes and top management commitment and active involvement both leading and requiring creativity and innovation.

All these required business principles and factors, common in all the above mentioned management systems, appoint to the process management system the title of being a requirement as well as an integral part of any TQM and/or ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems and make the process management issue and the target of its continual improvement as the required cornerstone of any attempt for implementing effectively and efficiently the ISO 9000:2000 QMS in any organization - the Greek agro-coops included - with the ultimate aim of achieving improved organizational performance through enhanced

customer-focused and market-driven business processes (the customer being internal and/or external), as the document's author believes.

CONTINUAL PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

To conform to ISO 9000:2000, quality management systems have to in-build systems, philosophy and methods that lead to identifying potential improvement changes and actualize them, as Goetch and Davis (2002) believe.

As ISO 9004:2000, clause 8.5.1 states (as adapted from Goetch and Davis (2002)):

“Management should continually seek to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the processes of the organization, rather than wait for a problem to reveal opportunities for improvement. Improvements can range from small step ongoing continual improvement to strategic breakthrough improvement projects.

The organization should have a process in place to identify, manage and control improvement activities. These improvements may result in change to the product or processes and even to the quality management system or to the organization”./Q2+Q5

The new version of ISO 900:2000 makes the following points, which were in part also made in earlier versions of the system:

- A quality management system consists of a number of elements;
- The quality management system is carried out by means of processes, existing within and across functions;
- For the quality management system to be effective, these processes and their supporting responsibilities, authorities, procedures and resources have to be defined and deployed in a consistent manner;
- The quality management system needs coordination and compatibility of its processes;
- The quality management system needs definition of the processes interfaces.

After analyzing all these points, it is obvious that the QMS in any organization should be structured and deployed in such a manner to cover all the processes and their cross-functional interfaces and interdepartmental (inter)relationships, lines of authority and responsibility and also the resources required for its successful development.

It is also very clear that ISO recommends that the best approach for setting up the quality management system is one based on processes and goes beyond this recommendation by stating:

“An advantage of the process approach is the ongoing control that it provides over the linkage between the individual processes within the system of processes, as well as their combination and interaction. When used within a quality management system, such an approach emphasizes the importance of:

- a) Understanding and fulfilling the requirements,
- b) The need to consider processes in terms of added value,
- c) Obtaining results of process performance and effectiveness, and,
- d) Continual improvement of processes based on objective measurement.

All these processes' cross-functional interfaces and interdepartmental relationships should be clearly defined, stated, communicated and documented.

However, this documentation should be kept as simple as possible, as one of the major disadvantages stated by many managers, employees and all parties involved in the quality management issues, is the overwhelming bureaucracy resulted from adhering to the point of the system's provisions and guidelines, following them blindly.

1. ALMME

ALMME has a representative President, changing each year for representing each one of its constituting agro-coops/producers' groups, each one of which has the 1/3 of the company's shares. Therefore, it was stated to the researcher by two members of the BoDs, that it would be better to have a conversation on the research issues only with the General Manager, as: “he express well our opinions and beliefs on this issue and handles the matter well”. This is the reason no interview was conducted with the President and/or members of the BoDs of ALMME A.S.E.

a) Aphrodite Filida / Quality and Production manager

She seems to be a fanatic supporter of ISO 9000 QMS and the other existing operating quality management systems, i.e. ICMS, HACCP and ISO 14001 and proved to know and be very competent in these quality systems' nature, as she referred to the following differences between ISO 9000:1994 and ISO 9000:2000 QMS: the new system has quantitative objectives (an indication of SPC), is more customer-focused and market-

oriented, favours process approach instead of functions-procedures and prevention rather than correction and according to her is more precise in its requirements, implementation processes and use purposes.

The same knowledge was proved concerning Process management and improvement field and its connection and integration in the new ISO 9000:2000 and the Quality issues in general, because as she stated: “The present and future of quality management is in applying a cross-functional and interdepartmental process management system as the new ISO provides for achieving synergies in all corporate operations.” She gives the example of her cooperation with the IT manager for reaffirming this statement (story telling).

b) Christos Giannakakis/General Manager

His views coincide with that of the Quality manager as he stated, but without further explaining what the content of these views is. On the other hand, he stated that through improved processes any company could achieve improvement of business performance. Therefore, I consider it a mixed answer, as he seems confused and not really having understood the interrelationship between Quality and Process management and improvement and ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use aiming at improved organizational performance.

c) Panayiotis Arvanitis/Financial and Vice General Manager

He agrees with the views and opinions of the General Manager especially and IT manager as well, as in both interviews it happened to be present during a long time period (especially in the interview with mr. Giannakakis).

2. LESEL SYN.P.E.

The President of the LESEL SYN.P.E., mr. Alekos Yatzitzoglou, said to the researcher, that it would be better to interview mr. Matas, who is going to be the next General Manager, since the current General Manager is going to retire by the end of 2005. “Therefore, I consider more appropriate for you conducting the research interviews with him and with the factory managers, meaning the two Quality managers and the Production manager, since these are the people who know and handle these issues and

after all I entrusts their opinions on the issue and they can very well represent me”. As a matter a fact, the interview course was conducted with the aforementioned employees.

a) Nikos Matas/Vice-General and Commercial Manager

The first question concerned the issues and concepts of Quality and Process management and improvement and their relationship with the nature of ISO 9000 QMS, especially of the new 2000 version. He answered: “I know the quality issue from articles reading and personal experience from the introduction and development of HACCP and ISO in LESEL. Thus, I know quality only through its specific aspects identified in these two systems. As far as the Process issue is concerned I know what everybody knows: that whatever we do in the company is called “process”.

I was not satisfied with his answer, therefore I requested him elaborating on the issue. He continued: “When I say process, I am referring to all processes, procedures, functions and operations we have to do each one in our department as part of our job duties”. This answer was a clue to ask him if he favors cross-sectional and – departmental operations. He answered he does not, as he believes in each one’s and accordingly in each department’s responsibility and accountability. On continuing I asked him what is his knowledge concerning the nature and the provisions of the “new” ISO 9000:2000 QMS in comparison with the “old” 1994 version. He replied: “I don’t know of any differences between these two. After all, this is the job of the factory people”, meaning the Quality management unit team consisted by the two Quality managers and the Production manager, “and as I know all the managers and employees believe it is the same system with no alteration at all”.

His entire answer is a clear indication that there exists no real knowledge of the Quality and Process management and improvement fields, as well of the ISO 9000 QMS’ nature and the existed interrelationship between all these aforementioned concepts. This is in contrast with Oakland (2001) and Foster (2002) held views that real and full knowledge of these concepts and fields are required for the proper implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS in any company.

b) Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelelis/Production manager

It was a panel conversation-interview, as they all participated in the in-depth interview behaving and acting as a team expressing, as they all stated in the beginning, their shared common opinions and views on the interview themes-questions. For facilitating the document's writing I will use the name of the first participant as representing all of them. Nevertheless, the reader should always keep in mind that in the conversation during the interview-process all of them participated expressing a common view and giving a common answer.

He seems to know well and in depth the issues of Quality management of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and the existing differences between the new ISO 2000 version and the old one-the 1994, because he stated: "The following major changes are prescribed in the new version: Process improvement, customer focused and top management commitment and involvement."

Furthermore, by the above answer and the following one he seems to know fair enough the issue of Process management and improvement and its interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose, because he continued: "Process improvement does really exist, but it could be more and better if theory commands were followed as they are prescribed. Quality processes should be implemented in all departments: the Commercial, Procurement, Production, Financial, Quality department for achieving synergies and enjoying improved performance", a statement very close to the one stated by Oakland (2003) and concerning the requirements and the enjoyed benefits of the transformed organization from a function based to a process one.

3. SKOS A.S.E.**a) Panayiotis Alevras/ President of the BoDs**

According to him, there does not exist enough knowledge of the agro-coops' key stakeholders - including himself as well - as far as the issues of Quality and Process management & improvement and their interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS is concerned. As he stated: "I consider it a major drawback for the system's effective

implementation and efficient use, therefore I think a thorough information is required by bodies as the Prefecture agencies, the Ministry of Agriculture agencies and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry”. Furthermore, he admitted not knowing any existing differences between ISO 9000:1994 QMS and the 2000 version of the standards. But, quite surprisingly for the researcher, he said: “Anyway, I believe whatever change is been made to any management system, it is for the “good” of the system.”

His view seems in accordance with the theory statements - Oakland, (2003), Goetch and Davis (2002) and Foster, (2002) - referring in the necessity of knowledge for successfully developing the system.

b) George Spiliotopoulos/SKOS Vice-General Manager and Quality Director

He seems to know about the nature of ISO 9000 QMS and its interconnection with the Process management and improvement field, because he stated: “The new version of the ISO 9000 QMS is based on the process approach and on customers’ satisfaction. In my opinion, these two changes are very important. First of all, the improvement of any company’s processes will improve its corporate operations and businesses and it could also improve the internal relations by auditing the processes that interface and are cross-functional. Secondly, for serving the markets and customers satisfactorily we all do have to improve our activities and behaviour and this fact-motive may also contribute to the improvement of the internal operations as well as of the entire corporate performance.”

On continuing he admitted: “Nevertheless, I believe the majority of the involved parties in the agro-coops’ sector is not well-informed on these issues and this may be proved a major drawback for the proper implementation and use of the system”.

4. UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES OF MESSINIA/UACM

a) Vasilis Kozobolis/President of the BoDs

His answer is in full accordance with that of mr. Alevras/President of the BoDs of SKOS ASE. The only difference is on stating some differences between the two ISO 9000 versions: “Not all involved parties are aware of the new ISO, the 2000 version. Perhaps, the most important benefits of it are is increasing focus on qualitative products safeguarding the consumers’ health.” His answer is a clear indication of his own ignorance concerning the nature of ISO 9000:2000 QMS.

Furthermore, he stated: “the majority of the farmers do not really know anything on the issue, besides the fact qualitative products means more money as income for them”. He, too, considers this ignorance a major drawback for the proper development of the system.

b) Dimitris Charitsis/General Manager of UACM

He answered as follows: “The only knowledge I have on quality issues, besides the general prevailing one considering quality as synonymous to better products and therefore higher prices, is the one regarding the ISO 9000 QMS and its provisions and requirements, as described in the manual we have. Of course I understand that ISO is a quality system with the emphasis of the new version been on the management side and on the processes-procedures we apply in all our operations and activities, especially the procurement, production and selling ones.”

It seems that he has a partial knowledge of the theme, as in his answer he confuses process with procedure and he does not acknowledge any interrelationship between Quality and Process management and improvement and the ISO 9000:2000 QMS, as theory suggests.

This is an identified remark in many of the research respondents’ answers with the exception of the majority of the Quality managers of the researched agro-coops.

Kostas Lyris/Quality manager of UACM

The researcher did not conduct any interview with mr. Lyris, as he was very reluctant to answer to any of the research questions, most probably due to the fact that he is a colleague with the researcher in the UACM and he might be afraid of his answers been manipulated and used by the researcher against his interests.

Nevertheless the researcher had a picture of his views through interviewing the external consultant, who is responsible for the ISO 9000 QMS auditing process in the UACM.

His views, as they were presented to the researcher by the external consultant seem to be close to the views of Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelelis/Production manager of LESEL SYN.P.E. in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS requirements, reasons-rational, results and problems theme-question.

His views on the other themes-questions as were expressed by the external consultant and the subsequent analysis and evaluation are as follows:

“He has a strongly held view especially in the issue of the Quality manager doing everything alone, but without admitting that a meeting of the Quality Team was never realized and there are not any Quality policy, strategy and plan in the UACM, besides the ISO 9000 QMS manual.

He expressed nothing openly against the members of the BoDs. Instead, he said that for the current unfavorable business and financial situation the Greek agro-coops are facing are all responsible and especially the members of the BoDs and the senior managers. Furthermore, he too believes in an Integrated QMS as a means of organizational change and strategic development, since gaining new customers and entering in new markets cannot be considered strategic goals.”

The researcher is just presenting mr. Lyris’ views as they were revealed by the external consultant. He has no intention to comment and/or interpret them neither will use them in the rest of the research process, since he has not conducted personally the interview, therefore he cannot claim on their validity and reliability.

5. SYKIKI SYN.P.E.

a) Sotiris Labropoulos/Quality manager

He seems to know ISO 9000 QMS and its interrelationship with the Process management field enough well, as he stated: “The new 2000 version is a customer oriented and process-based quality management system. I really believe that if was applied properly it could contribute to the overall operational performance improvement of SYKIKI, since ISO 9000:2000 is a major change towards adopting a quality philosophy close to the TQM. Those who deal with the system know and/or at least should know that the new one places emphasis on the improvement of the system while also covering the needs of the ‘old system’. I think that all Greek agro-coops would benefit by the improvement of their business processes and operations, if the ‘new ISO’ was implemented and used properly in them”.

b) Dimitris Zafiropoulos/General Manager

He answered as follows: “I know that ISO 9000 QMS is a quality system safeguarding and upgrading the products’ quality. I also know that it helps achieving better operations in the factory and I mean in the production and the quality inspection of the raw material. What I know about the ‘new ISO’, the 2000 version comes from the information I received from the SYKIKI Quality manager and the external organization which had undertaken our certification process. Furthermore, I believe that the majority of the involved parties, that is farmers and first degree cooperatives do not know anything on the question’s issues, besides the fact that ‘quality means more money as income in their pockets’. Therefore, I believe information and training on these issues is absolutely necessary.”

He seems to have a partial knowledge on the asked issues, but “he is not worrying on that since he can rely on his competent quality manager” as he told me, when I asked him. It is a similar attitude as the one expressed by the other researched senior managers, which is in full contrast of the statements made by Goetch and Davis (2002) and Foster (2002), who claim that unless all key parties have full knowledge on and of these issues, the proper development and use of the system is jeopardized.

c) Panagiotis Papageorgiou/President of the BoDs

He also expressed the same view with that of mr. Zafiropoulos. The only difference is that he added: “Since the farmers and the first degree agro-coops’ members have ignorance on the issues of quality and executing the correct processes and processes, we - the Unions and the State agencies - are obliged to teach them on these issues.” He also seems to have a very narrow knowledge on these issues.

6.3.2. Greek Agro-coops Business Status and its Interrelationship with the current status of ISO 9000 QMS

Today, the intervention of the agricultural cooperatives in the agricultural economy should aim at the increase of products competitiveness, not only with the reduction of their production cost and the upgrading of their quality, but also with their coordinated and modernized action in the whole spectrum of production - standardization - trade - integrated services to the farmers (Martinos et al, 1997).

However, the co-current exercising of economic and social policies and activities by the Agro-coops, the intense governmental intervention in the agro-coops affairs, policies and operations, the creation of additional but not productive job positions and the lack of constant criteria for the investment activities have created an unfavorable business operational and organizational environment for the Greek agro-coops.

More specifically, it led to the non-adoption of modern organizational methods and business operating practices, the absence of a continuing training of their human force, the micro-politics phenomena generated mostly by the members of the Board of Directors and the institutional organizations and bodies of the agro-coop sector and the absence of investment in Research and Development. All these negative business factors coincided with the imports of superior agro-products in terms of quality and value for money and the frequent and inadequate changes in the co-operative legislation and led to the current intense crisis that the Greek agricultural cooperatives experience.

Many of these Agro-Coops are threatened with bankruptcy and nullification of their activities, while in some of them this unwelcome situation has already occurred (Mavroyiannis, 1986).

The Greek agricultural cooperatives are called on today, to restructure and manage with success accumulated problems of decades. However, the course of reorganization of the agro-coops becomes more difficult due to the lack of the required business culture, enterprise mentality and managerial attitude and competence as well as to the imminent changes of the CAP, which in substance calls the agro-coops to transform and mutate into autonomous, modern economic and business entities as well as into the more general structural problems of Greek agriculture which undermine the necessary competitiveness of the Greek agricultural economy (Martinou N. et al, 1997).

Internal problems of Greek Agro-coops

Although the distinction between internal and external problems is not always easy, since the cause may be external and the effect internal, internal problems are called those for the existence of which responsible are the legal persons of the cooperatives themselves, their administrations or their members, all of who also have to deal with them.

The root-cause of internal problems is the failure to see the cooperative as a private enterprise and whatever this entails. The long term addiction, either to secondary roles

they were given or the role of the recipient of mandates and allowances, has corroded the entrepreneurship and responsibility which are both necessary to this type of enterprise (appropriate organisational structure and personnel etc.).

The overall view, which does not include certain significant exceptions, consists of cooperative organisations of administrative character. The managing board, elected through support of political parties, manages the affairs of the cooperative even if it does not have the adequate knowledge and experience to do so. In most cases, the line that separates the roles of elected administration from those of official management is vague and, most of the times, the elected administrations, although they do not have the necessary qualifications, do not grant the official management all responsibilities and powers required.

The powerful position of the elected administration, in combination with political connections and the governmental “protection”, limit the role of members even if all sorts of democratic procedures are followed. Meanwhile, the interest of the members is repressed as well as their restlessness about the future of their business, since even in the case of negative financial results the members are not required to cover any financial loss and damage. The tendency of each member to serve his or her own interest becomes a primary priority while the cooperation with the cooperative is rendered secondary. The cooperative is seen as a refuge when difficulties arise, without demanding any serious commitments or risks. As far as the members are concerned, the cooperative is one more supplier and one more possible buyer of products at a given price. General assemblies have no meaning unless there are elections. Internal inspection either has no power for effective control or acts under the rule of coalition of groups of the same political party. The information supplied and the conversation in front of huge assemblies simply cannot be sufficient and debate is not free of influence by specific interests. External control has been weakened.

The work and business environment created due to this situation does not attract capable and ambitious executives and makes all executives and managers, that do not accept this situation, leave and this result to this environment being maintained and reproduced. The educational programs of professional or cooperative content are minimal and their attendance by elected or clerical executives is low.

The strict economic criteria that should prevail in the operation as well as in the investments are weakened due to the absence of any consequence to the members, while

it is not possible to persuade the members to extend their financial participation, in terms of capital, in an activity that gives them the impression that there is no difference if they participate or not, with more or less capital, and no essential difference can be demonstrated by being a member of the cooperative or not (Papageorgiou et al, 1997).

From the presentation of just these present weaknesses of cooperatives, it is clear that the starting point is negative, not even at “zero datum”. Due to this, the effort of reconstruction will be more toilsome than simple adjustment to the new conditions. However, it is expected that the pressure applied by the circumstances will leave no choice other than to accelerate the processes of comprehension of the need for radical changes, provided the existence of the necessary conditions (Doutsias, 2003, p.98).

1. ALMME

a) Aphrodite Filida / Quality manager and Production manager

On the same question, she stated that in ALMME, the same person is responsible for many job tasks and positions, i.e. she is Quality manager, Production manager and Technical manager at the same time. This fact prevents her from being as effective and efficient as she could be in her job and this incident was referred as an implementation Problem, having to do more with the existing business mentality and situation of the Greek Agro-coops which is the main root cause for the lack of the required resources in terms of systems, machines, money and competent staff and consequently for any observed malfunction and mismanagement of any management system applied. This statement seems in accordance with the existing theory references, Oakland (2003).

On continuing, she said: “The decision for the introduction and implementation process of ISO 9000:2000 QMS was a result of the cooperation between the Quality manager and the General Manager. These two persons seem to cooperate and decide on all aspects concerning the ISO 9000 QMS’ development and the corporate Quality policy and strategy of ALMME.

Further on, the Quality manager introduces any Quality issue to and informs the General Manager and the final decision is on him after consulting her firstly and then the relevant managers in the Quality Team meeting.

- The Board of Directors is simply informed by them, in most of the times by the General manager, as they don’t know a lot of things, barely the basics, on ISO 900

QMS implementation and use rational, requirements, intended results and any required changes.”

She ended the conversation by pointing ironically and sarcastically: “They (the Board of Directors’ members) don’t know a lot of things. How should and could they? They are not managers, not even professionals in this job. They just decided on the system’s introduction and that’s it. In this way, they think their duty has been fulfilled. But this attitude is more preferable, than ‘having to deal with a BoDs’ taking irrelevant and autocratic managerial and business decisions.”

b) Christos Giannakakis/General Manager

His most interesting statement is the following: “The members of the Board of Directors do not know much about ISO 9000 QMS and that’s the reason the system’s practiced introduction, implementation process and use purpose are based on his introduction in the BoDs and his exclusive decision. Furthermore, all the members of the BoDs and even the President of ALMME should not and they do not know actually the required things about ISO 9000 QMS and its necessity, intended uses, implementation process, advantages and disadvantages, problems and drawbacks, identified during its development, since they do not possess the required and necessary academic knowledge and professional experience. Therefore, they are not in a position to discuss and decide on such issues. This also happens with any other important business issue”.

This expressed belief and attitude brings into the surface the existing rivalry between the elected members of the BoDs and the senior managers - especially the General Manager - in the Greek Agro-coops’ business reality and practice, as identified by Karamichas (1997), Papageorgiou (1997, 2000) and Doutsias (2003), who consider this rivalry as a root cause of the serious business problems Greek Agro-coops’ sector is facing. This fact is also identified in the research conducted in the other agro-coops and it was expressed directly and/or indirectly by both the members of the BoDs and/or the General Managers.

Another interesting point he made is this: “ Employees of lower managerial levels and workers too are not required and maybe is not good to know about ISO 9000 QMS in full detail (the Quality manager expressed a similar opinion too), since their involvement is limited to the execution of specific tasks during the ISO 9000 QMS

deployment”. This opinion is in contrast to the one referred by Oakland (2002), Foster (2002), Tricker and Shering-Lucas (2000) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001), who all state that full knowledge of the system, active involvement and training on the relevant issues of all employees and workers is required for the successful deployment of the system by any company.

He seems to believe in a paternalistic system of management, since he also stated the view that all his subordinates should follow his guidelines. Nevertheless, and to the contrary to the above stated belief by the General Manager, the researcher recalls the conversation he had with the Accounting Department manager – mr. Katsikaris, who said to him that the employees are motivated and encouraged by the General Manager to express their ideas and views about the ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose and their opinions and suggestions on any managerial issue are considered seriously by the General Manager and the relevant senior managers.

The IT manager had also the same opinion, as expressed to the interviewer. Therefore, the researcher has decided to ask again Mr. Giannakakis which one of the two statements represents the reality and he answered that: “as all matters reality can have two faces; it depends on the situation we are facing and the issue under question”. On continuing, he referred to his managerial attitude and practice as representing a more technocratic managerial stance that he had to adopt in order to introduce in ALMME the management systems required for its business survival and organizational development. It is a stance very close to the one expressed by Parnell (2000, pp.14-15) that the agro-coops management has to adopt the most optimum management systems suitable to each situation for aiding the agro-coops’ survival and prosperity.

In continuing on the current Greek Agro-coops’ sector business status and its interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS business status in Greek Agro-coops’ sector, he pointed out that: “The situation is as bad as it is presented in the media and maybe even worse, in terms of limited business presence and operations in the market, increasing debts and adoption of outdated managerial practices leading to poor organizational performance. In my opinion, the main cause of this situation is the existing rivalry amongst the personnel and the elected members, who -the later- insist in getting involved and decide on any matter concerning the agro-coops’ operation, although they do not possess the required knowledge and experience to deal with such issues. Furthermore, their decisions are based on personal interests and motives and

even more influenced by external groupings, as the political parties. Therefore, in order to prevent them harming the proper implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS, I decided not to inform them, keep them to the “sides” and me assuming full authority and consequently responsibility and accountability for the system’s chosen implementation and use”.

c) Panayiotis Arvanitis/Financial and Vice General Manager

He fully agrees, that Greek Agro-coops face a lot of business and financial problem, due to two reasons, as he pointed out: “first, the non adoption of modern management systems and techniques as private sector companies do and second the unnecessary intervention of the BoDs’ members on every issue, although they do not have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience.”

2. LESEL SYN.P.E.**a) Nikos Matas/Vice-General and Commercial Manager**

On the issue of the Greek agro-coops current business situation, he stated: “Everything is a matter of bad mentality. This is the root cause of all the current business and financial problems the agro-coops are facing. All the business matters should be decided and solved by the managers and not by the members of the Board of Directors.”

It is important to state here, that all managers and employees were very hesitant to talk about the business behavior and practice of the members of the BoDs, a fact that proves that this group really decides on LESEL business issues and manages the agro-coop. A fact disapproved by the majority of the staff, as it is also identified in the work of Papageorgiou et al (1997), as one of the root causes of the problems Greek agro-coops are facing.

b) Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelelis/Production manager

As it was mentioned before, he stated: “Quality processes should be implemented in all departments: the Commercial, Procurement, Production, Financial, Quality department for achieving synergies and enjoying improved performance, but they are not, due to Employees’ “old and bad” practice and mentality, as it is considered an obligation only of the Quality department and not, at least, of the Procurement and Commercial departments as it should be. There exist some quality criteria for the procurement of raw materials, but they are not exercised on a continuous basis and in all cases. The Quality Council/Team meetings are held only in relation and connection to issues referring to the Board of Directors’ meetings. Quality strategy and planning do not really exist. They exist to a degree lately, due to a decision of the Quality department staff and due to that, tracing of the raw material exists to a degree. Training and information on the

system and other quality issues are required for all involved parties, but old-senior workers and employees do not change due their inhibited old and bad work behavior and practice and job mentality”.

And on continuing: “Outdated business and management practices and the micro-politics phenomena, as well as personal interests and micro-regional interests observed very extensively in all agro-coops, are the basic disadvantages and drawbacks for achieving the proper implementation and use of any management system - I mean the ISO 9000 QMS, too - and the main root causes of the serious problems the agro-coops are facing.”

3. SKOS A.S.E.

a) Panayiotis Alevras/ President of the BoDs

As he stated: “There is not actually sufficient management competence in the Greek agro-coops’ sector and this is the main root cause of all the problems they are currently facing. Even the main cause of the inexistence of the appropriate information, knowledge and training on ISO 9000 QMS is a result of the inexistence of qualified personnel, in terms of academic background, professional experience and managerial competence.” On continuing, he said: “This situation prevents even the hiring of competent managers from the private sector companies, as they are not willing to operate in such an environment.”

I asked him if the elected members have any responsibility for the described situation and he replied as follows: “The President and the members of the BoDs are responsible for deciding on the strategic planning of the agro-coop. The responsibility of the managers is to implement effectively and efficiently this business policy. It is not the responsibility of the President, although we are obliged to handle daily business problems and issues, due to the incompetence of the managers. ”

With this statement, my respondent clearly reassures the existing rivalry in the Greek agro-coops between the elected members and the staff-managers. The interesting point is that both groups identify this rivalry as the root cause of the serious problems the agro-coops are facing, but they express contrasting views regarding the identification of the group which has to be held responsible and accountable for the creation of the existing situation.

b) George Spiliotopoulos/SKOS Vice-General Manager and Quality Director

During the conversation we had, he said: “Training and information on the system is required for all parties involved in its deployment – managers, employees and workers as well”.

Nevertheless, nothing was mentioned for the elected members, a fact that leads to his belief of them being useless in the Agro-coop management, because as he stated, “the vast majority of them do not have the required academic knowledge and professional experience to deal and handle successfully such issues. Only these elected members having the aforementioned competences could and should intervene in the management of any company and the Greek agro-coops as well.”

In his question we can identify the existing rivalry between the elected members of the BoDs and the clerical staff, in terms of who should be the Agro-coops’ real managing group.

In continuing, he added: “The Decision Making process on Quality management issues should be materialized after conversation with the responsible senior managers, who have to take into consideration the recommendations and opinions of the middle managers”, as in my question he answered that this practice is followed only up to a certain degree, but he seemed to have and express a grief.

Nevertheless, he considers the existing practice in SKOS A.S.E. concerning the business decision making process and operational setting as the more suitable and practical business-wise, since “only the elected members of the BoDs, who do possess the required professional and academic background intervene in the strategic planning and management and in consultation with the General Management and the senior managers”. This statement reaffirms his previous one, concerning the members of the BoDs optimum behaviour and practice as far as the agro-coops issues’ handling is concerned.

4. UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES OF MESSINIA/UACM**a) Vasilis Kozobolis/President of the BoDs**

On this theme-question he gave a general diplomatic question avoiding to specifically naming the main source of the problems’ creation: “I really think that the past business mentality and practice, which still prevail in the agro-coops’ sector, are the main sources and causes of the “bad” situation, we are all experiencing now. I don’t really

think we have to blame somebody specifically. It is a way of “doing business”, we all have adopted, even if we do not agree. It reminds the way the public sector is operating and which way we all blame as inefficient and unproductive. Therefore, the only solution is to redesign the whole system adopting the good practice of the private sector.”

On the other hand, he acknowledges as a source of the Greek agro-coops malfunctioning the insistence on using methods, behaviours and practices outdated. Furthermore, he considers everybody responsible for this fact, which is in accordance with the theoretical references (Papageorgiou, 1997 and Karamichas, 2003) and the E.U. (2001-2004) research findings of the “Social Dialogue” programme.

b) Dimitris Charitsis/General Manager of UACM

He was speaking generally for the root causes of the current business situation in Greek Agro-coops, their problems and how these problems influence the management of any system – the ISO 9000 QMS included – and of the agro-coops in general, with his view being very close to theory as he stated with emphasis: “I am really on my own concerning the managerial job, without help, without a clear and definite distinction between the authorities of the General Manager and these of the BoDs, who really intervene and decide on every issue although they don’t have the required background. Furthermore, there exist groups consisting of elected members and employees together, a fact that makes the exercise of real business management almost impossible. As I know, this is the prevailing situation in almost the totality of the Greek agro-coops regardless their degree, size, location and activities. This is the root-cause of all the currents problems we are facing and unless this situation changes, the business and financial position of the agro-coops will deteriorate more.” It is an opinion reassuring the ones of my former respondents.

5. SYKIKI SYN.P.E.

a) Sotiris Labropoulos/Quality manager

His answer covers the whole issue and is very well illustrating the agro-coops’ existing problems and business status, because the situation he describes “is an example of what is really happening”, as he said:

“The key stakeholders do not have special knowledge of the changes that followed the transition from the 1994 system to the 2000 one. Only the quality control team, especially the quality control manager knows about the changes. More specifically the quality control manager, after a decision taken by the board, followed a course on the changes between the old and the new system.

As far as the relationship between the board of directors (farmer’s representatives) and the top managers is concerned, this seems to vary depending on the various circumstances of each cooperative. The general idea however is that, the agricultural cooperatives cannot be attractive for a successful top manager as they do not function in a really “managerial” way. The fact that the board of directors is elected by the farmers and in most cases this board is consisted of persons who do not have the managerial and business knowledge and who act having in mind their voters, puts pressure on the top managers, pressure which cannot be regarded as social responsibility.

The pressure is bigger as the persons who constitute the board stay longer at their places and it can finally be disastrous for their relationship with the top management and for the future prospects of the cooperative. A manager in a cooperative does not have to act only as a manager but he also has to act always as a diplomat in every occasion of the daily functions of the cooperative.”

b) Dimitris Zafiropoulos/General Manager

As the rest of the senior managers believe, he also considers the elected members of the Board of Directors and the unclear situation regarding the decision making process in the Greek agro-coops, as the root-cause of the existing problematic situation the agro-coops are facing. He continued by saying: “The past ‘bad habits’ do not let us do our business. And how can somebody manage and decide properly, when he has to deal with people who do not have the required knowledge and background to deal with such business matters, but they insist intervening and deciding on everything?”

c) Panagiotis Papageorgiou/President of the BoDs

Mr. Papageorgiou expressed a totally opposite opinion by stating: “The agro-coops are really facing a lot of serious business and financial problems and this has to do with the non-existence of competent employees, as the ones working in the private sector companies. Here, the mentality of work is similar to that existing in the public sector.” It is a view in accordance with the one expressed by the other researched Presidents.

6.3.3 Nature of ISO 9000 QMS Implementation and Use / Rational - Requirements – Results: Benefits and Problems-Drawbacks-Difficulties

The global market place is rapidly becoming obsessed with the requirement of any company having a certified and internationally recognized quality management system for being permitted to do business worldwide and locally as well. This fact proves that ISO 9000 QMS is considered as a management tool “bearing in its baggages” the potentiality for the continuous enhancement of competitiveness by firstly improving business processes.

As Goetch and Davis (2002) present, a survey of North American (USA and Canada) firms registered to ISO 9000:1994, conducted by Quality System Update and the management consulting firm Deloitte and Touche, found that the investment costs required for the firm’s registration under ISO 9000:1994 is typically repair in three years, a very short payback time for any kind of investment incurred by any company.

Furthermore, the respondents to the survey listed the following factors / issues as the major internal business benefits of ISO 9000 registration: Better documentation which leads to process improvement, positive cultural change, greater quality awareness and higher perceived quality of product and/or service by all customers (internal and external) which was listed as the most important and valuable benefit.

On the other hand, many organizations reported that the decision to become an ISO 9000 certified company was a difficult one, as they considered ISO registration too costly and too much work requiring, while the anticipated benefits were not assured and well known due to a lack of understanding and knowledge about the system and its proclaimed benefits, besides of using it as an advertising/marketing tool and as a requirement for participating in public works / projects contests.

Proper Reasons for ISO Introduction and Implementation as Theory suggests

Therefore, as indicative appropriate incentives for adopting both ISO 9000 QMS and TQM and probably achieving the system's effective and efficient introduction and implementation are the following, according to Goetch and Davis (2002, pp.316-317), and also as reaffirmed by Oakland (2003), Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) and Foster (2001):

- To improve operations by satisfying the ISO 9000 requirements for management responsibility, resource management, product realization, and measurement analysis and improvement.
- To create or improve a quality management system that will be recognized by customers worldwide.
- To improve product or service quality and/or the consistency of quality.
- To improve customer satisfaction.
- To improve competitive posture
- To conform to the requirements of one or more major customers although adoption would be more and better motivated by internal factors as the preceding five.

The preceding analysis shows that, if ISO 9000 is to have a real and permanent positive effect on a company's business processes and organizational operations, it must be approached and adopted with a positive attitude and understanding of its real business benefits and the unwavering commitment of top management combined with the energetic involvement of all workforce motivated by the top management behavioral example and position toward the quality system.

As it was previously said, the same reasoning holds true for the effective and efficient adoption and deployment of a TQM system, which due to its pervasiveness to all businesses processes systems, operations, functions, levels and departments requires a better understanding of the system's rational and knowledge of its features and requirements.

Interestingly, an important number of many companies adopt TQM (as well as ISO 9000 QMS, but to a lesser degree) out of desperation and as a last means for business survival.

Oakland (2003) believes, that as it turns out, having the Japanese industry example in mind, this is the easiest reasoning and way of introduction and implementation of the

quality system and most of the times it proves to be successful, although precautions still exist and hold, that this approach is short-term minded and for this reason, in most of the cases, has a short period of success, since management enthusiasm and commitment flows out, as the initial business survival problems of the organization are faced and solved by the system's adoption and deployment.

It is better for managers to adopt and use preventive action and not a corrective one as the last resort. This of course is the message, the new version of ISO 9000:2000 adopts with its emphasis on measurement, analysis and consequently as a result on Continual Improvement in an ever-lasting spiral, like Deming's (1986) and Oakland's (1993 and 1994): Plan - Do - Check - Act/Adjust cycles, as Goetch and Davis believe (2002).

Requirements

The following elements should be considered as of increased importance for the effective and efficient introduction and implementation of ISO 9000 QMS, as well as for the continuous improvement of the applied quality management system, in any company regardless its size, industry sector, business scope and activities, type of legal entity and geographic location:

Continual improvement of business processes, increased emphasis on the role of the senior management, consideration of legal and regulatory requirements, establishment of measurable objectives for all relevant business functions and managerial levels, monitoring of customers' satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction as a measure of system performance, increased attention to resource availability, determination of employees' training effectiveness, measurements extended to system, processes, and product, and analysis of collected data on the performance of the QMS, as all quality authors – Oakland (2003), Foster (2002), Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001), state.

Costs and Benefits of having a Quality Management System

“An effective Quality Management System should be designed to satisfy the purchaser's conditions, requirements and expectations whilst serving to protect the needs of interested parties (ISO 9004:2000, source: Tricker & Sherring-Lucas, 2001, p.13).

Costs are incurred by implementing quality but they are offset by the savings gained by reduction in scrapped material, rework, defects and the resulting loss of existed and potential customers due to these costs of poor quality/of not having quality.

The main benefits of quality and of the application of a quality management system according to Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001, p.14) are:

- An increased capability to provide a product which consistently conforms to an agreed specification;
- A reduction in administration, manufacturing and production costs because of less wastage and fewer rejects;
- A greater involvement and motivation within an organization workforce;
- Improved customer relationships through fewer complaints, thus increasing sales potential.

Difficulties-Problems-Drawbacks

Of course, as many quality authors - such as Oakland (2003), Goetch and Davis (2002), Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001), Bank (2000), Foster (2001), Arvanitoyiannis (2001) - believe (and the document's author agree), all these benefits can be achieved only with the active involvement and participation of all the employees/the workforce in its totality who have to be well informed, trained and educated on quality as well as stimulated, motivated and encouraged to participate actively in every aspect of the organization's quality system implementation (this is a management of change element, according to this document's author's opinion). If these requirements are not present, then problems, drawbacks and difficulties will be encountered in the deployment of the system and the intended benefits may not be achieved, as these authors state.

A. Rational and Reasons for ISO 9000 QMS introduction and development

1. ALMME A.S.E.

a) Aphrodite Filida / Quality manager and Production manager

She replied that: "Customers and Markets demanded initially for ISO 9000:1994 introduction and development and later on, in year 2000, for the introduction and deployment of ISO 9000:2000". She considers it as the only way for the existing markets' maintenance and gaining of new ones, as: "In today's business world this the only available weapon for applying a "productive" marketing plan and increase sales."

According to her opinion, there does not exist any Legal obligation-requirement according to EU and national legislation, but in reality it does exist as a pressure for

assuring the markets' and consumers' food health and hygiene, although this legal requirement is satisfactorily covered by the HACCP system, which in fact was in operation in ALMME before the ISO 9000 QMS' introduction.

b) Christos Giannakakis/General Manager

Most of his views coincide with the views of the Quality Manager-Mrs. Filida and with the statements found in theory and research findings.

c) Panayiotis Arvanitis/Financial and Vice General Manager

He too agrees with the views and opinions of the Quality manager and the General Manager, as in both interviews it happened to be present during a long time period (especially in the interview with mr. Giannakakis). His only difference is that he sees ISO 9000 QMS' nature and use from a more cost-focused point of view.

2. LESEL SYN.P.E.

a) Nikos Matas/Vice-General Manager and Commercial Manager

He considers as major reasons for the system's introduction and development the following: "It is a clear request of the customers and markets as well as of the E.U. and National legislation. We are all obliged to become certified. I don't see any other reason". He seems considering ISO 9000 QMS' registration and development as an obligation imposed by external factors/drivers, which may be in contrast with his view on the possible benefits gained by the system's implementation and use.

b) Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelelis/Production manager

He said: "Market and customers' requirement and E.U. and National legislation for assuring public hygiene and food safety are the main reasons for the introduction and development of any quality management system, as ISO 9000 QMS." He is in complete accordance with theory writings and research findings.

3. SKOS A.S.E.

a) Panayiotis Alevras/ President of the BoDs

In accordance with the majority of the respondents, he points out the following points as the main reasons for an agro-coop seeking registration by and then developing ISO

9000 QMS: “Marketing reasons, E.U. directives and National legislation regarding food industry, as a proof of product quality assurance required by the markets and the customers and of course, since our competitors have it, we should have it, too”, he stated.

b) George Spiliotopoulos/Vice-General Manager and Quality Director

He said: “It is a customers’ requirement the procurement of certified and traceable qualitative products and an EU and National legislation requirement.

There exist also marketing reasons, especially since all the existing competitors are increasingly certified by ISO 9000 QMS and HACCP. Furthermore, upgraded quality in products and services may lead to new markets and aid gaining new customers. An important feature is the possible improvement of the corporate business processes, a fact that if achieved may lead to improved business performance.” It is a view in accordance with theory and having the strategic aspect of the QMS.

4. UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES OF MESSINIA/UACM

a) Vasilis Kozobolis/President of the BoDs

He said: “ISO 9000 QMS is a useful quality system, since all customers require it as a proof of qualitative and healthy products and of course, since the competition applies it everybody is obliged to have it.” He seems to have a narrow focus on the issue, since he mentioned nothing on the possible strategic use of the system.

b) Dimitris Charitsis/General Manager of UACM

He believes that: “It is a market and customers’ requirement as well as a necessary tool for been recognized globally for your qualitative products and services and being able to participate in international bids and enter in the international markets. Moreover, it is the National legislation and European Union directives that oblige any company having such quality systems, like the ISO 9000 QMS and HACCP.” He has a good and thorough knowledge of the issue.

5. SYKIKI SYN.P.E.

The interview took place in the factory premises in late September and during the working hours, meaning that the researcher spent almost the whole working day for completing this stage of the interview. In this phase, all three SYKIKI respondents were together in the factory area and the researcher had to be with them in the production line area, because this was the peak production period for the agro-coop and nobody had any spare time. The Quality manager, mr. Sotiris Labropoulos answered on behalf of all three, since “it is his area of professional interest and therefore he knows the issue better; furthermore we have spent a lot of time talking on these issues and we know by experience that he has the same opinions with us on these matters” as the President and the General Manager claimed. Therefore, only his answers will be presented in this part of the interview.

Moreover, the researcher believes that the President and General Manager’s statement is indicative of their mentality of not being involved in the daily operations of the system and holding accountable the Quality manager for the implementation of these operations. In a way, it is a reaffirmation of the belief expressed by all other quality managers. Nevertheless, we have to take into serious consideration the fact that these two did not have enough time to spend due to the peak period obligations they had.

Sotiris Labropoulos/Quality manager

He gave an integrated answer covering in brief all the issues put by the interview questions. His views coincide with the views of the rest of the quality managers, while at the same time they are in accordance with the theory statements. So, he said walking up and down the production line in the factory:

“The main reasons for the system’s introduction and development are the known ones. That is: Market and customer’s requirement for proving your products’ ‘good’ qualitative state, E.U. and National legislation, marketing reasons and since all companies have it, we must have it. Furthermore, it could be used for the auditing and improvement of the internal operations and business processes, but this goal requires the BoDs’ members’ and the General Manager’s knowledge to decide to use the system in such a way. The fact that many customers are asking for the certification may be the only reason the key stakeholders are supporting the system.

The requirements for its effective and efficient deployment are: the commitment and support of the BoDs and top management, information and training of all employees on the system's provisions and having the necessary infrastructure, that is systems, machines, tools and resources to support the system's implementation process."

Concerning the results he gave an ambiguous answer covering other issues too, as the issue of the business status of Greek agro-coops examined in the previous theme-question, and the sub-issue of the problems encountered in the system's implementation process, by saying: "In the beginning of the implementation, within the year 1999, the expectations were too high. The system was seen as something new and unknown creating expectations for the improvement of the whole system in which SYKIKI functions. Special improvements cannot be found. After 6 years of implementation the system is left to the quality control team and the management team deals with it rarely. One reason for the problems in implementing the system and not enjoying the intended benefits out of its use is the "old staff" of the cooperative, which did not help as it could in implementing a real and alive quality system, framing it only in writing down many procedures that were previously done orally.

About the nature of the system most of the key stakeholders see it as a bureaucratic instrument with which they do not have special involvement.

In any case and because they know that many customers are asking for it, they insist on the implementation of it.

The whole system is considered as too much bureaucratic by the senior managers and the other employees. They claim that, all the procedures now documented as written files, were always implemented by the Cooperative as a daily practice. The fact that they have now the duty to keep all that information written makes the system not functioning quickly, creating in that way a lot of problems.

This attitude towards the quality system runs all the employee levels of the Cooperative who are not willing to help in the improvement of the system. The fact that many customers are asking for the certification may be the only reason the key stakeholders are supporting the system.

The key stakeholders do not have special knowledge of the changes that followed the transition from the 1994 system to the 2000 one. Only the quality control team,

especially the quality control manager knows about the changes. More specifically the quality control manager, after a decision taken by the board, followed a course on the changes between the old and the new system. Those who deal with the system know that the new one places emphasis on the improvement of the system while also covering the needs of the old system.”

6.3.3.B. Requirements of ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation and use

1. ALMME A.S.E.

a) Aphrodite Filida / Quality manager and Production manager

She commenced her answer indirectly by saying: “I believe ISO 9000 QMS could be used as a strategic tool, but for this goal to be achieved senior management’s knowledge of, commitment to and training on the system’s implementation requirements is needed. Further on, middle managers and the rest of the employees as well as the workers have to be informed on the system’s philosophy, nature and corporate aims out of its operation and trained respectively according to each one job duties for rendering them co-partners and co-responsible to its development process.”

It is an approach very close to theory, as all quality authors - Oakland (2003), Foster (2002) - state and require companies to do for achieving a proper deployment of ISO 9000 QMS.

According to her, internal auditing is done on a regular basis, for assuring the system’s proper deployment. I have to admit here, I asked all the other company’s interviewees on this subject, in order to verify her sayings and they all answered positively, offering credit to her words.

On continuing, she stated that in ALMME, the same person is responsible for many job tasks and positions, i.e. she is Quality manager, Production manager and Technical manager at the same time. This fact prevents her from being as effective and efficient as she could be in her job and this incident was referred as an implementation Problem, having to do more with the existing business mentality and situation of the Greek Agro-coops which is the main root-cause for the lack of the required resources in terms of systems, machines, money and competent staff and consequently for any observed malfunction and mismanagement of any management system applied.

b) Christos Giannakakis/General Manager

His answer is as follows: “The requirements for the effective and efficient development of the system are the following:

-Top management active involvement, participation, guidance and planning as well as its unwavering commitment are absolutely required and necessary for the successful introduction and implementation of ISO 9000 QMS as well as for any other quality management system

-Senior management team knowledge of the system, active participation and guidance to their subordinates are all required for the successful development of the QMS.

- All employees’ training is required.”

Furthermore, as he stated: “Communication and information as well as training on ISO 9000 QMS is required for all – especially for the employees involved in its development and operations. The heads of the departments and the managers participating in the Quality Team have to know everything about the nature of the system and its implementation process and use purposes, therefore they have to be thoroughly trained on it”.

It is an answer very close to what all quality authors emphatically state as the most necessary requirements for any registered company wishing to achieve the ISO proper implementation and use in their writings.

c) Panayiotis Arvanitis/Financial and Vice General Manager

He agrees with the views and opinions of the General Manager especially and the Quality manager as well, as in both interviews it happened to be present during a long time period (especially in the interview with mr. Giannakakis).

2. LESEL SYN.P.E.**a) Nikos Matas/Vice-General and Commercial Manager**

He stated: “Real training and information – education of all the involved parties is required. Furthermore, cooperation of all the involved parties is required.

A fully equipped chemical laboratory exists and is staffed with two chemists for safeguarding product quality and achieving better results and prices”.

He adopts the more traditional approach, considering the benefits of ISO effective implementation and efficient use being only in terms of higher prices.

Nevertheless, he considers the existence of a fully equipped laboratory as a requirement for conducting better measurements and consequently achieving better results. He is the only one, who expresses such a correct view in accordance with ISO 9000 QMS Guidelines. His position may be explained by his stance being more an accounting one business and managerially-wise.

b) Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelelis/Production manager

He answered as follows: “The following are the main requirements, in my opinion: Quality processes should be implemented in all departments: the Commercial, Procurement, Production, Financial, Quality department for achieving synergies and enjoying improved performance. The Quality Council/Team’ meetings should be held at least once a week, for quality issues relevant to all functions and departments.

Training and information on the system and other quality issues are required for all involved parties – employees and workers, even for the members of the Board of Directors (but this never happens), as these are a prerequisite for the proper implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS. Especially for the newcomers: attendance in seminars on ISO QMS and on any other quality system should be a prerequisite for their hiring in order for the company better developing any quality and management system.

Quality strategy and planning are necessary for the proper development of the system.

Cooperation with the official bodies (Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Prefecture agencies and units) does not exist, although it has been requested by the LESEL.

Top management active and unwavering commitment, involvement and guidance are necessary for the smooth deployment of the system.”

An answer covering almost all requirements, as stated by the quality authors, and with a special emphasis on training of employees, especially the newcomers in the company. This point proves he knows the issue of quality management in depth and justifies the quality managers' group's demand to have a decisive role in all quality issues, as they are the professionals in this management field.

3. SKOS A.S.E.

a) Panayiotis Alevras/ President of the BoDs

His reply is as follows: "I believe that the complete and undisputable commitment and participation of all the involved parties as well as sufficient information and the appropriate training on the system's requirements are the necessary and capable elements for an agro-coop achieving the effective implementation and efficient use of the system. As a matter of fact, I think this holds true for any system under implementation in any company." A view in full accordance with theory and research studies findings.

b) George Spiliotopoulos/SKOS Vice-General Manager

He considers the following as the major requirements for achieving the proper implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS:

"Top management commitment, involvement and employees' motivation are absolutely required for the effective implementation and use of the system, as it happens in the operations of any system everywhere. It was an initiative and decision of the General Manager to become certified by ISO 9000 and apply it. Training and information on the system is required for all parties involved in its deployment – managers, employees and workers as well.

The existence and operation of the Quality Team/Council, plus the participation of the departments' managers in the Quality team meetings according to the issues under concern, are all requirements that have to be met."

On continuing, he stated that: "The Decision Making process on Quality management issues should be materialized only after the General Manager and Quality manager will have a conversation with the relevant senior managers, who have to take into consideration the recommendations and opinions of the middle managers." He seems to believe one hundred per cent in the recommendations of all quality "gurus" on the issue

of all employees' active involvement and real participation in the deployment of the system.

4. UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES OF MESSINIA/UACM

a) Vasilis Kozobolis/President of the BoDs

As everybody else, he too considers: "Involvement and commitment of everybody in the company, the existence of the required systems and tools, and continuous training and information on the system are the key requirements for its successful operation".

b) Dimitris Charitsis/General Manager of UACM

He is in total accordance with the UACM President's view. The only difference is that, he mentions the requirement of the existence of: "the necessary infrastructure that the system requires". They both forget to mention the unwavering involvement and commitment of the top management as the main requirement, as Oakland (2003) and Goetch and Davis (2002) believe.

6.3.3. C. Benefits of the ISO 9000 QMS Implementation and Use

1. ALMME A.S.E.

a) Aphrodite Filida / Quality manager and Production manager

"Production costs savings are enjoyed, but not to a great extent, since ALMME had adopted a preventive production policy even before the introduction of ISO 9000 QMS. Furthermore, the achieved product and services quality upgrading offers the possibility to the company to gain new markets and customers, if it capitalizes properly on this achievement."

She referred only to these two benefits and very briefly, because she seems to be more focused on the strategic aspect of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose, as it will be revealed by her following answers in Section 6.3.4.

b) Christos Giannakakis/General Manager

Most of his views coincide with the views of the Quality Manager and with the statements of the quality authors.

c) Panayiotis Arvanitis/Financial and Vice General Manager

He agrees with the views and opinions of the Quality manager, as it happened to be present in the interview with Mrs. Filida.

His only difference is that he sees ISO 9000 QMS' nature and use from a more cost-focused point of view. According to his opinion: "ISO saves costs-expenses with less defects and less costly internal processes and operations and by the product quality upgrading its implementation may achieve more customers' and markets gained. This outcome results to more profits, which are vital for the survival of any organization."

He focused on this issue, because as he continues: "The more optimum management of agro-coops' costs - especially the operating ones - is the only means for the agro-coops business and financial survival and this may free resources needed for investing in the production of more qualitative "with value for money" products; this fact will help the agro-coops keep their existing customers and enter in new markets, which is, the most important benefit gained by the effective implementation and efficient use of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek Agro-coops."

His view is very close to the one expressed by Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2002) concerning the costs and benefits of ISO 9000 QMS and also to the research findings of Dr. Agelis, as these were presented in the Quality Forum held in Athens in 1998 (DBA - Document 2, Section 14, Appendices).

2. LESEL SYN.P.E.**a) Nikos Matas/Vice-General and Commercial Manager**

He answered as follows: "Quality inspection and control saves costs on the raw material incoming. Furthermore, with the system's introduction and development, we now have a fully equipped chemical laboratory exists and is staffed with two chemists for safeguarding product quality and achieving better results and prices".

His answer represents his managerial stance and view regarding ISO 9000 QMS. He still considers it mostly as an inspection and control quality system and not as a quality management system as the "new" ISO 9000:2000 version claims it is.

It is an indication of his lack of knowledge concerning the nature of ISO 9000:2000. As a matter of fact, this was identified for almost all researched-interviewed agro-coops key stakeholders with the exception of the majority of the Quality managers' group. This lack of knowledge of the system's real nature may be a Key Business Factor for

the Greek agro-coops not achieving the optimum outcomes of the system's implementation and use.

b) Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelelis/Production manager

As he said: "The main benefits of the system's proper implementation and use are: the savings of costs due to defects and the improved product quality which leads to new markets and gains new customers and more profits; plus the gained corporate reputation and the upgraded company's image for producing and supplying qualitative and healthy products".

3. SKOS A.S.E.

a) Panayiotis Alevras/ President of the BoDs

He replied: "The main positive outcomes are: gaining new and more customers and markets, maintaining the existing ones, saving costs, produce more competitive products and thus becoming more competitive and offer more qualitative services to all parties doing business with us. As I said before, I also believe that if applied correctly, then ISO 9000 QMS could be used as a toll for corporate businesses and all department procedures auditing and the improvement of our business operation."

He is in accordance with the other respondents as far as the results of the system's implementation and use is concerned and he also repeats his belief in the possible use of the system as a strategic corporate resource, as Oakland (2003) suggests.

But the most interesting thing, according to the researcher, is the use of the word "procedures" in his answer. It is a fact proving his lack of knowledge of the system's nature and especially of the new 2000 version, as already identified in his answer in the subsection 6.3.1. - Theme 1, a fact that puts under serious consideration his understanding of the use of the system as a strategic resource, since he does not combine the process improvement concept with the improvement of the corporate performance. The only possible explanation is that he may use the words: "process and procedure" interchangeably and by attributing them the same meaning, as another respondent has already done.

b) George Spiliotopoulos/SKOS Vice-General Manager

He thinks: “The system promotes and helps prevention, which is better and more operational in terms of costs savings than correction.

Therefore, certification by ISO 9000 QMS and development of the system is and/or should be used for achieving and assuring better product and services quality and then capitalize on them by marketing it to gain customers, markets, costs savings, profits and business processes auditing, control and improvement leading to improved performance.” It is an opinion very close to theory suggestions and the findings of the International Quality Forum held in Athens in 2003 (in which the researcher was a participant), if it is really applied (specific article on process improvement resulting to organizational performance improvement).

On continuing he said: “SPC is really implemented in the control and measurement of the raw material procurement as well as in the control and measurement of the final product lots. Documentation and back-up of all the processes and operations exists and this fact, besides the proper implementation of ISO 9000 QMS, helps the good operating practice of the entire corporation.”

It is a very interesting point of view, since he is the first one talking of the need for prevention, SPC and documentation of the processes. These are all valuable tools for the proper implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS, as Oakland (2003) and Logothetis (1992) believe and state.

4. UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES OF MESSINIA/UACM

a) Vasilis Kozobolis/President of the BoDs

He answered: “The major benefits are: more qualitative standardized products, a fact that helps the agro-coop becoming more competitive for consequently entering in new markets and gaining new customers.” It seems a balanced response. With a sign for understanding the strategic nature of ISO 9000 QMS, since he states that the system’s development may help any agro-coop achieve some of its strategic goals.

b) Dimitris Charitsis/General Manager of UACM

The major benefits according to him are: “As I said before in the requirements, it is a tool for been recognized globally for your qualitative products and services and being able to participate in international bids and enter in the international markets. Furthermore through upgraded qualitative products and services you may gain better

contracts and prices and in this way the system may contribute to the organizational development of the union – meaning the UACM.”

It is an answer covering all the parameters, as for the first time he refers to the possible use of ISO as a corporate strategic resource, but he does not make any reference to the possible business processes improvement through the use of the system. This fact reaffirms his identified in Theme-Question 1 lack of knowledge as far as Process management and improvement and its interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS is concerned. It is a reoccurring research finding.

6.3.3.D – ISO 9000 QMS Implementation & Use Problems-Drawbacks-Difficulties

1. ALMME A.S.E.

a) Aphrodite Filida / Quality manager and Production manager

Her answer is as follows: “The main points are the following:

- Employees consider it a bureaucratic system.
- No existence of all the required resources, as stated before.
- Irrelevant and autocratic managerial decisions concerning quality management issues are taken sometimes.”

By whom I asked and she replied by the General Manager and/or the President and the other members of the BoDs. This is an indirect evidence of her belief that all corporate decisions on quality management issues should be taken only after her advice and opinion on the issue has been requested and given. She seems to base this attitude on her belief being the most competent on these issues, due to her academic background, professional experience and job position, and therefore the most capable of taking the right decisions. This is an issue referred directly and/or indirectly by almost all Quality managers during all interviews held and represents one of the most important findings this research study revealed, according to the researcher.

To be more specific, it seems that in Greek agro-coops internal rivalry and power games do not only exist between the employed staff and the elected members of the Board of Directors, but there exists similar competition among different groupings among the employees, i.e. General Managers’ group, other Senior managers’ group, Quality managers’ group, middle managers, other employees, workers. This view is evident in

mr. Giannakakis of ALMME saying, concerning the middle managers and other employees' training and information on quality management issues.

On continuing, she said: "There exists no documentation in each department of all business processes and operations concerning quality issues, as the employees believe that all the quality issues work should be done by the Quality manager only."

According to her, employees' training on quality issues is done but the results are not satisfactory, due to lack of the required knowledge of the system.

Workers' training is even more difficult due to their number, over 1000, and due to the fact they are seasonally employed.

According to the researcher's opinion this is a precise, accurate and honest description of all the encountered problems during ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use, which proves her deep knowledge on the issue and her willingness to discuss openly and honestly about the research issue.

b) Christos Giannakakis/General Manager

Most of his views coincide with the views of the Quality Manager-Mrs. Aphrodite Filida, but they do not have their breadth and depth, and with the statements found in bibliography-theory and the research findings.

c) Panayiotis Arvanitis/Financial and Vice General Manager

He expresses almost the same views and opinions with these expressed by the General Manager and the Quality manager especially.

2. LESEL SYN.P.E.

a) Nikos Matas/Vice-General and Commercial Manager

Surprisingly, he did not mention any identified Problems-Drawbacks and Disadvantages of the system's implementation and use in LESEL.

According to quality authors' - Oakland (2003), Foster (2002), Tricker and Scherring-Lucas (2001) - opinions and statements, these two aforementioned facts have to do with ignorance of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and its implementation and use interrelationship with the Quality and Process management and improvement fields, as well as with (his) ignorance on these two fields and concepts.

But, the researcher believes in another explanation. Most probably, mr. Matas believes that the Quality managers and the Production manager will mention all the encountered problems during the ISO 9000 QMS development, therefore he does not have to mention them. In a way, if this explanation is right, then it supports the above mentioned possible research outcome.

b) Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelalis/Production manager

As he said: "It is really a bureaucratic system, but it has some flexibility that allows things to advance smoother. Furthermore, as problems could be considered all the above stated requirements, if they are not present in the system's deployment, as they are not here and that's the reason we are not enjoying in full the benefits I stated earlier". He is closely aligned to theory, with the original remark that although bureaucratic as a system, it allows some flexibility to handle it.

Concerning the flexibility reference he made, when questioned he answered he means the "new" version in relation to the "old" one. This is a statement that, according to the researcher, shows the respondent's proper knowledge on ISO 9000 QMS' nature.

3. SKOS A.S.E.

a)Panayiotis Alevras/ President of the BoDs

He answered: "As I said before, there are positive results out of the system's deployment, but not in the breadth and depth we have planned due to: its bureaucratic nature; lack of the appropriate knowledge of and training on the system's nature and provisions identified in all involved parties; lack of Managers and employees having the

required academic background and professional experience to develop it properly; lack of the appropriate organizational structure; lack of entrepreneurial mentality and business operation based on the private sector's business and financial criteria; and lack of the appropriate and proper cooperation between the senior managers and the BoDs' members are the main difficulties observed for the ineffective implementation and inefficient use of ISO 9000 QMS and of any other managerial system in operation in the Greek agro-coops' sector.

Wherever these factors are not present, as this happens in SKOS ASE/a third degree central union and in contrast to what happens in the UACM and in other second degree unions, we observe more and better positive results.”

With his answer, he offers as an explanation of any drawbacks identified in ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use in the Greek agro-coops, the same reasons he stated as the root cause of the agro-coops business and financial problems, which means that he insists in and really believes this view and opinion.

b) George Spiliotopoulos/SKOS Vice-General Manager

He gave the following answer:

“It is considered by the employees as a bureaucratic system, due its documentation requirement, which is considered as resources and time consuming, although as I said before, I believe this documentation process helps the operation of the entire organization.

It requires the involvement of all participating parties - external and internal ones - which fact is considered as difficult to occur and as resources and time consuming.

There exists partial knowledge of and training on the system's practice requirements.

It requires the existence and operation of an appropriate IT system and machines and of all the required resources, which are and/or should be available in all circumstances”. It is a statement similar to the previous ones and close to theory.

4. UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES OF MESSINIA/UACM

a) Vasilis Kozobolis/President of the BoDs

According to him the only problem that may be observed during the system's deployment, is the employees' perception of the system as bureaucratic, due to its provision on continuous documentation of all actions undertaken. On continuing, he said: "Of course, if the requirements I previously referred as necessary are not met, then problems and drawbacks will appear". His view is close to the theoretical statements and the research findings on the problems – drawbacks – difficulties encountered in the system's implementation process.

b) Dimitris Charitsis/General Manager of UACM

He identified the ISO 9000 QMS as: "a bureaucratic system, which is time and resources consuming, due to its documentation requirement and the necessity to train unwilling employees, who have an "old fashioned" mentality and practice. The other problems that may be encountered rest in the lack of supplying the required resources." A belief similar to the one given by mr. Kozobolis, the President of UACM and close to the ones offered by a fair number of the other respondents, which are all close to theory and research findings., but not in full as they forget to mention the required existence of the company having and operating under a Quality culture and their members having the required knowledge on the Process management and improvement concepts and fields, in order for the company implement effectively and use efficiently the ISO 9000 QMS, as Oakland (2003) states.

6.3.4. ISO 9000 QMS as a Corporate Strategic Resource-Competence

ISO 9000:2000 represents a fundamental change in approach, and is a major, and needed improvement over the two earlier versions as many quality authors - like Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001); Goetch and Davis (2002); Oakland (2003) - believe. ISO 9000's evolution has aligned it more closed with the Total Quality Management philosophy. In ISO's own words, as presented in Goetch and Davis (2002): "The primary aim of the "consistent pair [ISO 9001 and ISO 9004] is to relate modern quality

management to the process and activities of an organization, including the promotion of continual improvement and achievement of customer satisfaction”.

They pointed out that the major change was from a “system based” to a more “process based” quality management system, which could improve organizational performance by improving business process, as Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001) state. Moreover, the new ISO 9000:2000 version is a quality management system and not only a quality assurance and/or control system, but to the contrary as a management system encompasses quality assurance and control and covers more topics.

This process model seems similar to the model of quality and (indirectly) process improvement, originally adopted and formulated by Demming (1982): the “Plan, Do, Check, Act” model, which is overwhelmingly adopted by many quality gurus, such as J.S.Oakland (1993, 1994, 2003), who qualifies this model as the best for continuous process improvement and consequently quality improvement.

It seems to be an endless spiral of continuous effort for achieving improved business processes and operations, which ultimately (and normally) may lead to improved business performance as Oakland states in his books “Total Quality Management.” (2003) and “Total Organizational Excellence” (2001).

As Oakland (2003) conveys operating a process-focused oriented and driven company provides a logical framework for any person of his/her role in the business and awareness for his/her obligation to satisfy customer (internal and/or external these maybe) with the ultimate business result of becoming a cost-effective, competitive organization, which is able to offer and deliver to all its customer upgraded and enhanced organizational performance.

Despite, these proclamations of organizational performance improvement through the adoption of a process orientation by an organization, there still remain a considerable number of enterprises who still remain traditional in operations being more function based and oriented rather than being process driven.

Research on these above mentioned companies has proved that deployment of a common process framework throughout the organization offers many advantages, such as: a common company image to all its customers and suppliers, lower costs and increased flexibility in terms of resource allocation, production operations and supply chain activities.

These required fundamental changes in the way organizations are operating and managing their businesses are the main cause root for many organizations not evolving to a process business but instead remaining “traditional” by focusing on tasks, jobs and people who do them and on structures.

1. ALMME

a) Aphrodite Filida / Quality and Production manager

As she stated: “In ALMME there exists a Quality strategy and plan and the implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS is based on that plan, although it is not always followed as it provides”.

On continuing, she said: “The decision for the introduction and implementation process of ISO 9000:2000 QMS was a result of the cooperation between the Quality manager and the General Manager. Further on, the Quality manager introduces any Quality issue to and informs the General Manager and the final decision is on him after consulting her firstly and then the relevant managers in the Quality Team meeting”.

These two persons seem to cooperate and decide on all aspects concerning the ISO 9000 QMS’ development and the corporate Quality policy and strategy of ALMME. Further on, the Quality manager introduces any Quality issue to and informs the General Manager and the final decision is on him after consulting her firstly and then the relevant managers in the Quality Team meeting.

As she continued, she stated her belief to an Integrated Quality Management encompassing all the existing quality management systems as the only means for really serving all the corporate goals and through it achieving organizational change and development.

Furthermore, she believes ISO 9000 QMS could and should be used as a strategic tool for business operations control and corporate strategic and operational development, through improved product and services’ quality and business processes improvement. “Production costs savings are enjoyed, but not to a great extent, since ALMME had adopted a preventive production policy even before the introduction of ISO 9000 QMS” as she said.

b) Christos Giannakakis/General Manager

In his own words: “ISO 9000 QMS is a strategic management tool and is used as such in ALMME, mostly for safeguarding product’s quality and safety, customers’ requirements and demands, legal considerations (EU directives and National legislation) and internal control and auditing of business processes and employees’ behaviour and practices.

ISO 9000 QMS can be seen as a strategic resource based on the aforementioned uses and also as a means to face competition, since it helps the company offering qualitative products, maintain the existed clientele and enter in new markets”.

It is interesting to note here, that the Quality manager expressed the same opinion.

His approach seems to know and favour the traditional approach rather than the more strategic one, as far as ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use is concerned. In this sense, ISO 9000 QMS is used to help the company achieving its strategic goals and indirectly it may be used as an organizational change and corporate strategic development tool through the auditing and improvement of the corporate business processes, behaviours and practices.

c) Panayiotis Arvanitis/Financial and Vice General Manager

He said the following: “As I told you before, ISO saves costs-expenses and helps gaining more customers’ and markets gained. This outcome results to more profits, which are vital for the survival of any organization. This is, the most important benefit gained by the effective implementation and efficient use of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek Agro-coops, because more customers means more income and profits and this is the only way for the agro-coops to ‘remain alive’ in this difficult situation. If they achieve it, then they can think of other uses of the system.” His point of view is correct, but according to the researcher is too narrow-focused and may be explained by his stance being more an accounting-financial one business-wise.

2. LESEL SYN.P.E.**a) Nikos Matas/Vice-General and Commercial Manager**

He too seems to have a narrow focus on the issue as he told to the researcher: “As I told you before regarding the benefits we enjoy out of the system’s use: Quality inspection and control, which saves costs on the raw material incoming is the one. And the second,

with the system's introduction and development, we now have a fully equipped chemical laboratory exists, which is staffed with two chemists for safeguarding product quality and achieving better results and prices, which ultimately brings more income and profits, which all agro-coops need desperately in the current situation".

He expressed almost exactly the same view, as the former respondent Mr. Arvanitis/ALMME. And the explanation I think is the same.

b) Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelelis/Production manager

Concerning the issue under question, he stated:

"The Quality Council/Team meetings are held only in relation and connection to issues referring to the Board of Directors' meetings. Quality strategy and planning do not really exist. They exist to a degree lately, due to a decision of the Quality department staff and due to that, tracing of the raw material exists to a degree.

And as I said before, the main benefits of the system's proper implementation and use are: the savings of costs due to defects and the improved product quality which leads to new markets and gains new customers and more profits; plus the gained corporate reputation and the upgraded company's image for producing and supplying qualitative and healthy products. I think these could be the strategic goals of any company".

An answer close to the marketing stance of Quality, confirming the theory findings in terms of the necessity of quality strategy and plan existence in the corporate business plan, but he is not referring at all to the principal strategic aim of organizational development and change through the corporate business processes improvement.

3. SKOS A.S.E.

a) Panagiotis Alevras/President of the BoDs

For the above asked issue Panagiotis said: "In my opinion, it could be used as a tool for the strategic improvement of the agro-coops, but first, the requirements I pointed out in my previous remark concerning the 'bad' business situation of the agro-coops have to be solved, in order to use ISO as a strategic management system. Furthermore, it has to be combined with the other existing corporate management systems, i.e. Business and Marketing Plan, ERP etc. for getting the maximum benefit out of its use."

I told him, I agree with his opinion, which I found in accordance with the existing theory and practice, and I asked him if there exist such systems in the Greek agro-coops. He answered: “I am not sure, but if there are not, then it is the obligation of the senior management to suggest the introduction of such systems and we, the BoDs, will decide on the issue”.

His answer is a clear indication of his belief concerning the roles between elected members and employed staff and which one should be the real decision making and managing group in Greek agro-coops; a fact that reinforces the identified existing rivalry between these two groups in the Greek agro-coops. It is in complete contrast to the suggested cooperation between these two groups, as it reveals from theory – all quality authors and “gurus” – and the research findings as identified in the E.U. (2001-2004) research on “Social Dialogue”.

b) George Spiliotopoulos/Vice-General Manager

His position is: “With ISO 9000 QMS any company aims at producing and offering enhanced qualitative products and services. But upgraded quality in products and services may lead to new markets and aid gaining new customers. Isn’t that a strategic goal of any company? An important feature is the possible improvement of the corporate business processes, a fact that if achieved may lead to improved business performance.” It is a view in accordance with theory and having the strategic aspect of the QMS. Furthermore, he affirmed the existence of a corporate quality policy and strategy and its incorporation in the corporate business-strategic plan in order to aid in the achievement of the corporate goals. And he finished by saying: “My opinion is that organizational change and strategic development can be achieved through such systems’ development, provided that the system’s implementation and use is planned, decided and deployed by those who have the qualifications to do it.” It is a view in accordance with theory and emphasizing the strategic aspect of the QMS. Moreover, it had a clear reference to the need of the various groups in any company having distinct roles in the managerial work and decision making process. This lack of distinct roles amongst the elected members and the senior managers’ group has been pointed as one of the main root-causes for all the business problems and malfunctions observed in the Greek agro-coops.

4. UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES OF MESSINIA/UACM**a) Vasilis Kozobolis/President of the BoDs**

He stated the following: “As I told you before, I believe that ISO 9000 QMS may help an agro-coop produce more qualitative products and offer more qualitative services. This is an important tool for gaining new customers and entering in new markets. This is what we have achieved in the Avia and Mikra Mantinea Agro-coop (a first degree agro-coop), in which I am President since 1994.

Therefore, in this sense the system could be considered and used as a corporate tool-resource for strategic development. Furthermore, it helped us organize better our work duties and operations and audit our work procedures and processes. Thus, I consider it a valuable tool, especially for the few first/1st degree agro-coops - like ours - which really exist and operate in the market. For the Unions it is clear that the system can be used as a strategic system for organizational change and strategic development through the auditing and improvement of the agro-coop’s business operations and processes.

But here, it is required a reconfiguration in the way we are operating. As I stated, we must stop operate and behave as being a public sector company. Rather we must adopt the business practices and behavior of the private sector companies, if we want to use ISO 9000 QMS or any other system in such a way.” His view seems to take in consideration the strategic aspect of ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use process, since as Oakland (2003) suggests, he pays specific interest to the improvement of the business behavior and the adoption of a process based orientation.

b) Dimitris Charitsis/General Manager of UACM

He did not make any specific reference to the possible strategic use of ISO 9000 QMS, because as he said: “even if it could be used as a strategic development tool, then the existing business situation in the agro-coops will nullify this utility”, meaning that the existing business status, financial conditions and managerial behaviour - as expressed by the members of the BoDs - in the UACM do not permit the proper implementation and optimum use of any managerial system, the ISO 9000 QMS included.

5.SYKIKI SYN.P.E.**a) Sotiris Labropoulos/Quality Manager**

He told me that he had covered this issue by the indirect answer he had already given to me. The following one: “As far as the relationship between the board of directors (farmer’s representatives) and the top managers is concerned, this seems to vary depending on the various circumstances of each cooperative. The general idea however is that, the agricultural cooperatives cannot be attractive for a successful top manager as they do not function in a really “managerial” way. The fact that the board of directors is elected by the farmers and in most cases this board is consisted of persons who do not have the managerial and business knowledge and who act having in mind their voters, puts pressure on the top managers, pressure which cannot be regarded as social responsibility. The pressure is bigger as the persons who constitute the board stay longer at their places and it can finally be disastrous for their relationship with the top management and for the future prospects of the cooperative. A manager in a cooperative does not have to act only as a manager but he also has to act always as a diplomat in every occasion of the daily functions of the cooperative.”

When I asked how this answer is related with the possible use of ISO 9000 QMS as a corporate management system aiding corporate organizational change and strategic development, he replied: “Of course, the system provisions are made for such possible use. In fact since a company can improve its products and services quality and through that attempt to gain new customers and enter in new markets, then some of its strategic goals may be achieved through the system. Nevertheless, improving the business processes for achieving performance improvement and organizational change is perceived as altering the current situation, the ‘status quo’, a fact disregarded by the majority of any agro-coop’s stakeholders; especially the members of the BoDs and a fair number of the senior managers.” It is an opinion well situated and closely aligned to the statement made by Scholes and Johnson (1993) concerning the power structure and ‘games’ in anyone organization.

b) Dimitris Zafiropoulos/General Manager

Dimitris said the following: “I really believe that any Union of agro-coops or third degree Central Union could and should use ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development

system. Moreover, it would be a valuable operation of the system, if we could use it as a business auditing tool, because this is needed in all Greek agro-coops.

Unless we redesign our operations and improve our processes, our problems we will never be solved. But first, this requires an organizational restructuring of the internal environment, since now no manager can act on a professional way and plan strategically for the future of the agro-coop, due to the existing internal environment I described before.”

He really believes in the strategic use of ISO 9000 QMS and he is in accordance with the theory and research findings and the view of his other colleagues, especially when he suggests solutions for using the system as a corporate strategic resource.

c) Panayiotis Papageorgiou/President of the BoDs

He expressed the same view as the General Manager but he pointed out another requirement for using the system in such a way, by stating: “Yes, the system can be used for the development of SYKIKI and for helping change our ‘bad’ operations and processes and behaviours. But, we need more competent managers, ‘real’ managers for implementing and using the system, and any other system, in such a way for achieving that goal.”

6.3.5. Change Management Process in the Greek Agro-Coops

Organizational change in the sector of Agricultural Cooperatives relates strongly to strategic change observed and experienced in the agricultural sector at a European, National and local level.

Organizational change can be defined as both: Strategic change and restructuring of operational practices and business processes - that is operational change - as these two aspects embrace the wholeness of the corporation and at the same time each one can be the cause and effect of the other in a continuous and successive manner, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) claim.

Organizational Change is a continuous process in modern societies, though not evenly occurring in time and place. It appears both as a threat and as an opportunity to local production systems. Though inevitable, its pace and end results are determined by the ability of the business “player” to anticipate changes and to adapt and reorganize itself.

There are a number of factors/drivers leading to organizational change, which can be seen as either threats and/or opportunities, according to Johnson and Scholes (1993):

- Changes in Product Demand
- Changes in Technology
- Changes in Management Practices
- Changes in Raw Materials
- Changes in Markets
- Changes in governmental policies
- Changes in the Socio-economic environment

Lewin (1951) offered a framework for analyzing and planning organizational change. This framework is called the Force Field Analysis and it applies on planned strategies of change. According to Lewin (1951) and as Wilson (2000) refers, “to energize change requires an ‘unfreezing’ of the status quo, the change to be effected, then a “refreezing” or consolidation of the new state”. In continuing, as Wilson (2000, p.29) refers, Lewin (1951) presented its equilibrium, which is the following:

Lewin's equilibrium: driving and restraining forces for organizational change

<u>Driving forces (forces for change)</u>	<u>Restraining forces (forces against change)</u>
New personnel	<i>From individuals</i>
Changing markets	Fear of failure– Loss of status – Loss of friends
Shorter product life cycles	Inertia (habit) – Fear of the unknown
Changing attitudes towards work	<i>From organizations</i>
Internationalization	Strength of culture – Rigidity of structure
Global markets	Sunk costs – Lack of resources
Social transformations	Contractual agreements
Increased competition	Strongly held beliefs and recipes for evaluating
New technology	corporate activities

In the agricultural sector all these factors are present to some degree, underlining the extent of structural transformations that farming and industrial processing of agricultural products face, as exhibited in the Greek agro-coops' Business status section of this document and in the relevant section on Greek agro-coops in Document 2 – section 2.

The incremental process improvement can be seen as incremental organizational change, while the breakthrough process improvement can be viewed as breakthrough organizational change.

In the main, organizational change in enterprises is incremental, with the breakthrough change being more occasional. Mintzberg's (1978) studies on organizations - as referred in Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.35 and p.69) - have verified this statement.

Small step change, that is incremental change, could become the basement for preparing an organization adapting more easily to and successfully adopting and implementing breakthrough change projects.

In so doing the enterprise may build on the skills, routines, beliefs and existing professional knowledge of its personnel for developing a change process smoothly and gradually and by gaining their consensus. The most dangerous problem here lies to the fact, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) believe, for organizational change being deployed incrementally in such a way and being based on the existing business "paradigm", with

the result leading the organization to neglect and overpass the need for any required breakthrough change and therefore risk experiencing deteriorating organizational performance.

Another problem, according to this document's author, is the existing danger that internal current business practice, which is proposed by this model of managing change to be used as a driver for organizational change, may block the change process partially and/or completely, if the intended results of the change process are perceived to be in contradiction with the key stakeholders' and their associated groupings personal and business interests as expressed and promoted by the current business practice and status-quo; therefore, organizational change adopting an incremental process has to be carefully planned and not resting entirely on the already existing current business systems (a Systems view of incremental change, according to Johnson and Scholes (1993, p.388)), as there may exist systems and practices/"loops" that are essential to the organization's identity and therefore very difficult to change.

The above stated analysis leads to the conclusion, according to the document's author view, that incremental (process) improvement / change is highly desirable in the beginning of a change process for building a more safe and concise ground for attempting the implementation of organizationally planned and/or more easily accepting, adapting and successfully operating in and under externally imposed unplanned, emergent-breakthrough improvement / change.

This approach can be more easily recommended to and successfully adopted by organizations characterized by rigid and bureaucratic hierarchies, closed communication channels, rigid production, customer needs and wants - both internal and external - negligence, paternalistic relationships with the state and political parties, internal groupings' conflict and rivalry and self-interested, incompetent, untrained and uninformed organizational staff and Board of Directors' members, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) state.

The Greek agro-coops are characterized by such phenomena and they are also facing a strategic drift by experiencing a gradual decline in their organizational performance (see section 2 of the Document, on the Greek Agro-coops).

Therefore, as this document's author thinks, the adoption of incremental change process in the beginning of the change process may facilitate the smooth and gradual development of the whole change process, which should be constituted by both incremental/continuous and breakthrough/emergent change processes - each one succeeding and superimposing each other, depending on the business circumstances and situation the agro-coop is in and facing - for it being effectively and efficiently deployed and successfully implemented and concluded.

For resistance and blockages to incremental process improvement/change will be less and more easily, quickly and successfully handled and overcome, at least in the initial phase of any integral organizational change process, than resistance and blockages expressed when breakthrough process improvement/change is attempted to be introduced and developed.

The extent, pace and results of an enterprise's organizational change process depend strongly on the firm's business culture characteristics. The existence of internal business mechanisms of diffusion and imitation of good industrial practices and the existence of an internal business tradition and culture in healthy industrial and corporate relations and consensus "building", is essential for eliminating inner-company tensions and stakeholders' resistance and sabotage, which may increase the negative outcomes experienced during the organizational change and even nullify the change process itself, as identified and presented in the Report paper on "Social Dialogue", Pro-dialogue program, (E.U./Social Policy Directorate, 2001-2004).

And continuing on this issue, it has been identified in this research paper that, if such mechanisms are not present, then they have to be introduced, developed and preserved, i.e. they have to be proven capable to increase the employee's trust in their ability to introduce, develop and accommodate organizational change, to foresee negative aspects and to contribute to their elimination.

International experience of organizational change process and practices indicate, that the negative results on the enterprise as a whole are remarkably increased when the change process planning and implementation are left only to the Board of Directors or only to the Managing Director's managerial will and competence and not on both these two groups, according to the research outputs presented in the aforementioned report (E.U./Social Policy Directorate, 2001-2004).

If the BoD's members do not cooperate with the Managing Director and the senior management team on the organizational change issue and process, then internal conflicts may be experienced; these conflicts, in most of the cases tend to result to the change process alteration and improper implementation, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) reassure.

1. ALMME

a) Aphrodite Filida / Quality and Production manager

As she has already stated: "The decision for the introduction and implementation process of ISO 9000:2000 QMS was a result of the cooperation between the Quality manager and the General Manager. Further on, the Quality manager introduces any Quality issue to and informs the General Manager and the final decision is on him after consulting her firstly and then the relevant managers in the Quality Team meeting".

These two persons seem to cooperate and decide on all aspects concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' development and the corporate Quality policy and strategy of ALMME.

Further on, the Quality manager introduces any Quality issue to and informs the General Manager and the final decision is on him after consulting her firstly and then the relevant managers in the Quality Team meeting.

On continuing, she stated her belief to an Integrated Quality Management encompassing all the existing quality management systems, as the only means for really serving all the corporate goals and through it achieving organizational change and development. It is a clear statement of her belief to a co-operating approach toward decision making and change management process in the Greek agro-coops. This approach leads naturally to the adoption of an incremental change process approach, very close to Johnson and Scholes (1993) proposals and the findings of the E.U. - Directorate of Social Issues (2001-2004) research survey and report paper.

b) Christos Giannakakis/General Manager**Question 2 - BSIR and Question 5 – Change Management and Internal Politics**

He repeated the answer he gave in theme – question 2, that is: “I really believe that should move to and adopt a more technocratic business attitude and practice for the Greek agro-coops surviving and develop. This means, a clear definition of the roles and authority of the elected members and the managerial personnel should be made, as the one we have achieve in ALMME. As I told you before in all important business issues I consult and talk with the relevant managers and then I inform the BoDs on the issue and we jointly take a decision. After all the majority of the elected members in the BoDs of all Greek agro-coops do not possess the required academic background and professional experience to decide on their own on business issues. In my opinion, this is the only way for dealing successfully with our problems. Furthermore, I have to state that I prefer an Integrated QMS for achieving ‘the most out of it’”.

This expressed belief and attitude brings into the surface the existing rivalry between the elected members of the BoDs and the senior managers - especially the General Manager - in the Greek Agro-coops’ business reality and practice, as identified by Karamichas (1997), Papageorgiou (1997, 2000) and Doutsias (2003), who consider this rivalry as a root cause of the serious business problems Greek Agro-coops’ sector is facing. This fact is also identified in the research conducted in the other agro-coops and it was expressed directly and/or indirectly by both the members of the BoDs and/or the General Managers.

Moreover his beliefs for establishing a cooperation between the se two groups by clarifying each group’s role and position in the company seems in accordance with Parnell’s (2000) opinion and the E.U. (2001-2004) research findings.

c) Panayiotis Arvanitis/Financial and Vice General Manager

He agrees with the views and opinions of the Quality manager and the General Manager, as in both interviews it happened to be present during a long time period (especially in the interview with mr. Giannakakis) and as he told me: “I do not think there exists any other solution for getting out of this crisis tunnel the agro-coops’ sector.”

2. LESEL SYN.P.E.**a) Nikos Matas/Vice-General and Commercial Manager**

His opinion on the issue is similar to the one expressed by the vast majority of the General and Quality managers' group. That is: "No change program can be implemented, unless the BoDs' members decide to do their job and let the employees do their own uninfluenced. Then, we all know that an incremental change program suits better the needs, interests and the prevailing internal situation of the Greek agro-coops." The interesting point that he seems to agree with the expressed by Johnson and Scholes (1993), Oakland (2003) and Parnell (2000) statements, that incremental change may be more suitable for organizations having rigid organizational structures, strong held attitudes and practices and a bureaucratic internal and external environment.

b) Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, Costas Pantelelis/Production manager

Their answer on the issue, unanimously, is the following: "As Michalis have already said: 'Outdated business and management practices and the micro-politics phenomena, as well as personal interests and micro-regional interests observed very extensively in all agro-coops, are the basic disadvantages and drawbacks for achieving the proper implementation and use of any management system and of any change management program, since they threaten the existing 'status quo', which is in favor of elected members of the BoDs. It could be better if a step by step change was possible.'"

Their view is in accordance with that of mr. Mantas and with theory as presented in the earlier statement made by mr. Mantas.

3. SKOS A.S.E.**a) Panagiotis Alevras/President of the BoDs**

In this question Panagiotis answered: "In my opinion, ISO has to be combined with the other existing corporate management systems, i.e. Business and Marketing Plan, ERP etc. for getting the maximum benefit out of its use, as I have already told you."

When I asked him how he imagines the whole process, he gave a similar to the previous issue answer: "It is the obligation of the senior management to suggest the introduction of such systems and we, the BoDs, will decide on the issue. Then we have to plan it and they have to secure its proper implementation and use."

Again, his answer is a clear indication of his belief concerning the roles between the elected members and employed staff and which one should be the real decision making and managing group in the Greek agro-coops; a fact that reinforces the identified research finding of the existing rivalry on any managerial issue between these two groups in the Greek agro-coops. His view is in complete contrast to the suggested cooperation between these two groups, as it reveals from theory – all quality authors and “gurus” suggest so – and the research findings as identified in the E.U. (2001-2004) research on “Social Dialogue”.

b) George Spiliotopoulos/Vice-General Manager

His position on the issue is: “As I said before, we need to develop such management and quality systems for achieving organizational change and strategic development. This can solve many of the problems that agro-coops are facing today, but for the proper implementation to happen any system’s implementation and use should be planned, decided and deployed by those who have the qualifications to do it; that is both the President and members of the BoDs and the General Manager with the senior managers team.”

It is a view in accordance with theory and emphasizing the need of cooperation between the various directing groups in any company having distinct roles in the managerial work and decision making process. This lack of co-operation amongst the elected members and the senior managers’ group has been pointed as one of the main root-causes for all the business problems and malfunctions observed in the Greek agro-coops’ corporate activities.

4. UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES OF MESSINIA/UACM

a) Vasilis Kozobolis/President of the BoDs

Vasilis answered as follows in the theme’s question: “I really believe we have to abandon old practices and behaviors and adopt the private sector’s ones, which have been proved more successful. This is the real change all Greek agro-coops need. Of course we must keep at the same time the ‘good things of the cooperative practice and ideology. That is cooperation with the first degree agro-coops, supporting and informing the farmers and introducing and developing an Integrated QMS as the ‘new’ ISO 22000 which covers all our needs and requirements for producing and offering to the public

safe and qualitative products and upgraded qualitative services. For the other issues I have already said my opinion.” It is a view in accordance with theory and emphasizing the need of cooperation between the various directing groups in the Greek agro-coops’ sector, but without further explaining how this co-operation will be achieved between the different groupings in the Greek agro-coops. Furthermore, the Integrated QMS – ISO 22000 aims at achieving such results, provided that it will be properly implemented and used in a well defined environment in terms of the decision making and management directing issues.

b) Dimitris Charitsis/General Manager of UACM

He made non-specific reference to the issue, because as he said: “I have already expressed my opinion in the issue concerning the possible strategic use of ISO. Even if a change program is decided, which fact I consider impossible, then the existing business situation in the agro-coops will nullify this change process”, meaning that the existing business status, financial conditions and managerial behaviour - as expressed by the members of the BoDs - in the UACM do not permit the proper implementation and optimum use of any change management project.

For justifying his view he added: “The real decision making is ‘on the hands’ of the President and members of the BoDs. They are responsible for everything, although they want to pass any wrong decision and its accountability on me; therefore, I cannot do anything else than/besides protecting protect myself.”

He seems disappointed and in a way he feels not being permitted to really participate in the decision making and planning process of the UACM’s strategic issues. His managerial stance and attitude seem to be very heavily influenced by the existing internal conditions as experienced in the majority of the Greek agro-coops.

This represents a good example of the results of the non co-operation between the managing groups in any company as presented in the E.U.- Directorate of Social Issues (2001-2004) research survey and report paper.

5.SYKIKI SYN.P.E.

a) Sotiris Labropoulos/Quality manager

His position on the topic is: “unless the power of the elected members is limited to a rational degree which will permit the co-operation with the agro-coops’ managers, no

change can be implemented in any agro-coop, due to their fear of losing their privileges, if the agro-coop's 'way of doing things' changes. This the only way for the Greek agro-coops to introduce and implement effectively and efficiently an integrated quality management system, encompassing all elements of EUREPGAP, HACCP and ISO 9000 QMS for achieving real business processes and operations' auditing and improvement for consequently achieving its strategic goals and enjoy organizational performance improvement." It is an interesting answer which favours the adoption of an integrated QMS after the two managing groups of the Greek agro-coops having arrived to a consensus. This answer too, is very close to theory and research findings, as the one presented by Mrs. Filida.

b) Dimitris Zafiropoulos/General Manager

He expressed a similar view as mr. Labropoulos, but he was more radical by saying: "As I stated earlier the real problem lies in the behaviour of the elected members. Unless they understand they do not have the required academic, managerial and professional competencies nothing will change and no one system will be implemented and used properly in any agro-coop. 'They should do their job and let us do ours'. This is the only solution to the problem.

Furthermore, he too expressed his belief to an integrated QMS, which "would cover every aspect 'from the farm to the shelf' and would minimize any hypothetical problem and malfunction" as he said. His view is close to theory and research findings and the 'new' ISO 22000 which will be available in 2006 and which combines the ISO 9000 QMS' and HACCP system's elements for offering to the Food Industry an integrated QMS.

c) Panayiotis Papageorgiou/President of the BoDs.

Although, he expressed an almost identical view with that stated by mr. Zafiropoulos in terms of using an Integrated QMS as a strategic means for the Greek agro-coops achieving organizational performance improvement, he focused on the: "inexistence of such qualified managers for successfully implement such a program" as he said.

Thus, he reaffirmed his view, expressed in Theme-Question 2 of this document, concerning the Greek agro-coops' managerial personnel as the main responsible source for their business problems.

7. DISCUSSION

As a consequence of the aforementioned findings and as it was previously referred, the research presented the research objectives within a context of an interpretative/case/ethnographic study critically examining and evaluating the ISO 9000 QMS' current business status and its perceived by the key stakeholders nature as well as the key business factors affecting this system's implementation and use in a fair number of Greek Agro-coops from the whole spectrum of Greek Agro-coops sub-sector.

Generally speaking, the main objectives of the qualitative study are:

- a) to investigate the current status of ISO 9000 QMS and the nature of its implementation process and use purposes in the Greek Agro-coops sector, and
- b) to identify the key business factors that influence and shape the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purposes in Greek Agro-coops by exploring the key stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and practices towards the aforementioned issues.

More specifically, the research addressed a range of questions and issues such as:

- The Greek agro-coops (key) stakeholders' knowledge and attitudes towards the Quality and Process Management issues and their perceived interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS.
- The ISO 9000 QMS' business status and interrelationship with the current Agro-coops' business status, financial position and management practices as perceived and practiced by the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders.
- The Greek agro-coops' (key) stakeholders' knowledge of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and its implementation process and use purpose importance as perceived and practiced by all the Greek agro-coops' (key) stakeholders
- The ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic corporate resource for achieving organisational change and corporate strategic development through business processes improvement and consequently aiming at organisational performance improvement and the existing relationship between quality management strategy and overall corporate strategy.
- The identification and evaluation of all the Key Business Factors which emanate from the Management of Change field in relation to ISO 9000 QMS' development in

the Greek agro-coops and the interrelated Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues, influencing the implementation process and use purpose of the ISO 9000 – QMS in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector, acting as Drivers and/or Constraints for the effective implementation and efficient use of this QMS, i.e.: Corporate attitudes and practices concerning all the above themes as well as the following issues: Organization and business activities of the Quality Management, Control & Assurance unit/department, the Decision Making Process on Corporate and Quality management issues, the existence of Quality management strategy and its relationship with and contribution to the overall corporate strategy and the aims of the key stakeholders concerning the future development of ISO 9000 in Greek agro-coops.

From the preceding critical literature review analysis (see relevant section on Greek agro-coops in Document 2) it becomes obvious, that the socioeconomic environment in which the agricultural cooperatives are operating - in both Europe and Greece - is currently undergoing a rapid change. Public Policy as demonstrated in the reformed CAP, trade liberalization under the GATT agreement signed in WTO and the E.U. enlargement are to bring more competition and less support to commodity markets. At the same time, biotechnology, information technology and the rising power of retail chains and MNEs require from the Agro-coops to adopt and adapt enhanced and improved business processes and operations with the final aim of achieving improved organizational performance in the agro-food chain and industry in order to deliver value to their customers and all the Agro-coops stakeholders (Martinós et al, 1997).

As an answer to these new demands, the food industry in general and the Agricultural Cooperatives in particular have preferred and adopted the introduction of Quality Assurance and Management Systems – including ISO 9000 QMS (mostly), TQM and BPR programs - in their business operations and processes (Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002), aiming at improving their business processes with the ultimate goal to improve their organizational performance, a legitimated intention as Oakland (2003) comments. It is also interesting that the same aims are expressed in the research surveys and identified in their findings on the implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS (see section on ISO 9000 research findings) by corporations worldwide.

On the other hand the effective implementation, use and operation of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management system in the Greek Agro-coops - and not only to these but even in corporations in various sectors of the economy and business environment - is under question as there exist a generally held doubt and dispute on the Agro-coops' operational and organizational infrastructure and competencies as well as their corporate culture and willingness to implement and use these Quality systems effectively and efficiently (Arvanitoyiannis, 2000; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002).

A) One of the most important findings of the qualitative research was the identification of a clear indication, that the majority of the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders have no real knowledge of and on the Quality and Process management and improvement fields, as well of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature & provisions and the existed interrelationship between all these aforementioned concepts.

And as mr. George Spiliotopoulos/SKOS ASE stated: "Nevertheless, I believe the majority of the involved parties in the agro-coops' sector is not well-informed on these issues and this may be proved a major drawback for the proper implementation and use of the system". This is an identified remark in many of the research respondents' answers with the exception of the majority of the Quality managers of the researched agro-coops.

It is an indication of their lack of knowledge concerning the nature of ISO 9000:2000. As a matter of fact, this was identified for almost all researched-interviewed agro-coops' key stakeholders with the exception of the majority of the Quality managers' group. This lack of knowledge of the system's real nature may be a Key Business Factor for the Greek agro-coops not achieving the optimum outcomes of the system's implementation and use.

For example, the respondents of UACM both forget to mention the unwavering involvement, commitment and support of the top management, as the main requirement for any company achieving the effective implementation and efficient use of ISO 9000 QMS, as Oakland (2003) and Goetch and Davis (2002) believe.

This identified practice is in contrast with Oakland (2003) and Foster (2002) held views, that real and full knowledge of these concepts and fields are required for the proper implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS in any company.

This is an identified remark in many of the research respondents' answers with the exception of the majority of the Quality managers of the researched agro-coops.

B) Another important finding was revealed by the statement of mr. Giannoukakis/ALMME: "the members of the BoDs are not informed by me on such issues, since they do not possess the required and necessary academic knowledge and professional experience. Therefore, they are not in a position to discuss and decide on such issues. This also happens with any other important business issue."

This fact is also identified in the interviews conducted in the other researched agro-coops and it was expressed directly and/or indirectly by both the members of the BoDs and the General Managers, as well as the Quality managers who expressed their disappointment of being let alone to do the whole work, while others decide on issues concerning their work field.

An example is mr. Alevras/SKOS ASE answer: "The President and the members of the BoDs are responsible for deciding on the strategic planning of the agro-coop. The responsibility of the managers is to implement effectively and efficiently this business policy. It is not the responsibility of the President, although we are obliged to handle daily business problems and issues, due to the incompetence of the managers. "

With this statement, my respondent clearly reassures the existing rivalry in the Greek agro-coops between the elected members and the staff-managers. The interesting point is that both groups identify this rivalry as the root cause of the serious problems the agro-coops are facing, but they express contrasting views regarding the identification of the group, which has to be held responsible and accountable for the creation of the existing situation.

i) This expressed belief and attitude brings into the surface the existing rivalry between the elected members of the BoDs and the senior managers - especially the General Manager - in the Greek Agro-coops' business reality and practice, as identified by Karamichas (1997), Papageorgiou (1997, 2000) and Doutsias (2003), who consider this

rivalry as a root cause of the serious business problems Greek Agro-coops' sector is facing.

ii) Furthermore, the expressed grief of the Quality managers brings into the surface another important issue: that of the existing rivalry and competition instead of cooperation among the existing different managerial groups in the Greek agro-coops.

As Parnell (2000) points out, this inner-management rivalry could be a main source of creating problems in the agricultural cooperatives by the non proper implementation and use of any management system, the ISO 9000 QMS included, with the ultimate consequence of limited corporate business presence and downgraded organizational performance.

C) Of paramount importance are the Greek Agro-coops' (Key) Stakeholders attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMS systems and their actual behaviors and practices concerning these systems' implementation, operation and use in the Greek agro-coops, for as Johnson and Scholes (1993) state, the existence of stakeholder groups, being formal and/or informal and being comprised by internal and/or external stakeholders, is an unavoidable and common phenomenon encountered in any organization. These stakeholder groups are seeking to influence the organizational behavior and practice very often, as Johnson and Sholes (1993) inform.

i) It is important to state here, that in all organizations the – key especially – stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs and practice towards any business process improvement, that is towards organizational change - for business process improvement is considered an organizational change process, according to Oakland (2003) and Banks (2000) - play a very important role in the successful implementation of this change process.

The same fact holds true for the introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops, which can be regarded and considered as an organizational change – being it incremental and planned, therefore voluntaristic and/or breakthrough and emergent, therefore deterministic – since it challenges the current business practices and organizational “status quo” of them.

It is an unwelcome event according to the majority of the Greek agro-coops stakeholders' view, as it is perceived as a threat to their established interests and the

existing configuration of power structures in the agro-coops environment (Karamichas, 1998; Martinos et al, 1997). This organizational change process “threatens the very bases of the business upon which many on the board had built their authority and power in the organization” as Johnson and Scholes (1993, p. 405) state. This statement is very closely aligned to the existing situation in the Greek agro-coops, as it was presented and analyzed in the relevant section of the document, analyzing and examining the current business situation of and in Greek agro-coops.

On this issue Mr. Pentoyennis/LESEL stated: “Outdated business and management practices and the micro-politics phenomena, as well as personal interests and micro-regional interests observed very extensively in all agro-coops, are the basic disadvantages and drawbacks for achieving the proper implementation and use of any management system - I mean the ISO 9000 QMS, too - and the main root causes of the serious problems the agro-coops are facing.”

Mr. Kozobolis/UACM acknowledges as a source of the Greek agro-coops malfunctioning the insistence on using methods, behaviours and practices outdated. Furthermore, he considers everybody responsible for this fact, which is in accordance with the theoretical references of Papageorgiou (1997) and Karamichas (2003) and the E.U. (2001-2004) research findings of the “Social Dialogue” programme, which suggest cooperation instead of competition for better serving the common goals.

ii) Mrs. Filida/ALMME stated her belief to a co-operating approach towards decision making and change management process in the Greek agro-coops. This approach leads naturally to the adoption of an incremental change process approach, very close to Johnson and Scholes (1993) proposals and the findings of the E.U.- Directorate of Social Issues (2001-2004) research survey and report paper.

Cii) It is noteworthy to mention here that the suggestion of Mrs. Filida adopting a cooperating approach between the elected members and the managers group as far as the decision making process and the authority & management issues are concerned is adopted by a fair number of the respondents as well from authors on agro-coops issues, like Papageorgiou (1997) and Maraveyias (2003) as the only means for the Greek agro-coops overcoming all the serious business and financial they are facing.

Therefore, it could be considered as an important finding of the qualitative research, that a fair number of elected members – i.e. mr. Kozobolis/UACM, ALMME President and in a way mr. Papageorgiou/SYKIKI – as well as managerial personnel – i.e. mr. Sotiropoulo/SKOS, mr. Pentoyennis/LESEL and mr. Labropoulos/SYKIKI, suggest this cooperative approach as a means for the Greek agro-coops overcoming past malfunctions and ‘bad’ practices and behaviours.

D) On continuing, she stated her belief to an Integrated Quality Management encompassing all the existing quality management systems, as the only means for really serving all the corporate goals and through it achieving organizational change and development, expressing in this way the views of almost all the interviewees, who stated that such a system could definitely support the strategic development of the agro-coops and their organizational change process through the auditing and improvement of their business processes and activities.

Further Research: It is a research finding that like the other three findings need to be researched more in the future for their validity, reliability and generality.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the adopted Qualitative Research Methodology and Methods:

This exploratory examination of the ISO 900 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops sub-sector has limitations as well as strengths. A significant amount of information was gathered through the direct one-on-one interview process. Furthermore, the personal in depth interview process gave to the researcher the chance to benchmark similar situations encountered in the majority of the Greek agro-coops. This is a semi-random sample, but reflective of the Greek agro-coops’ sector as a whole since it entails agro-coops of all degrees, locations, size and product specification. Nevertheless, for the results to be generalized across all Greek agro-coops’ sector further research, both qualitative and quantitative is required. The researcher intends to conduct a part of such a more general research in his proceeding phases of his research project.

8. CONCLUSIONS

A fair number of research studies and surveys have been conducted internationally so far attempting to examine and evaluate the significance and importance of the introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems for the business processes and operations as well as the overall organizational performance - as exhibited internally and externally - of the corporations.

Furthermore, the business factors (external and internal ones) that affect the implementation process of these quality systems in the organizations have been investigated, analyzed and evaluated with equal consideration in these research studies.

The same research aims and objectives have been adopted in this research project, which is conducted in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector. Emphasis is given to the examination of the role, importance and enterprising organization and operation of the agricultural cooperatives in Greece. The analytical reference to the structure and operation of the Greek agricultural cooperatives as well as in the characteristics of their intervention in the agricultural sector is owed to the drastic changes that are observed in the economic and social environment of the Greek agricultural cooperatives.

These changes lead to research and approaches of topics and subjects that are connected, on the one side with the current unfavorable position of the Unions of agricultural cooperatives and on the other with the necessary enterprising and operational adaptations that are required for the Unions of Agro-coops to survive and develop. One of these approaches is the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000-Quality management systems in any corporation active in the Agro-food industry (therefore, for the Greek agro-coops too), as it is stated in the book of Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002).

In Document 3 with the use of case studies based on open interviews and semi-structured interviews the research method produced qualitative research data but at the same time some sort of quantitative data have been produced through the analysis of the material.

Nevertheless, the purpose of document 4 will be to develop a detailed and deep account of the agro-cooperative's other stakeholders (i.e. employees, workers, third parties) attitudes and views towards Quality assurance and management systems.

DOCUMENT 4 (POSITIVIST RESEARCH)

As far as Document 4 is concerned it will be a largely positivistic part of the research, producing more quantitative data through the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured questionnaires.

The focus of the work will still be on the main research questions. But in this document the emphasis will be on establishing a representative view of two particular groups of stakeholders:

the Agro-coops' employees and workers and the Agro-coops' selling and supplying collaborators through the use of recognised sampling techniques.

In particular this document will answer the following questions:

-What is the view of the UACM's Selling Collaborators regarding its business operations, its presence in the market and the nature and practice of the business cooperation they have with the company?

-How do they view the UACM's Quality system implementation and use?

-Does it help their company's operations and selling activities?

This Group consists of the Company's Commercial Representatives and Agents both in the internal market and abroad as well as Independent Customers - Private Companies and Big Retail Chains / Super and Hyper Markets.

-What is the view of the UACM's Supplying Collaborators regarding its business operations, its presence in the market and the nature and practice of the business cooperation they have with the company?

-How they consider the UACM's Quality system application and use? Does it need any improvement?

The aforementioned group consists of the agro-coop's product and services suppliers, which are collaborating with the agro-coop a fair number of times. It has to be mentioned, that the first degree agro-coops are Supplying Collaborators of the UACM, therefore their perceptions and views on the research issues will be thoroughly investigated.

Regarding the UACM's Supplying and Selling Collaborators the following research methods will be used: first of all a structured questionnaire concerning the Company's operations in relation to the appliance of Quality Performance and Operations Criteria -

that the ISO 9002 Quality Questionnaire requires - and how they measure the UACM's compliance to these criteria and secondly semi-structured interviews will be the tool for a thorough analysis and understanding of their views and attitudes vis-à-vis the UACM's existing business operations.

Referring to the largest group of agro-coops' stakeholders, namely their employees and workers the following research questions will be carried out thoroughly:

- 1.1. What is their knowledge and perception of the ISO 9000 QMSystems?
- 1.2. What are their opinions, attitudes and perceptions towards the nature and the manner of the systems' implementation and its usefulness in terms of the produced results of its application?
 - 2.1. What difference (if any) does the transition to, and the introduction and implementation of, the "new" ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System make in comparison with the implementation of the "old" Quality assurance and management system - the ISO 9000:1994 - in terms of the Agro-coops' business operations?
 - 2.2. According to them which are the intended results of the new system's operation and use and which is the rational of its introduction?
- 3.1. What are the results of the introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000:1994 – Quality Assurance System in their Agro-coop?
- 3.2. Have they been informed - prior to the system's introduction - of the rational for the system's implementation and use? Of the intended results of its operation? Of the system's specific usefulness for their company? If yes, by whom? If not, why not according to them?

Concerning the largest group of the company, namely the company's employees and workers both pre-coded questionnaires as well as open-unstructured ones concerning some special cases/topics will be used.

It is in the researcher's intention to combine pre-coded questions as well as open question in the same single questionnaires in order to achieve in this way the responders openness, clarity and true expression of their opinions and views (all questionnaires will be returned unsigned in a carton box which will be in the work place for as long as it is required in the absence of the researcher).

The following possible sub-questions may be used in this session of the DBA research:

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- How the Agro-coops'/UACM's employees and workers perceive the current business situation and position in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use?
 - How the Agro-coops'/UACM's employees and workers perceive the current business situation and position of their company?
 - Which is their knowledge considering the ISO 9000 QMS nature, manner of implementation, requirements of use, aims and goals, intended results?
 - Why does a Corporation have to introduce and implement the ISO QMS?
 - Is there any difference between the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems? And if yes in terms of what and which ones?
 - Do they believe that the company has to restructure its organisation and change its business operations concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS development and implementation?
 - What aspects of the ISO 9000 QMS application processes and operations have to change, why, when, how and to which direction?
 - Will this change lead to the development of customer-focused and market-oriented business processes and activities? Does the Company need to develop such business operations? And if yes: Why?
 - What do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks?
 - Who should lead the ISO 9000 QMS implementation effort? Is it the Top Management's responsibility? Is a Quality plan, strategy, communication program necessary and why?
 - According to them what are the attitudes, behaviour and real practice of the UACM's/Agro-coops' Top Management as well as of the members of the BoD regarding the above mentioned topics and themes?
 - How all these stakeholders consider and evaluate the competitors' manner of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use in their companies?

Having come to an in-depth view of stakeholders' attitudes in document 3, document 4 will concentrate on measuring the extent to which the various attitudes identified are shared and distributed amongst the various stakeholders.

DOCUMENT 5 (THESIS)

Finally, in Document 5 with the use of the case study method (in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia) and the in depth surveys tool (in the other previously referred Greek Agro-Coops and/or other Third Degree-Central Unions and Second Degree Unions of Agricultural Cooperatives) as the predominant research tool and as a secondary mean the open interviews and the semi-structured interviews in order to explore:

1. The ISO 9000:2000 – Quality Management System’s Introduction and Implementation in the Greek Agro-coops and the results of its implementation and use in these agro-coops’ businesses and operation. Prescribed, intended, actual and perceived Outcomes of the Systems’ operation according to all Stakeholders’ (including managers of the external professional organizations and accrediting bodies - How they consider and evaluate the manner of ISO 9000 QM systems’ implementation and use in these companies) opinion and the identification of the causes of any observed and registered discrepancy between these different types of outcomes according to them.
2. How all these key stakeholders consider and evaluate other companies' manner and rational of ISO 9000 Quality system’s implementation and use?
3. Evaluation and measurement of the (Key) Stakeholders’ role, degree and size of influence on the ISO 9000 QMS manner of operation in the Greek Agro-coops. What are their levels of commitment (positioning them on the grid) and more specifically:
 - whether there exists any difference and gap between their espoused position and their actual behavior towards the implementation and use of the Quality System.
 - what is their role and degree of influence & affection on the effectiveness of the system’s implementation and the efficiency of its use.
4. Final investigation and concluding results of the Drivers and Restraints of the ISO 9000 QMSystem’s efficient introduction and effective use and implementation – Balance of Forces in the Force Field Analysis.

In this way, research method tends to be more qualitative as open questionnaires and the open interviews will provide the required qualitative data as a product of Phenomenological research, while at the same time some sort of quantitative data can be produced through the use of the semi-structured interviews and the cross-evaluation of

the case studies, of the in-depth surveys and of the open interviews. Because as Bell (1993) states: “the case study approach is an umbrella term which includes a wide range of evidence capture and analysis procedures and due to this flexibility a case study may be an almost entirely positivistic or almost entirely phenomenological study or anything between these two extremes”.

Moreover, the cross-evaluation of all research data produced throughout the research processes held in Documents 3, 4 and 5 can produce the needed quantitative data required for producing the optimum “blending” of research findings which may lead to the formulation of the best practice model concerning the Introduction, Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agricultural Cooperatives.

The selection of the case study as the predominant research tactic in this stage is made for the accomplishment of two research objectives:

Firstly, to confirm, support and reassure all the research findings and their deriving conclusions, and secondly to effectively benchmark the implementation and use as well as the conceptual and operational framework of the ISO 9000 Quality Management systems in various Greek Agro-Coops in order to be able to identify and suggest (throughout and as a research product) a Best Practice model of the Quality System’s Implementation and Use in the Greek Agro-Coops.

The use of methodological pluralism throughout the whole research process is an expedient way of ensuring against the uncertainties inherited in research processes. Pragmatism requires the use of methodological pluralism since investigating / researching a “living organisation”, such as a co-operative corporation, the researcher must be able to “jump” from the exploratory to descriptive to explanatory, to hypotheses and then to “paradigm” formulation stage of research process at any time, in order to cope effectively and efficiently with the complexities of business phenomena.

9. APPENDICES

9.1 APPENDIX 1

1. The local focus of the RESEARCH/UACM

The Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Prefecture of Messinia/UACM will be the initial empirical focus of the DBA project. It was founded in 1987 by the unification of the following Unions of the Prefecture regions: Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Kalamata; Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messini; Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Ano Messinia; Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Filiatra; Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Pylia; Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Gargaliani – Chora; Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Kyparissia; Central Cooperative Union of Messinia (K.S.E.M.).

The UACM is a second degree agricultural cooperative. It has its headquarters in Kalamata - the capital city of the Messinia prefecture and subsidiary offices in the major six cities of the prefecture. It is consisted by 242 first degree agricultural cooperatives with 20,479 farmers - producers as its natural members.

The Company is specialized in the production, gathering, processing, standardization and trading of strategic (for the regional and national economy) agricultural products such as: extra virgin olive oil, edible "Kalamata" olives and black currants. More specifically the business activities and infrastructure of the UACM are the following:

- An extra virgin olive oil processing, standardization and packaging plant with a production capacity of 15 tons/ 8 hours, where 800-1000 tons of extra virgin olive oil are processed and standardized each year. Moreover, in the same space a modern chemical laboratory is operating.
- An edible - table "Kalamata" olives processing, standardization and packaging plant with a production capacity of 8 tons/ 8 hours, where 400-500 tons of "Kalamata" table olives are processed, standardized and packaged each year.
- A black currant processing and packaging plant with a production capacity of 15 tons/8 hours, where 1000-1500 tons of black currants are processed each year.
- Olive oil stainless tanks of 5000 tons capacity.

- A processing, standardization and packaging plant of animal feeding including stocking tanks with a capacity of 4000 tons.

Furthermore, the UACM is engaged in the management and administrative work of all the E.U. subsidies for the agricultural products and livestock of the Messinia prefecture and which task refers to 62,000 producers approximately (UACM archival data, 2003).

The extra virgin olive oil processing plant and the table olives processing plant are operating throughout the year, while the peak periods are Christmas time, Winter months, Easter time and September (thus, the 70-80% of the whole year the processing plant is fully utilized while the remaining period is underutilized).

As it was above mentioned, the UACM processes and standardizes each year approximately 800-1000 tons of extra virgin olive oil whereas the plant capacity is almost triple. The 65% of the standardized production is sold in the internal market, especially in northern Greece, while the remaining 35% is exported mainly to UK, Germany and France. USA, Poland and Switzerland import small quantities.

The prevailing analysis holds true for the edible olives processing and trading statistical data. Furthermore, the UACM does not standardize organic olive oil and table olives (a very promising food sector) as it considers the organization and training of farmers in the cultivation of organic produces a difficult issue. On the other side, the UACM standardizes and trades extra virgin olive oil - Protected Designation of Origin with the trademark "Kalamata" (a well known generic term for the product all over the world) and plans to do the same with the table olives.

Investments in the mechanical and technological equipment of the production lines and improvements and modifications of the already existing equipment are realized systematically every 4-5 years since the mid eighties (1986 - now).

The UACM runs a quality assurance and control laboratory and has been certified at ISO 9002:1994 and HACCP systems. Furthermore, it has appointed a Quality Management Team (in which the Researcher is a member) for managing the implementation of ISO 9000:1994 Quality Assurance System and the transition period of the introduction as well as implementation of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality management system. A major drawback is that Research and Development as a department and/or even process/activity does not exist while at the same time the Quality Management Team is under-operating and functioning and without applying a

clear Quality Policy, Strategy, Plan and Communication programs in connection with the other departments and the branch offices.

Another organizational disadvantage is that little emphasis has been given to the adequate staffing of all departments (especially the Commercial department and the Procurement department) while in other departments there exists a lack of specialized personnel.

The human force consists of 120 employees and workers out of which 105 are employees and the fifteen persons are workers. The composition of the personnel appears to be inappropriate as the percentage of the clerical employees in comparison to that of workers seems disproportionate, considering the fact that the UACM has four processing plants and the 60% of its annual turnover of circa 15-20 million Euros comes from the trading of the processed products (olive oil, table olives, currants, animal feeding). Furthermore, out of 105 employees the 60% is occupied with the management and payment of subsidies of the products to the producers- farmers.

Employees' business training occurs abnormally, inconsistently, accidentally, without any justified need and without any obvious connection and relation to the corporate policy, strategy and business goals.

There exists no training on the Quality issues and the ISO 9000 QM System's requirements and implementation goals and intended outcomes are not stated and/or communicated thoroughly and clearly to the employment force.

It is obvious and mentioned in several meetings of the Board of Directors and of the Team of Directors (in which the researcher was present) that there seems to exist a lack of strategy in the UACM's activities and that restructuring of the organizational and operational activities and processes is required in order for the company to successfully compete and improve its business and financial position - i.e : 4 meetings of the Team of Directors in 2002 and 2003 and at least in 8 meetings of the BoD from October 2001 till March 2003.

The same opinion was stated in the interview sessions the researcher had prior to his hiring with the President, the Vice President and some members of the BoD as well as with the Managing Director/General Manager of the UACM. In these sessions there was also a belief in the absence of the appropriate business culture and work mentality to the

employees (President and Vice President of BoD), with the contracting view of the Managing Director that the BoD intervenes in work matters inappropriately.

2. ALLME Growers SYN.P.E.

a) Profile

ALLME is the association of three agricultural first-degree cooperatives, namely ALIAKMON, MESSI, MELIKI, founded in 1996 with the aim to promote their collaborative business action and operation. These cooperatives have about 2000 growers as members and their cultivations cover an area of 3200 hectares in the Central Macedonia, Greece and particularly, in the heart of Imathia region.

The cooperatives ALIAKMON, MESSI, and MELIKI are active as fruit growers since 1928 and in the last 30 years, they invested in fruit and vegetable packing and they also entered in the food industry establishing frozen fruits and vegetables. In particular the fruits that are packaged and processed are peaches, nectarines, kiwis, cherries and apples.

The latest investment of these cooperatives is the industrial fruit processing complex, ALLME, situated in Kouloura Imathias that is considered one of the best in the world and processing canned peaches, pears, fruit cocktail and all kind of berries in syrup, water or juice as well as fruits in plastic pots, in syrup, juice or jelly. These facilities are considered being one of the most updated and modern fruit processing in the world and it has been recognized as such from all the major supermarket chains worldwide, which are procuring canned fruits from ALLME. The overall processing capacity is over 500 tons/day with a processing of 30,000 tons of peaches during the season, while its sales income ranges from 20 to 25 million Euros each year.

b) Quality and Traceability

The quality of the products coming out of ALLME's facilities is assured by applying the latest methods of quality control and assurance, during all production stages and particular in:

- The Raw Material

The quantities of fertilizers, pesticides and all other kinds of chemical substances are under a detailed control, by applying the Integrated Corp Management System (ICM). The use of the high-resolution photos from the satellite "Quick Bird", gives detailed statistical elements and supports the ICM system. In addition a network of 4

meteorological stations, gives the possibility to ALMME to ensure the rational use of fertilizers and pesticides. A modern and fully equipped chemical analysis laboratory owned by ALMME is supporting the whole system.

- The Industry

Delivery of the raw material is made separately from every grower and there is the ability to trace every grower's name, who delivered his quantities in every lot of the final product. By this way, the full traceability system is followed. ALMME is also certified by the Quality Management-Control Systems ISP 9000:2000 and HACCP.

- The Environment

ALMME is recognized as a friendly environment factory and is certified by ISO 14001. In addition, organic fertilizers are produced from the industrial residuals.

c) Interviewees

The name of my first respondent is Christos Stergiou. He is the IT manager of ALMME, holds a degree in IT from the University of Thessaloniki and has been with ALMME since 1996 as IT junior manager and from 2000 as IT senior manager.

The name of my second respondent is Aphrodite Filida. She is the Quality manager of ALMME since 1999 and holds a B.Sc. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Thessaloniki.

The third interviewee is mr. Christos Giannakakis, who is the General Manager of ALMME since its establishment. Previously he was working as General Manager in Aliakmon cooperative. He holds a degree in Economics from the University of Athens.

Last but not least is mr. Panayiotis Arvanitis, the Financial and Vice general manager, who is working in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector the last 25 years and holds a degree in Economics from the University of Athens.

3. LESEL SYN.P.E.

a) Profile

The Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Lesvos/LESEL is one of the biggest enterprises on the island of Lesvos (the third biggest island of Greece). LESEL collects, grades and bottles all the olive oil produced by the 13000 members of the agro-coop. It was founded in 1929 and soon became known as LESEL. Its main goal is the trading of

standardized extra virgin olive oil and its by-products. It has its central offices in the capital town of Lesvos, Mytilene, and the laboratory, storage and bottling unit premises are all together in a new factory located a few miles away.

LESEL has a vital economic and social role in Lesvos, as the greater part of the island's manufacturing economy is based on its activities. Its annual income is around 20-25 million Euros.

b) Interviewees

The name of the first interviewee is Nikos Matas, who is Vice-General and Commercial Manager and is with LESEL since 1985. He holds a degree in Economics

From the University of Athens.

The other interviewees form the 'factory team' and are: Michalis Pentoyennis/Quality manager, holding a degree in Chemistry from the University of Thessaloniki, he is with LESEL since 1998; George Deliyiannis/Quality manager and Production manager, holding a degree in Chemistry from the University of Thessaloniki as well and he is in the company since 1996; and Kostas Pantelelis/Production manager, holding a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Thessaloniki also, he is in LESEL since 1989.

4. SKOS A.S.E.

a) Profile – b) Premises

SKOS A.S.E. is the Central Panhellenic Union of all black currants growers-producers. Its main activity is to coordinate the action of all the Unions of Agricultural Cooperatives, which are its members and are 12 in number.

Furthermore, it is its duty to promote and trade the standardized product of all its members-Unions of Agro-coops. It is a third degree Agro-coop being at the same time a public liability Company. Its offices and premises are in Patras, Greece and its employed staff is over 90 persons on a permanent persons.

c) Interviewees

Panayiotis Alevras/ President of the BoDs – Member in the BoDs of the UACM and President of the BoDs in UACM from 1997-2005 – Former employee in the UACM / Director of the Union of Ano Messinia – President of Dessyla First degree agro-coop.

According to the researcher, he has a great experience in and knowledge of all the research issues, as he has been through all the stages and levels of the Agro-cooperative institution and sector.

The second interviewee is mr. George Spiliotopoulos, who is Vice-General manager and Quality Director and is in SKOS since its establishment in 1987. He is a graduate in the School of Business Administration of the University of Athens.

5.SYKIKI SYN.P.E.

a) Profile –b) Premises/Quality Control and Assurance

"SYKIKI" is the Fig Growers Organization throughout Greece. It was established in 1953 with its headquarters in Kalamata. It is a third degree agricultural cooperative with an annual sales income of 10 milion Euros approximately.

SYKIKI aims at the improvement of the fig Grower's economy which is accomplished by the well studied development programs on fig growing, the improvement of the quality of the figs and the processing and selling of the fig products (dried figs and figs paste) in Greece and abroad.

For accomplishing its purposes, SYKIKI has invested capital on the following establishments, which are constantly expanded and on equipment which is constantly improved:

1. A modern packaging plant for the processing and packaging of dried figs and for the production of fig paste with a yearly output of 5.000 tons of fig products.
2. A group of buildings (General Fumigatories) located in the Industrial Zone of Kalamata where in large storage houses , furnished with modern technical installations the last step to maintaining healthy finished goods (packaged figs and fig paste) is taken place.
3. Thirty (30) storage houses, established in the fig producing areas of Messinia , Lakonia , Arkadia , Evia and Lesvos where the yearly Crop of Figs of these areas is received , categorized into grades of quality , and is kept and maintained is an excellent condition.
4. Three (3) storage houses in Messinia and Lakonia for storage and maintenance of the yearly crop of Industrial Figs.
5. A fully equipped modern product quality control and assurance department.

6. SYKIKI SYN.P.E. is registered under the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System and HACCP procedures for achieving superior product quality and hygiene for all its customers.

The main countries that SYKIKI exports its Fig Products are: U.S.A , Canada, Australia, E.U. countries, Russian Federation , Serbia, Egypt and other Arabic countries.

SYKIKI's careful selection of the product, the right maintenance and its excellent processing and packaging facilities offer the CONSUMER delicious, nutritive and healthy products.

c) Interviewees

The name of my first interviewee is Dimitris Zafiropoulos. He is the General Manager since 1992 and holds an Agronomist degree from the University of Athens.

The second interviewee is Sotiris Labropoulos, who is the Quality and Rproduction manager of SYKIKI. He is also an Agronomist, holding a BSc. degree from the University of Athens and a MSc. degree from the University of Edinburg, Scotland.

He is working in SYKIKI since 1999 and this is his first job.

The last one is mr. Panayiotis Papageorgiou, the President of the Board of Directors since 1997. Mr. Papageorgiou is a farmer and a Second Education graduate. He is also the President of the Polylofos/Messinia first degree agro-coop.

9.2.APPENDIX 2**INTERVIEW OUTLINE**

To be filled out by the interviewer during the interview.

1. Company Name:
2. Interviewee:
3. Title:
4. Background:
5. Years with company:
6. Date interviewed:
7. Interview duration:

A representative set of interrelated sub-questions, which was fully developed during the research interviews period by a reflexive method, contained in and covering the main questions of Document 3 is the following:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do the Agro-coops' key stakeholders perceive the terms and issues of quality and process management and their interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS? What is the practice of these issues in their Agro-coop?
2. How the Agro-coops' key stakeholders perceive the current business situation and position in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in their companies?
3. How do they perceive the current business situation, financial position and management practice of their corporation? Is there any interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS development?
4. What is their knowledge and perceptions considering the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and the manner of its implementation and use as well as the system's requirements (according to theory and them) for achieving a proper development?
5. Why does a Corporation - the Agro-coops included - have to introduce and develop the ISO QMS?
6. Which do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks of the system's implementation and use?
7. Which do they consider as being the most important outcomes- benefits of the

-
- system's implementation and use?
8. Is there any difference between the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 QMS systems? And if yes, in terms of what and which ones?
 9. Could and/or should the implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS lead to improved Business Processes and ultimately Organisational Performance and if not why not?
 10. Could and/or should the ISO 9000 QMS be considered and used as a corporate resource-business tool aiming at business operations and management practices auditing and improvement for achieving strategic organizational development and organisational change?
 11. Are a Quality strategic plan, policy and communication program necessary and why? Do they have to be incorporated in and interrelated with the corporate strategic plan?
 12. What do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks of the system's implementation and use?
 13. What do they consider as being the most important outcomes- benefits of the system's implementation and use?
 14. Do they believe that the company has to change its organisational structure, operations and practices for improving its business processes concerning the ISO 9000 – QMS development?
 15. What specific aspects of the ISO 9000 QMS application processes and operations have to change, why, when, how and to which direction?
 16. Will and/or should this change lead to the development of customer-focused and market-oriented business processes and activities? Does the Company need to develop such business operations? And if yes: Why?
 17. Who should plan and lead the ISO 9000 QMS implementation effort and decide on its use purpose/goals?
 18. Are Quality management policy and strategy as well as a business plan and communication program necessary and why? Do they have to be incorporated in and interrelated with the corporate strategy and business plan?
 19. What are the opinion, attitude and practices of the employees, workers and other third parties regarding the aforementioned topics and themes as perceived and experienced by the key stakeholders?
 20. Are these key stakeholders aware of other companies' - including competitors -

manner of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use in their companies?

How do they consider and evaluate this ISO QMS' status/state?

21. Do internal operating problems and the human relations structure (e.g. micro-politics, groupings, personal interests) as well as external influences affect the effective Implementation and efficient Use of any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included - in Greek Agro-coops?
22. How do they rate and evaluate the decision making system as it is practiced and experienced in the Greek Agro-coops' sector?
Which managing group should be the Decision maker group:
the managing team/employees or the Board of Directors' members/elected members?
23. According to their opinion which direction should the issue of quality management be guided to for the Agro-coops enjoying the optimum results out of its implementation and use?

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DOCUMENT 4

A REPORT ON A PIECE OF STRUCTURED RESEARCH

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19 February 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

The socioeconomic and business environment in which the agricultural cooperatives are operating - in both Europe and Greece - is currently undergoing a rapid change. Public Policy as demonstrated in the reformed CAP, trade liberalization under the GATT agreement signed in WTO and the E.U. enlargement are to bring more competition and less support to commodity markets.

At the same time, biotechnology, information technology and the rising power of retail chains and MNEs require from the Agro-coops to adopt and adapt enhanced and improved business processes and operations with the final aim of achieving improved organizational performance in the agro-food chain and industry in order to deliver value to their customers and all the Agro-coops stakeholders (Martinou et al, 1997).

As an answer to these new demands, the food industry in general and the Agricultural Cooperatives in particular have preferred and adopted the introduction of Quality Assurance and Management Systems - including ISO 9000 QMS (mostly), TQM and BPR programs - in their business operations and processes (Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002), aiming at improving their business processes with the ultimate goal to improve their organizational performance, a legitimated intention as Oakland (2003) comments. It is also interesting that the same aims are expressed in international research surveys and identified in their findings on the implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS (see relevant section on ISO 9000 research findings in Document 2) by corporations worldwide.

On the other hand the effective implementation, use and operation of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management system in the Greek Agro-coops - and not only to these but even in corporations in various sectors of the economy and business environment - is under question as there exist a generally held doubt and dispute on the Agro-coops' operational and organizational infrastructure and competencies as well as their corporate culture and willingness to implement and use these Quality systems effectively and efficiently (Arvanitoyiannis, 2000; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002).

The Greek Agro-coops' (Key) Stakeholders' attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMS systems and their actual behavior and practice concerning these systems' implementation and use are important, for as Johnson and Scholes (1993) state, the existence of stakeholder groups, being formal and/or informal and being comprised by internal and/or external stakeholders, is an unavoidable and common phenomenon encountered in any organization. These stakeholder groups are seeking to influence the organizational behavior and practice very often, as Johnson and Scholes (1993) inform us.

It is important to state here, that in all organizations the – key especially – stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs and practice towards any business process improvement, that is towards organizational change - for business process improvement is considered an organizational change process, according to Oakland (2003) and Banks (2000) - play a very important role in the successful implementation of this change process.

The same fact holds true for the introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops, which can be regarded and considered as an organizational change – being it incremental and planned, therefore voluntarist and/or breakthrough and emergent, therefore deterministic – since it challenges the current business practices and organizational “status quo” of them.

It is an unwelcome event according to the majority of the Greek agro-coops stakeholders' view, as it is perceived as a threat to their established interests and the existing configuration of power structures in the agro-coops environment (Karamichas, 1998; Martinos et al, 1997). This organizational change process “threatens the very bases of the business upon which many on the board had built their authority and power in the organization” as Johnson and Scholes (1993, p. 405) state. This statement is very closely aligned to the existing situation in the Greek agro-coops, as it was presented and analyzed in the relevant sections of the critical literature review and the qualitative research documents.

As has already been pointed out in documents 1, 2 and 3 of the DBA research project, and the preceding literature review indicates, the study of the role and contribution of ISO 9000 QMS to the corporate strategic development and organizational change, and

performance improvement of the Greek agro-coops as well as the identification and analysis of the drivers and constraints of this system's effective implementation and efficient use has and/or should have been the subject of increased attention in recent times.

Moreover, this research becomes a necessity, since the majority of these organisations face increasing financial and business operating problems over the last three decades, as it was identified in a collective work of Papageorgiou et al, published in "Syneteristiki Poreia" (volumes of years 2000-2003) and the re-configuration of their organisational practices and activities, referring to any management system adapted and applied – e.g. the ISO 9000 QMS, is considered a "must" for their business survival in the words of Arvanitoyiannis (2001).

As a result of the aforementioned facts and due to his current professional status, the researcher decided to focus his DBA research on issues relating to the role and contribution of the quality management systems - and more particularly of the ISO 9000 QMS - to the achievement of Greek Agricultural Cooperatives' corporate strategic goals and organizational performance improvement through the improvement of their business processes.

The critical examination of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems' implementation process and use purpose by the Agricultural Cooperatives sector in Greece is the broad and general Topic of my Doctorate Research. It is mainly connected with these two current issues, which were analyzed more extensively in the preceding DBA Research documents:

- on one hand, with the reanimation of the ongoing dialogue and debate concerning the perspectives of the Agricultural Cooperatives in Greece and the future status of the 15-18% of the country's active population which is occupied in the broader agricultural sector (Bank of Greece, 2002), and
- on the other hand, with the ever increasing public concern, interest and demand for safer, healthier and quality enhanced food products and services all over the world (ICAP, 2002 and Arvanitoyiannis, 2000).

The principal aim of this research is to: thoroughly examine, analyze and critically evaluate the manner of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems’ implementation and use in the Greek agricultural cooperatives for:

- investigating and critically evaluating the systems’ role and degree of contribution in the development and sustainable application of improved business processes and ultimately organizational performance, and
- examining and critically analyzing the key business factors influencing the Quality Management Systems’ effective and efficient development, practice and use in the aforementioned business environment.

As a result of the above mentioned main research aim, the following working hypothesis is going to be critically examined and evaluated throughout the whole research process/project:

ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems are considered by the Greek agro-coops (and their (key) stakeholders) as an organizational change management tool, that is effectively implemented and efficiently used for achieving improved business processes and organizational performance, despite their existing organizational, behavioral and operational settings and arrangements that might affect and impair their business performance and consequently might influence the effective implementation and the efficient use of these systems.

As a conclusion of the aforementioned analysis, the researcher has defined the following objectives for his DBA project:

1. To analyze and critically evaluate the current status of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems in Greek Agro-coops in relation to the agro-coops’ current business status.
2. To evaluate the role and contribution of these Quality management systems to the development of improved business operations and processes by the Greek agro-coops with the final aim of achieving improved Operational and organizational Performance and Business Excellence.
3. To examine these Quality management systems’ role and influence in the Greek agro-coops’ business reorientation towards customer-focused and market-oriented business practices, services and operations.

4. To identify the driving and restraining forces concerning the implementation, operation and use of ISO 9000-Quality Assurance and Management Systems in Greek Agricultural Cooperatives.
5. To investigate the Greek Agro-coops' (Key) Stakeholders attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMSystems and identify their actual behaviors and practices concerning these systems' implementation, operation and use in the Greek agro-coops.

Therefore, a thorough auditing of all the Key Business Factors, that influence the implementation and development process of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agro-coops, is a main task of the Research Process. More specifically, a critical examination, analysis and evaluation of all the Critical Success Factors, which will be viewed as the Driving Forces as well as of the Critical Failure Factors which will take the place of the Constraining Forces that affect and influence the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek Agro-Coops will be conducted.

The examination of existing literature in document 2 and the outcomes of the qualitative research in document 3 provided useful and researchable indications and insights into the extent to and the required manner with which quality management systems - the ISO 9000 QMS included - may contribute to the enterprises' - therefore, the Greek agro-coops' too - improvement of their core and secondary business processes and operations and consequently organizational change and corporate strategic development.

On the other hand several external and internal business and market constraints have been pointed out as possible major cause-root reasons for the ineffective and inefficient implementation and use of any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included - in the Greek agro-coops.

As a consequence and in relation and accordance to the already materialized qualitative research, the quantitative research survey realized in document 4 will study and critically evaluate:

how these agro-coops' stakeholders perceive, experience and practice these systems' business nature and role in relation to the Quality and Process management and improvement fields;

the stakeholders' level and depth of knowledge of the systems' implementation and use requirements and its business nature;

the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose interrelationship with the existing corporate politics, power structure and decision-making process.

the current business state of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek agro-coops in relation to their existing business status and practices.

Furthermore, one of the main aims is to examine the importance given to these issues by the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders and the extent to which these QMS are taken into account in the formulation of the overall business strategy. Moreover, investigate the level of the stakeholders' awareness of this system's ability to contribute to the improvement of the overall business operations and processes and consequently corporate performance, by acknowledging its business role and property being used as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource.

Finally, it will offer an indicative presentation, and critical investigation and evaluation of the KBF (including the ones already identified in the qualitative research stage in Document 3), required for the QMS being deployed effectively and efficiently in Greek agro-coops' sector, for the final thorough research, analysis and critical evaluation of these KBF will be materialized in the Final thesis-Documents 4 and 5 of the entire DBA research project.

This will be achieved by a structured questionnaire, surveying the biggest agro-coops' stakeholders' group, that is the employees and production foremen of the Greek agro-coops that were researched in the undertaken qualitative research presented in Document 3. This positivistic cross-sectional, large-scale survey, which adopts the deductive theory and process in terms of research hypotheses' generating and testing, aims at revealing insights into this group of Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices concerning the business status and nature of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

Through these insights the research will try to identify the KBF leading to the system's proper deployment in this sub-sector of the Greek agro-food industry.

Because, as businesses become more competitive within the E.U. zone and the overall global market place, and the effect of proactive corporate management on organizational performance becomes more indisputable, the survey anticipates Greek agro-coops' interest in achieving proper implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS to increase steadily.

The research is divided into eight sections. The first section is the Introduction to the quantitative research topic. In the second section, the research objectives and questions to be answered are identified and presented. The third section provides the development of a conceptual framework, including the key concepts and variables that will be used for the data analysis and testing. The fourth and fifth sections present the methodological literature with particular emphasis on the research methodology, quantitative methods and design as well as justification of the quantitative research tactics and instruments adopted.

The sixth section reports the results of the research, interpreting and presenting the findings of the statistical analyses and hypotheses testing. The seventh section summarizes and discusses the basic results of the research in relation to the adopted conceptual framework, existing literature and previous researches' findings. Finally, section eight provides some concluding remarks to this research and suggestions for further research required.

More specifically, the quantitative research document contains the following:

- Introductory presentation of the quantitative research topic in relation to the entire DBA major research topic and theme.
- Discussion of the importance of the specific research questions or issues chosen from the general research topic, investigated by the large - scale survey based research.
- Description of the conceptual framework and identification of the hypotheses tested.
- Consideration of possible research methods, discussion of research method adopted, and the rationale for adoption.

- Discussion of sample choice, construction and size.
- Discussion of the design and implementation of the research instruments.
- Analysis of the findings including the use of appropriate statistical techniques.
- Conclusions and identification of further research.

In this document, the initials QMS are used to denote the Quality Management System; the initials QMFD are used to denote the quality management system function deployment in the surveyed Greek agro-coops; the initials KBF are used to denote the Key Business Factors affecting the ISO 9000 QMS effective implementation and efficient use; the initials UACM are used to denote the local focus of the quantitative research as well as of the entire DBA research, which is the Union of the Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia; the initials BoDs and MD are used to denote the Board of Directors and Managing Director terms; and the initials SYN.P.E. and A.S.E. are used to denote the legal status of the Unions of Greek Agricultural Cooperatives meaning Limited Liability Cooperatives and PLC respectively.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

A fair number of research studies and surveys have been conducted internationally so far attempting to examine and evaluate the importance and impact of the introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems on corporate business processes and operations and consequently performance, as exhibited and experienced internally and externally business wise.

Furthermore, the key business factors, external and internal ones, that affect the implementation process and use purpose of these quality systems in the organizations have been investigated, analyzed and evaluated with equal consideration in these research studies.

The same research aims and objectives have been adopted in this research, which is conducted in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector. Emphasis is given to the examination of the role, importance and enterprising organization and operation of the agricultural cooperatives in Greece. The analytical reference to the structure and operation of the Greek agricultural cooperatives as well as in the characteristics of their intervention in the agricultural sector is owed to the drastic changes that are observed in the economic and social environment of the Greek agricultural cooperatives.

These changes lead to research and approaches of topics and subjects that are connected, on the one side with the current unfavorable business status and financial position of the Unions of agricultural cooperatives and on the other with the necessary enterprising and operational adaptations that are required for the Unions of Agro-coops to survive and develop. One of these approaches is the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000-Quality management systems in any corporation active in the Agro-food industry (therefore, for the Greek agro-coops too), as it is stated in the book of Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002).

As it was previously presented, the principal aim of my entire DBA research is to: thoroughly examine, analyse and critically evaluate the manner of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems' implementation and use in the Greek agricultural cooperatives for:

- investigating and critically evaluating the systems' role and degree of contribution in the development and sustainable application of improved business processes and ultimately organizational performance, and
- examining and critically analyzing the key business factors influencing the Quality Management Systems' effective and efficient development, practice and use in the aforementioned business environment.

As a result, the principal aim of the quantitative part of the DBA research, is to in depth explore issues relating to the current business status and nature as well as to the adopted practice of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-coops sub-sector, by investigating and critically evaluating the Agro-coops' various Stakeholders' groups' knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and practices towards this QMSystem's deployment nature and status.

Thus, the quantitative research process, being mainly deductive in terms of research hypotheses' generating and testing, will be held and materialized within a positivistic context by a cross-sectional, large-scale survey based study, using as research instrument a structured questionnaire and aiming at critically examining and evaluating the issue of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use as perceived, practiced and experienced by the biggest group of stakeholders of the Greek Agro-coops, of all three degrees of the agricultural cooperative sector, that constituted the research sample of the qualitative research conducted in document 3.

Furthermore, the broad aims of the quantitative research aim at critically investigating the following main research issues-topics:

1. What are the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes and practice towards the Quality and Process Management concepts and issues and the perceived by them interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS?
 - 1.1. According to their opinion where should the issue of quality management systems be directed for the Agro-coops enjoying the optimum results out of its implementation and use?

the 1.1 question will be a concluding question referring to the potential and required future development of the Quality Management Systems applied in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector.

2. What is the Stakeholders' knowledge towards the nature of the ISO 9000:2000 Quality Management System and the reasons, results and requirements of the system's implementation and use?

More specifically the following sub-questions will be set:

2.1. What difference does the introduction and implementation of the "new" ISO 9000:2000 QMSystem make in comparison with the implementation of the "old" version- the ISO 9000:1994 - in terms of the Agro-coops' business operations?

2.2. What are their opinions and beliefs concerning the reasons, requirements and results of the ISO 9000:2000 QMSystem's implementation and use?

2.3. What are the results of the Introduction and Implementation of the ISO 9000:1994 – Quality Assurance and Management System in the UACM and in the other selected Greek Agro-coops.

Note: the researcher aims at investigating the agro-coops' stakeholders' knowledge of and training on the ISO 9000:1994 QMS' implementation process and use purpose too and compare them with their relevant knowledge and training on the system's new version, that is ISO 9000:2000 QMS, for critically identifying and evaluating the prevailing business attitude and practice of the researched agro-coops on the aforementioned issues.

2.4. What are the Agro-coops' Stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards the ISO 9000 – QMS' influencing role and contribution in the:

2.4.1 sustainable development of improved business processes and operations with the ultimate aim of achieving improved organizational performance.

2.4.2 agro-coops' business reorientation towards customer-focused and market-oriented business practices and operations.

2.4.3 achievement of the corporate strategic goals through its incorporation in and relationship with the corporate strategic plan?

3.1. How do the Greek Agro-coops' stakeholders' groups experience and rate their companies current business status, financial position and managerial practices?

3.2. According to the Stakeholders' opinion and experience do the current Agro-coops'

business status, financial position and management practices affect the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and nature of its implementation process and use purpose?
If yes, in what way?

- 4.1. Do the Greek Agro-coops' stakeholders believe that the internal business relations structure (e.g. micro-politics, groupings, personal interests) as well as external influences (e.g. political parties, regional interests) affect the effective Implementation and efficient Use of any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included - in Greek Agro-coops?
- 4.2. How do the researched stakeholders rate and evaluate the decision making process as it is practiced and experienced in the Greek Agro-coops' sector?
Which managing group should be the Decision makers group?:
the managing team & employees or the Board of Directors' elected members?
- 4.3. Do they believe that the corporate attitudes and practices concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose have to change?
More analytically:
 - 4.3.1. Who should decide, plan and lead this change management process? and by whom to be deployed and assessed?
 - 4.3.2. How is this change process perceived and experienced? As an outcome of external and/or internal business factors-forces? Is it a superimposed, breakthrough, deterministic and/or a planned, incremental, voluntaristic business need, action and result?
 - 4.3.3. Should and/or could this change management process orientate the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose toward an organizational change and strategic development direction?

More specifically, the quantitative research will investigate and critically evaluate the ISO 9000 QMS's business nature and status as perceived, practiced and experienced by the Greek agro-coops' main group of stakeholders-employees and production foremen, that is: its perceived, intended and applied-actual implementation process and use purpose; stakeholders' attitudes, behaviours, practices and knowledge; level of importance and interconnection with business strategy and corporate strategic development as well as business processes and operations improvement; organizational structure and operations of the QMS unit/department (if existing); interrelationship with

the current corporate business status and processes as well as with the quality and process management & improvement fields; interdependence with the management of change topic and the connected corporate politics, power structure and decision-making process issues.

Amongst the issues that the quantitative research aims at critically identifying, examining and evaluating are:

1. Knowledge and training on the concepts of Quality and Process management and improvement and their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS.
2. the Agro-coops' employees and foremen group perception, experience and evaluation of the current business situation and position in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use.
3. the Agro-coops' employees and foremen group perception, experience and evaluation of the current business situation and financial position of their company.
4. Does there exist any relationship between the two aforementioned issues?
5. Identification and evaluation of the existing agro-coops' key stakeholders' groups' business interrelationships, organisational power structure & corporate politics and their impact on ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose.
6. Reasons for ISO 9000 QMS introduction and deployment.
7. Knowledge and training on the QMsystem's implementation and use provisions and requirements, according to theory and research findings.
8. Perceived and actual outcomes - benefits and/or disadvantages - of ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use: internal and external ones.
9. Encountered problems during ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use processes.
10. Perceived costs of ISO 9000 QMS introduction and continuous development.
11. Necessity of the existence of a Quality management department - unit - team. organizational structure and business operations of the Quality management unit/department and function in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

12. Authority, responsibility and accountability for decision-making on ISO 9000 QMS' issues at both the operational and strategic level, as well as on any corporate strategic and operational issues and their interconnection.
13. Existence of explicit Quality management strategy, nature of strategic planning in ISO 9000 QMS issues and its interrelationship with the corporate business strategy and the management of organisational change.
14. Identification of the existing managerial, operational and financing resources and methods used in the actual deployment of ISO 9000 QMS, frequency of use of specific methods and evaluation of the appropriateness of these methods in order to optimise the system's implementation and use.
15. Activities undertaken to release or add value to the ISO 9000 QMS deployment activities (e.g. education, training, development of quality teams, concept of "internal customer", cooperation amongst the departments and the involved employees & groups and with the suppliers and selling collaborators).
16. Greek agro-coops' existing and prevailing managerial attitudes and behaviours as well as business practices and their impact on the ISO 9000 QMS actual development.
17. Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' beliefs on the future development of ISO 9000 QMS' trends and course.
18. Knowledge of ISO 9000 QMS' business nature's property and potentiality of being used as a strategic development and organizational change corporate competence for achieving improved business operations and processes and consequently organizational performance.

Concerning the largest group of the agro-coops' stakeholders, namely the company's employees and production foremen, a structured questionnaire is used as research instrument, including both pre-coded, structured questions as well as semi-structured/open-end ones concerning some special issues/topics will be used.

It was in the researcher's intention to combine mostly pre-coded closed questions as well as a few semi-closed and/or open-end questions in the same structured questionnaire in order to achieve in this way the respondents' openness, trustworthy, clarity and true expression of their opinions and views (all questionnaires will be returned unsigned in a carton box which will be in the work place for as long as it is required in the absence of the researcher). The researcher also aims at assuring the

validity, reliability and consistency of the respondents' answers, since he knows, due to his professional experience and current employment status in the UACM, that this is the only way to achieve these goals.

Having come to an in-depth view of the key stakeholders' attitudes in document 3, document 4, that is the quantitative research, will concentrate on measuring the extent to which the key stakeholders' attitudes and practices, identified by the qualitative research, are shared amongst and adopted by the Greek agro-coops' (that were researched in the qualitative stage of the entire DBA research project) main group of stakeholders, which is consisted by the agro-coops' employees and production foremen.

This group is considered and treated in practice as a homogeneous one, since in practice they have the same professional status and the same professional responsibilities, merits and accountabilities. Therefore, they express similar business behaviours, perceptions, attitudes and practices and they expect outsider to treat them as one group.

As a result of the aforementioned facts and, in terms of the quantitative research process' deployment validity and reliability as well as its accomplishment, they will be considered and consequently surveyed as a homogeneous group of Greek agro-coops' stakeholders.

As it was previously referred, the positivistic research will employ a large-scale, cross-sectional survey (since it is applied in seven different Greek agro-coops of all three degrees), having as research instrument a structured questionnaire and adopting the deductive theory and process in terms of the research hypotheses' generating and testing, in an attempt to provide insights and data on the business nature and status of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector, such as:

what is being managed, who is managing it, how it is being managed and why it is managed under the adopted approach, as well as to evaluate the role and contribution of ISO 9000 QMS in achieving improved business processes and corporate operational performance and strategic development by critically researching the agro-coops' stakeholders' beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices concerning all the aforementioned topics.

The focus of the work will still be on the entire DBA research project main questions-themes. But in this document the emphasis will be on establishing a representative view of the Agro-coops' employees and production foremen business behaviours, perceptions, attitudes and practices towards the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose, through the use of recognised sampling techniques.

This will provide a base from which to identify good practice and develop recommendations for the enhancement of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use processes in the Greek agro-coops' business environment.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The study of the Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 - Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Agro-food industry in general and in the Agricultural Cooperatives in particular, as well as research on these systems' role and degree of contribution to the achievement of improved business processes and operations and organizational performance, has been the subject of increasing interest and attention over the last decade.

It is expected that this interest will continue and be extended as several factors contribute to the strengthening of this interest. The most crucial factor is consumers' growing demand for safer food products with upgraded quality and more value for money. In relation to that, the differentiation of demand brings new requirements, as food consumption is increasingly related to non-consumption utilities like social referencing, health, product safety and quality, environmental friendliness and product regional origin (EU - New CAP, 2004).

This demand tends to become an operating prerequisite for all Food Industry corporations, as it has already been institutionalized through the European Union Directives referring to and concerning food safety and consumers' health protection. Furthermore, these directives have already been embodied in the national legislation of the state members and in the national legislation of other states - i.e. U.S.A., Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, South Africa and so on -, thus affecting the legal as well as the business status of all food industry companies on a national, European and global level and scale, as Arvanitoyiannis (2001) states.

In the agro-food industry, the economic and business integration worldwide advances through joint ventures, strategic alliances, conglomerates, business takeovers and business clusters. The resulting effect is the emerging need for entrepreneurial, adaptive, quality-driven business processes and market-driven & customer-oriented corporate operations and organizational structures for every type of institution in the agro-food industry, especially the agro-coops, as Parnell (2000) believes.

As a result, in all private companies of the Food Industry, the introduction and implementation of Quality Assurance and Management Systems - such as the ISO 9000,

ISO 14000 and HACCP, as well as TQM and BPR programs - is considered an imperative and the only debatable argument is how they can improve the implementation of these Quality and Process management systems aiming at the upgrading of their business processes and operations and consequently the improvement of their organizational performance, as Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002) refer.

The protagonists of all these processes, the private ownership companies of the agro-industry, are the main competitors of the agricultural cooperatives' sub-sector. This fact almost forces the Greek agro-coops to adopt the introduction and development of such quality systems and attempt to implement and use them effectively and efficiently, for remaining competitive in the food industry sector.

The agricultural cooperatives represent or should represent, according to the public view and opinion, an organisation operating at the edge of business excellence; this is not a paradox as in public's mind the Agro-coops are synonymous to social public organizations, whose main mission is or should be the general public welfare in Parnell's (2000) view.

Nevertheless, the agro-coops in Europe - especially the Greek ones - are facing serious problems in their business operations during the last two decades especially, with the result of decreased market presence, competitiveness and profitability, and heavy borrowing from the state banks, all these facts leading them even to bankruptcy ("IMERISIA", 27-28/11/2004, p.10) and ("Syneteristiki Poria", issue 72, October – December 2003, p.p. 225-228).

As a result of this situation, the European Union Agricultural Committee through the issue of a new statute concerning the agricultural cooperatives seems to enhance cooperation among agro-coops and the transformation of their businesses being based on a new operational framework similar to the private sector companies' one.

As a consequence of all these developments and changes, a new rationale concerning and requiring the effective and efficient introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek agro-coops is emerging; the ultimate goal of this approach is for Greek agro-coops achieving improved business processes and organizational performance through the strategic use of these quality management systems, as Arvanitoyiannis states (2000).

This approach is further verified by the Research studies findings presented in the Proceedings of the Quality and Competitiveness International Forums, held in Athens in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

In the studies of Kasinides (1998) and Angelides (1998) on ISO 9000:1994 QMS' implementation and use in British and Cypriot enterprises the three most important benefits for the British organizations were: a) been aware for problems of business processes (78%), b) covering the foreigner customers' requirements (72%) and c) covering the local customers' requirements (62%), and for the Cypriot ones: a) been aware for problems of business processes (86%), b) increase of customers' service (79%) and c) improvement of managerial control (75%).

Almost identical research findings are identified in an initial survey conducted in 1995-97 - as it is referred by Petroheilou (1999) in the Proceedings of the 5th Conference on Competitiveness and Quality held in Athens, Greece in 1999 - and concerning the reasons the Greek companies are pursuing the ISO 9000:1994 registration and certification the main reasons were: for Marketing purposes -42%, due to their Customers' pressure and demands -30%-, senior management decision and request -24%-, and other reasons -4%-.

Besides these mainly external and unrelated to the internal organizational operations' goals, the outputs identified and referred as enjoyed benefits of the internal organizational performance after the system's introduction and initial implementation in most certified Greek companies were among others: Standardization of internal business processes and operations -27%-, Operational and Managerial Control -20%- (which to this document's author's view seems a logical consequence and intended result by the senior management of these companies favouring the Standardization of their companies business processes as being the prime benefit of the system's use and implementation), Delegation of management control, responsibility and accountability -10%-, Improvement of Quality inspection and control -10%, Improvement of internal communication -10%-, Production Cost decrease -8%-, and Others -10%-.

Of course, as many quality authors - such as Oakland (2003), Goetch and Davis (2002), Tricker & Sherring-Lucas (2001), Foster (2001), Arvanitoyiannis (2001) - believe (and the document's author agree), all these benefits can be achieved only with the

unwavering commitment and support of the corporate top management team. Furthermore, they state as a prerequisite the active involvement and participation of all the employees/the workforce in its totality, who have to be well informed, trained and educated on quality management issues as well as motivated and encouraged to participate actively in every aspect of the organization's quality management system implementation and use. This is a management of change element for the Greek Agro-coops "operating paradigm", according to this document's author's opinion and theory writings as presented in document 2 – Management of Change section.

On the other hand as many researchers identify, there exists a gap between the will and the ability of the Greek agro-coops to implement effectively and use efficiently the ISO 9000 QMSystems. According to Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002), this inability is an outcome of the inefficient organizational operation of the agro-coops, therefore as Ageletopoulos and Yiannatos (1995) state, a researcher should first examine if - a company in the food industry is and consequently - the Greek agro-coops are ready to adopt such systems. Further on, as they continue, he/she should conduct a thorough investigation of their organizational, behavioral and operational settings and arrangements that impair the effective implementation and the efficient use of these systems and consequently influence their business performance.

As a consequence of the aforementioned findings and as it was previously referred, the quantitative research, with the use of a structured questionnaire, will display the research objectives within a context of a positivistic/large scale, cross-sectional survey study critically examining and evaluating the ISO 9000 QMS' current business status and its perceived by the stakeholders business nature, as well as the key business factors affecting this system's implementation and use in a fair number of Greek Agro-coops from the whole spectrum of Greek Agro-coops sub-sector.

Generally speaking, the main objectives of the study are:

- a) to investigate the current status of ISO 9000 QMS and the nature of its implementation process and use purposes in the Greek Agro-coops sector, and
- b) to identify the key business factors that influence and shape the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purposes in Greek Agro-coops by exploring the

key stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and practices towards the aforementioned issues.

More specifically, the quantitative research will address a range of anchor questions and issues such as:

- the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' knowledge and attitudes towards the Quality and Process Management issues and their perceived interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS.
- the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' knowledge of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and its implementation process and use purpose importance as perceived and practiced by all the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' groups.
- the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and interrelationship with the current Agro-coops' business status, financial position and management practices as perceived and practiced by all the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' groups.
- the ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic corporate resource for achieving organisational change and corporate strategic development through business processes improvement and consequently/aiming at organisational performance improvement and the existing relationship between quality management strategy and overall corporate strategy.
- the identification and evaluation of all the Key Business Factors which emanate from the Management of Change field in relation to ISO 9000 QMS' development in the Greek agro-coops and the interrelated Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues, influencing the implementation process and use purpose of the ISO 9000 – QMS in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector, acting as Drivers and/or Constraints for the effective implementation and efficient use of this QMS, i.e.:

Corporate attitudes and practices concerning all the above themes as well as the following issues: organization and business activities of Quality Management, Control & Assurance unit/department, the Decision Making process on Corporate and Quality management issues, the existence of Quality management strategy and its relationship with and contribution to the overall corporate strategy and the aims and beliefs of the stakeholders concerning the future development of ISO 9000 in Greek agro-coops.

The quantitative research, being mainly deductive in terms of the research hypotheses' generating and testing, will present the above objectives within the context of a positivistic large-scale, cross sectional survey study, using as research instrument a structured questionnaire, aiming at critically examining and evaluating the ISO 9000 QMS' current business status and its perceived and practiced by the various groups of stakeholders business nature, as well as the key business factors affecting this system's implementation process and use purpose in a fair number of Greek Agro-coops from the whole spectrum of the Greek Agro-coops sub-sector.

Based on the above literature review, the researcher's working experience in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector and the previous qualitative research findings (identified in Document 3), the following quantitative research working hypothesis is constructed:

Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management and improvement fields and perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS, as well as their knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature, influence the system's deployment process and use purpose.

In addition, Greek agro-coops' business status, financial position and managerial practices as well as their Stakeholders' groups' relations, corporate politics & power structure, and Decision making process affect the ISO 9000 QMS' development business status.

All the aforementioned factors are considered as the Key Business Factors/KBF influencing the business status of ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

So five testable hypotheses are formed:

H1: Knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management and improvement fields affects the stakeholders' perception of these concepts interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS.

H2: Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS business nature influences the system's deployment process.

H3: Greek agro-coops' business status, financial position and managerial practices affect the ISO 9000 QMS' development business status.

H4: Stakeholders' groups' relations, corporate politics & power structure, and Decision making process affect (Stakeholders' perception and) Greek agro-coops' use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource.

H5: Greek agro-coops' Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management fields as well as knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and implementation and use requirements affect the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

In addition, the agro-coops' current business status, managerial practices and financial position in relation to the existing decision making process and corporate politics & power structure influence the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

It is significant that the conceptual framework of the present research emanates from the initial conceptual framework and the qualitative research undertaken in Document 3 and its identified outcomes. Furthermore, it compares fairly enough with that of earlier researches such as these presented in document 2 – Research findings in the Appendixes section. Although the hypotheses researched and study approach taken by the different researchers vary from one another, there exists a certain degree of similarity among the various variables hypothesized to influence ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose and consequently corporate performance. In fact, the aforementioned four factors-research hypotheses are not mutually exclusive but in many cases interrelated, as it is apparent in the fifth research hypothesis.

The key concepts and variables I will be drawing on are presented in Figure 1 that depicts the conceptual framework used for the quantitative research data analysis.

The anchor research themes-issues-questions presented in the Conceptual Framework and the quantitative research hypotheses are interrelated and research findings may be identified in more than one theme, as it is evident in the fifth theme-research hypothesis issues, which are pervasive and included in all other previous four themes.

The key concepts and variables of the already undertaken qualitative research are shown in Figure 2.

The research themes-issues-questions of the two Conceptual Frameworks are interconnected and related, since they both emanate from the entire DBA main research themes-anchor questions and working hypothesis. Therefore, the researcher believes and adopts the stance that the qualitative research findings have to be critically examined and evaluated via the quantitative research process, while at the same time other research findings may be identified as a result of the quantitative stage of the entire DBA research project.

3.1.Figure 1

Stakeholders’ Knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management fields + Stakeholders’ Perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS’ business practice

&

Stakeholders’ knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature + Stakeholders’ attitudes and business practices concerning ISO 9000 QMS’ deployment

and

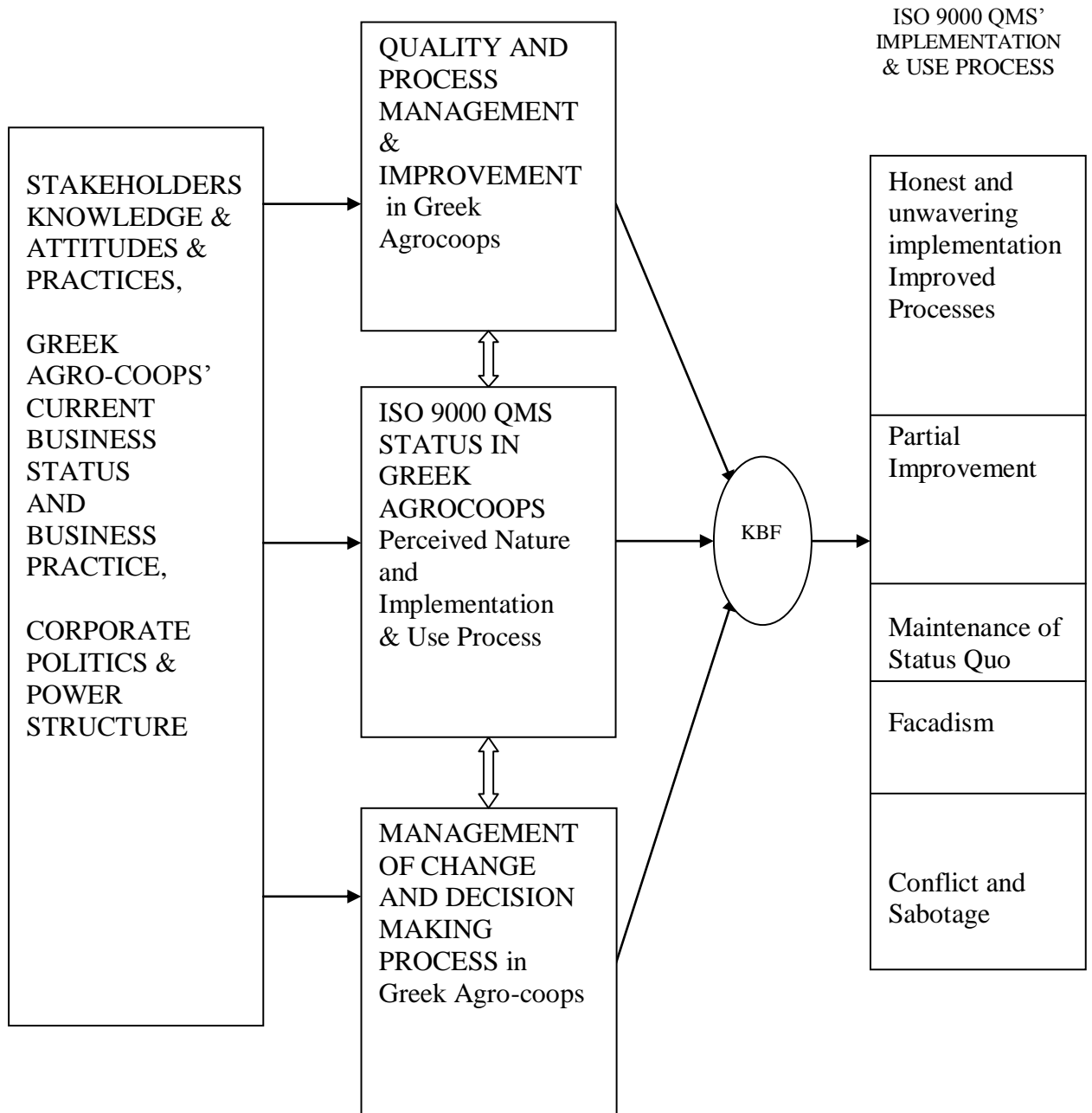
Greek agro-coops’ business status, financial position and managerial practices + ISO 9000 QMS’ business status and operational practices

&

Corporate politics& power structure and Decision making process mgt. + Perception&Use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource

= **influence actual business status of ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops**

3.2. Figure 2



4. METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Before a social researcher can begin to conduct social research, he needs to consider the relationship between theories and the empirical world. The empirical world is the world of the senses: the world you can see, hear, smell, touch, and (less frequently considered in the social sciences) taste. Traditional social research draws on the model of a natural scientist conducting research in a laboratory. In this tradition, often called the “scientific method,” the main goal of social research is theory construction and most importantly, theory testing. Conventional social research uses deductive reasoning. That is, you begin with a theory and then deduce logical extensions of it, called hypotheses that you can test.

The process of deductive reasoning is usually described as having several stages. The first stage involves developing a theory, usually based on the body of research that other scholars have already conducted. The second stage involves operationalization of the theory – that is, putting it in a testable form – by developing hypotheses and choosing a representative sample and a research design. The third stage involves actually carrying out the research: collecting data and conducting analyses. If the results of the test confirm the hypotheses, then the theory is considered more plausible. If not, the theory needs to be reconsidered and further research conducted.

The final stage involves writing the results up and disseminating them either in a journal or book or in an oral presentation at a professional conference, for the results have to be exposed to critical examination and evaluation by the scientific and professional body of the field theme under research.

4.2 The Paradigm of Positivism

Traditional approaches to social research are based on a paradigm known as positivism. It came into its own with the work of August Comte (1798-1857) who outlined an approach to positivism in his ‘Course of Positive Philosophy’. In this tradition, the goal of social research is to discover a set of causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human behaviour. The philosophical stance or paradigm sees the researcher

as an objective analyst and interpreter of a tangible social reality. Underlying positivism is the assumption that the researcher is independent of and neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research. It is assumed that there are independent causes that lead to the observed effects, that evidence is critical, that parsimony is important and that it should be possible to generalise or to model, especially in the mathematical sense, the observed phenomena. Positivism emphasises quantifiable observations that lend themselves to statistical analysis.

The doctrine of positivism is extremely difficult to pin down and therefore to outline in a precise manner, because it is used in a number of different ways by authors. For some writers, it is a descriptive category – one that describes a philosophical position that can be discerned in research - though there are still disagreements about what it comprises; for others, it is a term used to describe crude and often superficial data collection.

Bryman (2004) gives a definition of positivism. “It is an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond. But the term stretches beyond this principle, though the constituent elements vary between authors.”

This stance consists of five principles that describe a relationship between theory and research and entails elements of both a deductive approach and an inductive strategy. More specifically, positivism entails the following principles (Bryman, 2004):

1. the principle of phenomenalism: only phenomena and hence knowledge confirmed by the senses can genuinely be warranted as knowledge.
2. the principle of deductivism: the purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested and that will thereby allow explanations of laws to be assessed.
3. the principle of inductivism: Knowledge is arrived at through the gathering of facts that provide the basis for laws.
4. Science must (and presumably can) be conducted in a way that is value free and objective. Social researchers must somehow free themselves from the social and cultural values that govern other kinds of human activity. They must transcend personal biases, prejudices, and values and remain neutral toward their object of study.
5. There is a clear distinction between scientific statements and normative statements and a belief that the former are the true domain of the scientist. This last principle is

implied by the first because the truth or otherwise of normative statements cannot be confirmed by the senses.

Therefore, from the epistemological point of view (that is, what should be regarded as acceptable knowledge) the positivism answers the question of whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences.

From the ontological point of view (the nature of social entities) the central point of orientation is the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors. According to Bryman (2004), objectivism is: “an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. It implies that social phenomena and the categories that we use in everyday discourse have an existence that is independent or separate from actors.”

Many writers on methodological issues find it helpful to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research. Thus, quantitative research can be described as a research strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data.

The following table outlines the differences between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of principal, epistemological and ontological orientation.

Table 1: Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies

<u>orientation</u>	<u>Quantitative</u>	<u>Qualitative</u>
Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research	Deductive; testing of theory	Inductive; generation of theory
Epistemological orientation	Natural science model, in particular positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological orientation	Objectivism	Constructionism

Source: Bryman, (2004).

4.3. The Quantitative Research Strategy

Quantitative research usually emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a research strategy it is deductivist and objectivist and incorporates a natural science model of the research process (in particular, one influenced by positivism), but quantitative researchers do not always subscribe to all three of these features (Bryman, 2001:506).

According to Sarantakos (1998), quantitative methods are methods employing quantitative theoretical and methodological principles and techniques and statistics. Bryman (1988) has discussed the five main methods of quantitative social research and these are set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Methods of quantitative research

<u>Method</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Advantages</u>
Social survey	Random samples; Measured variables	Representative; Tests hypothesis
Experiment	Experimental stimulus; Control group not exposed to stimulus	Precise measurement
Official statistics	Analysis of previously collected data	Large datasets
Structured observation	Observations recorded on predetermined schedule	Reliability of observations
Content analysis	Predetermined categories used to count content of mass media products	Reliability of measures

Source: in D. Silverman (2001) adapted from Bryman, 1988: 11-12

Bryman (2004) suggests the main steps in quantitative research. It represents a useful starting point for getting to grips with the main ingredients of the approach and the links between them. The main steps are the following:

1. Theory
2. Hypothesis
3. Research design
4. Devise measures of concepts
5. Select research site(s)
6. Select research subjects / respondents
7. Administer research instruments / collect data
8. Process data
9. Analyse data
10. Findings / conclusions
11. Write up findings / conclusions

The above process is also called hypothetico – deductive research process. At the first stage the literature review and knowledge gathered from other sources allows for a theory to be developed, and from the theory a hypothesis may be constructed which can, in turn, be tested. A hypothesis is a statement that expresses the expected causal relationships between concepts. A concept is a theoretical unit that allows a researcher to organize an idea or observation. In turn, this unit needs to be translated from an abstract idea into something that can be identified and measured if it is to be researched. So before the hypothesis can be tested the concepts need to be operationalized, requiring the development of an operational definition and measurable indicators.

Without an operational definition of the concept it would not be possible to collect data to accept or reject the relationship stated in the hypothesis. The operationalization process turns concepts into observable and measurable entities that are then stored as variables for the purposes of analysis.

To establish a relationship between two variables, as stated in a hypothesis, requires the use of statistical techniques to establish causality. Variables can be placed into three different roles depending on the complexity of the hypothesis or model of the relationship: these are an independent variable, dependent variable or control variable. The hypothesis represents what the researcher proposes as the relationship between the variables. Variables can take on one or more of these roles according to the relationship that is being described and tested. The independent variable, also referred to as the cause, is assumed to be the variable that is influencing a second, dependent variable. The independent variable is presented as the X variable in mathematical notation.

The dependent, also referred to as the effect variable, is the variable that is being influenced by the independent variable. The dependent variable is presented as the Y variable in mathematical notation. Reducing the analysis to a simplistic cause – and – effect relationship between two variables would hardly seem sufficient. The data analysis would need to reflect the range of factors identified from the literature review. The use of a cause – and – effect relationship model, though, does provide a useful structure at the data analysis stage.

Variables can be defined into four different data types, known also as levels of measurement. The four data types are nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio. It is important that the researcher is able to distinguish between them, as the data type will influence the type of statistical analysis techniques available at the data analysis stage.

Interval / ratio data is measured on a continuous scale can be placed in rank order and can be subjected to mathematical calculations. Interval data does not have a true zero point (measures such as time and temperature). Ratio interval data does have a true zero point (measures such as length, height, age). Ordinal data are categorical variables that can be placed into a rank order of importance (rating scales, Likert scale). No mathematical calculations can be made in relation to the distance between the categories. Nominal or sometimes qualitative data cannot be placed into any specific order and no judgement can be made about the relative size or distance of one category to another. The above mentioned types of variables can be placed into a hierarchical order from the lowest level (nominal) to the highest (interval / ratio) in order to be possible to recode or adjust the data.

After the operationalization phase, the next phase in the hypothetico-deductive model is the collection of data. After data collection, the data can be analysed to explore the relationships stated in the hypothesis. From the analysis the initial hypothesis can then be accepted or refuted with subsequent alterations to the initial theory made.

This research process is an idealized model. The reality for the social researchers is that the research process is frustrated by the complexities of the social world.

As Bryman states: “Quantitative research is invariably much more messy. It tends to involve false trails, blind alleys, serendipity and hunches to a much greater degree than the idealization implies. Nor does the idealized model take sufficient account of the

importance of resource constraints on decisions about how the research should be carried out.” (Bryman, 1998:21).

However, the idealized model of the research process does provide a valuable structure and rigour for the researcher. The importance of addressing the issues at each stage in the research process should not be underestimated.

What is crucial is whether measures are reliable and whether they are valid representations of the concepts they are supposed to be tapping. The issues of reliability and validity are important because they are the basic criteria used to evaluate research and should indicate how well the research will be accepted by a critical audience of peers and assessors or examiners.

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept over time, or simply, will the respondent give the same response if asked to give an answer at a different time. The three prominent factors involved when considering whether a measure is reliable is stability (test-retest method), internal reliability and inter-observer consistency.

Validity refers to the degree to which a measuring instrument actually measures and describes the concept it was designed to. Several ways of establishing validity are explored such as face validity; concurrent validity; predictive validity; construct validity; and convergent validity.

4.4. The Main Preoccupations and Critique of Quantitative Research

Both quantitative and qualitative research can be viewed as exhibiting a set of distinctive but contrasting preoccupations. These preoccupations reflect epistemologically grounded beliefs about what constitutes acceptable knowledge. In the first part of this section, four distinctive preoccupations that can be discerned in quantitative research will be outlined: measurement, causality, generalization, and replication (Bryman, 2004).

There are three main reasons for the preoccupation with measurement in quantitative research. First of all, measurement allows us to delineate fine differences between people in terms of the characteristic in question. Secondly, measurement gives us a consistent device for making such distinctions. This consistency relates to two things:

our ability to be consistent with other researchers and our ability to be consistent over time. This measure has to do with the issue of reliability, which will be examined later. Finally, measurement provides the basis for more precise estimates of the degree of relationship between concepts (for example, through correlation analysis).

There is a very strong concern in most quantitative research with establishing causal connections between variables, rather than mere relationships between them. The quantitative researchers are rarely concerned merely to describe how things are, but are keen to say why things are the way they are. The concern about causality is reflected in the preoccupation with the issue of internal validity.

In quantitative research the researcher is usually concerned to be able to say whether the results of a study can be generalized beyond the specific research context in which it was conducted. This concern reveals itself in social survey research in the attention that is often given to the question of how one can create a representative sample. Probability sampling (a sample that has been selected using random sampling and in which each unit in the population has a known probability of being selected) is the main way in which researchers seek to generate a representative sample. This concern has to do with the issue of external validity particularly using cross-sectional and longitudinal designs.

Quantitative researchers in the social sciences often regard replication, or more precisely the ability to reproduce each other's experiments, as an important ingredient of their activity. If there is a failure to replicate, so that a scientist's findings repeatedly could not be reproduced, serious questions would be raised about the validity of the findings. The concern of replication has to do with the issue of internal reliability.

Over the years, quantitative research along with its epistemological and ontological orientations has been the focus of a great deal of criticism particularly from qualitative researchers. Silverman (2001) attempted to summarize these criticisms in the following table.

Table 3: Some criticisms of quantitative research

1. Quantitative research can amount to a ‘quick fix’, involving little or no contact with people or the ‘field’.
 2. Statistical correlations may be based upon ‘variables’ that, in the context of naturally occurring interaction, are arbitrarily defined.
 3. After the fact speculation about the meaning of correlations can involve the very common-sense processes of reasoning that science tries to avoid (see Cicourel, 1964:14, 21).
 4. the pursuit of ‘measurable’ phenomena can mean that unperceived values creep into research by simply taking on board highly problematic and unreliable concepts such as ‘delinquency’ or ‘intelligence’.
 5. While it is important to test hypotheses, a purely statistical logic can make the development of hypotheses a trivial matter and fail to help in generating hypotheses from data (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967).
-

Bryman (2004) presents four criticisms of quantitative research that will be covered briefly below.

1. *“Quantitative researchers fail to distinguish people and social institutions from the world of nature.”* Schutz (1962) and other phenomenologists charge social scientists who employ a natural science model with treating the social world as if it were no different from the natural order. In other words, they draw attention to the principles of the scientific method that can and should be applied to all phenomena and ignore that people interpret the world around them and they have the capacity for self-reflection that cannot be found among the objects of the natural world.
2. *“the measurement process possesses an artificial and spurious sense of precision and accuracy.”* It has been argued that the connection between the measures developed by social scientists and the concepts they are supposed to be revealing is assumed rather than real. In the case of a questionnaire it presumes that when members of a sample respond to a question, they interpret the key

terms in the question similarly. For many writers, respondents simply do not interpret such terms similarly.

3. *“the reliance on instruments and procedures hinders the connection between research and everyday life.”* This issue relates to the question of ecological validity and mean that people may answer a question designed to measure something, but respondents’ actual behaviour may be at variance with their answers that do not relate to their everyday lives.
4. *“the analysis of relationships between variables creates a static view of social life that is independent of people’s lives.”* This criticism incorporates the first and third criticisms but adds a further element-namely, that it creates a sense of a static world that is separate from the individuals who make it up. In other words, quantitative research is seen as carrying an objectivist ontology that reifies the social world.

4.5 Quantitative Research Methods

There are numerous methods of data – collection in social research, from the lengthy, exploratory pilot interview, with its ‘hidden agenda’, to the impersonal, mailed questionnaire and the analysis of documents. The two main traditional methods of data collection when adopting quantitative research are the self-completion survey, also known as the social survey or questionnaire survey, and the structured interview. Both approaches require the respondent to complete a series of questions that have been designed by the researcher. The traditional and most widely used approach is to send the self-completion survey through the postal service, when it is known as the mail survey or postal survey. In recent years the growth of the Internet has seen a rise in its use, where the surveys can be distributed and returned via e-mail or at a site on the world wide web. The structured interview involves an interviewer asking questions and recording the responses from the respondent being interviewed. Where the interview is conducted in person with both the interviewer and interviewee, or respondent present, it is called a face-to-face interview. An alternative method is to conduct the interview by telephone, known as telephone interviewing.

The general advantages and disadvantages of using self-completion surveys and structured interviews for data collection are covered briefly below.

According to Oppenheim (1966), the chief advantage of the postal or mail questionnaire is cheapness. Since it does not require a trained staff, travel expenditures and so on, virtually all that it requires is the reproduction of the questionnaire, envelopes, postage costs and data entry costs. The second advantage is that data from a large sample, possibly distributed over a wide geographical area, can be surveyed within a limited time span. The third advantage is that there are no interviewer effects, and the fourth is that when collecting data on sensitive topics that the respondent may otherwise be too embarrassed or reluctant to respond to. Other advantages include that the respondents can complete the questionnaire at a time convenient to themselves, and that questionnaires can be completed and returned anonymously by the respondent.

By far the largest disadvantage of mail questionnaires, however, is the fact that they usually produce very poor response rates. Reasons for this are varied and can include factors such as ‘the subject matter of the survey, the target population under study, the recipients’ perception of its value, and the ease of completion of the questionnaire’. (Simmons, 2001:87)

However, good question development and layout, together with clear instructions on the nature of the study and why it is important to complete and return the questionnaire, can dramatically improve response rates. Other disadvantages include the inability to control the context within which the questions are completed; respondents may jump between questions and not complete in the intended order or the researcher is unable to determine if the targeted sampling unit, for example, a named individual, was actually the person who completed and returned the questionnaire.

One of the biggest advantages of face-to-face structured interviews is that there can be a greater use of open questions and the interviewer can provide additional explanation, if required, to aid the respondent’s understanding of the question. In the contrary, in a face-to-face interview the issue of anonymity no longer applies, though the interviewer can make assurances of confidentiality. There is also the potential for both interviewer effect and interviewer bias. The telephone interview survey can be a favoured method when funding is sufficient to cover telephone costs, and it is also possible to obtain a large sample over a wide geographical area. The disadvantages are that the guidelines

for self-completion questions must still be adhered to. Questions should be short, simple, and the number of response categories specified must not be too great as the interviewee will be unable to remember all the list items from which to choose.

4.6. The Quantitative Data Analysis

The analysis of quantitative data is also known as social statistics and is accompanied by a range of statistical and analytical terminology. The process of quantitative data analysis involves the key stages of: data entry; univariate analysis, the examination of individual variables; bivariate analysis, the describing and exploring of relationships between two variables; multivariate analysis, the expansion of the analysis to three or more variables; and statistical testing to enable judgements as to the generalizability of sample findings to the population.

There are a number of specialist software applications available to support quantitative data analysis. These include Minitab for Windows, SPSS for Windows and SAS for Windows. In an academic setting the choice of software package is often between SPSS and Minitab. In terms of basic analysis, there is little difference in the operational characteristics of these two. The main difference comes in the ability of SPSS to manage variables collected from multiple answer questions and arrange these in to sets for analysis purposes. The data management techniques are also greater in SPSS, with additional modules of specialist features available. SPSS (originally short for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is generally the software application most used by business, market researchers and social researchers for managing and analysing quantitative data.

As a result of the aforementioned, the researcher has chosen and used the SPSS programme - version 14.00 for the statistical analysis of the respondents' answers to his quantitative research structured questions. Moreover, he will apply the ANOVA test and will use consequently the Duncan test for producing the statistical tables relevant to the respondents' answers' ratings referring to the questionnaire questions and evaluating these answers' ratings in terms of their statistical closeness.

A more thorough presentation of the issue will be offered in the proceeding Section 6, Sub-Section 6.4 of this document.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 The Proposed Research Methodology

In terms of this study, taking a positivistic stance means that the researcher's basic belief is that the social reality is an external, objective reality. The researcher, on the basis of what is known about ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector, deduces a hypothesis (or hypotheses) that must then be subjected to empirical scrutiny. Embedded within the hypothesis will be concepts that will need to be translated into researchable entities. The researcher has to deduce a hypothesis and then translate it into operational terms.

This means that, the researcher needs to specify how data can be collected in relation to the concepts that make up the hypothesis. Theory and the hypotheses deduced from it come first and drive the process of gathering data.

Therefore, the researcher will materialize the quantitative part of his entire DBA research project by using a large scale, cross-sectional survey, having as research instrument a structured questionnaire and by adopting the deductive theory in terms of research hypotheses' generating and testing, which represents the commonest view of the nature of the relationship between theory and social research. The process of deduction was outlined in the previous section.

As referred previously, the precedent literature review and the previous qualitative research findings (identified in Document 3) show that:

Knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management and improvement fields and perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS, as well as Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS business nature influence the system's deployment process.

Additionally, Greek agro-coops' business status, financial position and managerial practices as well as their Stakeholders' groups' relations, corporate politics & power structure, and Decision making process affect the business status of the ISO 9000 QMS' development process.

All the aforementioned factors are considered/hypothesized of being the Key Business Factors/KBF influencing the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

These reflections constitute what they refer to as the “theory” that guides the quantitative research and from which the following hypotheses are derived:

H1: Knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management and improvement fields affects the stakeholders’ perception of these concepts interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS.

H2: Stakeholders’ knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS business nature influences the system’s deployment process.

H3: Greek agro-coops’ business status, financial position and managerial practices affect the ISO 9000 QMS’ development business status.

H4: Stakeholders’ groups’ relations, corporate politics & power structure, and Decision making process affect (Stakeholders’ perception and) use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource.

H5: Greek agro-coops’ Stakeholders’ knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management fields as well as knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and implementation and use requirements affect the business status of ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

In addition, the agro-coops’ current business status, managerial practices and financial position in relation to the existing decision making process and corporate politics & power structure influence the business status of ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

The above hypotheses are going to be tested within the Greek agro-coops’ sub-sector business environment by critically examining and evaluating the perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and practices of the stakeholders’ main group (that is: employees and production foremen) of the seven agro-coops that were investigated in the qualitative research stage of the entire DBA research project.

This study demonstrates the process, whereby hypotheses are deduced from a combination of the existing theory as presented in the critical literature review-Document 2 and the precedent qualitative research analysis and findings-Document 3 and these then guide the process of data collection so that they can be tested.

5.2 The Proposed Research Method

Surveys are a common approach to research in business and management. Surveys are concerned with the administration of questionnaires offering an opportunity to collect large quantities of data or evidence (Oppenheim, 1966) in a quick and convenient manner. In business and management research, questionnaires are often used to collect evidence concerning management opinions. The logic of a traditional survey is strictly positivistic. The evidence is frequently treated as though it were the result of measurements of a machine used in an entirely physical or life science environment. Standard statistical techniques used for ordinal numbers are increasingly applied with no recognition of the problems of the subjectivity of the opinions.

The main purpose of questionnaire research is to obtain information that cannot be easily observed or that is not already available in written or computerised form. Evidence from the questionnaire survey is then used for one or more of the following purposes – description, explanation, hypothesis testing. The types of information sought when surveying individuals or objects, such as firms, usually include evidence on demographic and socio-economic variables. In addition, depending on the study, evidence may be sought on opinions or beliefs related to behaviours, experiences, activities and attitudes. The philosophical attitude that underpins the use of a questionnaire for the purposes of evidence collection is that there exists a generalisable opinion that is available to be tested through the use of these sorts of questions. (Remenyi *et al*, 1998).

The questionnaire survey method is applied in the present study. the main research objectives-themes of this large scale, cross-sectional survey applied in a positivistic context are the following:

- a) critically investigating the current state and nature of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector in relation to the Quality and Business Management & Improvement fields,
- b) surveying the agro-coops' stakeholders' knowledge, perceptions and attitudes towards the ISO 9000 QMS' deployment requirements and business nature,
- c) examining the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders attitudes towards the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in relation to these stakeholders'

- perception of their agro-coop's current business status, financial position and managerial practices,
- d) evaluating the actual impact of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose on Greek agro-coops' business processes and corporate strategic development & improvement and consequently corporate performance, and finally
 - e) identify and evaluate the Key Business Factors/KBF – which may act as drivers and/or constraints – in relation to the Change Management field, that affect the effective implementation and efficient use of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

Moreover on theme 5, this study hypothesizes that: Greek agro-coops' Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management fields as well as knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and implementation and use requirements affect the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

In addition, the agro-coops' current business status, managerial practices and financial position in relation to the existing decision making process and corporate politics & power structure influence the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

Thus, the questionnaire survey aims at providing important findings and insights for further critical research on the business status and nature of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops sub-sector.

This research will be conducted in the forthcoming Document 5, which will be the Final thesis of the researcher's entire DBA project.

The data-gathering instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire composed of thirty-one questions (a copy of the questionnaire is reproduced in the Appendix 2).

Firstly, general information of the respondents and the companies (type of agro-coop, annual turnover, number of employees) is presented.

Following, the quantitative research questions covered five main areas-themes:

- 1) these corporations' stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions of as well as experiences and practices towards the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and role in relation to the Quality and Process management and improvement fields,

- 2) the stakeholders' level and depth of knowledge of and training the systems' implementation and use requirements and its business nature,
- 3) the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose interrelationship with the existing corporate politics, power structure and decision-making process,
- 4) the current business state of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek agro-coops in relation to their existing business status and practices.

Furthermore, one of the main aims is to examine the importance given to these issues by the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders and the extent to which these QMS are taken into account in the formulation of the overall business strategy.

Moreover, investigate the level of the stakeholders' awareness of this system's ability to contribute to the improvement of the overall business operations and processes and consequently corporate performance, by acknowledging its business role and property being used as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource.

It is an aim pervasive in all four themes, but the questions on it will be mainly held in the second area-theme.

Finally, theme 5 will offer a presentation, and critical investigation and evaluation of the KBF (including the ones already identified in the qualitative research stage in Document 3), required for the QMS being deployed effectively and efficiently in Greek agro-coops' sector, but the final thorough research, identification, analysis and critical evaluation of these KBF will be materialized in the Final thesis-Document 5 of the entire DBA research project.

6. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.1. Research Design

Document 4 – Quantitative / Positivistic Research

Large Scale, Cross - Sectional Survey / Structured Questionnaire

The structure of this review is based on a number of issues and themes arising from the two pillars of the entire DBA research: the Greek agro-coops and the Quality management - and more specifically the ISO 9000 QMS - concepts and fields, plus the inter-connected and inter-related sub-pillars of business process management & improvement and organizational change management.

The main parts-sections of the qualitative research document comprise the critical examination, analysis and evaluation of the following research topics-themes:

- Greek agro-coops' sector current business status, financial position, and corporate attitudes and practices' influence on/in ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in the sector's corporate entities.
- Quality and Business Process management and improvement concepts and fields' nature, inter-connection & inter-relationship with the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose.
- Key Stakeholders' knowledge and perception of the nature, requirements, reasons and results/effects of the ISO QMS' implementation and use in the Greek agro-coops sector.
- Corporate knowledge and acknowledgement of ISO 9000 QMS' importance in operating and being used as an organizational change and strategic development corporate resource/competence.
- Management of change field in relation to ISO 9000 QMS' development in the Greek agro-coops and the interrelated Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues.

Note: the interrelationship and interdependence as well as the influence each theme-concept exercises on another is obvious – e.g. process management & improvement and management of change, therefore analysis and critical evaluation of one concept's identified research elements and features may appear in the section referring to the

critical analysis and evaluation of another concept-theme's research findings, throughout this document review and/or the research process of the entire DBA project.

For this quantitative research project/survey study seven Greek Agro-coops were selected out of all three degrees of the Greek Agro-coops sub-sector. Their selection was based upon size, business location and product-business activities, their relevant importance in the agro-coops sub-sector, active business operations, their stakeholders' willingness to submit to a detailed questionnaire research process and permit publication of results and most importantly due to their key stakeholders' previous participation in the qualitative part of the entire DBA research project.

A listing of these Greek Agro-coops appears in the following Table.

TABLE

Second Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia SYN. P.E. / UACM
2. Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Lesvos SYN.P.E. / LESEL
3. ALMME. SYN. P.E.

Third Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. SYKIKI S.A.
2. S.KO.S. S.A.

First Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. Avia and Mikra Mantinea Agricultural Cooperative/Messinia
2. Dessyla Agricultural Cooperative/Messinia

The structured questionnaire questions were developed drawing upon the existing literature as it was critically evaluated in Document 2, the researcher's on-going working experience in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector and the findings of the previously materialized qualitative research. The researcher had a prepared list of issues to incorporate in the structured questionnaire. He used four sources for the topics to be included in an interview guide: the relevant literature; his own personal knowledge and professional experience on the area; the conceptual framework and findings of the already materialized qualitative research; and informal preliminary work such as unstructured discussions with people, who have personal experience on the research topic, such as quality consultants of external bodies and organisations.

The questionnaires were not required to be signed by the respondents, as it was considered an “unwelcome and dangerous” situation by the majority of the surveyed Agro-coops’ stakeholders; this fact will be presented and explained in the forthcoming ‘Method of Analysis’-6.2 section of the Document.

The overall questionnaire outline is reproduced in the Appendix 2.

The two first degree agro-coops were selected due to their active business presence in terms of standardizing and selling their products on their own rather than selling their members’ produce as raw material, as the majority of first degree agro-coops are doing. This research was practiced when investigating their Production foremen, who are considered and treated as having the professional status of a permanent employee (as happens in all Greek agro-coops) and their other permanent employees. The same tactic was followed with the employees and production foremen of the other agro-coops which were investigated during this research process.

A written company profile had been already requested from each organization and secondary source documents about each company were tried to be reviewed (annual reports, websites, recent business press articles) were tried to be reviewed, provided that such documents existed and the access to them was permitted to the researcher; in most of the cases it was not possible to review these documents for any of the two or even for both of the aforementioned reasons. This process was completed and presented in Document 3, which presented the process and results of the qualitative research part of the entire DBA project.

It is important to refer here, that the quantitative research process lasted from two to three days in each Agro-coop and it was a multi-site research, as the researcher visited all the required sites and relevant premises - i.e. offices, factory, laboratories, product quality inspection and assurance premises - in all the Agro-coops he researched.

The research was conducted from mid-May to mid-September, because the majority of the Greek agro-coops’ stakeholders - the researcher included - were not easily available during the research period, due to their heavy workload as a consequence of the new CAP work requirements concerning the farmers-producers’ subsidies’ activation and recording.

More specifically, the quantitative research study analysis comprise five major sections and five research variables are shown as the variables-determinants of the ISO 9000 QMS' adopted and experienced practice in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector by the researched agro-coops' main stakeholders' group, that is: their employees and production foremen, consisting one homogeneous group:

1. Quality and Process Management & Improvement fields' knowledge (QPKNI).
 2. Greek Agro-coops' and ISO 9000 QMS' business status and interrelationship (BSI).
 3. ISO 9000 QMS' development reasons, requirements and results (IURRR).
 4. ISO 9000 QMS and corporate strategic development (STRCH).
 5. Change Management Key Business Factors-Corporate politics (CHKBF).
- Section 1 investigates the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' knowledge and attitudes towards the Quality and Process Management issues and their perceived interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS / QPKNIR.
 - Section 2 tries to identify the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and interrelationship with the current Agro-coops' business status, financial position and management practices as perceived and practiced by all the Greek agro-coops (key) stakeholders / BSIR.
 - Section 3 explores the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders' knowledge of the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and its implementation process and use purpose's reasons, requirements and results as perceived, practiced and experienced by all the Greek agro-coops stakeholders / IURRR.
 - Section 4 aims to discover whether the ISO 9000 QMS is used in Greek Agro-coops as a strategic corporate resource for achieving organisational change and corporate strategic development through business processes and consequently organisational performance improvement and the existing relationship between quality management strategy and overall corporate strategy / STRCH.
 - Section 5 acts as the concluding part of the analysis aiming at identifying and evaluating all the Key Business Factors, which emanate from the Management of Change field in relation to ISO 9000 QMS' development in the Greek agro-coops and the interrelated Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues,

as well as Decision – making process influencing the implementation process and use purpose of the ISO 9000 – QMS in the Greek Agro-coops’ sub-sector, acting as Drivers and/or Constraints for the effective implementation and efficient use of this QMS / KBF.

i.e.: Corporate attitudes and practices concerning all the above sections-themes’ issues as well as the following issues: organization and business activities of Quality Management unit/department, the Decision Making Process concerning Quality management issues, the existence of a Quality management strategy and its relationship with and contribution to the overall business strategy and the aims of the key stakeholders concerning the future development of ISO 9000 in Greek agro-coops.

6.2. Method of Analysis of the Open-End Questions

To analyse the open-end questions transcripts of this quantitative research questionnaire, the researcher adopted and used the method of analysis that is referred to as coding and which is broadly used in analyzing qualitative research data. Coding is analysis of your research data and at the same time it is an attempt to interpret it very broadly.

For in qualitative research analysis, the goal is to begin to focus on the potential meanings of your data. For the qualitative research purposes it is not the words themselves but their meaning that matters. As a matter of fact qualitative coding entails the three basic processes of noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena and analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994): “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to chunks of varying size - words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one (e.g. a metaphor).”

The proposed method of creating codes in this study is that of creating a provisional ‘start list’ of codes prior to fieldwork. That list comes from the quantitative research

conceptual framework, the list of research questions and the preliminary work the researcher has done in relation to this quantitative research study.

The start list contains the above five elements and the process was to take a fair number of answers from the stakeholders of the agro-coops under research, trying to identify the narratives identified in their answers to the open-end questions relevant to these five elements.

The researcher chose to include open-end questions in the quantitative research questionnaire hoping that this fact would generate to the researched sample a positive attitude and stance against the research in process and thus the researched would avoid to either refuse to participate or give false, partial and misleading answers which would have no validity and reliability.

As a matter of fact, in that way the researched sample were more eager to participate in a research based on a structured questionnaire large scale survey, having a few both open-end questions and a scheduled list of structured questions, of which they were aware by communicating them the broad aims of the research and by assuring them that they could refuse to answer any question that would seem to them dangerous and/or peculiar.

This process in itself was interesting and may be more valid and reliable and the offered answers by the respondents were more consistent, as it is evident by the research analysis, where different questions, but indirectly similar in nature and essence, which are included in different research topics-themes, are answered in a way that proves consistency and correlation between these answers, for the researched felt free to speak on the research questionnaire themes openly as their majority admitted to the researcher. To be more specific on the research reliability and validity issues, the proceeding presentation of theory on these two issues is in accordance and guided the chosen and adopted by the researcher aforementioned method of managing the research process in relevance to these two issues.

6.2.1. Reliability and Validity of Research

The use of indicators and tests raises issues of reliability and validity. Reliability is the degree to which the indicator or test is a consistent measure over time, or simply, will the respondent give the same response if asked to give an answer at a different time. The importance of accurately measuring an indicator is that it will allow for the detection of differences, or variance, between different groups of cases. It is inevitable that the data collected in a measurement tool, or indicator, will consist of the true measure plus an error measure. The reliability of a measure is measured by consistency in response and the limitation of the error measure. It is not possible to totally eliminate error. Reliability is an important issue as a large error or unreliability will impact on the analysis of relationships between the variables.

“When a measure has low reliability, some of the differences in scores between people which it produces are spurious differences, not real differences” (Punch, 1998:100).

The only way of assessing the reliability of the measurement tool or question is the test-retest method where the respondent is asked the same question at different intervals.

Correlation techniques can then be used to assess the consistency in the answers given. A correlation coefficient of 0.8 or higher is taken as an indication that the question is reliable (de Vaus, 1996:55). The difficulties with the test-retest method are that it is often not practical to ask the questions to the same sample on two or more occasions and respondents may remember their previous response. The test-retest can then become a measure of respondent’s memory and not reliability of the measurement tool. Reliability can be improved by the careful construction and piloting of the questions, making use of existing questions from reputable surveys.

Validity refers to the degree to which a measuring instrument actually measures and describes the concept it was designed to. Validity is a more complex issue to understand as it is separated into a number of sub-divisions such as face validity; concurrent validity; predictive validity; Construct validity; and convergent validity.

Here the term is being used for what was referred to as measurement or construct validity. Logical tests were performed through the initial use of the pilot test in order to ensure questionnaire’s internal consistency and questions were electronically edited to avoid possible bias due to the human factor or other external sources.

The next part of this document offers the evaluation of the respondents' answers in the structured questionnaire questions, in terms of these five major themes - questions and their connection with the existing literature.

6.3 Respondents Profile

The sample comprises of the employees and production foremen (as they are called) of the seven Greek agro-coops, that participated in the qualitative research undertaken in the previous stage of the entire DBA research process/project.

For this research project/study seven Greek Agro-coops were selected out of all the three degrees of the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector. their selection was based upon their previous participation in the qualitative research process, size, business location and product-business activities, their relevant importance in the agro-coops' sub-sector, active business operations, willingness of their main group of stakeholders - employees and production foremen - to submit to the structured questionnaire research process and permit publication of results.

Furthermore, the researcher gave the questionnaires to the sample population in person and spent two to three days in each agro-coop location for requesting and achieving the completion of the questionnaire by the respondents. According to the researcher's opinion, this is the one of the two main reasons that the questionnaire was completed in its totality and returned by 300 respondents out of the 495, which is the total number of the sample population. This number represents a response rate of 62.42% approximately.

The other reason for achieving such a high response rate is the fact that, the interviewees considered the research as serving their interests by aiming at identifying the reasons for the mismanagement and use of any management system (the ISO 9000 QMS included) used in their agro-coop, therefore they adopted it and responded in such a high number. These Greek Agro-coops appears in the following Table.

Second Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia SYN. P.E. / UACM
2. Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Lesvos SYN.P.E. / LESEL

Third Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. SYKIKI S.A.
2. S.KO.S. S.A.
3. ALMME. SYN. P.E.

First Degree Greek Agro-coops

1. Avia and Mikra Mantinea Agricultural Cooperative/Messinia
2. Dessyla Agricultural Cooperative/Messinia

The structured questionnaire was developed drawing upon the existing literature as it was critically evaluated in Document 2, the researcher's on-going working experience in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector and the interview questions and most importantly the findings of the qualitative research undertaken in the previous stage of the entire DBA research project and presented in Document 3.

The researcher had a prepared list of issues to use during the questionnaire construction. He used four sources for the topics to be included in a pilot questionnaire: the relevant literature; his own personal knowledge and professional experience on the area; the findings and research themes of the qualitative research already undertaken; and informal preliminary work such as unstructured discussions with people who have personal experience on the research topic, and use and testing of the pilot structured questionnaire with quality consultants of external bodies and organisations and production managers of the researched and other agro-coops.

Concerning their number of employees and production foremen, it is found that the vast majority of the sample consist large agro-coops. More specifically, UACM employees 142 employees and production foremen, LESEL 133 , ALMME 116, SYKIKI 49 and SKOS 39, all in total 476 employees and production foremen, who with their counterparts employed in the two first degree agro-coops under research represent a research population of 495 individuals.

The employees' number in the two 1st degree agro-coops is as follows: AVIA has 12 and Dessyla 7 production employees and foremen.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS: 1 and 2

In Question 1 all the sample respondents, that is 300 employees – 100%, answered they are aware and familiar with the ISO 9000 QMS and they all also answered their agro-coop is registered under the ISO 9000 QMS.

Moreover, the 85% of them, that is 254 employees and production foremen stated aware and partly familiar with the HACCP system, since as they said their agro-coop is already and/or in the process to register under the aforementioned system.

Concerning the ISO 14000 QMS one third of the respondents - 102 out of 300 - are partly aware of the system - “Yes, I have heard something, but I don’t really know it”, was the median answer - , while all of the respondents admitted not being aware of any other Quality Management System, like the: ISO 22000 QMS, OHSAS, BRC etc.

Initially the researcher thinks that, these answers is a fair indication of the sample respondents and respondents’ business ignorance on the Quality Management concept and field, but a more precise evaluation of the status of their knowledge on the aforementioned issue will be investigated and evaluated by the subsequent research questions in Part A of the Quantitative research questionnaire, which follows.

6.4 The Agro-Coops’ Stakeholders’ Knowledge of and Training on the Quality and Process Management & Improvement Fields and their Perceived Interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS

The researcher uses the SPSS programme - version 14.00 - for producing the required statistical tables in order to critically analyze and evaluate the statistical closeness of the respondents’ answers’ ratings.

More specifically, he uses the ANOVA test for producing the statistical tables, which are then tested by the Duncan sub-test for examining the respondents’ answers’ ratings of each question and/or group of questions, in terms of their statistical closeness, that is of them being statistically aligned.

Furthermore, with the use of this programme, he mainly aims at checking the validity and consistency of the respondents’ answers by critically comparing the responses’

ratings offered in relevant and interrelated research questions. This is accomplished through the critical examination of the statistical closeness of the ratings of the respondents' answers, offered in these different but interrelated research questions.

The researcher classifies-groups all the dichotomous (YES-NO) questions of each main theme – part of the quantitative research questionnaire, into groups of questions, these been:

Group1/PART A: Questions 3, 4, 4a, and 5.

Group2/PART B: Sub-group I: 7, 8 and Sub-group II: 13, 14, 15.

Group3 / PART C: Questions 21, 23 and PART D: Question 25.

Group4/PART D: Questions 28, 29, 30.

As previously presented, he uses the ANOVA test for creating the statistical tables of the respondents' answers in each question included in the relevant group of questions. Then through the appliance of the Duncan test, he investigates and evaluates the statistical closeness amongst the research questions included in this group of questions, aiming at producing insights by analysing and evaluating this statistical closeness among these questions.

For any other question included in the questionnaire, being a “separate” one - that is not being a dichotomous one, but one having n options, each one option of which is offered to each research respondent as a possible answer - the same statistical analysis process (ANOVA test and consequently Duncan test of the produced statistical table) is followed, for critically investigating the statistical closeness amongst the answer options of each of the following questions:

Question 9, Question 10, Question 11, Question 12, Question 16, Question 17, Question 18, Question 19, Question 20, Question 22, Question 24, Question 26, Question 27, aiming at producing insights by analysing the statistical closeness among the answer options of each such question.

Group 1 / PART A – QUESTIONS: 3, 4, 5 and 4a

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	37,683	3	12,561	74,364	,000
within Groups	202,017	1196	,169		
Total	239,699	1199			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
2,00 / Q4	300	,0700			
3,00 / Q5	300		,1700		
1,00 / Q3	300			,3233	
4,00 / Q4a	300				,5400
Sig.		1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

Almost one out of three (32.33% - 97 positive answers in Question 3) of the respondents reported that they have some kind of knowledge of and information on the Quality and Process management & improvement fields. Only 21 respondents, this represents the 7%, have received any training course on the aforementioned fields (Question 4). Therefore, it is not surprising that only the 17%, that is only 51 out of the 300 respondents that completed the questionnaire, acknowledge the existence of an interrelationship between the Quality and Process management & improvement fields and the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose (Question 5). Furthermore, they specify this relationship as follows (Question 6): "It is evident that these are interconnected, since the quality and process concepts and issues are incorporated in the ISO 9000 QMS, aiming at the standardization and improvement of the corporate operations". It is an indication that, at least the respondents having Knowledge and Training (Question 3) on the aforementioned issues adopt the most important feature of this interrelationship, as theory suggests (Oakland, 2001 and

Arvanitoyiannis, 2002) and other researches' findings prove (Quality Forums 1997, 1998, 1999).

In contrast to the aforementioned questions' responses and analysis, a vast majority of the respondents, that is 162 out of the 300 - the 54% of the sample -, consider knowledge and training, on these two fields as necessary and required (Question 4), because as the majority stated: "You have first to know something, for developing it properly, when they ask you so later on". It is an indication, that the majority (54%) of the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' main group adopts the notion-concept of the necessity of knowledge and training for achieving "professionalism" in their jobs.

A belief very close to the statements of Papageorgiou et al. (1997), concerning the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders' groups' lack of knowledge and training on business issues and management systems.

There does not exist any statistical relationship-correlation between the answers concerning the questions of theme 1-Part A, as these two statistical tables show.

Nevertheless, through the analysis of the answers' statistics to each relative question and the answers' analysis of the open-end question 6, there seems to exist a logical sequence in the respondents' replies and the consequent produced statistics, for they represent the agro-coops' main group of stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards the aforementioned issues, being based on their current experience on the issues.

6.5 The Agro-Coops' Stakeholders' Knowledge of and Training on the ISO 9000 QMS' Business Nature and its Perceived and Practiced Interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS' Implementation Process and Use Purpose

Group 2 / PART B – QUESTIONS: 7, 8, 13, 14, 15

ANOVA

VAR00004

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	53,340	4	13,335	68,213	,000
within Groups	292,260	1495	,195		
Total	345,600	1499			

VAR00004

Duncan

VAR00003	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
5,00 / Q15	300	,1367			
3,00 / Q13	300		,2500		
4,00 / Q14	300			,3467	
1,00 / Q7	300			,3667	
2,00 / Q8	300				,7000
Sig.		1,000	1,000	,580	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

Two sub-groups of questions are created in terms of the quantitative research main aims - parts / themes. The one sub-group consisted by the questions 7 and 8 dealing with the stakeholders' knowledge of and training on the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and implementation and use requirements.

The other sub-group consists from Questions 13,14 and 15 which all refer to and investigate the concept and issue of the agro-coops' stakeholders' perception and use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource, a main research issue of Part B of this research study.

Almost, only 37% of the sample respondents, that is 110 out of the 300 employees, who in their vast majority represent the employees and foremen of the production department, admit having been informed and trained on the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and implementation and use requirements (Question 7). This is a low index of stakeholders' having knowledge and training on the system's business nature and provisions, although as theory suggests (Oakland, 2001; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001) this is considered a prerequisite for any company achieving the proper deployment of the system.

In fact, all the respondents seem to have and express indirectly the same opinion on these aforementioned issue, since in Question 8 (asking them on their belief on this necessity) they - the 70% / 210 employees and foremen out of 300 - overwhelmingly respond that, they too consider information and training on the system's implementation and use processes requirements, as a prerequisite for a company achieving the optimum out of the system's introduction and development. As a result of this analysis and in accordance with the previous statistical table, there does not seem to exist any statistical correlation between the answers of Questions 8 and 9.

In specifying the reason they are not informed and not trained (open-end Question 7a) and in relation to the department in which they are employed (Question 7), the vast majority claimed that the top management does not consider their department employees having undertaken such information and training necessary, besides for the employees and foremen of the production department. In continuation, they stated that, there does not exist an organized and staffed Quality management department in their agro-coop. only in LESEL and ALMME such a department exists and operates "fair well, but not as it could and should", as LESEL and ALMME employees said.

The above mentioned respondents' answers' analysis becomes more evident with the following analysis of Question 9, where the respondents have been asked to state the most important difference (if any) between ISO 9000:1994 and ISO 9000:2000 QMS.

QUESTION 9

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	96,887	4	24,222	242,953	,000
within Groups	149,047	1495	,100		
Total	245,933	1499			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
5,00	300	,0067			
2,00	300		,0736		
3,00	300		,1033	,1033	
4,00	300			,1467	
1,00	300				,6697
Sig.		1,000	,196	,093	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

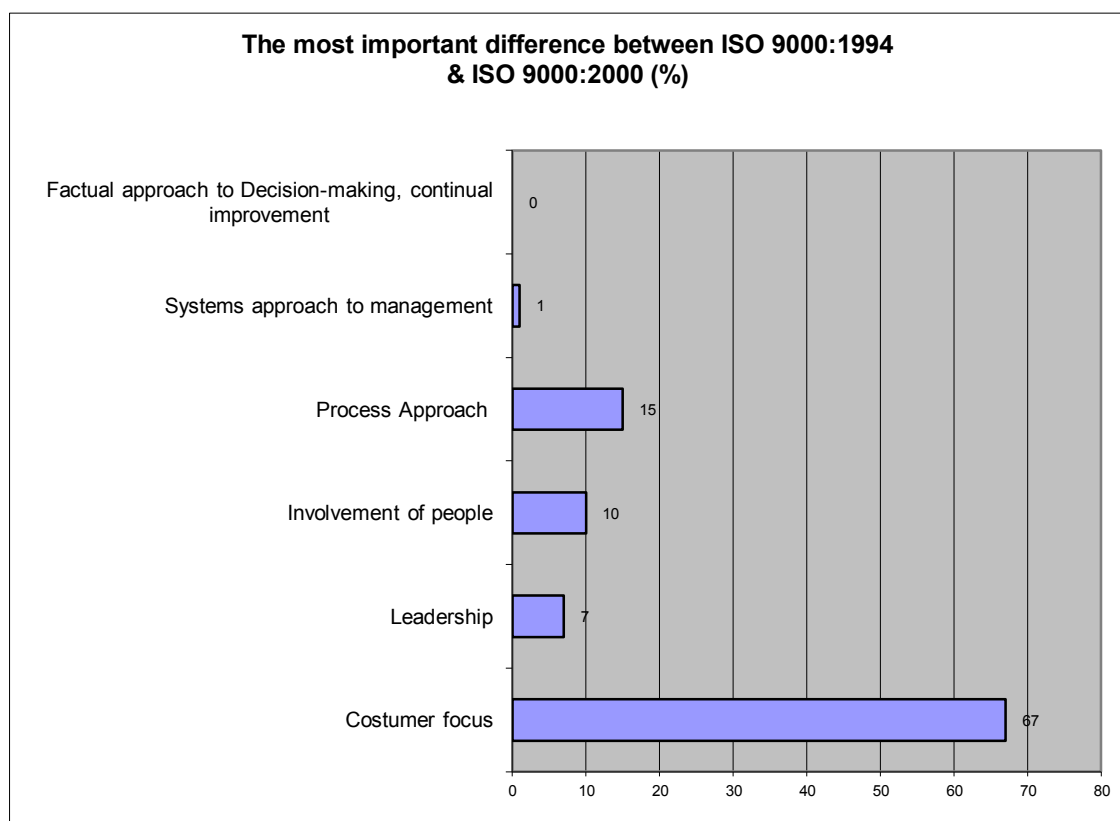


Figure 1

From this figure, it becomes clear that the 67%-201 out of the researched 300 people have claimed that, the most important difference between the two ISO 9000 QMS’ versions is that the “new” one is more customers’ focused.

Moreover the 15% of the respondents consider as the most important difference the Process approach, a statistical number that seems in medium correlation with the number of the researched employees and production foremen claiming that, they have been informed and trained on the Quality and Process management & improvement fields (Question 4) - only 21 people / 7% -, while 110 respondents, that is the 37%, stated that, they have been informed and trained on the ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature, and its implementation and use requirements (Questions 7 and 7a).

the 10% and the 7% of the respondents think as the most important difference: Involvement of people and Leadership respectively, while a negligible number of two respondents consider the Systems approach to management as the major difference between the two ISO 9000 QMS’ versions. Moreover, 11 respondents – 3.3% requested to name two options as the most important difference and they chosen as their second option – equal to their first option, the Continuous improvement of the system.

All the aforementioned answers of Question 9 are statistically fairly correlated and in consistency with the answers given in Questions 4 and 7 concerning the researched Stakeholders’ level and depth of Knowledge of and Training on the respective issues of Quality & Process management and ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and implementation and use requirements.

ii)Reasons – Results/Benefits and Problems of ISO 9000 QMS’ development

Concerning the main reason an agro-coop has to introduce and develop the ISO 9000 QMS, the most important benefit of the system’s implementation and use and the main problem encountered during the system’s development, the sample respondents seem to agree with theory and research findings as presented by many authors on quality issues - e.g. Oakland (2001), Tricker R. & Sherring-Loukas B. (2001), Arvanitoyiannis I. et al. (2000), Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002) – and in the Quality Forums of 1997, 1998, 1999 (see relevant section/Appendix in Document 2 – Critical Literature Review).

QUESTION 10

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	26,333	4	6,583	46,063	,000
within Groups	213,667	1495	,143		
Total	240,000	1499			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
4,00	300	,0167			
5,00	300		,1233		
2,00	300		,1633		
1,00	300			,3100	
3,00	300				,3867
Sig.		1,000	,195	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

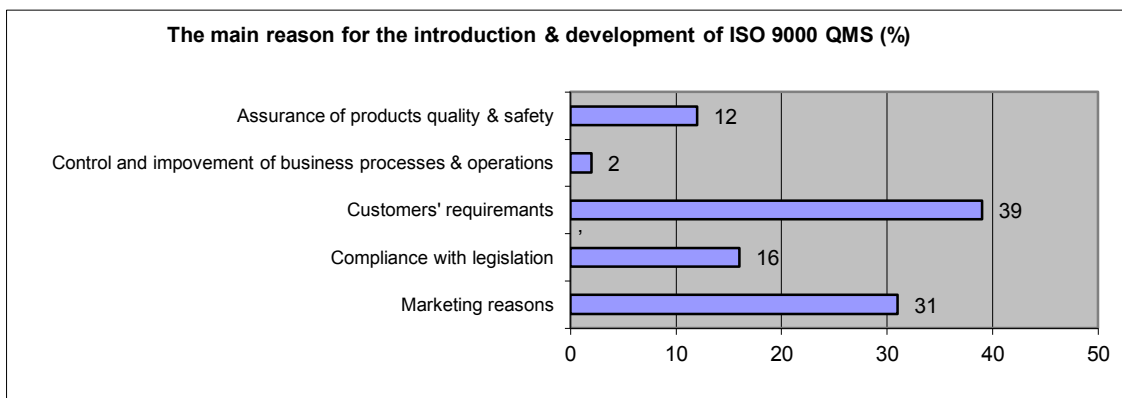


Figure 2

More specifically, the 39% and the 31% of the respondents consider respectively the customers' requirements and marketing reasons as the most important factor for the system's introduction and deployment in their agro-coop.

On the other hand, 16% and 13% of the respondents - numbers that are statistically correlated - believe that compliance with legislation and assurance of products quality and safety are respectively the most important reason.

Only 5 respondents out of the 300 – approximately 2% stated as the main reason the control and improvement of business processes and operations. This percentage has to and will be compared with and evaluated against the relevant questions 23 of Part C and 25 of Part D on the Greek Agro-coops' Stakeholders' Perception and Use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource.

QUESTION 11

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	71,913	4	17,978	154,451	,000
within Groups	174,020	1495	,116		
Total	245,933	1499			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
5,00	300	,0133		
1,00	300		,1100	
2,00	300		,1100	
4,00	300		,1667	
3,00	300			,6033
Sig.		1,000	,054	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

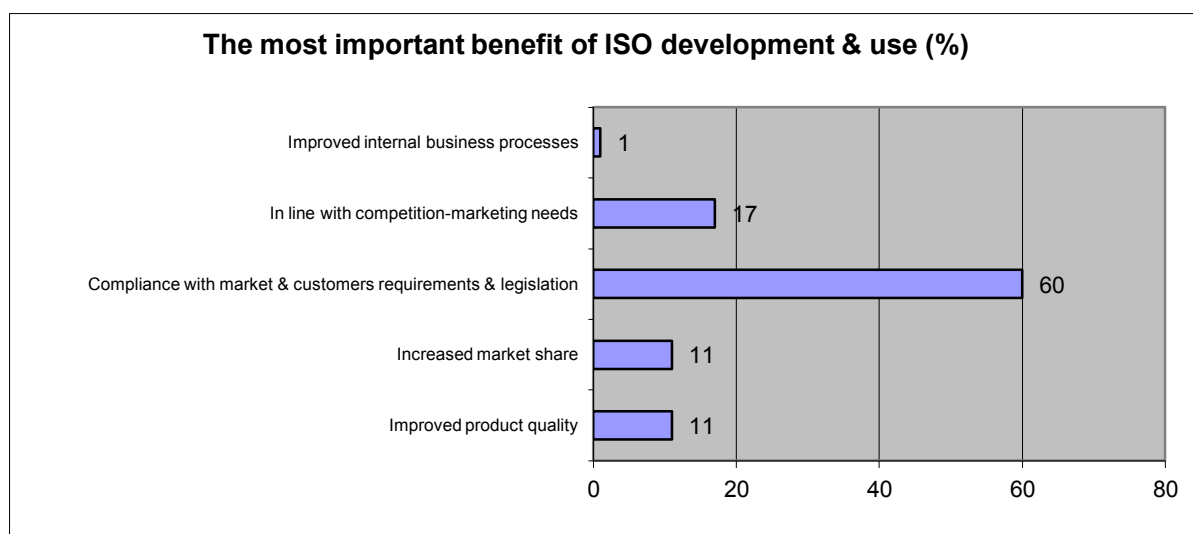


Figure 3

In reference to the question concerning the most important benefit gained by the implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS in their agro-coop the researched sample answered as follows:

The 60% - 180 respondents consider as the most important one: Compliance with market and customer requirements, and legislation. Furthermore, another 17% of the respondents rate as most important benefit: to better serve the marketing needs of the agro-coop by being in line with the competition.

These two statistical results, if accumulated, are strongly correlated and in consistency in statistical terms with the rates offered in the previous Question 10, where the 39% and the 31% of the respondents consider respectively the customers' requirements and marketing reasons, as the most important factor for the system's introduction and

deployment in their agro-coop, while compliance with legislation accounted for another 16%.

Improved product quality and increased market share are two options both rated 11% by the respondents, in fact very close to the number of respondents choosing to select the option: in line with the competition-marketing needs. Therefore, these three options are considered of being strongly correlated as the statistical table shows and since they have been chosen by 33 respondents the two former ones and by 50 respondents the latter one.

A negligible 1.33% - only 4 respondents consider as main benefit of the system's implementation and use the improvement of the internal business processes. It is a statistical rate very close/in strong correlation and in consistency to the one identified in Question 10 – option 4: Control and improvement of business processes and operations being the main reason of the system's introduction and development.

QUESTION 12

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	44,693	4	11,173	85,528	,000
within Groups	195,307	1495	,131		
Total	240,000	1499			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
1,00	300	,0233		
3,00	300		,1233	
5,00	300		,1567	
4,00	300		,1667	
2,00	300			,5300
Sig.		1,000	,167	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

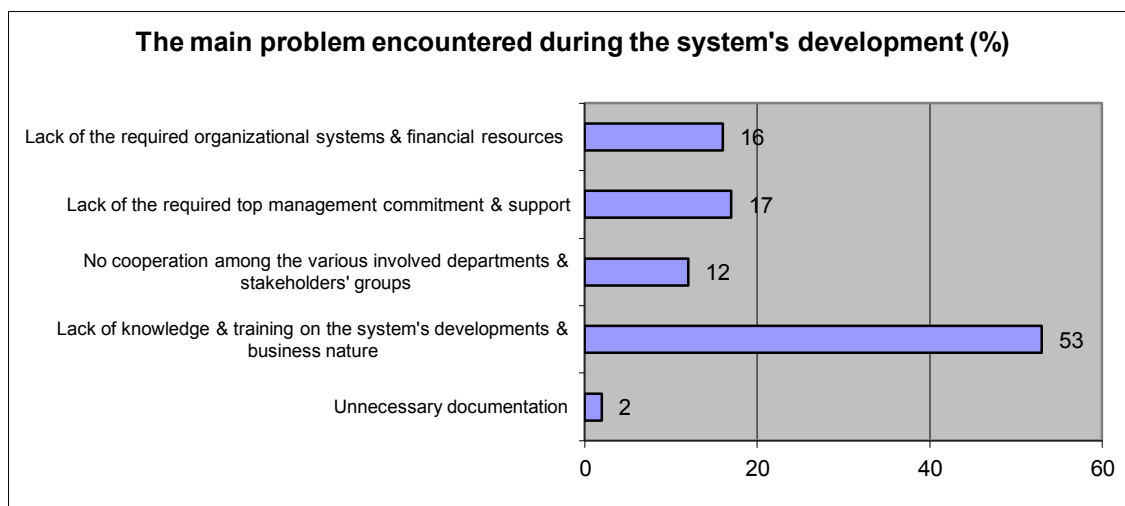


Figure 4

The 53% of the sample responded that, lack of knowledge and training of the system's development requirements is the most important problem encountered during the system's implementation and use in their agro-coop.

Statistically-wise this number is highly correlated and in consistency with the answers offered in the Questions 7 and 8 and 8a of Part B (see pages 43-44) and 4a of Part A (see pages 40-41), where the 63% of the respondents answered that knowledge of and training on the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and implementation and use requirement is considered necessary for a company achieving the effective implementation and efficient use of the system.

Furthermore, the 17%, 16% and 12% approximately replied that the main problem encountered during the system's deployment is: i) No existence of the required top management commitment and support, ii) No existence of the required organizational systems and financial resources, and iii) No cooperation among the various departments and stakeholders involved in the system's deployment.

These three answers are correlated and in consistency with the answers given by the respondents, when they specified the reason they are not informed and not trained (open-end Question 7a) and in relation to the department in which they are employed (Question 7), the vast majority claimed that the top management does not consider such information and training necessary, besides for the employees and foremen of the production department. In continuation, they stated that, there does not exist an organized and staffed Quality management department in their agro-coop.

QUESTION 16

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	170,460	3	56,820	1245,998	,000
within Groups	54,540	1196	,046		
Total	225,000	1199			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
4,00	300	,0000		
2,00	300	,0100		
3,00	300		,0900	
1,00	300			,9000
Sig.		,566	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

In consistency and correlation to the aforementioned analysis, the 90% of the researched stakeholders answered that the Quality manager of their agro-coop is the key stakeholder, being responsible for the daily activities concerning the ISO 9000 QMS development.

Only 9% and 1% of the respondents mentioned the Quality department staff and the Quality council/team respectively, a statement in accordance to the previous answer that only in LESEL Union of agro-coops operates a Quality management and assurance department, which is organized and staffed promptly.

Group 2 / PART B – QUESTIONS: 7, 8, 13, 14, 15

ANOVA

VAR00004

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	53,340	4	13,335	68,213	,000
within Groups	292,260	1495	,195		
Total	345,600	1499			

VAR00004

Duncan

VAR00003	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
5,00 / Q15	300	,1367			
3,00 / Q13	300		,2500		
4,00 / Q14	300			,3467	
1,00 / Q7	300			,3667	
2,00 / Q8	300				,7000
Sig.		1,000	1,000	,580	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

Two sub-groups of questions are created in terms of the quantitative research main aims - parts / themes. The one sub-group consisted by the questions 7 and 8 dealing with the stakeholders’ knowledge of and training on the ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and implementation and use requirements.

The other sub-group consists from Questions 13,14 and 15, which all refer to and investigate the concept and issue of the agro-coops’ stakeholders’ perception and use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource, a main research issue of Part B of this research study.

More particularly, in Question 13 the 25% of the respondents replied their agro-coop and its (key) stakeholders’ groups consider the ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource. In contrast to that

percentage in the next Question 14, a surplus of 10% - in total the 35% - replied that their agro-coop and its (key) stakeholders' groups should consider the ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource. This difference is further verified by the percentage of positive answers - being approximately 15% - in Question 15, where only the 15% of the respondents admitted the existence of quality policy, strategy and communication program in their agro-coop, which are incorporated in the overall corporate strategic plan.

The answers of all three questions verify the low rate of the agro-coops' (key) stakeholders' groups' perception and use in practice of the ISO 9000 QMS, as a corporate resource-competence for their agro-coop achieving organizational change and strategic development. It is an indicative finding in correlation with the outcome of Question 16, where only the 10% of the respondents acknowledged the existence of a well organized and staffed Quality management and assurance department.

Moreover, it is in statistical correlation and in consistency with the responses' ratings of Question 4, where only 7% of the respondents admitted having undertaken any training course on the Quality and Process management and improvement fields and issues.

Furthermore, it is in accordance with the theory statements concerning the agro-coops' business practice and as presented by Parnell (2000), as well as the Greek agro-coops as Arvanitoyiannis (2001) and Papageorgiou et al (1997) state.

On the other hand, this identified attitude of the researched agro-coops' (key) stakeholders is in contrast with the research findings of Kassinides (1997) as presented in this years' quality forum held in Athens, where more private companies are using the system in such a strategic manner (Document 2 – Appendix 2).

Moreover, as the agro-coops' stakeholders stated in Question 14a, they consider by a percentage of 77% as responsible for the non-use of the system as a strategic change and development corporate resource: the Board of Directors' members and especially the President, and the Managing Director, who adopted decision making process which restricts innovation, participation of the employees and cooperation amongst the different departments and stakeholders' groups.

On the other hand, another 20% approximately consider as responsible the “old bad business behaviours and practices” experienced in their agro-coop, which in practice is very close to the preceding view.

In replying the Question 14b, a majority of 95% believe that if the system was used as a strategic corporate resource, then the agro-coops would enjoy improved business operations and enhanced market presence, while the other 5% believe that the agro-coops would be able to enjoy improved business processes, operations and practices and consequently possibly improved organizational performance.

It is a response rate statistically correlated and in consistence with the response rates offered in Question 10-main reason of ISO introduction and development and in Question 11-main benefit enjoyed by the system’s implementation and use.

6.6. Corporate Politics, Power Structure and Decision Making Process and their Interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS’ Implementation Process and Use Purpose

Concerning the corporate politics, power structure and decision making process as practiced in the agro-coops and experienced by their stakeholders the following set of Questions from 17 – 23 and their critical analysis will try to offer an indicative insight on these research issues.

QUESTION 17

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	96,809	3	32,270	299,904	,000
within Groups	128,690	1196	,108		
Total	225,499	1199			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
2,00	300	,0000		
1,00 / Q17	300	,0367		
3,00	300		,2533	
4,00	300			,7133
Sig.		,171	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

Concerning the ISO 9000 QMS strategic and operational development, the 71% rate the Board of Directors and especially the President as being the key decision making group. only the 25% consider the Managing Director as “being in charge”, while a negligible 4% state that the Quality Manager and the Production foremen are the responsible stakeholders for this business operation.

On the other hand, as it is identified in the Question 18 answers, only the 40% state that the Board of Directors and the President should be responsible for the strategic and

operational development of ISO 9000 QMS. In relation to this outcome the 32% and the 26% of the respondents state that, the Managing Director and the Quality manager in cooperation with the Production foremen respectively should be the responsible stakeholders for this business function.

The discrepancy between the two questions rates will be more investigated and critically evaluated in the forthcoming Questions statistical analysis presentation.

QUESTION 18

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	77,233	3	25,744	162,539	,000
within Groups	189,433	1196	,158		
Total	266,667	1199			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
2,00	300	,0267		
1,00	300		,2567	
3,00	300		,3200	
4,00	300			,3966
Sig.		1,000	,052	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

The next two questions: 19 and 20, try to identify the agro-coops' key decision making group on the issue of their business strategic and operational development, as it is currently practiced and as it should be according to the sample respondents' opinion.

QUESTION 19

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	119,847	2	59,923	670,605	,000
within Groups	80,153	897	,089		
Total	200,000	899			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
3,00	300	,0100		
1,00	300		,1467	
2,00	300			,8433
Sig.		1,000	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

Firstly in Question 19, the 84% responded that the Board of Directors and the President are the key decision making group on any issue referring to the strategic and operational development and business practice of their agro-coop. Only the 15% acknowledged such a role to their agro-coop’s Managing Director. A negligible 1% stated that the top management team asserts this role.

On the other hand in Question 20, and in contrast to the previous Question 19 answers’ ratings, the 48% of the respondents claim that the Managing Director is the most suitable key stakeholder for managing the aforementioned business issues, while the 34% assign such a role to the Board of Directors’ members and the President. Another 14% believes that the top management team/the relevant manager in cooperation with the Managing Director should manage these managerial themes, especially the operational ones, as they stated.

It is noteworthy, that all the sample respondents made a distinction between the corporate operational and the strategic issues in both questions 19 and 20.

As far as the operational issues are concerned, the 73% stated that the most suitable group is the Managing Director with the cooperation of the relevant manager and/or the top management team, while the 37% requires the cooperation of the MD, the President of the BoDs and the relevant on the business issue Manager.

In terms of the strategic issues, the 55% requires the cooperation of the MD and the President of the BoDs, while the rest 45% of the respondents state as more appropriate and productive the cooperation of the MD, the President of the BoDs, the top management team and the relevant on the business issue Manager.

QUESTION 20

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	17,882	2	8,941	44,887	,000
within Groups	178,673	897	,199		
Total	196,556	899			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
3,00	300	,1400		
2,00	300		,3433	
1,00	300			,4833
Sig.		1,000	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

QUESTION 22

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	84,896	5	16,979	180,858	,000
within Groups	168,423	1794	,094		
Total	253,319	1799			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
1,00	300	,0100			
2,00	300	,0267			
3,00	300	,0333			
4,00	300		,0867		
5,00	300			,2100	
6,00	300				,6333
Sig.		,804	1,000	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

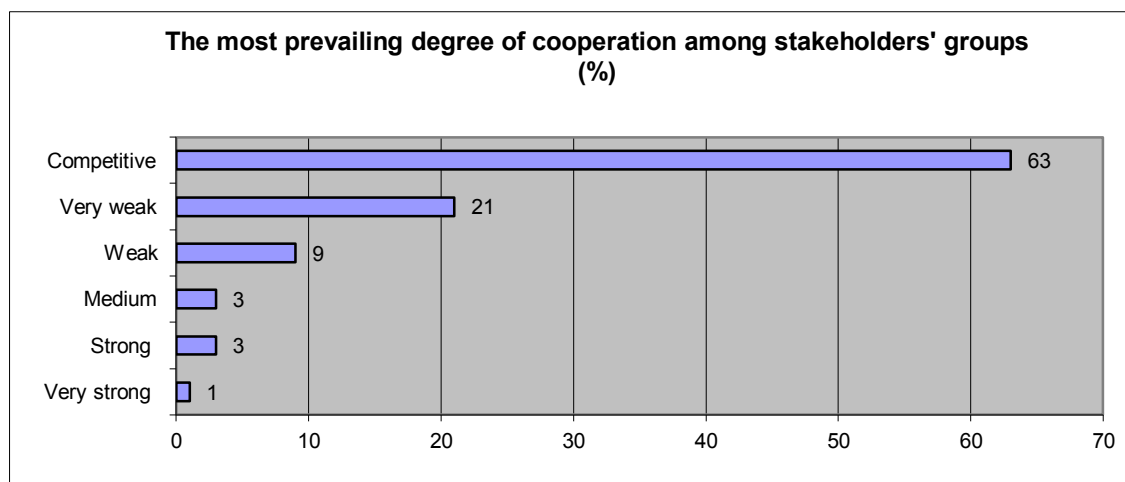


Figure 5

In continuation and in correlation and consistency with the analysis of the respondents' answers in the previous questions 19 and 20, 190 out of the agro-coops stakeholders – quantitative research respondents, that is a rate of 63%, rate the degree of existing

cooperation among the different agro-coops' stakeholders' groups as being characterized by rivalry and power competitiveness. Moreover, the 21% considers the level of business cooperation of the corporate groups as very weak/very low, while the 9% rates it as weak/low.

It is important to note here, that this cooperation level is rated all together as medium, strong and very strong degree only by the 8% of the total sample respondents. In fact a very low rating, which represents the prevailing internal business situation of and in the Greek agro-coops, where different stakeholders' groups represent and pursue differing business interests and aims and where internal corporate competition is the norm instead of cooperation. A fact very close to theory statements as Papageorgiou et al (1997) present and as it was presented and analyzed in Document 2 – Critical Literature Review, in the relevant section concerning the Greek agro-coops.

Furthermore, this analysis will be compared with the research questions presented and analyzed in Part D and Part E of this study, as well as in the forthcoming Group D of questions.

Group 3 – PART C: QUESTIONS: 21 and 23 and PART D: QUESTION 25

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	79,416	2	39,708	287,689	,000
within Groups	123,807	897	,138		
Total	203,222	899			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
2,00 / Q23	300	,0833		
3,00 / Q25	300		,1900	
1,00 / Q21	300			,7600
Sig.		1,000	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

In Question 21 the sample participants were asked if the actual decision making group on the four aforementioned issues (Questions: 17-20), as identified by their answers, is considered and held accountable on its decisions on each issue.

The 76%, that is 228 employees out of the total 300, answered negatively. This rate is in statistical correlation and consistency business-wise, with the stakeholders' expressed views on the precedent questions 17-20.

In statistical correlation and in consistence business-wise to the answers offered in the other Questions of Part C of the quantitative research questionnaire, in Question 23, as presented in the relevant statistical table the 91.67% of the respondents claim that the Corporate politics, power and stakeholders' relations structure and the decision making process, as experienced by them, affect negatively the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the aforementioned business environment.

More specifically, a strong correlation and consistence degree is also observed between Question 23 and Question 22, where the respondents were called to rate the prevailing degree of co-operation amongst the various stakeholders' groups in their agro-coop and by far, indeed the 84%, answered that the prevailing norm is Competitive-rivalry (the 63%) and very weak (21%).

Furthermore, only the 19% - that is 57 out of 300 employees - of the sample respondents believe and replied in Question 25, that their agro-coops' current business status and practices as well as their financial position have a positive impact on the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use purpose, as they experience them in their agro-coops' business environment. To the contrast the 81% - 243 of the respondents replied that their agro-coops' business status has a negative impact on the ISO 9000 QMS deployment process and use purpose.

As it will be shown in the forthcoming Question 24 findings' presentation and analysis, there exists a strong correlation and consistency between Questions: 24, 25, 25a and 23 as in Question 24 the 75% of the respondents evaluate and rate their agro-coop's business status, managerial practices and financial position as either Very Low/Very Weak (the 45%) or Low/Weak (the 30%).

In continuation to the above presented findings, in Question 25b the respondents replied by 72%, that their agro-coop's business status affects negatively corporate business issues as well as ISO 9000 QMS' issues, because their agro-coop's key stakeholders insist on adopting and applying "old fashioned" management methods, they have the inadequate knowledge on business and management issues, while they do not promote the "co-operative spirit" in the cooperation required amongst the various stakeholders' groups for managing the business issues and operations of the agro-coop.

The remaining 20% presented as a complementary reason the lack of the required managerial systems and training of the personnel due to the financial problems their agro-coop is facing and to the inappropriate employees' hiring and placement in the relevant job position system that prevails in their agro-coop.

Only 8% said that the main reason is the lack of the required human, managerial and financial resources, continuing that the key stakeholders' groups are responsible and accountable for the creation of this situation.

As a matter of fact these answers' rate correlate strongly and are in consistency not only with the rates of the answers offered in Questions 17-23 / Part C-Corporate Politics, power structure and decision making process, and in relevant (even indirectly) Questions of Part B, e.g. Questions: 7, 7a and 8 as well as Questions 14, 14a, 14b and 15 where the issue of the stakeholders' perception and use of the ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource was put in place.

Furthermore, these answers' rates are also in strong correlation and consistency with the rate and nature of the answers offered on this research issue-theme by the key stakeholders of the researched agro-coops during the qualitative research (see Document 3 – the Qualitative Research, relevant Section)

The two questions' - 23 and 25 – answers' rates correlate strongly and are in consistency. This is not a paradox, since as Parnell (2000) states, agro-coops' business status and practices, and Corporate politics influence each other and at the same time each one can be considered the cause and effect of the other.

To be more specific, in Question 23 the respondents were asked if Corporate politics, stakeholders' relations and power structure affect the ISO 9000 QMS implementation

process and use purpose as well as the corporate strategic and operational management and development processes and operations.

Only the 8.33% of the respondents admitted a positive influence and interrelationship between the two aforementioned in the question business topics, while the rest 91.67% stated the existence of a negative one.

On continuing in Questions 23a and 23b, where the respondents were asked to name the main reason that Corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations affect either negatively or positively the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose as well as the corporate strategic and operational management and development processes and operations the following answers' rates are identified:

the 60% -179 of the researched employees and production foremen offered as a reason for this negative interrelationship the fact that, the key stakeholders' groups - the BoDs' members and the President - responsible for their agro-coop's strategic and operational development do not possess the required managerial "know-how", educational background, professional experience and business issues knowledge.

On the other hand, 93 out of the total 300 respondents- the 31% state the lack of co-operation among the President and the members of the BoDs with the Managing Director and the top management team, as well as the lack of information, training and managerial support of the middle and junior managers and the rest of the employees and production foremen as the key source and reason for this negative impact.

For as a responded answered: "You cannot manage a ship in the ocean, unless each one of the crew and the passengers knows exactly where he/she stands, what to do and is capable of and accountable for doing it".

Indeed, this is a phrase epitomizing the essence of the respondents' stance towards Questions 23, 23a and 23b, while as a counterpart of the statistical numbers identified and analyzed in the aforementioned questions, it shows the strong correlation and consistency with the respondents answers' rates in Part C of the Questionnaire – Questions 17-22.

The remaining 28 respondents – 9% replied that, Corporate politics and stakeholders' relations in their agro-coop play a positive role and have a positive impact on the ISO 9000 QMS deployment as well as in the strategic and operational development of all other corporate issues. They explained this position by saying that they enjoy and experience “a good co-operative climate in their agro-coop”. The majority of these respondents are employed in ALMME SYN.P.E., while a few of them are in SKOS ASE.

The answers' rates of Questions 23 and 25 also correlate strongly and are consistent with the rates of the answers offered by the respondents in the forthcoming Question 24, where they were called to rate the business status and practices and financial position of their agro-coops as perceived, experienced and evaluated by them.

All the answers' rates of the questions presented in Part C are in correlation with the answers of the researched agro-coops' key stakeholders identified in the qualitative part of the entire research – Document 3. The lack of cooperation and the existence of rivalry relations among the various stakeholders' groups is also identified in the quantitative research process.

Moreover, the employees and production foremen when asked for their lack of knowledge of and training on the Quality and Management fields and on the ISO 9000 QMS business nature (strategic and operational development) and implementation and use requirements, named the unwillingness of the key stakeholders' groups for providing to them this absolutely required “business resources and supplies”.

6.7 The Greek Agro-Coops' Business Status & Practices and Financial Position and their Perceived Interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS' Implementation Process and Use Purpose

QUESTION 24

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	38,280	4	9,570	70,926	,000
within Groups	201,720	1495	,135		
Total	240,000	1499			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
1,00	300	,0300			
2,00	300	,0500			
3,00	300		,1633		
4,00	300			,3033	
5,00	300				,4533
Sig.		,505	1,000	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

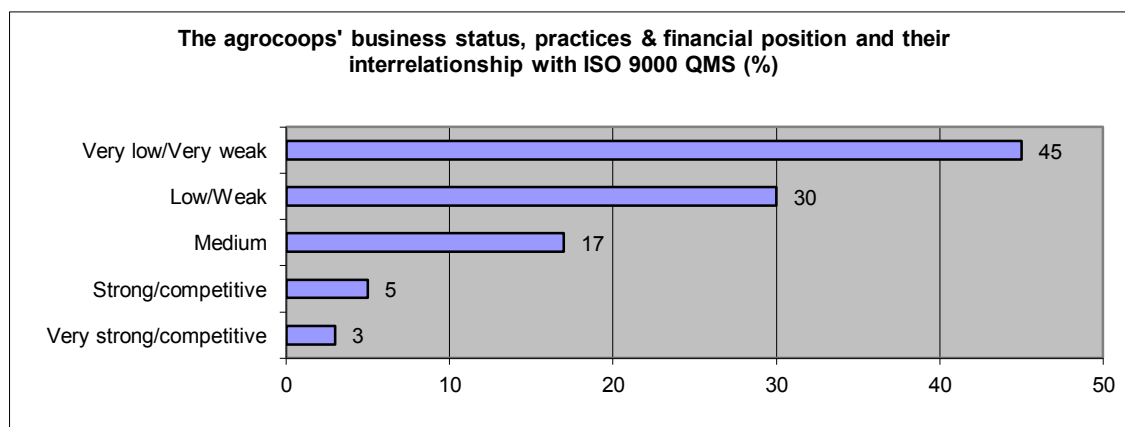


Figure 6

In this question, the 45% as well as the 30% rated their agro-coops' business status and financial position as Very Low/Very weak and Low/Weak respectively. This means that 227 out of the 300-75% employees and production foremen of the agro-coops under

investigation evaluate the business state of their corporation as being under a serious question and consideration. Only the 25% of them in aggregation has a positive view on this issue. Therefore, it is a logical consequence that they believe this low business position of their agro-coops undermines the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use effort and affects them negatively. For corporations, the Greek agro-coops too, experiencing such a business state, it would be a paradox to develop and manage effectively and efficiently any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included – as many business issues’ authors (Parnell, 2000; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2001; Johnson and Scholes, 1992; Oakland, 2001) believe.

QUESTION 26

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	51,560	3	17,187	118,515	,000
within Groups	173,440	1196	,145		
Total	225,000	1199			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
4,00	300	,0267		
3,00	300	,0667		
1,00	300		,4000	
2,00	300			,5000
Sig.		,199	1,000	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

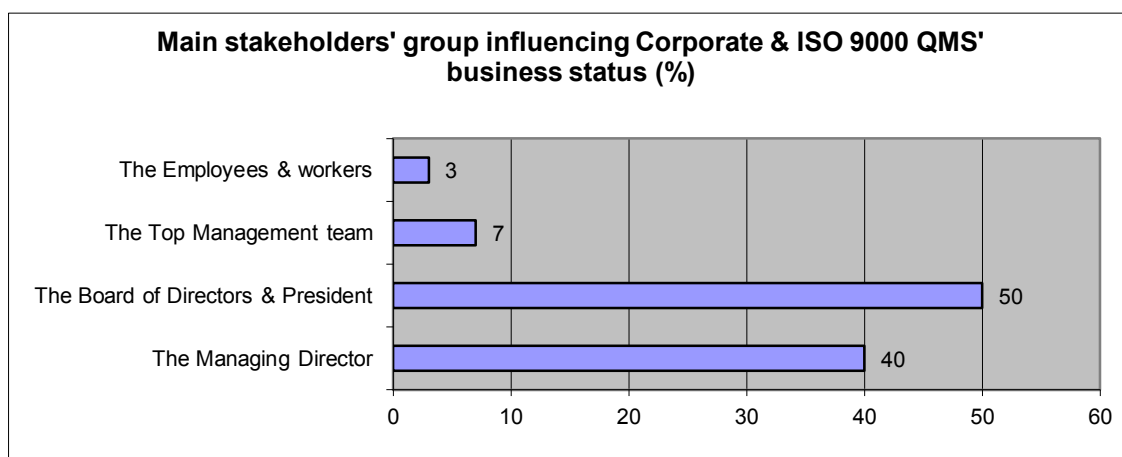


Figure 7

On continuing on the aforementioned research issue, the 50% of the respondents held responsible and accountable for the current business status and practices, and financial position of their agro-coop, the President and members of the Board of Directors. 120 respondents state that the Managing Director is responsible for that situation, while the 7% and a negligible 3% of them consider as the main source the Top management team and the group of the employees and the production foremen respectively.

The answers' rates are in consistency and correlation with the answers offered in Questions 23a and 23b, as well as with the rates and essence of the responds answering the questions 17-23 of Part C of this research.

6.8. Identification and Evaluation of the Key Business Factors influencing the Business Status of ISO 9000 QMS' Implementation Process and Use Purpose

QUESTION 27

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10,707	4	2,677	20,963	,000
within Groups	190,893	1495	,128		
Total	201,600	1499			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05		
		1	2	3
4,00	300	,0433		
5,00	300		,1567	
3,00	300			,2433
2,00	300			,2633
1,00	300			,2933
Sig.		,087	1,000	,493

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000

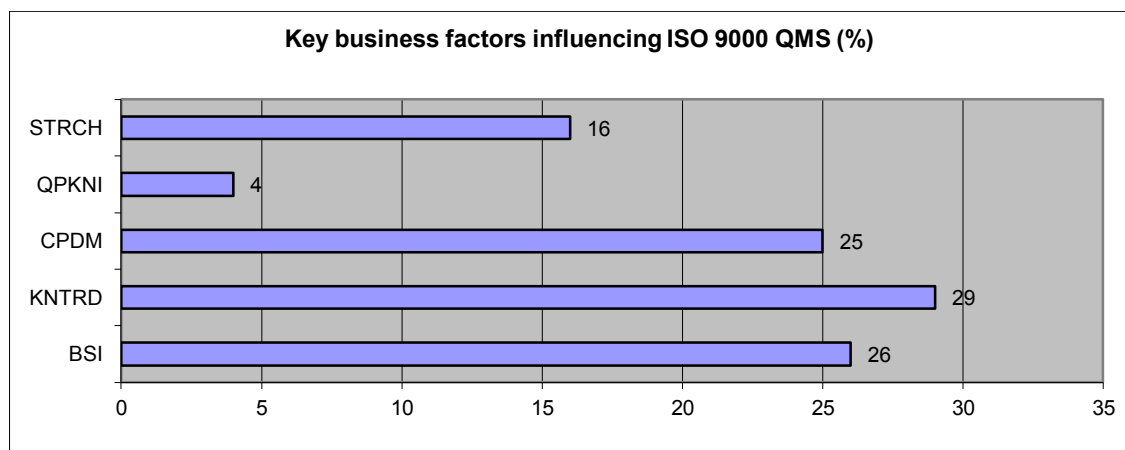


Figure 8

Concerning the KBF that may influence ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose, the sample respondents answered as follows (% of the sample):

- Greek agro-coops' business status, managerial practices and financial Position: 26.33%
- Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on the system's business nature: 29.33%
- Corporate politics, power structure and adopted decision making process: 24,33%
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the Quality and Process management & improvement fields and perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS: 15,67%
- Key stakeholders' perception of and attitudes towards the ISO 9000 QMS business property and potentiality of being used as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource: 4,33%

The rates of these answers are in correlation and consistency - business wise - with the relevant rates identified in each Part of the questionnaire – where each one of the aforementioned KBF was corresponding to each main research theme respectively - and there are also in consistency with the researched respondents' answers especially in Question 29, where the respondents since they answer either Yes or No they accept indirectly that these KBF affect the ISO 9000 QMS' deployment process and use purpose in their agro-coop.

In continuing, in the other three questions – 28, 29 and 30, they proceed to an evaluation of the role these KBF are playing in both the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose and in the organizational performance as exhibited, perceived and experienced in various business units-areas of their agro-coop.

Group 5 – PART E: QUESTIONS: 28, 29 and 30

ANOVA

VAR00002

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	53,396	2	26,698	160,509	,000
within Groups	149,200	897	,166		
Total	202,596	899			

VAR00002

Duncan

VAR00001	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
		1	2
3,00 / Q30	300	,1667	
1,00 / Q28	300	,1733	
2,00 / Q29	300		,6867
Sig.		,841	1,000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 300,000.

On continuing on the research main theme-issue of the identification and evaluation of the Key Business Factors/KBF affecting the ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops under investigation in the quantitative research (which were also the research sample in the qualitative part of the entire DBA research process), the Questions 28, 29 and 30 have been grouped in order to examine any correlation between them, concerning the respondents’ answers on the aforementioned questions relevant sub-themes.

So, in Question 28 only the 17,33%-52 respondents out of the total responding sample acknowledged a positive impact of any and/or all of the aforementioned in Question 27 KBF on the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in their agro-coop.

In Question 30, only the 16,67%-50 respondents acknowledged a positive impact of these KBF on the improvement of their agro-coop’s business processes, operations and consequently performance in some selected key business areas. This statistical number is in strong correlation and in consistency to the statistical number identified by the respondents’ answers’ ratings in the previous Question 28.

These business areas are presented in Question 29, where the 67%-206 employees and production foremen, out of the total 300 respondents, accepted that these business areas' operations could be influenced by the aforementioned KBF, which affect also the effective and efficient deployment of ISO 9000 QMS in their agro-coop.

Nevertheless, as presented before, only fifty of the respondents, that is the 20%, perceive and experience a positive influence and consequently identify an improvement in the organizational performance as realized in these business areas.

PART F - QUESTION 31: Finally, we would like you to state your opinion and make your comments regarding the ISO 9000 QMS' future development, for your company enjoying the best outcomes of the implementation and use of a QMS.

In this open-end question the sample respondents seem to be in accordance with the findings of the qualitative part of the research.

Moreover, in that research the researched agro-coops' key stakeholders expressed their belief towards an Integrated Quality Management for their agro-coop enjoying the best outcomes of the implementation and use of a QMS and consequently attempting to achieve improved business processes and as a result improved organizational performance.

More specifically in this quantitative survey, the 157 employees and production foremen/52% stated that any agro-coop - and corporation in general - needs an holistic QMS covering every business aspect and every business activity and area "from the farm to the shelf", as a fair enough number of them claimed.

Another 83 respondents/28% stated their belief to "an enhanced and more integrated ISO" as they said - a view closely aligned to the previous one.

the remaining 60 employees and production foremen/20% prefer the ISO 9000 QMS as it is, but they require - in correlation and consistency to their views expressed in previous research questions/Part B mostly – all involved stakeholders to be adequately informed and "professionally" trained on the system, "for executing well their work and duties", as they write in their answer.

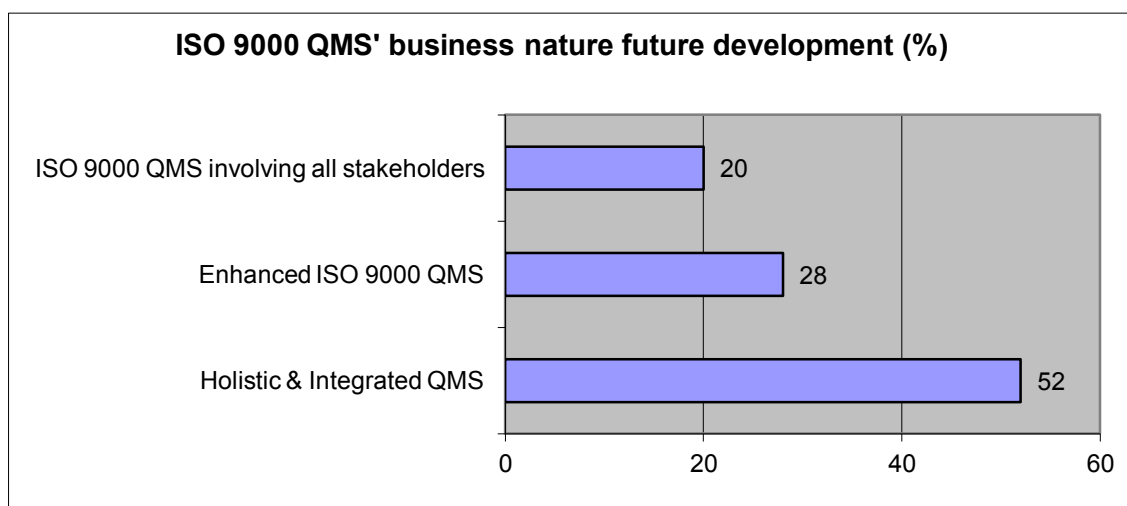


Figure 9

6.9. General Conclusions – Accept or Reject Hypotheses

The preceding critical analysis and evaluation of the quantitative research findings, lead to the acceptance of all the quantitative research hypotheses, these being:

H1: Knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management and improvement fields affect the stakeholders' perception of these concepts interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS.

H2: Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature influence the system's deployment process.

H3: Greek agro-coops' business status, financial position and managerial practices affect the ISO 9000 QMS' development business status.

H4: Stakeholders' groups' relations, corporate politics & power structure, and Decision making process affect (Stakeholders' perception and) Greek agro-coops' use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource.

H5: Greek agro-coops' Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management fields as well as knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business

nature and implementation and use requirements affect the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

In addition, the agro-coops' current business status, managerial practices and financial position in relation to the existing decision making process and corporate politics & power structure influence the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

Moreover, it should be emphasized, that the quantitative research working hypothesis:

Knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management and improvement fields and perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS, as well as Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature, influence the system's deployment process and use purpose.

In addition, Greek agro-coops' business status, financial position and managerial practices as well as their Stakeholders' groups' relations, corporate politics & power structure, and Decision making process affect the ISO 9000 QMS' development business status.

All the aforementioned factors are considered as the Key Business Factors/KBF influencing the business status of ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector,

has been also verified by the sample respondents' answers in all the relevant questions of each Part of the questionnaire, corresponding to each one of the five testable research main themes.

In fact, the four key business factors investigated in each of the four first research hypotheses are not mutually exclusive but in many cases interrelated and influencing each other, as it is apparent in the fifth research hypothesis and in the overall quantitative research process' analysis and findings, as it was presented in section 6 of this document.

It is important to state here that the conceptual framework and working hypothesis of the quantitative research emanate from the initial conceptual framework and the qualitative research undertaken in Document 3 and its identified outcomes. Furthermore, it compares fair enough with that of earlier researches such as these presented in document 2 – Research findings in the Appendixes section. Although the hypotheses researched and study approach taken by the different researchers vary from

one another, there exists a certain degree of similarity among the various variables hypothesized to influence ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose and consequently corporate performance.

Nevertheless, this is the first research project surveying the business status and nature of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose, as well as the Key Business Factors influencing them, in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

Moreover, it is interesting that the quantitative research findings are in consistency and correlation - business and statistically wise – with the qualitative research findings undertaken in the previous stage of the entire DBA research process and been presented in Document3.

7. DISCUSSION

This exploratory quantitative research, held in a positivistic context, aims at critically investigating and evaluating the business status and nature of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in as perceived and practiced by the main stakeholders' group of some major Greek agro-coops.

The results of this research demonstrate that the ISO 9000 QMS' management and development processes are only in its infancy stage. Nevertheless, considerable information about the business status of ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose was obtained.

As it was previously referred, the quantitative research process was held and materialized within a positivistic context by a cross-sectional, large-scale survey based study, using as research instrument a structured questionnaire and aiming at critically examining and evaluating the issue of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use as perceived, practiced and experienced by the biggest group of stakeholders of the Greek Agro-coops, of all three degrees of the agricultural cooperative sector, that constituted the research sample of the qualitative research conducted in document 3.

Generally speaking, the main objectives of the quantitative study are:

- a) to investigate the current status of ISO 9000 QMS and the nature of its implementation process and use purposes in the Greek Agro-coops sector, and
- b) to identify the key business factors that influence and shape the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purposes in Greek Agro-coops by exploring their main group of stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and practices towards the aforementioned issues.

More specifically, the research addressed a range of questions and issues such as:

- the Greek agro-coops (key) stakeholders' knowledge and attitudes towards the Quality and Process Management issues and their perceived interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS,
- the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and interrelationship with the current Agro-coops' business status, financial position and management practices as perceived and practiced by the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders,

-
- the Greek agro-coops' (key) stakeholders' knowledge of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and its implementation process and use purpose importance as perceived and practiced by all the Greek agro-coops' (key) stakeholders,
 - the ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic corporate resource for achieving organisational change and corporate strategic development through business processes improvement and consequently/aiming at organisational performance improvement and the existing relationship between quality management strategy and overall corporate strategy,
 - the identification and evaluation of all the Key Business Factors which emanate from the Management of Change field in relation to ISO 9000 QMS' development in the Greek agro-coops and the interrelated Corporate Business practice, Politics and stakeholders' issues, influencing the implementation process and use purpose of the ISO 9000 – QMS in the Greek Agro-coops' sub-sector, acting as Drivers and/or Constraints for the effective implementation and efficient use of this QMS, i.e.: Corporate attitudes and practices concerning all the above themes as well as the following issues: organization and business activities of Quality Management, Control & Assurance unit/department, the Decision Making process on Corporate and Quality management issues, the existence of Quality management strategy and its relationship with and contribution to the overall corporate strategy and the aims of the key stakeholders concerning the future development of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek agro-coops.

From the preceding critical literature review analysis (see relevant section on Greek agro-coops in Document 2), it becomes obvious that, the planning and management of the ISO 9000 Quality Management System as well as its active implementation and use processes remain a challenge for many organisations in today's increasingly competitive world economy and business.

While companies are facing faster rates of change, greater levels of competition, revolutions in technology and changing customer demands, any corporation's Quality management systems' - the ISO 9000 QMS included - activities and operations are still considered and practiced, by a fair number of corporations and their stakeholders, as a specialised bureaucratic business system and function, which is time and resources consuming and isolated from the other corporate activities, functions and departments (Quality Forums Proceedings - Athens, 1997 and 1998).

Furthermore, for the majority of the corporations, ISO 9000 QMS is still perceived as a necessary management system and business tool required and used mainly for marketing and legal reasons, as many quality authors, i.e. Oakland (2003), Arvanitoyiannis (2001), Foster (2001) state and not as a corporate resource that could contribute to the organizational change process and corporate strategic development if applied as theory suggests, that is, as an incorporated organic part of the entire corporate strategy and business operation, as Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002) believe.

On the other hand, as Goetch and Davis (2002) refer, any Quality Management System's proper implementation and use require the corporate long-term strategic planning and unwavering commitment and support – especially these of the Key Stakeholders – as well as the provision of the necessary and required resources for the system's successful development and continuous improvement.

This is an approach that is required to be applied in a very short-term oriented business world, while at the same time as theory suggests the corporate activities and intended results of the ISO 9000 implementation and use are supposed to be strategically planned and long-term oriented.

This business situation and fact may be perceived and experienced as contradictory and in a way hardly functional by many managers, who may find themselves not informed, untrained and inexperienced in the system's requirements and proper practice, as it was presented in the Proceedings of the Quality Forums held in Athens, in 1997 and 1998.

Under this attitude and practice any corporation could only use its adopted quality management systems – the ISO 9000 QMS included – as a management tool not for its strategic development and business processes and operations control, assessment and improvement, but rather mainly for its products and services quality assurance upgrading, as it is required by the market needs, the European Union directives and the National legislation on Food safety, as Oakland (2003) considers.

In reality, Arvanitoyiannis (2000) believes that, for a fair number of (Greek) business entities and their stakeholders this approach remains still the system's main purpose and use, while for an increasing number of other corporations a tendency is identified to utilise the ISO 9000 QMS as a corporate strategic resource aiming at the achievement of organisational change through the improvement of business processes and consequently

organisational performance as the research findings present (Document 2, Appendix 14).

Due to the aforementioned facts, the study of the role and contribution of ISO 9000 QMS to the corporate strategic development and organisational change and performance improvement of the Greek Agro-coops as well as the identification and analysis of the drivers and constraints of this system's effective implementation and efficient use has and/or should have been the subject of increased attention in recent times, as the majority of these organisations face increasing financial and business operating problems over the last three decades. This was identified in a collective work of Papageorgiou et al, published in "Syneteristiki Poreia" (volumes of years 2000-2003) and the re-configuration of their organisational practices and activities, referring to any management system adapted and applied – e.g. the ISO 9000 QMS, is considered a must for their business survival in the words of Arvanitoyiannis (2001).

On the other hand the effective implementation, use and operation of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management system in the Greek Agro-coops - and not only to these but even in corporations in various sectors of the economy and business environment - is under question as there exist a generally held doubt and dispute on the Agro-coops' operational and organizational infrastructure and competencies as well as their corporate culture and willingness to implement and use these Quality systems effectively and efficiently (Arvanitoyiannis, 2000; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002).

Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct a quantitative research, held in a positivistic context and aiming at critically investigating and evaluating the agro-coops' stakeholders perceptions, attitudes and practices towards the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the researched agro-coops.

The most important findings of this research are the following:

1. Knowledge of and Training on the Quality & Process management fields and their perceived by the agro-coops' stakeholders interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature

- one of the most important findings of the quantitative research was the identification of a clear indication, that the majority of the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders have no real knowledge of and training on the Quality and Process management and improvement fields, as well of the ISO 9000 QMS' nature & provisions and the existed interrelationship between all these aforementioned concepts. And as a fair number of respondents stated the majority of all the involved stakeholders' groups in the agro-coops' sub-sector are not well-informed, educated and trained on these issues and this may be proved a major drawback for the proper implementation and use of the system.

Almost one out of three (32.33% - 97 positive answers in Question 3) of the respondents reported that they have some kind of knowledge of and information on the Quality and Process management & improvement fields. Only 21 respondents, this represents the 7%, have received any training course on the aforementioned fields (Question 4).

Therefore, it is not surprising that only the 17%, that is only 51 out of the 300 respondents that completed the questionnaire, acknowledge the existence of an interrelationship between the Quality and Process management & improvement fields and the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose (Question 5).

This is an identified remark concerning the majority of the research respondents with the exception of the majority of the Quality and Production departments' employees and foremen of the researched agro-coops, who state that knowledge and training on these issues are required for achieving improved deployment and use of the ISO 9000 QMS.

The respondents having Knowledge and Training (Questions 3 and 4) on the aforementioned issues adopt the most important feature of these fields interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS, by stating that knowledge and training on these issues are required for achieving improved deployment and use of the ISO 9000 QMS.

This is a remark very close to theory suggestions (Oakland, 2001 and Arvanitoyiannis, 2002) and other researches' findings (Quality Forums 1997, 1998, 1999).

Furthermore,

- the vast majority of the respondents, that is 162 out of the 300 - the 54% of the sample -, consider knowledge and training on these two fields as necessary and required (Question 4a), because as the majority stated: “You have first to know something, for developing it properly, when they ask you so later on”. It is an indication, that the majority (54%) of the Greek agro-coops’ stakeholders’ main group adopts the notion-concept of the necessity of knowledge and training for achieving “professionalism” in their jobs.

A belief very close to the statements of Papageorgiou et al. (1997), concerning the Greek agro-coops’ stakeholders’ groups’ lack of knowledge and training on business issues and management systems.

2. Agro-coops’ Stakeholders’ Knowledge of and Training on the ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and deployment requirements

- Almost, only 37% of the sample respondents, that is 110 out of the 300 employees, who in their vast majority represent the employees and foremen of the production department, admit having been informed and trained on the ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and implementation and use requirements (Question 7).

This identified practice is in contrast with Oakland (2003) and Foster (2002) held views, that real and full knowledge of these concepts and fields are required for the proper implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS in any company.

In fact, all the respondents seem to have and express indirectly the same opinion on these aforementioned issue, since in Question 8 (asking them on their belief on this necessity) they - the 70% / 210 employees and foremen out of 300 - overwhelmingly respond that, they too consider information and training on the system’s implementation process and use purpose requirements, as a prerequisite for a company achieving the optimum out of the system’s introduction and development.

- This stakeholders’ lack of knowledge and training concerning the business nature of ISO 9000:2000 as well as its implementation and use process requirements was identified by the 29.33% (the highest rate) of the sample respondents as being the Key Business Factor for the Greek agro-coops not achieving the optimum outcomes of the system’s implementation and use.

2a. ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource

Furthermore,

- only the 25% of the respondents replied that, their agro-coop and its (key) stakeholders' groups consider the ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource.

In contrast to that percentage in the next question 14 a surplus of 10%, in total the 35% replied that their agro-coop and its (key) stakeholders' groups should consider the ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource. This difference is further verified by the percentage of positive answers - being approximately 15% - in Question 15, where only the 15% of the respondents admitted the existence of quality policy, strategy and communication program in their agro-coop, which are incorporated in the overall corporate strategic plan.

The answers of all three questions verify the low rate of agro-coops' (key) stakeholders' groups' perception and use in practice of the ISO 9000 QMS as a corporate resource for the agro-coop achieving organizational change and strategic development. It is an indicative finding in correlation with the outcome of Question 16 where only the 10% of the respondents acknowledged the existence of a well organized and staffed Quality management and assurance department.

Furthermore, it is in accordance with the theory statements concerning the agro-coops as Parnell (2000) and Greek agro-coops' business practice as Arvanitoyiannis (2001) and Papageorgiou et al (1997) state, while it is in contrast with the research findings of Kassinides (1997) as presented in this years' quality forum held in Athens, where more private companies are using the system in such a strategic manner (Document 2 – Appendix 2).

Moreover, as the agro-coops' stakeholders stated in Question 14a they consider by a percentage of 77% as responsible:

- for the non-use of the system as a strategic change and development corporate resource, the Board of Directors' members and especially the President, and the Managing Director, who all have adopted decision making process which restricts innovation, participation of the employees and cooperation amongst the different departments and stakeholders' groups. on the other hand,

- another 20% approximately consider as responsible the “old bad business behaviours and practices” experienced in their agro-coop, which in practice is very close to the preceding view.

In replying the Question 14b, a majority of 95% believe that if the system was used as a strategic corporate resource, then the agro-coops would enjoy improved business operations and enhanced market presence, while the other 5% believe that the agro-coops would be able to enjoy improved business processes, operations and practices and consequently possibly improved organizational performance.

These percentages are in perfect consistency with the low rate of respondents’ (only 5 out of 300, being the 2%) having a thorough knowledge of and training on the system’s business nature, and consequently on its business property and potentiality of being used as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource with the final aim of achieving improved organizational performance through improved business processes (a field where the rate of respondents considering such a use purpose of the ISO 9000 QMS was also very low – only 4 out of 300, a negligible 1,2%).

This identified practice is in contrast with Oakland (2003) and Foster (2002) held views, that real and full knowledge of these concepts and fields are required for the proper implementation and use of ISO 9000 QMS in any company.

The aforementioned respondents’ answers’ analysis lead to another important finding.

3. Corporate Politics, Stakeholders’ relations and power structure, and Decision-making process

Of paramount importance are the Greek Agro-coops’ (Key) Stakeholders attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards the ISO 9000 QMS systems and their actual behaviors and practices concerning these systems’ implementation, operation and use in the Greek agro-coops, for as Johnson and Scholes (1993) state, the existence of stakeholder groups, being formal and/or informal and being comprised by internal and/or external stakeholders, is an unavoidable and common phenomenon encountered in any organization. These stakeholder groups are seeking to influence the organizational behavior and practice very often, as Johnson and Sholes (1993) inform.

It is important to state here, that in all organizations the – key especially – stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs and practice towards any business process improvement, that is towards organizational change - for business process improvement is considered an organizational change process, according to Oakland (2003) and Banks (2000) - play a very important role in the successful implementation of this change process.

The same fact holds true for the introduction and implementation of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops, which can be regarded and considered as an organizational change – being it incremental and planned, therefore voluntaristic and/or breakthrough and emergent, therefore deterministic – since it challenges the current business practices and organizational “status quo” of them.

It is an unwelcome event according to the majority of the Greek agro-coops stakeholders' view, as it is perceived as a threat to their established interests and the existing configuration of power structures in the agro-coops environment (Karamichas, 1998; Martinos et al, 1997). This organizational change process “threatens the very bases of the business upon which many on the board had built their authority and power in the organization” as Johnson and Sholes (1993, p. 405) state. This statement is very closely aligned to the existing situation in the Greek agro-coops, as it was presented and analyzed in the relevant section of the document, analyzing and examining the current business situation of and in Greek agro-coops.

In statistical correlation and in consistency business-wise to the answers offered in the other Questions of Part C of the quantitative research questionnaire, as well as with the qualitative research findings as presented in the previous Document 3,

- the 84% of the respondents claim that the Corporate politics, power and stakeholders' relations structure and the decision making process as experienced by them, affect negatively the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the aforementioned business environment.

This expressed belief and attitude brings into the surface the existing rivalry between the elected members of the BoDs and the senior managers - especially the General

Manager - in the Greek Agro-coops' business reality and practice, as identified by Karamichas (1997), Papageorgiou (1997, 2000) and Doutsias (2003), who consider this rivalry as a root cause of the serious business problems Greek Agro-coops are facing.

Furthermore, the expressed grief of the employees and production foremen towards their senior managers and the Managing Director brings into the surface another important issue: that of the existing rivalry and competition instead of cooperation among the various stakeholders' groups in the Greek agro-coops.

To be more specific, statistically-wise,

- 190 out of the agro-coops' stakeholders – quantitative research respondents, that is a rate of 63%, rate the degree of existing cooperation among the different agro-coops' stakeholders' groups as being characterized by rivalry and power competitiveness. Moreover, the 21% considers the level of business cooperation of the corporate groups as very weak/very low, while the 9% rates it as weak/low.

It is important to note here, that this cooperation level is rated all together as medium, strong and very strong only by the 8% of the total sample respondents. In fact a very low rating, which represents the prevailing internal business situation of and in the Greek agro-coops, where different stakeholders' groups represent and pursue differing business interests and aims and where internal corporate competition is the norm instead of cooperation. A fact very close to theory statements as Papageorgiou et al (1997) present and as it was presented and analyzed in Document 2 – Critical Literature Review, in the relevant section concerning the Greek agro-coops.

Of course, as Parnell (2000) points out, this intra-business rivalry could be a main source of creating problems in the agricultural cooperatives by the improper implementation and use of any management system, the ISO 9000 QMS included, with the ultimate consequence of limited corporate business presence and downgraded organizational performance. Indeed, as presented before,

- the 84% of the respondents claim that the Corporate politics, power and stakeholders' relations structure and the decision making process as experienced by them, affect negatively the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the aforementioned business environment,

while,

- the 81% - 243 of the respondents replied that their agro-coops' degraded business status and financial position, and "bad and old fashioned" managerial practices have a negative impact on the ISO 9000 QMS deployment process and use purpose.

3.1. Decision-making process

Concerning the ISO 9000 QMS strategic and operational development, as well the corporate strategic and operational development, there is identified a high discrepancy in the respondents' answers, since in both issues:

the 70% - 85% respectively of the respondents rate the Board of Directors and especially the President as being the key decision making group and only the 25% - 15% respectively consider the Managing Director as "being in charge".

On the other hand, only the 40% of the respondents state that the Board of Directors and the President should be responsible for the strategic and operational development of ISO 9000 QMS. In relation to this outcome the 32% and the 26% of the respondents state that, the Managing Director and the Quality manager in cooperation with the Production foremen respectively should be the responsible stakeholders for this business function.

It is noteworthy, that all the sample respondents made a distinction between the corporate operational and the strategic issues.

As far as the operational issues are concerned, the 73% stated that the most suitable group is the Managing Director with the cooperation of the relevant manager and/or the top management team, while the 37% requires the cooperation of the MD, the President of the BoDs and the relevant on the business issue Manager.

In terms of the strategic issues, the 55% requires the cooperation of the MD and the President of the BoDs, while the rest 45% of the respondents state as more appropriate and productive the cooperation of the MD, the President of the BoDs, the top management team and the relevant on the business issue Manager.

4. Greek agro-coops' business status, managerial practices and financial position

On that research issue-theme,

- the 45% as well as the 30% rated their agro-coops' business status and financial position as Very Low/Very weak and Low/Weak respectively. This means that 227 out of the 300-75% employees and production foremen of the agro-coops under investigation, evaluate the business state of their corporation as being under a serious question and consideration. Only the 25% of them in aggregation has a positive view on this issue.

Therefore, it is a logical consequence that they believe this degraded business position of their agro-coops undermines the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use effort and affects them negatively.

- For only the 19% - that is 57 out of 300 employees - of the sample respondents believe and replied in Question 25, that their agro-coops' current business status and practices as well as their financial position have a positive impact on the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use purpose, as they experience them in their agro-coops' business environment. To the contrast the 81% - 243 of the respondents replied that their agro-coops' business status has a negative impact on the ISO 9000 QMS deployment process and use purpose.

For corporations, the Greek agro-coops too, experiencing such a degraded business state, it would be a paradox to develop and manage effectively and efficiently any management system - the ISO 9000 QMS included – as many business issues' authors (Parnell, 2000; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2001; Johnson and Scholes, 1992; Oakland, 2001) believe.

In continuation to the aforementioned findings,

- the respondents replied by 72%, that their agro-coop's business status affects negatively corporate business issues as well as ISO 9000 QMS' issues, because their agro-coop's key stakeholders insist on adopting and applying "old fashioned" management methods, they have the inadequate knowledge on business and management issues, while they do not promote the "co-operative spirit" in the

cooperation required amongst the various stakeholders' groups for managing the business issues and operations of the agro-coop.

The remaining 20% presented as a complementary reason the lack of the required managerial systems and training of the personnel due to the financial problems their agro-coop is facing and to the inappropriate employees' hiring and placement in the relevant job position system that prevails in their agro-coop.

Only 8% said that the main reason is the lack of the required human, managerial and financial resources, continuing that the key stakeholders' groups are responsible and accountable for the creation of this situation.

On continuing on the aforementioned research issue,

- the 50% of the respondents held responsible and accountable for the current business status and practices, and financial position of their agro-coop, the President and members of the Board of Directors. 120 respondents state that the Managing Director is responsible for that situation, while the 7% and a negligible 3% of them consider as the main source the Top management team and the group of the employees and the production foremen respectively.

5. Key Business Factors influencing the business status and nature of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops

Concerning the KBF that may influence ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose, the sample respondents answered that the following KBF do influence the system's development and use (% of the sample):

- Greek agro-coops' business status, managerial practices and financial Position: 26.33%
- Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on the system's business nature: 29.33
- Corporate politics, power structure and adopted decision making process: 24,33
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the Quality and Process management & improvement fields and perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS: 15,67%

- Key stakeholders' perception of and attitudes towards the ISO 9000 QMS business property and potentiality of being used as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource: 4,33%.

The rates of these answers are in correlation and consistency - business wise - with the relevant rates identified in each Part-Main theme of the questionnaire – where each one of the aforementioned KBF was corresponding to each main research theme respectively - and they are also in consistency with the researched respondents' answers especially in Question 29, where the respondents since they answer either Yes or No, they accept indirectly that these KBF affect the ISO 9000 QMS' deployment process and use purpose in their agro-coop.

On continuing, in the other three questions – 28, 29 and 30 of this main theme, they proceed to an evaluation of the role these KBF are playing in both the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose and in the organizational performance as exhibited, perceived and experienced in various business units-areas of their agro-coop. So, in Question 28 only the 17,33%-52 respondents out of the total responding sample acknowledged a positive impact of any and/or all of the aforementioned in Question 27 KBF on the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in their agro-coop. In strong correlation to this statistical number and in consistency to their previous answer, again only the 16.67%-50 respondents acknowledged a positive impact of these KBF on the improvement of their agro-coop's business processes, operations and consequently performance in some selected key business areas. It is a statistical number identified by the respondents' answers in Question 30.

These business areas are presented in Question 29, where the 67%-206 employees and production foremen, out of the total 300 respondents, accepted that these business areas' operations could be influenced by the KBF that affect also the effective and efficient deployment of ISO 9000 QMS in their company .

Nevertheless, as presented before, only fifty of the respondents, that is the 20%, perceive and experience a positive influence and consequently identify an improvement in the organizational performance as realized in these business areas.

The two questions' - 23 and 25 – answers' rates correlate strongly and are in consistency. This is not a paradox, since as Parnell (2000) states, agro-coops' business status and practices, and Corporate politics influence each other and at the same time each one can be considered the cause and effect of the other.

To be more specific, in Question 23 the respondents were asked if Corporate politics, stakeholders' relations and power structure affect the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose as well as the corporate strategic and operational management and development processes and operations.

Only the 8.33% of the respondents admitted a positive influence and interrelationship between the two aforementioned in the question business topics, while the rest 91.67% stated the existence of a negative one.

On continuing in Questions 23a and 23b, where the respondents were asked to name the main reason that Corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations affect either negatively or positively the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose, as well as the corporate strategic and operational management and development processes and operations the following answers' rates are identified:

The 60% -179 of the researched employees and production foremen offered as a reason for this negative interrelationship the fact that, the key stakeholders' groups - the BoDs' members and the President - responsible for their agro-coop's strategic and operational development do not possess the required managerial "know-how", educational background, professional experience and business issues knowledge.

On the other hand, 93 out of the total 300 respondents- the 31% state the lack of co-operation among the President and the members of the BoDs with the Managing Director and the top management team, as well as the lack of information, training and managerial support of the middle and junior managers and the rest of the employees and production foremen as the key source and reason for this negative impact.

For as a responded answered: "You cannot manage a ship in the ocean, unless each one of the crew and the passengers knows exactly where he/she stands, what to do and is capable of and accountable for doing it".

Indeed, this is a phrase epitomizing the essence of the respondents' stance towards Questions 23, 23a and 23b, while as a counterpart of the statistical numbers identified and analyzed in the aforementioned questions, it shows the strong correlation and consistency with the respondents answers' rates in Part C of the Questionnaire – Questions 17-22.

The remaining 28 respondents – 9% replied that, Corporate politics and stakeholders' relations in their agro-coop play a positive role and have a positive impact on the ISO 9000 QMS deployment as well as in the strategic and operational development of all other corporate issues. They explained this position by saying that they enjoy and experience “a good co-operative climate in their agro-coop”. The majority of these respondents are employed in ALMME SYN.P.E., while a few of them are in SKOS ASE.

The answers' rates of Questions 23 and 25 also correlate strongly and are consistent with the rates of the answers offered by the respondents in Question 24, where they were called to rate the business status and practices and financial position of their agro-coops as perceived, experienced and evaluated by them.

All the answers' rates of the questions presented in Part C are in correlation with the researched agro-coops' key stakeholders' answers as identified and evaluated in the qualitative part of the entire DBA research process – Document 3. The lack of cooperation and the existence of rivalry-competitive relations among the various stakeholders' groups are also identified in the quantitative research process.

Moreover, the employees and production foremen when asked for their lack of knowledge of and training on the Quality and Management fields and on the ISO 9000 QMS business nature (strategic and operational development) and implementation and use requirements, named as root cause the “unwillingness” of the key stakeholders' groups for providing to them these absolutely required “business resources and supplies” for achieving the proper ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose.

6. Part F: the future development of ISO 9000 QMS

In this open-end question the sample respondents' answers seem to be in accordance with the findings of the qualitative part of the research.

Moreover, in that research the researched agro-coops' key stakeholders expressed their belief towards an Integrated Quality Management for their agro-coop enjoying the best outcomes of the implementation and use of a QMS and consequently attempting to achieve improved business processes and as a result improved organizational performance.

More specifically in this quantitative survey, the 157 employees and production foremen/52% stated that any agro-coop - and corporation in general - needs an holistic QMS covering every business aspect and every business activity and area "from the farm to the shelf", as a fair enough number of them claimed.

Another 83 respondents/28% stated their belief to "an enhanced and more integrated ISO" as they said - a view closely aligned to the previous one.

the remaining 60 employees and production foremen-20% prefer the ISO 9000 QMS as it is, but they require - in correlation and consistency to their views expressed in previous research questions/Part B mostly – all involved stakeholders to be adequately informed and "professionally" trained on the system, "for executing well their work and duties", as they write in their answer.

This exploratory examination and critical evaluation of the ISO 900 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector has limitations as well as strengths. A significant amount of information was gathered through the structured questionnaire process including mostly pre-coded, closed questions as well as a few semi-closed and open-end ones, process gave to the researcher the chance to benchmark similar situations encountered in the vast majority of the researched Greek agro-coops.

This is a semi-random sample, but reflective of the Greek agro-coops' sector as a whole, since it entails the main stakeholders' group - being consisted by the employees and production foremen - of agro-coops of all degrees, locations, size and product

specification. Nevertheless, for the results to be generalized across all Greek agro-coops' sector further research, both qualitative and quantitative, is required. the researcher intends to conduct a part of such a more general research in the proceeding final phase-Main thesis, that is Document 5, of his entire DBA research project.

During the questionnaire design thorough and extensive quality controls were conducted. A special computer programme was developed in order to check the validity of the questionnaire and detailed reliability analysis using dummy data was performed.

8. CONCLUSIONS

As it has already been referred and pointed out, a fair number of research studies and surveys have been conducted internationally so far attempting to examine and evaluate the significance and importance of the introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems for the business processes and operations as well as the overall organizational performance - as exhibited internally and externally - of the corporations.

Furthermore, the business factors (external and internal ones) that affect the implementation process of these quality systems in the organizations have been investigated, analyzed and evaluated with equal consideration in these research studies.

The same research aims and objectives have been adopted in this quantitative research project, which is conducted in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector. Emphasis is given to the examination of the role, importance and enterprising organization and operation of the agricultural cooperatives in Greece. The analytical reference to the structure and operation of the Greek agricultural cooperatives as well as in the characteristics of their intervention in the agricultural sector is owed to the drastic changes that are observed in the economic and social environment of the Greek agricultural cooperatives.

The ultimate goal of any corporate resource/competence, and as it was previously presented any Quality management system, the ISO 9000 QMS included could be considered as such as many authors on quality issues believe, is and/or should be to enhance the achievement of the company's strategic goals, while achieving synergy across lines of business operations and departments and managing the risk of longer-term business activities and operations, as Johnson and Scholes (1992) state.

However, compared with other corporate resources such as human resources, information systems, marketing research, new product development etc., there is a paucity/lack of research and frameworks to improve corporate attitudes and practices in the field of the quality management systems' - the ISO 9000 QMS included - implementation and use in the Greek Agro-coops with the corporate goal to improve business processes in order to achieve corporate strategic development and

organizational performance improvement, as theory suggests and research findings identify, i.e. all the aforementioned authors on quality management issues and Quality Forums Research Findings, held in Athens in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

As a result of the aforementioned, these identified business changes lead to research and approaches of topics and subjects that are connected, on the one side with the current unfavorable position of the Unions of agricultural cooperatives and on the other with the necessary enterprising and operational adaptations that are required for the Unions of Agro-coops to survive and develop. One of these approaches is the effective and efficient implementation and use of the ISO 9000-Quality management systems in any corporation active in the Agro-food industry (therefore, for the Greek agro-coops too), as it is stated in the book of Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002).

In the previous qualitative research undertaken and presented in Document 3, with the use of case studies based on open interviews and semi-structured interviews the research method produced qualitative research data but at the same time some sort of quantitative data have been produced through the analysis of the material.

The purpose of this current quantitative research presented in this document 4, held in a positivistic context, adopting the large scale, cross-sectional survey and using as research instrument the structured questionnaire, was to develop:

a detailed and deep account of the agro-coops' (being researched during the qualitative research) main stakeholders' group - consisted by the employees and production foremen, all of them being considered and researched as a homogeneous group - perceptions, attitudes and practices towards the ISO 9000 QMS, aiming at critically investigating and evaluating the current business status of ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector, as perceived and practiced by all the researched agro-coops' stakeholders' groups.

Therefore, the main topics of the large-scale, cross-sectional survey based quantitative research are the following:

- a) critically investigating the current state and nature of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector in relation to the Quality and Business Management & Improvement fields,

-
- b) surveying the agro-coops' stakeholders' knowledge, perceptions and attitudes towards the ISO 9000 QMS' deployment requirements and business nature,
 - c) examining the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders attitudes towards the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in relation to these stakeholders' perception of their agro-coop's current business status, financial position and managerial practices,
 - d) evaluating the actual impact of ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose on Greek agro-coops' business processes and strategy development & improvement and consequently corporate performance, and finally
 - e) identifying and evaluating the Key Business Factors/KBF – acting as drivers and/or constraints – in relation to the Change Management field, that affect the effective implementation and efficient use of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

In specific terms, this study attempted to:

- i) obtain basic data by exploring the business status and perceived nature of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek agro-coops through the assessment of this sub-sector stakeholders' knowledge of and attitudes, behaviours and practices towards this system's implementation and use reasons, requirements and results,
- ii) critically examine not only the system's intended and actual implementation process and use purpose, its deployment techniques adopted and the frequency of use of specific methods, but also how the researched stakeholders understand and evaluate the appropriateness of these methods for the Greek agro-coops achieving the optimum corporate outputs of the system's implementation and use, and ultimately
- iii) gain insight, through these stakeholders' expressed beliefs as well as via their examined and identified actual practice, into the key business factors/KBF, which act as either drivers and/or constraints of the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use in the Greek agro-coops sub-sector.

Document 4 presented the above within the context of a large-scale, cross-sectional survey based quantitative research study using as research instrument a structured questionnaire and aiming at critically examining, identifying and evaluating the current business state and nature of as well as the KBF affecting the ISO 9000 QMS

implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector of the food industry.

DOCUMENT 5 (THESIS)

Finally, in Document 5 with the use of the case study method (in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia) and the in depth surveys tool (in the other previously researched Greek Agro-Coops and/or other Third Degree-Central Unions and Second Degree Unions of Agricultural Cooperatives) as the predominant research tool and as a secondary mean a structured questionnaire administered to:

- i) all the UACM raw materials' suppliers, that is all its active first degree agro-coops' Presidents and operating managers, and
- ii) the key stakeholders (Presidents and General Managers as well as the relevant to the research issues Top Managers) of all the second (Unions of agro-coops) and third degree (plc-General Unions of agro-coops) Greek agro-coops in order to critically explore and evaluate:

1. the ISO 9000:2000 – Quality Management System's Introduction and Implementation in the Greek Agro-coops and the results of its implementation and use in these agro-coops' businesses and operation. Prescribed, intended, actual and perceived Outcomes of the Systems' operation according to all Stakeholders' (including managers of the external professional organizations and accrediting bodies - How they consider and evaluate the manner of ISO 9000 QM systems' implementation and use in these companies) opinion and the identification of the causes of any observed and registered discrepancy between these different types of outcomes according to them.
2. How all these key stakeholders consider and evaluate other companies' manner and rational of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation and use?
3. Evaluation and measurement of the (Key) Stakeholders' role, degree and degree of influence on the ISO 9000 QMS' management and development in the Greek Agro-coops. What are their levels of commitment (positioning them on the grid) and more specifically:
 - whether there exists any difference and gap between their espoused position and their actual behavior towards the implementation and use of the Quality System,
 - what is their role and degree of influence & affection on the effectiveness of the system's implementation and the efficiency of its use.

4. Final investigation of and concluding results concerning the Key Business Factors acting as Drivers and/or Restraints of the ISO 9000 QMSystems' efficient introduction and effective use and implementation – Balance of Forces in the Force Field Analysis.

In this way, research method tends to be more qualitative as open questionnaires and the open interviews will provide the required qualitative data as a product of Phenomenological research, while at the same time a substantial amount of quantitative data can be produced through the use of the structured questionnaires and in few cases the semi-structured interviews and the cross-evaluation of the case studies, of the in-depth surveys and of the open interviews. Because as Bell (1993) states: “the case study approach is an umbrella term which includes a wide range of evidence capture and analysis procedures and due to this flexibility a case study may be an almost entirely positivistic or almost entirely phenomenological study or anything between these two extremes”.

Moreover, the cross-evaluation of all research data produced throughout the research processes held in Documents 3, 4 and 5 can produce the required quantitative data required for producing the optimum “blending” of research findings which may lead to the formulation of the best practice model concerning the Introduction, Implementation and Use of the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agricultural Cooperatives.

The selection of the case study as the predominant research tactic in this stage is made for the accomplishment of two research objectives:

Firstly, to confirm, support and reassure all the research findings and their deriving conclusions, and secondly to effectively benchmark the implementation and use as well as the conceptual and operational framework of the ISO 9000 Quality Management systems in various Greek Agro-Coops in order to be able to identify and provide suggestions (throughout and as a research product) for the ISO 9000 QMS; effective implementation and efficient use in the Greek Agro-Coops' sub-sector, as well as insights requiring for further research.

Secondly, the use of methodological pluralism throughout the whole research process is an expedient way of ensuring against the uncertainties inherited in research processes. Pragmatism requires the use of methodological pluralism since investigating /

researching a “living organisation”, such as a co-operative corporation, the researcher must be able to “jump” from the exploratory to descriptive to explanatory, to hypotheses and then “paradigm” formulation stage of research process at any time, in order to cope effectively and efficiently with the complexities of business phenomena.

In generic terms, the document 5 will include:

1. Further primary research following up themes originally identified and arising out of the previous documents.
2. Update of the critical literature review.
3. Reconsideration of the initial and developmental conceptual frameworks and themes.
4. Critical evaluation of the initial working hypothesis of the entire DBA research project.
5. Analysis and discussion of all empirical material.
6. Conclusions and managerial guidelines and recommendations.

DOCUMENT 6

Document 6 will contain reflections on each element of the research programme, which will be compiled progressively as each research activity proceeds. the reflective journal will include the following basic elements:

1. Reflections on the process.
2. The researcher’s own process towards thorough understanding of the subject being researched and the research process.
3. Influences that have played a part in the researcher’s intellectual development.
4. Summary of learning gained from studying at doctoral level.
5. Summary of professional learning and experience gained from surveying and consequently benchmarking various Greek agro-coops.
6. Influences that have played a part in the entire DBA research development.

9. APPENDICES**9.1. APPENDIX 1****COVERING LETTER**

THE NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
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DOCTORATE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (DBA) PROGRAMME

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Kalamata, Date:

Name of respondent:

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My name is Exarchos K. Dimitropoulos and I work for the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia/UACM since 2001.

I address to you this letter as a doctoral research candidate at the Nottingham Business School, U.K. My research topic deals with the issue of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

Current management literature and practice have shown the increasing interest by the Greek agro-coops for applying ISO 9000 QMS effectively and efficiently. Many corporations are awakening to the importance of their quality management systems.

As businesses become more competitive and the need for implementing effectively and using efficiently their ISO 9000 QMS becomes more indisputable, the study anticipates the increased interest of Greek agro-coops' sub-sector in ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose.

Therefore, the aim of this questionnaire survey is to identify the current business status of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek agro-coops' sub-sector by surveying a representative sample of them, as well as to identify the Key Business Factors/KBF that act as either drivers and/or constraints for the effective implementation and efficient use of ISO 9000 QMS in the aforementioned business environment.

You have been selected for inclusion in this study. Questionnaires are sent-given to the stakeholders some selected agro-coops of all three degrees, so that the scope of the study will be as wide as possible and therefore the validity and usefulness of the study relies heavily on the co-operation of the research subjects, that is: you.

All the information that is gathered from the survey will be treated with the outmost confidentiality and anonymity. We would appreciate it if you could complete and return the enclosed questionnaire in the (pre-paid) reply envelope as soon as possible, even better during the researcher's presence period in your agro-coop.

The findings and conclusions of the research will be sent as a report to all agro-coops that take part in the study.

If you would like more information about the research you can contact Exarchos K. Dimitropoulos (Tel: 0030-27210-23419, 6932-467665).

We thank you for your participation in this survey and look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Exarchos K. Dimitropoulos MBA

DBA research candidate

9.2. APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE'S GENERAL DATA (Please fill the appropriate)

Agricultural Cooperative's name:

Address:

Business position:

(based on Agricultural Cooperatives ranking)

Annual Turnover (2005):

Number of employees:

Managing Director or General Manager:

Phone:

Fax:

President of the Board of Directors:

Phone:

Fax:

Quality Manager:

Phone:

Fax:

Production Manager and Foreman:

Phone:

Fax:

1. Please tick the Quality management systems you are aware of and familiar with

- ISO 9000 QMS
- HACCP
- ISO 14000-Environmental MS
- ISO 22000
- OHSAS
- Name any other

2. Please check the Quality management systems your company is registered under

- ISO 9000 QMS
- HACCP
- ISO 14000-Environmental MS
- ISO 22000
- OHSAS
- Name any other

PART A. STAKEHOLDERS' LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF AND TRAINING ON QUALITY AND PROCESS MANAGEMENT & IMPROVEMENT FIELDS

3. Do you have any knowledge of the Quality and Process management and improvement fields?

Yes

No (If your response is No, please skip to question 3a + 4a)

If your answer is Yes, please specify the degree of your knowledge:

High

Fair enough - Adequate

Medium

Low

Negligible

4. Have you received any training courses on the aforementioned topics?

Yes

No (If your response is No, please skip to question 3a + 4a)

If your answer is Yes, please specify the degree of your knowledge:

High

Fair enough - Adequate

Medium Low Negligible

3a + 4a. Do you consider knowledge of and training on the aforementioned topics as necessary, and if yes, why are they necessary?

 Yes No

Please specify the reason:

5. Does there exist any interrelationship between these two fields and ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use process?

 Yes (If your response is Yes, please skip to question 6) No

6. Please specify this interrelationship

PART B. STAKEHOLDERS' LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF AND TRAINING ON ISO 9000 QMS' BUSINESS NATURE

7. Have you been informed and trained on the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature, and its implementation and use requirements ?

Yes (If your response is Yes, please skip to question 7a)

No (If your response is No, please skip to question 7b)

7a. If your answer is Yes, please specify the degree of your knowledge of and training on these issues:

High

Fair enough - Adequate

Medium

Low

Negligible

7b. Please specify the reason you are uninformed and untrained

8. Do you consider information and training on the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature as a prerequisite for a company achieving the effective implementation and efficient use of this system?

Yes (If your response is Yes, please skip to question 8a)

No (If your response is No, please skip to question 8b)

8a. If your answer is Yes, please specify the degree of your knowledge of and training on these issues that is necessary:

High

Fair enough - Adequate

Medium

Low

Negligible

8b. Please specify the reason they are not necessary:

9. Please name the most important difference (if anyone exists) between ISO QMS 9000:1994 and ISO QMS 9000:2000?

(Please tick the most important difference)

- Customer focus
- Leadership
- Involvement of people
- Process approach
- Systems approach to management
- Factual approach to Decision-making
- Continual improvement

10. Which is the main reason for the ISO 9000 QMS introduction and development? (Please tick the reason you consider as main)

- Marketing reasons
- Compliance with legislation
- Customers' requirements
- Control and improvement of business processes and operations
- Assurance of products quality and safety
- Decreased operational and production costs

11. What do you consider to be the most important benefit of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use?

(Please tick the benefit you consider most important)

- Improved product quality
- Increased market share
- Compliance with market and customers requirements, and legislation
- In line with competition-marketing needs
- Improved internal business processes
- Decreased operational and production costs

12. Which is the main problem you encounter during the system's development? *(Please tick the problem you consider most important)*

- Unnecessary documentation
- Lack of knowledge of and training on the system's deployment requirements and business nature
- No cooperation among the various involved departments and stakeholders' groups
- No existence of the required top management commitment and support
- No existence of the required organizational systems and financial resources
- No training and information on the system's development course

13. Do your company and its key stakeholders' groups consider and use the ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource aiming at business processes and operations improvement?

Yes (If your response is Yes, please skip to question 14b)

No (If your response is No, please skip to question 14a)

13a. Which is the reason it is not considered and/or used as such?

13b. What are/should be the intended and actual results of such a usage?

14. Does there exist any quality policy, strategy and communication program in your company and if yes, is this strategy incorporated in the overall business strategy?

Yes

No

15. Which is the stakeholders' key group being responsible for the deployment of ISO 9000 QMS in your company?

(Please tick the one that applies)

- The Quality manager and/or the Production foreman
- The Quality management team/council
- The Quality management unit/department
- Other (please specify) _____

**PART C. CORPORATE POLITICS, POWER STRUCTURE AND DECISION-
MAKING PROCESS**

16. Which stakeholders' group is the decision making group concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' strategic and operational development in your company?

(Please tick the one that applies)

- The Quality manager and/or the Production manager and foreman
- The Quality management team/council
- The Managing Director
- The Board of Directors members/the President of the BoDs

17. Which stakeholders' group should be the decision making group concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' strategic and operational development in your company?

(Please tick the one that applies)

- The Quality manager and/or the Production manager and foreman
- The Quality management council
- The Managing Director
- The Board of Directors members/the President of the BoDs

18. Which stakeholders' group is the decision making group concerning your company's strategic and operational development?

(Please tick the most influential and authoritative one)

- The Managing Director
- The Board of Directors members/the President of the BoDs
- The Top Management team-the Relevant manager

19. Which stakeholders' group should be the decision making group concerning your company's strategic and operational development?

(Please tick the most influential and authoritative one)

- The Managing Director
- The Board of Directors members/the President of the BoDs
- The Top Management team-the Relevant manager

20. Is the actual decision making group on the four aforementioned issues considered and held accountable for its decisions?

- Yes
- No

21. Please rate the most prevailing degree of cooperation amongst the various stakeholders' groups in your company?

(Tick the answer that applies)

- Very strong
- Strong
- Medium
- Weak
- Very Weak
- Competitive

22. Do corporate politics, stakeholders' relations and power structure affect ISO 9000 QMS strategic and operational deployment and use?

- Yes, Positively
- Yes, Negatively
- Neither Positively or Negatively

22a. Which is the reason of their negative and/or positive impact on the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose?

22b. Which is the reason of their negative and/or positive impact on the corporate issues' management and development?

PART D. GREEK AGRO-COOPS' CURRENT BUSINESS STATUS & PRACTICES AND FINANCIAL POSITION AND THEIR INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH ISO 9000 QMS

23. Please rate the business status & practices and financial position of your company? (Tick the answer that applies)

- Very strong/competitive
- Strong/competitive
- Medium

Low/Weak

Very Low/Very Weak

24. Do your company's current business status & practices and financial position affect ISO 9000 QMS' strategic and operational implementation process and use purpose?

Yes, Positively

Yes, Negatively

Neither Positively or Negatively

**24a. How and why do they affect negatively and/or positively the:
i) corporate and ii) ISO 9000 QMS' strategic and operational issues management and development?**

25. Which stakeholders' group do you consider responsible for your company's current: a) business status & practices and financial position? b) ISO 9000 QMS' strategic and operational implementation process and use purpose?

The Managing Director

The Board of Directors members/the President of the BoDs

The Top Management team

The Employees and workers

PART E. IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION OF THE KEY BUSINESS FACTORS INFLUENCING ISO 9000 QMS IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND USE PURPOSE BUSINESS STATUS

26. Below is a list of different factors that may influence the business status of ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector.

Please tick the most important factor according to your existing business experience and belief.

- Greek agro-coops' business status, managerial practices and financial position
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the system's business nature
- Corporate politics, power structure, stakeholders' (groups') relations and decision making process
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the Quality and Process management & improvement fields and perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS
- Key stakeholders' perception of and attitudes towards the ISO 9000 QMS business property and potentiality of being used as a strategic development and organizational change corporate resource

27. Are and/or could be these factors affecting either positively and/or negatively the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in your company and the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector?

- YES, POSITIVELY
- YES, NEGATIVELY
- NEITHER POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY

28. Below is a list of different business areas that are and/or could be influenced by the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector: Customers' service; Internal business processes and operations; Managerial control; Market share; Product and business processes' quality improvement; Production and business operations costs control. Do you agree?

- YES
- NO

29. Have these business areas been influenced positively, that is experiencing improved business processes and operations, and organizational performance, by the ISO 9000 QMS' introduction and implementation process and use purpose in your agro-coop?

- YES NO

If your answer is Yes, please specify the business

area(s): _____

PART F: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF ISO 9000 QMS

30. Finally, we would like to state your opinion and make your comments regarding the ISO 9000 QMS future development for your company enjoying the best outcomes of the implementation and use of a QMS.

If you are interested to inform you the results of the research, please complete the following data:

Company's/Agro-coop's name: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP

Please post the completed questionnaire as soon as possible in the pre-paid addressed envelope provided.

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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
NOTTINGHAM BUSINESS SCHOOL

DOCTORATE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

DOCUMENT 5

A THESIS

**“ISO 9000 QMS: A STRATEGIC BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT AGENT OR A PRODUCTION QUALITY
ASSURANCE AND MARKETING TOOL:
THE GREEK AGRO-COOPS’ EXPERIENCE”**

EXARCHOS DIMITROPOULOS

24 AUGUST 2011

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Agro-Coop:	Agricultural Cooperative
UAC:	Union of Agricultural Cooperatives/Union of Agro-coops / agro-Union
SYN.P.E.:	Limited Liability Cooperative / 2 nd degree Union of Agro-coops
S.A.or ASEE:	3 rd degree Confederation of Unions of Agro-Unions
O.SYN.P.E:	Limited Liability Cooperative / 2 nd degree Union of Agro-coops, in which participation is obligatory for all producers
HACCP:	Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points System
ISO 9000	
QMS:	ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems / ISO 9000 QMSystems
ISO 22000 –	The new series of standards combining elements of both HACCP
HACCP:	and ISO 9000 QMS
DM:	Decision Making process
BoDs-	Elected Members of the Board of Directors
Directors:	
QMS:	Quality Management System(s)
QM:	Quality Manager
SMoQMS:	Strategic Management of Quality Management Systems
OMoQMS:	Operational Management of Quality Management Systems
QDA:	Qualitative Data Analysis
KBF:	Key Business Factors / Drivers - Constraints
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
DBA:	Doctorate of Business Administration
PASEGES:	Central Confederations of Greek agro-coops' Unions and Confederations of agro-coops' Unions
TQM:	Total Quality Management
BPR:	Business Process Re-engineering
QPKNTR:	Quality and Process Management & Improvement fields' knowledge of and training on
IKNTR:	Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and, operational and strategic properties
BFSMPIR:	ISO 9000 QMS' business status' relationship with Greek Agro-coops' business and financial status', and managerial practices
IURRRPD:	ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use reasons, requirements, results and problems, and differences
STRBDCH:	ISO 9000 QMS and Strategic change and business development Change Management Key Business Factors
CPPSR:	Corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders relationships

ABSTRACT

A serious business issue, recurring in the public debate held in Greece and concerning the future of the Agricultural sector, is the stated need of the Agro-coops' sector's organisational and operational reform and improvement (Karamichas, 2008; Tolios, 2003). This identified and/or suggested required strategic business development and change is considered to be a product and at the same time the source of the agro-coops' required organisational performance improvement, as Kamenidis (2008), Arvanitoyiannis (2001) and Parnell (2000) suggest. Furthermore, they relate this strategic business development and change, and performance improvement process with the agro-coops' business processes' reconfiguration and resulting improvement.

According to the majority of the proposed economic and business models, the major mechanism to accomplish the aforementioned aim - that is the strategic choice of the Agro-coops' sector for operating effectively and efficiently - is and/or should be the adoption of the privately owned businesses' sector organisational framework (Karamichas, 2008; Parnell, 2000). Furthermore, the agro-coops have to combine these adopted elements and practices with the particularities of the agricultural business sector, as Ian McPherson (1995) emphatically states. On the other hand, the distinct ownership structure of the agro-coops which is more democratic than hierarchical makes the implementation of change more difficult.

In the Greek business environment, many authors (Karaiskaki, 2003; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002) relate this required organisational performance improvement with the effective implementation and efficient use of the adopted and developed by the agro-coops ISO 9000 QMS, which is the particular focus of this final thesis' document. According to them, this model represents one of the best business practices for the Greek agro-Unions achieving improved business processes and product quality. These, by their turn, may lead the agro-Unions enjoying improved organisational performance and consequently business and financial state.

On the other hand, as Kokkinos (2009) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001) state, the Greek agro-Unions' business sector has been suffering the last two to three decades from:

1. outdated managerial practices and business behaviour,

2. insufficient “investment” in human resources due to inappropriate recruitment and development of them by the required educational and training programmes,
3. competitive relations between the Board of Directors’ elected members and the professional managers, as well as among the members of these two groups,
4. undermined business status and endangered financial position,
5. inappropriate and not clearly defined operational (actual management and strategic decision-making process) framework as far as authority, responsibility and accountability issues are concerned,
6. interference of external parties aiming at serving their own interests.

Based on these aforementioned identified weaknesses, required reform actions and proposed business models of organisational change and strategic business development, the researcher decided to focus his entire DBA research project and this final thesis research study on the critical investigation, analysis and evaluation of the ISO 9000 QMS’ business status and manner of implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-Unions’ business sector. The main research question was and is: what are the driving and restraining forces that influence how efficiently and effectively the Greek agro-Unions have been implementing and using ISO 9000 QMS.

During 2005-2006, the researcher conducted a series of case studies research, including both a qualitative research based on in-depth interviews and a quantitative research based on a large scale, cross-sectional survey in a fair number of Greek agro-coops for critically investigating, analysing and evaluating this main research question.

Moreover, he also proceeded to the thorough investigation of these aforementioned major research aims in this final thesis’ qualitative research study, which was conducted from March to September of 2007, by in-depth interviewing 62/sixty two key stakeholders - them being: the Board of Directors’ elected members (especially the Presidents), General Managers and Quality & Production managers - of 21/twenty one agro-Unions and 7/seven Confederations of them, which represent the 30% of the sector’s population.

These main research aims were accomplished by the exploration and critical evaluation of the researched agro-Unions’ key stakeholders’ perceptions, attitudes and practices

towards ISO 9000 QMS' business nature, and operational and strategic business properties. Because, as Oakland (2003) and Foster (2001) believe, any quality management system's effective implementation process and efficient use purpose are strongly based on and influenced by the corporate stakeholders' "business stance" - that is their attitudes and business practices - towards it.

This final thesis' qualitative research study is mainly empirical in nature, but it also uses the existing literature and theories concerning this research topic, other researches' findings and this DBA research project's previous phases' outcomes. It suggests, in accordance to the entire DBA research project, that ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use could be a competitive model of business practice for the Greek agro-Unions achieving strategic business development and change, through their business processes and consequently organisational performance improvement. Furthermore, it hypothesises that the Greek agro-Unions and their key stakeholders are using ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic resource-competence for achieving the aforementioned strategic aim, despite these corporations' existing business status, financial position and managerial practices, as well as organisational context and settings, and operational framework.

The research study's main findings are: i) rival relations among the key stakeholders' groups and even between members of the same group, ii) outdated managerial practices and business behaviour related with: iii) inappropriate and inadequate decision making process and actual management, both associated with, iv) the stakeholders exhibiting a paternalistic view and pursuing personal and even external parties' - political interests; v) lack of accountability in terms of the decision making process and outcomes, as far as the elected members of the BoDs is concerned; vi) not clearly defined and used in actual practice lines of authority, responsibility and accountability between the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers; vii) Key stakeholders' groups' (especially the BoDs' members') lack of and/or limited knowledge of and training on business issues in general and ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties in particular; resulting in connection with the previous findings to viii) improper use of these systems' operational properties in a fair number of agro-Unions; , and ix) non-use of the strategic one aiming at the strategic business development through the improvement of business processes in the majority of them; x) adoption and practice of a an externally imposed, breakthrough

change process being followed by an incremental one, which in most cases is based on benchmarking and adopting the agro-Union's strategic business partner-private sector's company; xi) business competence based on seniority of years occupancy as member of the BoDs (BoDs' members) versus business competence based on educational knowledge and business experience as professional manager (professional managers).

In relation to and as a result of the aforementioned the researcher's recommendations for change are: a) policy and legal changes concerning the authority, responsibility and accountability issues by: i) a new statute referring to the agro-Unions' ownership shareholding scheme, ii) the use of an independent external agent for auditing the agro-Unions' business operations and financial results, and attributing accountability to the involved stakeholders respectively, iii) clearly defined and established by the PASEGES lines of authority and responsibility between the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers in terms of actual operational and strategic management and decision making process; b) adoption and practice of a "new" scheme concerning the continuous training in business issues, as well as in cooperative issues of all the stakeholders, them being: the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers in order for them acquiring the required business competence for properly deciding and managing the operational and strategic business issues. This training programme could be provided by the PASEGES and/or University schools in the form of educational programmes and business practice of three to six months each time, c) recruitment and advancement of the professional managers based on managerial and business competence and on achievement of objectives, d) audit of ISO 9000 QMS' management and development by an independent external agent in cooperation with state agencies for assuring the systems' actual development and use according to ISO 9000 Guidelines and the agro-Union's quality and corporate business plan.

Based on a conceptual framework of key business factors that are constituting and influencing ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use, the researcher identifies, presents and discusses some of the theoretical, business practice and policy issues, as regards the business status and nature of ISO 9000 QMSystems' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-Unions' sector, by the critical analysis, interpretation and evaluation of this final thesis' research findings.

Since, and as it has been already referred, no previous studies regarding the ISO 9000

QMS implementation process and use purpose have been conducted in Greece the researcher believes in the originality of this research and the significance of its theoretical and practical contribution to the Agricultural sector and the Agro-coops' sector's business practice in Greece. Moreover, the aforementioned key research findings (a fair of number of which have been inductively identified, examined and critically evaluated) and the resulting by them presented managerial recommendations in terms of the theoretical, business practice and especially policy issues further enhance the originality and contribution of this research study.

This final thesis' research document is divided into eight sections with the Introduction being the first one. In the second section, the research objectives and questions are identified and presented in relation to the used theoretical frameworks. The third section illustrates the conceptual framework, in which the key concepts drawn on this research are presented. The fourth section presents the methodological literature with particular emphasis on the research methodology, qualitative methods, and design. The fifth section offers the research methodology, method and findings of the Qualitative and Quantitative research studies conducted in the preceding phases of the entire DBA research project.

The sixth section reports the results of the research through the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative research findings in comparison to each anchor research theme's relevant updated critical literature review.

The seventh section critically examines and discusses the basic results of the research in reference to the conceptual framework, while it critically compares these outcomes with the ones identified and evaluated in the aforementioned preceding qualitative and quantitative researches.

The eighth section, being the last one, provides some concluding remarks to this qualitative research. More specifically, this research study concludes with policy and managerial recommendations, suggests further research studies and contributes to the debate on what management actions could and should be adopted by the Greek agro-coops' Unions' stakeholders, for their corporate entities achieving improved business processes and consequently organisational performance in the current highly competitive business environment.

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CHAPTER1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.1.1 CONTEXT

The ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems' actual implementation process and use purpose remain a challenge for many organisations in the current increasingly competitive world economy and business environment.

For the majority of them, ISO 9000 QMS is still perceived as a management system required and used mainly for addressing marketing purposes and legal directives, as many quality authors, i.e. Oakland (2003), Arvanitoyiannis (2001), state. These companies' stakeholders do not use ISO 9000 QMS as a corporate resource that could contribute to their strategic business development. This goal could be achieved if these QMSystems were applied as an incorporated organic part of the corporate business strategy and operational framework aiming at their business processes' and continuous auditing and improvement, as Karaiskaki (2003) and Parnell (2000) believe.

As a matter of fact, for an increasing number of others a tendency is identified to use ISO 9000 QMS as a corporate resource for achieving improved organisational performance through their business processes' improvement (DBA Document 2, Appendices section - Chapter 14, Proceedings of Athens and Thessaloniki Quality Forums, 1997 – 2007).

However, compared with other corporate resources such as human resources, management information systems, marketing etc., there exists a lack of research and frameworks concerning the improvement of corporate business attitudes and practices in the field of the quality management systems', ISO 9000 QMS included, implementation and use in the Greek Agro-coops.

As it has been already pointed out in the previous DBA documents 1, 2, 3 and 4, the study of the ISO 9000 QMS' role and contribution to the Greek agro-coops' strategic business development, organisational change and performance improvement, as well as, the identification and analysis of the drivers and constraints of this system's effective implementation and efficient use has and/or should have been the subject of increased

attention in recent years.

The root cause is that the majority of these organisations face increasing financial and business operating problems over the last three decades (Kokkinos, 2009; Doutsias, 2003). Therefore, the re-configuration of their business practices and attitudes towards any developed and used (quality) management system - e.g. the ISO 9000 QMS - is considered a requirement for their business survival and development (Karaiskaki, 2003; Kamenidis, 2008).

The critical examination and evaluation of the ISO 9000 QMSystems' manner of implementation process and use purpose by the Greek Agricultural Cooperatives' sector is the DBA research focus. It is mainly connected with the following two issues, which were analysed more extensively in the DBA preceding documents:

1. on one hand, with the reanimation of the ongoing dialogue and debate concerning the perspectives of the Agricultural Cooperatives in Greece and the future status of the 15-18% of the country's active population which is occupied in the broader agricultural sector (ICAP, 2007), and
2. on the other, with the ever increasing public concern, interest and demand for safer, healthier and quality enhanced food products and services worldwide (ICAP, 2007; Arvanitoyiannis et al., 2000).

The main aim of the entire DBA and the final thesis' research process is to examine, analyse and critically evaluate the manner and business nature of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-Unions' business sector for and by:

- investigating and critically evaluating their key stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes and actual business practice concerning these QMSystems' role and degree of contribution in the development and sustainable application of improved business processes and ultimately organisational performance, and
- critically identifying, analysing and evaluating the key business factors influencing these QMS' effective implementation and efficient use.

As a result of the aforementioned main research aim, the following working hypothesis is going to be examined and tested throughout the final thesis' research study:

The manner of ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems' implementation process and use purpose by the Greek agro-Unions (and their key stakeholders) is crucially affected

by a number of Key Business Factors, which act as either drivers or constrains forces shaping the outcomes' business nature.

1.1.2 PURPOSE

This final thesis' document summarises the main research findings from a detailed, qualitative set of in-depth interviews - mainly semi-structured and some open-end ones - and case studies of ISO 9000 QMS' management and deployment - that is their implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-coops' sector. The research sample is consisted by a number of agro-Unions and Confederations of them, and their key stakeholders' groups.

1.1.3 DESIGN-METHODOLOGY-APPROACH

The final thesis' qualitative, interpretative research study is in-depth interview driven and case study method based, while a limited number of them were based on documental material analysis and interpretation. The main research tool is the semi-structured interviews, compiled mainly by semi-structured questions and a few open-end ones.

It is based mainly on empirical research findings, but it makes also use of the existing literature and theory as these have been examined and critically evaluated by the researcher and the DBA previous researches studies' outcomes. The researcher adopts and uses a type of the Grounded Theory methodological approach as developed by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998), which emphasizes the inductive theory generation.

The research sample totals to twenty one agro-Unions, and seven Confederations of them. The researched corporate entities represent the 30% of the sector's population (92 active agro-Unions) and the 70-80% of the entire sector's business activities and operations, market presence, sales volume, exports activity and financial earnings according to PASEGES (2007) and ICAP (2007) archives.

The researched agro-Unions and Confederations of them, and their interviewed key stakeholders constitute the two sub-groups of the research sample's population, which are both presented with their relevant codes in section 4.4. The sample consist three

groups of Greek agro-Unions and Confederations of them, and three groups of key stakeholders:

the Presidents and BoDs' elected members / Directors; and the professional managers / General Managers and Quality managers.

1.1.4 ORIGINALITY AND VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

This thesis is important in highlighting the main areas of ISO 9000 QMS' operational and strategic management, development and use in the Greek Agro-coops' sector. During the last ten years, a new tendency in Greece has manifested itself, towards a more effective and efficient management of the agro-coops' business operations and functions. In that way, an opportunity is offered to them for improving their organisational performance in order to reduce their operational costs, increase business profits and free capital necessary for reducing corporate long and medium-term debt in order to achieve their business survival and organisational development.

This study is our contribution to the debate on what can be done for the Greek agro-Unions achieving: improved business processes and operations, and consequently organisational performance; strategic business development; operational framework, and organisational context and settings' improvement; successful management of agency theory issues.

In that way, it is aimed to offer viable business solutions for the agricultural sector and its constituting shareholders: agro-coops of all three degrees, Producers' groups and farmers.

It has to be emphasised that, this is the first research study conducted in the Greek agro-Unions' business sector and having these research focus and main aims.

1.2 RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process is divided into the following separate but related chapters:

The research commences with an updated critical literature review leading to the purposes and objectives, and a number of specific research questions relevant to the thesis' further research are identified and explored in Chapter two. The importance of the field and possible beneficiaries of the research to various constituencies is discussed. This literature review concerns the business fields of: Quality and Process Management and Improvement - ISO 9000 QMS being the major topic; ISO 9000:2000 QMS' business nature and properties, and implementation and use reasons, results (benefits and difficulties-problems) and requirements, and differences with ISO 9000:1994; Greek Agro-coops' business sector; ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property; and Change of Management business field.

Chapter three provides a set of working definitions of the key concepts and themes to be analysed in the research. It also illustrates the conceptual themes and framework in relation to the research questions.

Chapter four discusses the methodological strategy, considering the interpretative and qualitative approaches that have been undertaken by the researcher in order to answer this document's research questions. Specifically, in-depth interviews are conducted with Greek agro-Unions' Directors and professional managers, and the case study method is selectively used, as it allows an in-depth analysis of the information and learning from the experiences of interviewees. Ethical and political considerations are also discussed, and finally the research design followed by the researcher is described.

Chapter five provides a brief analysis of the research studies' methodology, methods and findings undertaken for documents 3 and 4, considering the current business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sector.

The main body of Chapter six consist the presentation and initial evaluation of each relevant Key research theme's and relevant anchor research question's Qualitative Data Analysis process, content and research findings. It also includes an initial comparison of each anchor research theme's qualitative research data analysis and research findings, with the current literature of each key research theme's business topics.

The critical examination and evaluation of these business topics' impact on ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose represent a major aim of this research.

In chapter seven a critical evaluation of the final thesis' research findings is presented, for the readers arriving at an optimal stage of understanding and critically evaluating the Greek agro-Unions' actual practice, in terms of implementing and using ISO 9000 QMS and possibly any other Quality management system, i.e. the recently adopted and introduced ISO 22000-HACCP or the new ISO 9000:2008 series available in due course.

Moreover, a comparison, between the DBA previously undertaken researches' findings and the final thesis' research findings, is conducted and presented. The aim of this comparison is the identification and evaluation of the similarities and differences between all three researches' findings, in order to arrive to conclusions, which are representative of the entire DBA research process.

All these additional interpretative findings are discussed further in chapter eight together with the theoretical and practical implications and managerial guidelines, in order for the reader to contextualise and conceptualise the entire research and to assess the contribution of this research to current knowledge.

Finally, chapter eight provides some concluding remarks and research limitations, as well as recommendations for further research: in the field of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose approach, ii) and in the field of Quality Management Systems development and use in the Greek agro-coops' business sector especially and in the other business sectors as well. Furthermore, it includes the key conclusions and managerial recommendations based on the DBA research studies' findings, as these are revealed by the entire DBA research study.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

In this chapter, the objectives of the research and the research questions to be answered, as well as the importance of the topic and possible beneficiaries of the research to various constituencies are identified and presented. Moreover, the Theoretical Frameworks used are presented through a summary of an updated critical literature review.

2.1 PROBLEM DESCRIPTION - UPDATED CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The socioeconomic and business environment in both Europe and Greece, in which the agricultural cooperatives are operating, is currently undergoing a rapid change. Public Policy as demonstrated in the reformed C.A.P., trade liberalisation under the GATT agreement signed in the W.T.O. and the E.U. enlargement are to bring more competition and less support to commodity markets. At the same time, biotechnology, information technology and the rising power of the retail chains and MNEs require from the Agro-food industry's companies - including the agro-coops - to adapt successfully in this 'new' business environment in order to survive and develop.

In relation to that, the developed countries' societies state new requirements, as food industry's operations are increasingly associated with: consumers' growing demand for enjoying safer food products with upgraded quality and 'more value for money'; public health; environmental protection; agro-communities' upgrading; and all stakeholders' welfare (E.U. - New CAP, 2004; the emerging CSR business field).

This demand tends to become a business operating and legal prerequisite for all Food Industry's corporations, as it has been already institutionalised through the European Union's directives concerning food products' quality and safety, and consequently consumers' health protection.

As a matter of fact, these directives have been already embodied in the national legislation of the state members and in the national legislation of other states - i.e. U.S.A., Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, South Africa and so on -, thus affecting the legal, as well as the business status of all food industry companies on a national,

European and global level and scale (Karaiskaki, 2003; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001).

The aforementioned evolving business operations' requirements and market demands have forced all corporations to proceed to the adoption and use of updated management systems and business practices for handling them successfully (Doutsias, 2003).

Thus, all the Food Industry's private companies favoured the introduction, implementation and use of Quality Assurance and Management Systems - such as the ISO 9000, ISO 14000 and HACCP, and to a much lesser degree TQM and BPR programs (which are considered by the Greek agro-food industry's stakeholders as more costly and difficult to develop) as a means for remaining competitive and survive, business wise (Kokkinos 2009; Tolios, 2003). This approach requires the effective implementation and efficient use of these introduced, developed and used (quality) management systems for achieving their business processes' and consequently organisational performance improvement (Semos, 2003; Parnell, 2000). As a matter of fact, the agricultural cooperatives are obliged to adopt and use this approach among a number of business innovation and structural reforms that have to undertake in order to be able to counter the negative effects of global competitiveness, as Prakash (2010) states in his paper presented at the 14th ICA-Japan International Training course in 2010.

ISO 9000:2000 represents a fundamental change in approach, and is a major and needed improvement over the two earlier versions (Oakland, 2003). ISO 9000's evolution has aligned it more closely with the Total Quality Management philosophy. In ISO's own words, as presented in Goetch and Davis (2002): "The primary aim of the "consistent pair [ISO 9001 and ISO 9004] is to relate modern quality management to the process and activities of an organization, including the promotion of continual improvement and achievement of customer satisfaction".

They pointed out that the major change was from a "system based" to a more "process based" quality management system, which could improve organisational performance by improving business process. Moreover, ISO 9000:2000 is a quality management system encompassing and covering both the quality assurance and control topics.

Despite, these proclamations of organisational performance improvement, through the adoption of a process orientation by an organisation, a considerable number of

enterprises still remain traditional in operations, being more function based and oriented rather than being process driven.

Research on these above mentioned companies has proved that, deployment of a common process framework throughout the organisation requires: appointment of processes' agents and work tasks' 'owners'; delegation of authority and responsibility to the specific task owner; existence of accountability to the relevant task owner and/or process agent; acquirement by the relevant work task owner of the required academic knowledge, business experience and continuous training, all leading to business competence. These required fundamental changes in the way organisations are operating and managing their businesses are the main root causes for many organisations not evolving to a process business, but instead remaining "traditional" by focusing on tasks, jobs and people who do them and on structures.

It may be considered by a fair number of corporate stakeholders as a possible challenge, since this change may affect the existing established organisational context and settings, as well as operational framework (Oakland, 2003; Foster, 2001).

On the other hand, the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use in and by various business sectors' corporations - Greek agro-Unions, too - is under question. The underlying reason refers to the adequacy of their prevailing operational framework, organisational context and settings, and business infrastructure and competencies to effectively implement and efficiently use these systems (Doutsias, 2003; Parnell, 2000).

This view is further verified by an article of Stafylidis (Quality magazine ECO-Q, issue 60, November – December 2006), a certified consultant-inspector and General Manager of the Northern Greece's office of EUROCERT S.A. referring to the problems encountered by the Greek small and medium size enterprises, in terms of ISO 9000:2000 QMS' deployment process and use purpose. As main sources of the ISO 9000 QMS' under-management and misuse, he pointed out the following:

- lack of the corporate stakeholders' knowledge of and training on the systems' business nature and proper deployment and use requirements,
- lack of the key stakeholders' management competence being specified as lack

of: knowledge, training, professional business experience and management expertise concerning the business issues' actual operational and strategic management,

- the stakeholders' ignorance of ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property and potentiality of being used as a management system aiding the corporation's strategic business development through its business processes' improvement,
- inexistence of the required human, managerial and financial resources, and technical infrastructure as the SPC programs,
- the BoDs' members and senior professional managers are not eager to decentralise the operational activities and grant increased authority and responsibility to their subordinates, resulting to their avoidance to participate actively,
- a clash of interests and goals among the corporate stakeholders' groups, mostly exhibited in the medium size companies,
- lack of the corporate stakeholders' business mentality and actual practice of the required ISO 9000 QMS' continual improvement process.

Due to the fact that, the initiators and implementers of all these business developments are the private ownership companies of the agro-food industry, the (Greek) agro-Unions have been obliged to introduce these quality management systems and attempt to implement and use them effectively and efficiently for achieving business competitiveness and survival (Sotiropoulos, 2009; Goniotakis, 2009).

But, the majority of the Greek agro-Unions have been facing serious business and financial problems over the last two-three decades due to similar problems to the aforementioned ones. Their operational framework and, organisational context and settings are characterised by:

1. insufficient "investment" in professional managers by their inappropriate recruitment and inner-business development the required educational and training programmes,
2. competitive relations between the BoDs' and professional managers, as well as among these groups' members,
3. inadequate level of knowledge and business experience of the BoDs' members,

4. lack of the required educational and training programmes for all stakeholders,
5. outdated managerial practices and business behaviour,
6. ineffective and inefficient operational framework (actual management and strategic decision-making process) in terms of the stakeholders' authority, responsibility and accountability issues,
7. lack of both external and internal auditing of the agro-coops business' practices, as identified by Kokkinos (2009) and Doutsias (2003), and in the collective work of Maraveyas et al. (2003). As a result, the Greek agro-Unions experienced decreasing market presence, competitiveness and profitability, and heavy borrowing from the state banks leading them even to bankruptcy, according to the aforementioned authors.

It is important to state that the agricultural cooperatives worldwide face similar problems as Prakash (2010) refers by presenting the Japanese agro-coops' business status in "Strengthening management of Agricultural cooperatives in Asia". To overcome these problems he suggests among others the: human resource development through formal and informal training of the members and the employees, improvement of the legal framework of agro-coops and development of commercial partnership and joint ventures with private sector's companies.

The Japanese agro-coops have already adopted these suggestions by promoting the: empowerment and participation of the members and their representatives in the BoDs; provision to all agro-coops' members of educational programmes on agricultural products' safety and quality efficient restructuring of the cooperative business practices; and restructuring of their organisational context and settings in terms of agency theory issues among the Directors' and professional managers' groups.

A similar approach has been already adopted and practiced by the American agro-coops with the 'dramatic' birth and evolution of the "SAPIRO III New Generation agro-coops" type, as it was first presented in an article of Cook (December 1995, pp. 1153-1159).

In this paper, Cook examines the strategic and structural shifts in U.S.A. agricultural cooperatives and applies a Neo-Institutional approach in terms of economics in order to speculate for their future organisational and operational frameworks' status and nature.

It is noteworthy, as it is referred, that the results of various studies have identified the following (among others) factors responsible for the success of agricultural cooperatives: cooperatives are efficiently supervised, controlled and managed by experienced, trained and professionally-qualified managers and democratically-elected boards of directors; principles of "accountability" and "answerability", "role model", ethical behaviour and good governance are employed; cooperatives undertake programmes for the education and training of the staff and of the BoDs' members; cooperatives should be managed in a more business-like manner and business should be conducted in accordance with modern management principles; and remain free from all external controls and directions.

The agro-coops are not and/or should not be obliged to operate as social clubs or charity organisations (Prakash, 2010).

On the other hand, the Greek agro-coops are almost 'obliged' to safeguard the public social and economic welfare, a fact that prohibits and/or offers the excuse to their key stakeholders of and/or of not adopting and using the private sector's companies' aforementioned business 'paradigm', as Kokkinos (2009) and Semos (2003) state.

These two aforementioned business aims are perceived as contradictory by the agro-coops' stakeholders, while they generate contrasting business practices, goals and interests and ultimately rival relations among these stakeholders' various groups. The end-result is an ineffective and inefficient operational framework and a fierce organisational context (Karaiskaki, 2003; Parnell, 2000).

In addition to these, the state's legal and institutional intervention, and the political parties' interference and exercised political influence through the BoDs' elected members affect their actual operational framework and, organisational context and settings and ultimately their organisational performance (Goniotakis, 2009; Kamenidis, 2008).

The internal business and financial auditing either has no power for effective control or acts under the rule of coalition of groups of the same political party. The information supplied is not sufficient and free of influence by specific interests. External auditing of agro-Unions' business has been weakened or does not exist.

The working environment created due to this situation does not attract competent managers and/or obliges the existing ones to quit. The agro-coops' members and their BoDs' members do not have the required academic knowledge and previous business experience in business and financial issues, while they are not eager to attend such programs. Therefore, in most of the cases, the decisions made by the agro-coops' members and/or Directors either are based in other criteria than financial and business development ones or they are not taken by persons having the appropriate business knowledge and managerial competence (Doutsias, 2003: 98).

Actually, the Greek Agro-Unions' key Stakeholders' groups are seeking very often to manipulate the organisational context and settings, and influence the organisational behaviour and business practice towards servicing their own and/or other parties' interests instead of the Unions' ones. This practice generates conflict among the stakeholders and under- and/or mismanagement of the business affairs, while it prohibits any attempt to improve their operational framework and, organisational context and settings, since it is viewed as an undesired change that could alter the existing favourable for them "status quo" (Kokkinos, 2009; Daoutopoulos, 2006; Parnell, 2000).

As a matter of fact, the emergence of the Power-Politics perspective in Organisation theory puts forward a similar view first introduced by Zaleznik in his seminal work published in the Harvard Business Review (May-June, 1970). He advocated that organisations are also political structures in which decisions on power, distribution of authority and pursuit of interests in a fair number of cases are driven and based on irrational terms and personal motives and affect crucially the organisational relationships and consequently the organisational context and settings.

Moreover, as it is stated in a Beeman's and Sharkey's article (2001) ~~xstatex~~ "the heart of all corporate politics is competition within a highly complex social system". As a

matter of fact, the (Greek) agricultural cooperatives resemble to such systems, thus, intense political behaviour generating dysfunctional organisational behaviour and business practices is a common phenomenon in them. The end-result is that their key stakeholders use too much of their power and influence in the political maneuvering in expense of the corporate affairs and interests with the end-result of subverting the organisational goals.

Burnes (2000:173) argues: “organisations often act irrationally, that their goals and objectives emerge through a process of negotiation and influence, and that they are composed of competing and shifting coalitions of groups and individuals”. Moreover, political interference in internal business issues influence the decision making process, while it most possibly generates competing stakeholders’ groups with multiple and conflicting interests that may be different if not competing to the organisational ones (Cyert and March, 1963: cited in Burnes, 2000:174).

Due to this attitude, the dominant stakeholders’ group withhold authority of the decision making process, while other groups may withhold information, since these two are considered as sources of power (Pettigrew, 1985, 1987: cited in Burnes, 2000: 175).

This approach could become a management of change factor concerning the Greek Agro-coops’ operational framework and business practice, as well as their organisational context and settings. Because, delegation and/or withholding of authority is one of the major means for a stakeholder controlling the organisational power structure for his own interest, as Wilson (2000) and Burnes (2000) point out.

This organisational behaviour, creating the aforementioned business constraining forces, has been first explained by the Agency theory as presented in the seminal article of Jensen and Meckling (1976).

Agency theory can be defined as “the theory that indicates the manner the corporate stakeholders handle the business issues for servicing their own and/or other parties’ interests, instead of the corporate ones. In that way, they prevent the corporation from achieving its strategic business development goals” (cited in Daoutopoulos, 2006: 90).

In their paper the authors combined elements from the theory of agency, the theory of

property rights and the theory of finance to develop a theory of the ownership structure of the firm. In addition, they defined the concept of agency costs, investigated its nature and presented its relationship to the 'separation and control' issues and to the generation of conflicts of interest among the corporate stakeholders.

They also provided a new definition of the firm influenced and based: on the agency theory issues as well as on the Stakeholders' ubiquitous agency relationship, in which one party (the principal) delegates work to another (the agent), who performs the work. According to them many problems in the firm can be viewed as cases of the theory of agency relationships, which are contracts between the principal(s) and the agent(s).

“Contractual relations are the essence of the firm, not only with employees but with suppliers, customers, creditors and so on. The problem of agency costs and monitoring exists for all of these contacts...Most organisations (firms, non-profit institutions, co-operatives and even governmental bodies) are simply legal fictions which serve as a nexus for a set of contracting relationships among individuals”, as they claimed.

Fama and Jensen (June 1983) investigated the issue of the separation of ownership and control, which is intimately associated with the general problem of agency. Moreover, they examined its impact on large corporations' (i.e.: large professional partnerships, non-profit organisations, co-operatives etc.) organisational and operational framework and in the survival of the organisations.

Michael Cook (1994) and Jerker Nilsson (1997) adapted Agency theory in the agro-coops' business sector and attempted to explain the nature and root-cause of their stakeholders' business behaviour and practice (cited in Daoutopoulos, 2006: 90).

More specifically, Cook (1994) argued that “organisational differences influence management behaviour by affecting managerial working roles”, thus the roles and behaviour of the general manager of a user-oriented firm (as the agricultural cooperatives are) differ from those of his/her counterpart in an investor-owned firm (IOF).

In that way, the contractual agency relationships play a very important role in the actual organisational behaviour and framework, and business practice as these are exhibited in any firm and especially in the agricultural cooperatives, whose agency relationships are

of a different nature and degree in comparison to these of the IOFs.

As a consequence of the aforementioned agro-coops' internal and external business framework, a new rationale concerning and requiring the effective and efficient introduction, implementation and use of the ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-Unions has been emerging. Apostolopoulos (2009) and Daoutopoulos (2006) consider the business processes and consequently organisational performance improvement, through the proper ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use, as the most suitable means for the Greek agro-Unions' business survival and development.

Moreover, they relate their operational framework and organisational context and settings' improvement with their key stakeholders' acknowledgement and use of these QMS' strategic business property for the agro-coops achieving business processes' and consequently organisational performance improvement (Papandreou, 2009; Dale, 2003).

As Karamichas (2009, 2008) and Daoutopoulos (2006) suggest, a means for the Greek agro-coops achieving these goals and overcoming the aforementioned business problems is to adopt the private sector's companies' 'best practice' in terms of:

i) stakeholders' relations and power structure, ii) managerial practices in terms of the business issues' management and decision making process, iii) use of business informational and training courses to all stakeholders for improving their business knowledge and managerial competence, because these business themes' status could affect the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and manner of implementation and use.

As a matter of fact, these suggestions are verified by the findings of the Douglas et al. study (2003), which summarises the arguments for and against ISO 9000 QMS by surveying 100 Quality managers/ representatives of ISO certified companies, whose majority are content with the systems' contribution to process and quality improvement. An important fact is that the research sample is consisted by organisational members who possess a high degree of business experience, knowledge and training on the business topic under research, thus they are able to effectively implement and efficiently use ISO, as the authors argue.

Moreover, Martinez-Costa and Martinez-Lorente (2007) conclude that implementing

ISO 9000 QMS just for compliance does not constitute a competitive advantage, while the status and nature of the organisational framework affects and is affected by these QMS systems' implementation process and use purpose.

The "new" ISO 9000:2000 version is process-driven rather than being based on procedures as the "old" version ISO 9000:1994 was. Thus, it favours the continuous process improvement approach in order to improve organisational performance in the words of ISO Technical Committee (ISO 9000 Handbook and Guidelines, 2000).

This achievement could be considered as the outcome of the improvement of their organisational context and operational framework, which are both affected by the business processes' status and improvement process, as Dale (2003), Wilson (2000), Burnes (2000) and, Hammer and Champy (1993) consider.

Same views are revealed by a research study exploring how the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process transforms the organisational climate and assessing the impacts of its use in the internal human and organisational environment by acting as a strategic change agent (Kunnanatt, 2007).

According to Srivastar's (2010) research study's findings ISO 9000 QMS' implementation enhances the culture of collaboration; transforms the organisational climate from dysfunctional to functional; and strengthens problem solving through teamwork.

Therefore, the adoption and use of optimal business practices towards these systems' implementation and use could be considered as a serious business requirement and means for achieving the aforementioned goals (Kamenidis, 2008; Kokkinos, 2009).

The process-based management is also favoured as the most optimal approach to provide the best answers to the ISO 9001 requirements in the study of Carmignani (2008).

Goetch and Davis (2002) verify the aforementioned views by presenting a survey of North American (USA and Canada) firms registered to ISO 9000:1994, conducted by Quality System Update and the management consulting firm Deloitte and Touche S.A.. First, the respondents to the survey listed the following issues as the major internal business benefits of ISO 9000 registration: Better documentation which leads to process improvement, positive cultural change, greater quality awareness and higher perceived quality of product and/or service by all customers (internal and external), which was listed as the most important and valuable benefit.

On the other hand, many organisations reported that the decision to become an ISO 9000 certified company was a difficult one, as they considered ISO registration too costly and too much work requiring. Moreover, the anticipated benefits were not assured and well known due to a lack of understanding and knowledge about the system and its proclaimed benefits, besides of using it as a marketing tool and as a requirement for participating in public projects contests. On continuing, other organisations reported of having difficulties developing effectively and efficiently ISO 9000 QMS, because different perceptions on quality held by, poor communication skills of and competitive relations among the stakeholders' groups' members still existed, as the aforementioned author refers.

The results from a survey of 146 Singaporean firms suggest that some problems encountered in companies certified under ISO 9000 QMS include the failures to establish adequate monitoring programs, to follow set procedures and to carry out appropriate management reviews of the system as well as not establishing clear lines of authority, responsibility and accountability in terms of process ownership and agency (Chow-Chua, Goh, Wan; 2003).

Apostolopoulos (2009) and Foster (2001) explain these contradictory results by stating that, different quality perceptions emerge from the different functional roles that have to be fulfilled by the employees in anyone organisation – agro-coops, too.

These functional differences create different perspectives on the quality issue. A solution in this problem can be achieved by adopting the organic view of the organisations, as Beckford (2002) and Foster (2001) suggest.

The organic view of the organisation helps to see the organisation as an entity of interrelated and interconnected functions, processes, systems, methods and departments and by this way it may help anyone overcome the differing perceptions on quality held by the different parts of the organisation. The emergence of the process approach may help more in this issue, as communications' issues find resolution easier and organisational processes become more cross-functional, as the aforementioned author believes.

As a matter of fact, this view is reinforced by the findings of a study on 132 Austrian firms focusing on the impact of Business Process orientation on Organisational Performance conducted by Kohlbacher, Gruenwald and Kreuzer (September, 2010).

This approach is further verified by the research studies' findings presented in the Proceedings of the Quality and Competitiveness International Forums, held in Athens in 1997, 1998, 1999 concerning ISO 9000:1994 QMS. It has been also ascertained by the research studies presented in the Quality Forums of years 2006 and 2007, which referred to ISO 9000:2000 QMS' business status, development and use in Greek companies.

In the studies of Kasinides (1998) and Aggelidis (1998) on ISO 9000:1994 QMS' implementation and use in British and Cypriot enterprises, the three most important benefits for the organisations were: a) been aware for problems of business processes (78%), b) covering the customers' requirements (72%) and c) improvement of managerial control (75%).

Almost identical research findings were identified in an initial survey conducted from 1995 to 1997 (Petroheilou, 1998). The Greek companies were pursuing the ISO 9000:1994 registration and certification: for marketing purposes - 42%; due to their customers' pressure and demands - 30%; senior management decision and request - 24%; and other reasons - 4%.

The main benefits were: Standardisation of internal business processes and operations - 27%; Operational and Managerial Control - 20%; Delegation of management authority, responsibility and accountability - 10%; Improvement of Quality inspection and control -10%; Improvement of internal communication - 10%; Production Cost decrease - 8%.

As proved by a study (Zaramdini, 2007), the UAE certified companies were more

concerned by internal reasons like improving business processes and/or products' quality than by external reasons like pressure from customers or imitation of competitors. In addition, the certification process has generated more internal benefits (the aforementioned reasons) than external ones.

Similar findings are identified in the Kim, Kumar and Kumar study (2011) which is concentrated on three research topics: motivations/reasons; critical success factors/requirements - KBF; and impacts/results of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use. Further on, this study proposes a performance realisation framework for explaining causal relationships among the aforementioned three research topics.

Achieving (internal mainly) benefits is positively affected by the existence of internal reasons and negatively affected by the difficulties to meet the standard requirements, as research in 97 Greek food companies showed (Fotopoulos, Psomas, Vouzas; 2010).

As George Kechribaris - the Managing Director of TUV HELLAS S.A. - referred in the 2006 Quality Forum held in Athens, almost similar benefits were pointed out as the most serious ones in a research survey concerning the implementation and use of ISO 9000:2000 in 277 U.S.A. companies.

He also presented the research outputs of another similar research survey conducted in 15 countries. According to the respondents, the main benefits were the following, as ranked in terms of their importance: Corporate image improvement; Businesses' processes improvement; Improvement of the corporate relations with the state agencies and other third parties; Customers' satisfaction improvement; Employees' morale improvement; Products' and services' quality improvement; Production costs' decrease; Productivity increase; Just on time production and delivery of the produced goods; and, Market share and Profitability increase.

More specifically, in the research study conducted by the Japan Quality Association/JQA the (key) stakeholders of 630 Japanese corporations stated the following requirements for achieving the ISO 9000:2000 proper implementation and use: Continual improvement – 26%; Customer focused – 20%; Business process focused – 20%; Incorporation of ISO 9000 QMS' planning in the strategic business planning – 15.3%; Top managers' and Directors' groups' participation and commitment in the proper implementation process and use purpose of ISO 9000 QMS – 12.2%.

Dale (2003) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001) believe that, all the aforementioned benefits can be achieved only with the unwavering commitment and support of the Directors and the senior professional managers, who have to be well informed of, trained on and adequately experienced in quality and process management and improvement, as well as in other business issues. In that way, they could manage efficiently and effectively the corporate business issues and management systems, ISO 9000 QMS, too.

Actually, in a study of ISO 9000 maintenance approach in two service organisations published in the *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, it was found that the company with higher top management commitment, empowered employees and better internal communication experiences higher maintenance rate of the ISO QMS' upgraded business status (Wahid, Corner, Tan; 2011).

Moreover, as Dale (2003) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001) state, the corporate stakeholders' active involvement in ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose presupposes clearly defined lines of authority, responsibility and accountability, as far as the business processes' actual management and decision making process are concerned (Kokkinos, 2009; Parnell, 2000; Hammer and Champy, 1993).

This approach could result to a more cooperative business attitude and practice expressed by the corporate stakeholders, which ultimately aids the creation of cooperative relations among them and the pursuing of the corporate goals and interests instead of their own (Kamenidis, 2008; Oakland, 2003).

Similar findings are presented in a study (Rusjan and Alic, 2010) which aggregates the outcomes of several research papers discussing the requirements for and the benefits (emphasis on the use of the systems' strategic business property for achieving improved business processes) of any company effectively implementing and efficiently using ISO 9000 QMS.

Because, as Burnes (2000) and Wilson (2000) state, the existence of stakeholder groups attempting to manipulate the organisational behaviour and business practice, (formal and/or informal and comprised by internal and/or external stakeholders) is a common phenomenon encountered in any organisation.

Thus, these stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, and practices towards any business issue and/or management system play a very important role concerning the proper

actual management and decision making process of it.

In relevance to these, as Oakland (2003) and Banks (2000) refer, business process improvement achieved by the ISO 9000 QMS' optimal manner of implementation and use could affect the current operational framework and, organisational context and settings of any company, due to its transformation to a process driven one (ISO 9000 QMS' Handbook Guidelines; Oakland, 2003; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001).

This organisational transformation could be perceived and used as a possible business means by any corporate stakeholder and/or stakeholders' group wishing to influence and/or alter the already established interests and power structures in the agro-coops' organisational framework and context. Such a change process would not be easily accepted by the other interested parties (Doutsias, 2003; Tolios, 2003).

As a reciprocal and self-defending means, they could 'sabotage', pretend of supporting or remain uninvolved in the systems' proper implementation and use in order to safeguard their own interests according to Parnell (2000) and the aforementioned.

Therefore, their reactions towards any management system, ISO 9000 QMS also, generating such a situation may range from totally negative to the other end of the continuum, that is to totally positive, depending on their interests' servicing.

Due to this reason, this fact may be proven a major constraint for a corporation achieving the proper ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose, since a major shift of the existing corporate culture, operational practices, and power structure and relations is required for achieving the aforementioned aim (Apostolopoulos, 2009; Dale, 2003).

As a result, a fair number of companies, characterised by strictly formalised and rigid organisational cultures and structures, and inappropriate operational framework and outdated managerial practices, prefer to operate under the "old way", as Daoutopoulos (2006), Karamichas (2009, 2008) and Kamenidis (2008) pointed out referring to the Greek agro-Unions.

In that way, their current organisational context and settings, as well as stakeholders' level of knowledge of business issues and managerial practices seem to affect the

business issues' actual operational and strategic management and decision making process and consequently the implementation process and use purpose of any management system developed and used, thus, ISO 9000 QMS too.

Indeed, as referred in another article of Kohlbacher and Gruenwald (2011), the (proper) process management is a concept consisting among others from: management commitment towards process orientation; the existence of the process owner role; application of continuous process improvement methodologies; and process-oriented organisational structure and culture.

Moreover, improved business processes may contribute decisively to the improvement of the organisational performance provided that the corporate culture emphasises: customer orientation; personal accountability; a cooperative leadership style and teamwork; customer orientation; and willingness to change, as Kohlbacher and Ringhofer (2010) state in their paper concerning Continuous Process Improvement and Innovation.

It is evident from these research studies' findings that, ISO 9000:2000 QMS' effective implementation process and efficient use could contribute significantly to the business processes' and consequently organisational performance improvement and, business and financial state upgrading, under the condition that the aforementioned requirements are covered.

Actually, in a USDA study (2002) as presented by Maraveyias et al. (2003), the American agro-coops' key stakeholders are required to overcome anyone and/or all of the aforementioned business constraints for managing effectively and efficiently the agro-coops' business issues and achieving their 'survival', strategic business development and structural reform.

2.2. OBJECTIVES

In relation to the already investigated research objectives in the previous DBA Documents 3 and 4, the following form the basis for further primary research in the Final Thesis' research study:

A. to investigate the research sample's three sub-groups of Greek agro-Unions' three Key Stakeholders' groups' perceptions, attitudes and actual practices in terms of:

1. the existing status and nature of the Agro-Unions':
 - a) Stakeholders' business expertise and managerial competence,
 - b) Operational framework (business and financial status, and business practices),
 - c) Organisational context and settings (corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations),
2. the aforementioned business factors'-topics' impact on/interrelationship with the agro-Unions' actual operational practice, that is the decision making process and management of the operational and strategic business issues and management systems in use (ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use business nature, manner and outcomes, too),
3. the required business status and nature of the aforementioned business factors'-topics for any corporation (the Agro-Unions, too):
 - a) properly managing the business issues and any (quality) management system in use, and more especially
 - b) implementing effectively ISO 9000 QMS and using efficiently these QMS' business nature and i) operational and ii) strategic business properties for achieving improved business processes and its strategic business development and organisational change goals.

B. In addition to the aforementioned objectives, the following form the basis for further primary research in the research sample's three sub-groups of Agro-Unions, each one of which retains a business partnership of a different nature and degree with the private sector's companies:

4. to investigate these third parties' – external stakeholders' influence on:
 - 4.1 ISO 9000 QMS' business nature, manner and outcomes of implementation process and use purpose, by assessing the degree and nature of the impact of

this business partnership:

4.2. on the aforementioned three research objectives' status and nature, and

4.3. on the nature and outcomes of the course of action adopted (or not) by the researched agro-Unions for successfully overcoming the problems-constraints

encountered during the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose.

C. 5. To conduct a cross-case comparative analysis and evaluation of the research data and the resulting findings identified in each research sample's group in relation to those identified in the other research sample's groups, in order to

6. extrapolate from the above and formulate a set of the Key Business Factors that influence by acting as either driving and/or restraining forces the nature, manner and

outcomes of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-Unions' business sector.

2.3 QUESTIONS

In light of the above-mentioned research issues, this section addresses the “what”, “why”, “by whom” and “how” questions in relation to the business nature and manner of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose approach.

More specifically, it investigates and critically evaluates the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and status as perceived and practiced in the Greek agro-coops' sector, that is: intended and actual implementation process and use purpose through the key stakeholders' knowledge of, training on and consequently perceptions, attitudes, and practices toward ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and operational and strategic properties; as well as with the quality and process management & improvement fields; interrelationship with the existing corporate business and financial status, and managerial practices' nature and status; stakeholders' acknowledgement of the systems' strategic business property referring to business processes' continuous auditing and consequent improvement; existence of quality management strategic business plan and

its interconnection with the corporate strategic business plan; interrelationship with the prevailing corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations' issues; identification of existence, and nature, manner and effects of another ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose 'paradigm' adopted as a solution to the problems generated by the existing nature and manner of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose.

This will provide a base from which to identify good practice and develop recommendations for the enhancement of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use processes in the Greek agro-coops' business environment.

As a result of the aforementioned set of research objectives (section 2.2) and main aim (section 1.1), the following set of key research questions were developed:

1. What are the Greek agro-Unions' key stakeholders' knowledge of and training on, as well as attitudes and business practices towards the Quality and Process management and improvement issues, and the perceived and practiced by them interrelationship of these business fields with ISO 9000 QMS?

2. What are the Key Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and, operational and strategic business properties?

Moreover, the following sub-questions are included in order to investigate the relevant research themes:

2.1. What are their perceptions, attitudes and practices concerning the proper reasons, requirements, results and problems of the systems' implementation and use?

2.2. What are the differences between ISO 9000:2000 QMS and ISO 9000:1994 QMS in terms of their business nature and properties?

2.3. What are the actual results of the systems' implementation process and use purpose in comparison to the intended ones?

Note: The researcher aims at comparing the agro-Unions' key stakeholders' knowledge of and training on the ISO 9000 QMS' 'old' and 'new' version for critically identifying and evaluating the prevailing business perceptions, attitudes and practices of the researched agro-Unions' stakeholders on this research theme.

Furthermore, to investigate their beliefs and experiences regarding the systems' implementation and use actual results compared to the intended ones.

3.1. How do the Greek Agro-Unions' key stakeholders' groups experience and rate their companies current business status, financial position and managerial practices?

3.2. According to them do these factors affect the:

i) actual management and decision making process of both the operational and strategic business issues?, and ii) ISO 9000 QMS' business status and nature of implementation process and use purpose? If yes, in what way? If no, why do they not?

4. What are the Agro-Unions' Key Stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes and actual practice towards the ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property and its influencing role? in the:

4.1. agro-Unions' proper strategic business development and change through the use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic corporate resource-competence aiming at achieving business processes' and consequently organisational performance improvement,

4.2. existence and use of a quality business plan incorporated in the corporate strategic business plan for achieving the corporate goals.

5.1. Do the Greek agro-Unions' prevailing organisational context and settings, that is: corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations (e.g. micro-politics, groupings, personal interests, external influences and third parties' interests) affect:

i) any management system's, including ISO 9000 QMS', implementation process and use purpose, and ii) the actual management and decision making process of both their operational and strategic business issues?

5.2. How do the researched key stakeholders rate and evaluate the actual management and decision making process of the agro-Unions' operational and strategic business issues, ISO 9000 QMS also?

Which stakeholders' group should be the key decision-makers?: the General Manager in cooperation with the senior managers' group or the BoDs' President with the other members or both of them?

5.3. Do there exist among the stakeholders any clear lines of authority, responsibility and accountability in terms of the decision making process and actual management of the corporate business issues? If yes, how are they classified and to which stakeholders' group do they refer? If no, what is the reason and effects of this lack?

6.1. Do the external stakeholders – third parties exercise any influence on the nature and

manner of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose? What is the nature of this influence?

6.2. Does there exist any other course of action offered as a solution to the problems encountered during the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use, and what are its:

i) root cause-agent, ii) business nature and key business factors, iii) requirements for optimal deployment and use, and iv) outcomes and (possible) effects on the aforementioned objectives' business topics' status, and on the

6.3. business nature, manner and outcomes of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use as practiced by the Agro-Unions having offered this solution.

The researcher adopts and uses also the triangulation method, an indirect research method, which uses multiple but independent measures (Easterby-Smith, 2002:146) for assessing the validity and reliability of all the preceding interviews' offered answers through the critical examination and evaluation of their consistency.

Data triangulation refers to research where data is collected over different time frames or from different sources, as Easterby-Smith (2002:146) refers. This is achieved by his resetting quite similar questions in a later phase of the interview for comparing the offered answers by the same respondent in both phases of the same interview.

The comparison of the consistency and statistical aligning of variant answers' content permit the researcher to render to the specific interview a fair degree of consistency and therefore, validity and reliability.

Therefore, the researcher decided to set two questions relevant to the research questions and relative topics 1 and 2. These questions are indirectly related to the aforementioned anchor research questions and relevant topics and were asked at the end of the interviews:

1+2.1. According to their opinion where should the issue of quality management systems be directed, for the agro-coops enjoying the optimum results out of the adopted systems' implementation and use?

1+2.2. What are the agro-coops' key stakeholders' beliefs and attitudes concerning the implementation process and use purpose of any Quality management system adopted and applied in their agro-Union in the future?

These questions are used for critically identifying, evaluating and verifying in an initial research stage, the key stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and practices

towards any adopted and applied Quality management system in their agro-coop.

This could be a prominent research field to be pursued when ISO 22000-HACCP and ISO 9000:2008 will have been fully developed and used by the Greek agro-coops.

The sub-questions used for the respondents further elaborating on the aforementioned anchor research questions are presented in Chapter 9 - Appendices, Interview Guide.

2.4 IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

The proposed research thesis' aims to be of interest and potential benefit to all, or some of the following constituencies: i) The researcher as a practicing professional; ii) The academic community; iii) The Greek agro-coops' stakeholders; iv) Managers and private corporations in the food industry; v) Public sector and local authorities; vi) Agricultural sector's stakeholders, institutions and bodies.

The researcher is a senior manager in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia, dealing with the business' commercial and financial activities. Through his work experience and contact with a number of Greek agro-Unions, he realised that they have a number of underused and/or under-mismanaged business resources and management systems.

Moreover, he has been dealing a fair number of problems and issues concerning: products' and services' quality assurance and management; business processes' management; stakeholders' relations' themes.

Therefore, any management system's - ISO 9000 QMS', too - effective implementation and efficient use in the Greek agro-Unions' sector are topical areas of professional and academic interest to the researcher as a professional manager, and possibly as an academic in the near future.

It is possible that opportunities may arise to exploit this developing expertise regarding strategic and operational management of Quality management systems, through the provision of consultancy advice towards the Greek agro-food industry's businesses.

For an academic, the research topic can provide not only opportunities to develop and apply a wide range of research skills and competencies, but also to show material and findings that will be of interest to others and thereby have the potential for wider

academic application, as articles in professional journals or seminar presentations.

Specifically, at a personal level, this interpretative piece of research has been undertaken to achieve the following objectives: i) To explore the intellectual basis of the interpretative research; ii) To understand the methodological implications, taking an interpretative stance of explaining social phenomena; iii) To acquire competence and skills associated with the design and implementation of an inductive study (a theory generation about ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose, as practiced and experienced in the Greek agro-coops' sector); v) To develop skills concerned with the collection, interpretation, and critical analysis and evaluation of qualitative data.

It is important to note here, that although, there is university faculty interested in doing research in the Quality management systems' discipline within the Greek academic community, there do not exist any research studies having dealt in width and depth with the ISO 9000 QMS' introduction, implementation and use in the Greek agro-coops' business sector.

Since, and as it has been already referred, no previous studies regarding the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose have been conducted in Greece, according to the data available from the National Documentation Centre of Greece and the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Foods, the researcher believes in the significance of this research and its theoretical and practical contribution to the Agricultural sector and the Agro-coops' sector's business practice in Greece.

This research could be also of interest and potential benefit to corporate managers, since it could enhance understanding that ISO 9000 QMS are a corporate resource, that can be used as a strategic development and organisational change management tool through the business processes' and consequently organisational performance. This ISO 9000 QMS' use has not yet been researched in depth in any sector.

Moreover, it would facilitate the optimal introduction, implementation and use of ISO 22000, which combines elements of ISO 9000:2000 and HACCP, while registration and certification under it becomes an imperative for all Food Industry's organisations.

The rationale lies to the fact, that companies already registered and certified under ISO 9000:2000 would have to cover similar requirements to the ones required for the proper

deployment and use of the two aforementioned QMSystems.

Therefore, the identification and critical evaluation of the Key Business Factors influencing the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use could point out indirectly the Key Business Factors influencing (at least partially) the ISO 22000 effective implementation and efficient use.

The research study should be also useful to public and local authorities and organisations in their view of ISO 9000 QMS being used not only as a quality assurance and management system, but also as a corporate resource, whose exploitation as a strategic competence could better serve public interests and generate value and income for the agricultural sector and community as a whole.

This research study may also act as a driver for the materialisation of further relevant research studies in both the private and the agro-coops' sector's companies.

CHAPTER 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. WORKING DEFINITIONS AND KEY CONCEPTS

This research thesis' document's section gives valuable insights and explanations by presenting the concepts, themes and terms, which are used in this research document and have been also encountered throughout the entire research process. The concepts are: "the building blocks of models and theories and are the working definitions which are used in the particular analysis for which they have been devised and chosen" (Fisher, 2002).

Insight into, description and explanation of the terms and fields of Quality and Process Management and Improvement, including ISO 9000 QMS, as well as Strategic business development and Change Management, and Greek agro-coops, which are central to this study, have been already provided in Document 2 – the Critical Literature Review phase of the entire DBA project.

However, before presenting the conceptual framework of the DBA research thesis' process, it is considered appropriate to present indirectly and in this way define the framework of the key concepts and themes, which will be used in this final research project. These definitions evolve from the preceding critical literature review conducted in the previous DBA document 2 and aim at helping the researcher and the readers understand, clarify and explain the subject field of the final thesis' qualitative research.

In the agro-food industry, the economic and business integration worldwide advances through joint ventures, strategic alliances, conglomerates, business takeovers and business clusters. Furthermore, in all Food Industry's private companies, the introduction and implementation of Quality Assurance and Management Systems - such as ISO 9000, ISO 14000 and HACCP , as well as TQM and BPR programs - has been considered an imperative, since the late 1980's. The only debatable argument is the adopted business manner of these QMSystems' introduction and development processes for achieving the optimal benefits out of these systems' implementation and use (Oakland, 2003). As a result, the agro-coops were and still are almost forced to proceed to the introduction of such quality management systems and consequently attempt to implement and use them effectively and efficiently, for remaining competitive in the

business environment.

On the other hand, the differentiation of demand brings new requirements, as food consumption is increasingly related to non-consumption utilities like Corporate Social Responsibility and citizens' health, through at least upgraded products' and services' safety and quality, and environmental friendliness (Oakland, 2001; Tolios, 2003).

The combined effect is the emerging need for any company - and more especially, for the agro-coops - "employing" quality driven business processes, market driven and customer oriented operations and 'cooperative' stakeholders' relations (Parnell, 2000; Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis, 2002; Beckford, 2002).

Because, according to the public view and opinion, these corporations represent and/or should represent organisations operating at the edge of "business excellence". This is not a "paradox", as in public's mind the (Greek) agro-coops are synonymous to social public organisations, whose main mission is and/or should be the general public welfare.

To the contrary, over the last two to three decades, the Greek agro-coops are synonymous with fierce organisational settings, and inappropriate and inadequate management practices. As a consequence, their majority faces serious business and financial problems, which are undermining and degrading their business status and financial position, as Karamichas (2009, 2008) and Daoutopoulos (2006) refer.

Therefore, there exists a widely held and openly stated business view that, for these organisations achieving their business survival and business development, they have first to proceed to their required organisational change by: adopting and using updated management-business practices; restructuring their organisational context and operational framework; and, achieving the effective implementation and efficient use of any management system, the ISO 9000 QMS and any other QMS included, as Doutsias (2003), Arvanitoyiannis (2001) and Parnell (2002) state.

As a result of the aforementioned, and as mentioned in the Introduction chapter of this document, the structure of this research process review is based on a number of issues and themes arising from the two pillars of the research study: the Greek agro-coops' and the Quality management - ISO 9000 QMS' concepts and business fields, plus the interrelated with them sub-pillars of: business process improvement and strategic

business development and change management concepts and business fields.

The key research concepts-themes and consequently sections of the final thesis' research study, as well as of the entire DBA research project's process are presented in section 3.3, sub-section 3.3.1. and represent the main research categories - codes and their interrelationships as exhibited and explained in the final thesis' Conceptual Framework - section 3.3, sub-section 3.3.2. Moreover, they are examined and critically evaluated in Chapter 6, which contains the QDAnalysis.

3.2 CONCEPTUAL THEMES AND FRAMEWORK

In order to start and direct the analysis of the research material, the researcher defined concepts and created a conceptual framework, taking into consideration that, as Watson (1994) and Fisher (2002) mentioned, the concepts used were: i) analytical schemes; ii) simplified reality to make it easier to discuss, analyse or research; iii) simplified reality by selecting certain phenomena/variables and suggesting certain relationships between them; iv) were judged in terms of utility, not correctness.

The mentioned in section 3.1 conceptual terms and themes are identified and described in the critical literature review in section 2.1 and sub-section 1.1.1. They are also summarised together with their interrelationships in the Theoretical Frameworks presented mainly in in the aforementioned section and sub-section, which are leading conclusively to the set of objectives (section 2.2), anchor research questions (section 2.3) and key research themes (section: 3.3) of this research study . They constitute this qualitative research's conceptual framework and both of them are presented more thoroughly in the following section 3.3.

The research final thesis' conceptual framework is a representation of the researcher's argument and provides a visualization of the linkages between the key concepts. These linkages could be also conceived and expressed in other ways. It might also serve as a basis for further discussion. As referred, it is a product of the used Theoretical Frameworks, which are emanating from and representing the following business fields and topics: the Greek agro-unions':

-
1. stakeholders' knowledge of and training on: i) Quality and Process management, and ii) ISO 9000 QMS business nature and properties, through their attitudes concerning the systems' implementation and use reasons, requirements, results and problems, and the differences between the ISO 9000:1994 and ISO 9000:2000, and
 2. business status, financial position and managerial practices, and
 3. corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations' impact on their operational framework (management and decision-making process of the operational and strategic business issues, and the
 4. identification and critical evaluation of the third parties' - external stakeholders' influence on the agro-Unions' operational framework, and organisational context and settings and consequently on i) the adopted and exercised nature and manner of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose, ii) the course of action adopted or not (offered solution) by the researched agro-Unions to the problems encountered during the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use. The implementation and use business nature, manner and effects of this course of action on the agro-Unions' operational framework, and organisational context and settings.
 5. All the aforementioned key business factors impact on the operational and strategic business issues' decision-making and management, and consequently
 6. their impact on the ISO 9000 QMS' business status, nature and manner, and resulting outcomes of implementation process and use purpose.

3.3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.3.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK and, KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS' and THEMES' interrelationship with the CODING FRAMEWORK

The goal of the research is to provide information on, insight into and answers to the key research themes, which are the constituting parts of the Conceptual Framework.

Moreover, the key research themes represent the categories-codes constituting the coding framework used for the Qualitative Data collection and analysis processes. The researcher adopts and uses the Grounded Theory methodological approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998 and 1990) for conducting the final thesis' QDA analysis. It is a methodological approach combining deductive and inductive elements, and whose elements, features and process of development and use are presented in Section 4.2.8. The manner of this research QDA is the creation of the (initial) template of codes, which is a representation of the key research themes and their interrelationships, as portrayed and explained in the Conceptual Framework, section 3.3.2.

The key research themes have been generated by the main research aims, set of specific objectives and anchor research questions. The latter have been the product of the used Theoretical Frameworks, which are constituted by: a critical literature review of the existing body of theory, whose a summarised, integrated part is presented in section 2.1; the previous DBA research studies' findings; other research studies' content and findings; and its own business experience, being a professional manager in the agro-Unions' business sector for over 8 years.

As Saunders et al. (2003: 378) refer and the researcher adopts, the (initial) conceptual framework has been formulated before the data collection and analysis. In the beginning, the researcher classified the data into categories, each one of which is representing the relevant key research theme.

The research goal is achieved by critically examining the Greek agro-Unions' key stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes and resulting actual practice in terms of the following set of key research themes - categories / codes:

1. Their knowledge of, training on Quality and Process management and improvement

business fields and consequently their perceptions, attitudes and practices towards these issues' interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS / Code: QPKNTR.

2. Their knowledge of and training on the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and operational and strategic properties, identified by their beliefs concerning the differences between two ISO 9000 QMS / Code: IUDIFF and these QMS' proper implementation process and use purpose - reasons, requirements, results and problems. Moreover, the importance of these issues for achieving the optimum development of these QMS, as perceived and practiced by all the (key) stakeholders / Code: IKNTR / Sub-codes: IURRRP.

3. The agro-Unions' current business status, financial position and managerial practices' status and impact on the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and manner of implementation and use / Code: BFSMPIR.

4. Their perception and use in practice of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic corporate resource for achieving their strategic business development through business processes and consequently organisational performance improvement, and the existing relationship between quality management strategy and overall corporate strategy / Code: STRBDCH and Code: QMSTR&CSTR.

5. The agro-Unions' corporate politics, power structure, and stakeholders' relations' status and impact on the business nature and manner of ISO 9000 QMS' development and use and the interrelated with them corporate business practice in terms of actual management and decision making process / CPPSR.

6. The external stakeholders' - third parties' influence / Code: EXTINFL on the:

i) ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and manner of implementation process and use / Code: EXTINFLISO,

ii) the agro-coops' operational framework, and organisational context and settings, and stakeholders' level of knowledge of and training on business issues and (quality) management systems, ISO 9000 QMS' included / Code: EXTINFLAC,

and iii) the related sub-theme of the adopted and offered solution to the problems experienced during the systems' implementation and use process and the corporate

business issues' management and decision-making process / Code: SOL; its source / Code: SOURCE, its effects on the aforementioned themes / Code: EFFTH; its resulting impact on the systems' manner of implementation and use / Code: IMPISO; and outcomes of the systems' actual implementation process and use purpose / Code: OUTCOMES.

7. As a result of the aforementioned key research themes' investigation, interpretation and critical evaluation: the identification and critical evaluation of the KBF influencing

the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose / ISOIUKBF.

7A. The following factors are also supposed to influence the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-coops' business sector / Code: ISOIU, acting as drivers and/or constraints / Code: IUKBF: affecting the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation process and efficient use purpose, which could result to improved business processes and aid the improvement of their operational framework, and organisational context and settings. These improvements could lead to improved organisational performance, according to theory and previous research studies.

Corporate attitudes and practices concerning all the above themes, as well as the following issues: Change process agent: External – Internal: Code: CHEXT - CHINT; Change process nature: Emergent/Breakthrough – Incremental/Planned: Code: EMERG

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INCR; the actual Decision Making process concerning the Corporate operational and strategic business and Quality management issues / Code: DOMB/DMSB and Code: DMQM; and the beliefs, attitudes and aims of the researched agro-Unions' key stakeholders concerning the future development of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-Unions' business sector / Code: FQMS; its business nature and properties / BNPR; Recommended Implementation process and use purpose / RECIU.

3.3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proceeding Figure 1 represents the underlying logic for this research process. It shows in diagrammatic format the kind of argument the researcher is making about the manner and nature of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-Unions' business' sector and the key business factors influencing it either positively or negatively.

The research topic is mapped out in a diagrammatic format in order to undertake an analytical evaluation of the main arguments, concepts and theories relevant to the topic in order to synthesise from the analysis an approach or thesis that is important and unique.

This mapping, therefore, enables analysis and synthesis to be undertaken putting together the different elements and business factors of the whole research course (Greek agro-Unions' business sector and their business and financial status, and managerial practices; operational framework in terms of decision making and actual management process; organisational context and settings in terms of organisational politics, power structure, and stakeholders' relations; quality and process management and improvement business fields; ISO 9000 QMS business nature and operational and strategic properties; Greek agro-coops' strategic business development and change business sub-field; and stakeholders' knowledge of and training on, and perceptions, attitudes and practice towards the aforementioned concepts - themes) that make up the body of knowledge on this business research study.

It is used as a tool for identifying these Key Business Factors, which operate as presented in the Conceptual Framework (page 38) as the Inputs (first column) that are transformed by the Processes (second column) to a range of positive to negative Outcomes in terms of business processes' improvement (third column).

The use of both planned and emergent strategic business development and change approaches by the agro-Unions has been identified throughout the final thesis' research study, since "new" key research themes have been emerged during this process and due its qualitative data collection and analysis processes' interactive and inductive nature:

- i. External stakeholders' influence and intervention (political parties, strategic business partners)
- ii. Lack of stakeholders' accountability and of clearly defined lines of authority and responsibility among the key stakeholders' groups
- iii. Information withholding
- iv. Autocratic and paternalistic actual management and decision-making process
- v. BoDs' members' empirically accumulated business knowledge and experience through their long-term involvement in the agro-Unions' BoDs and consequently business affairs.

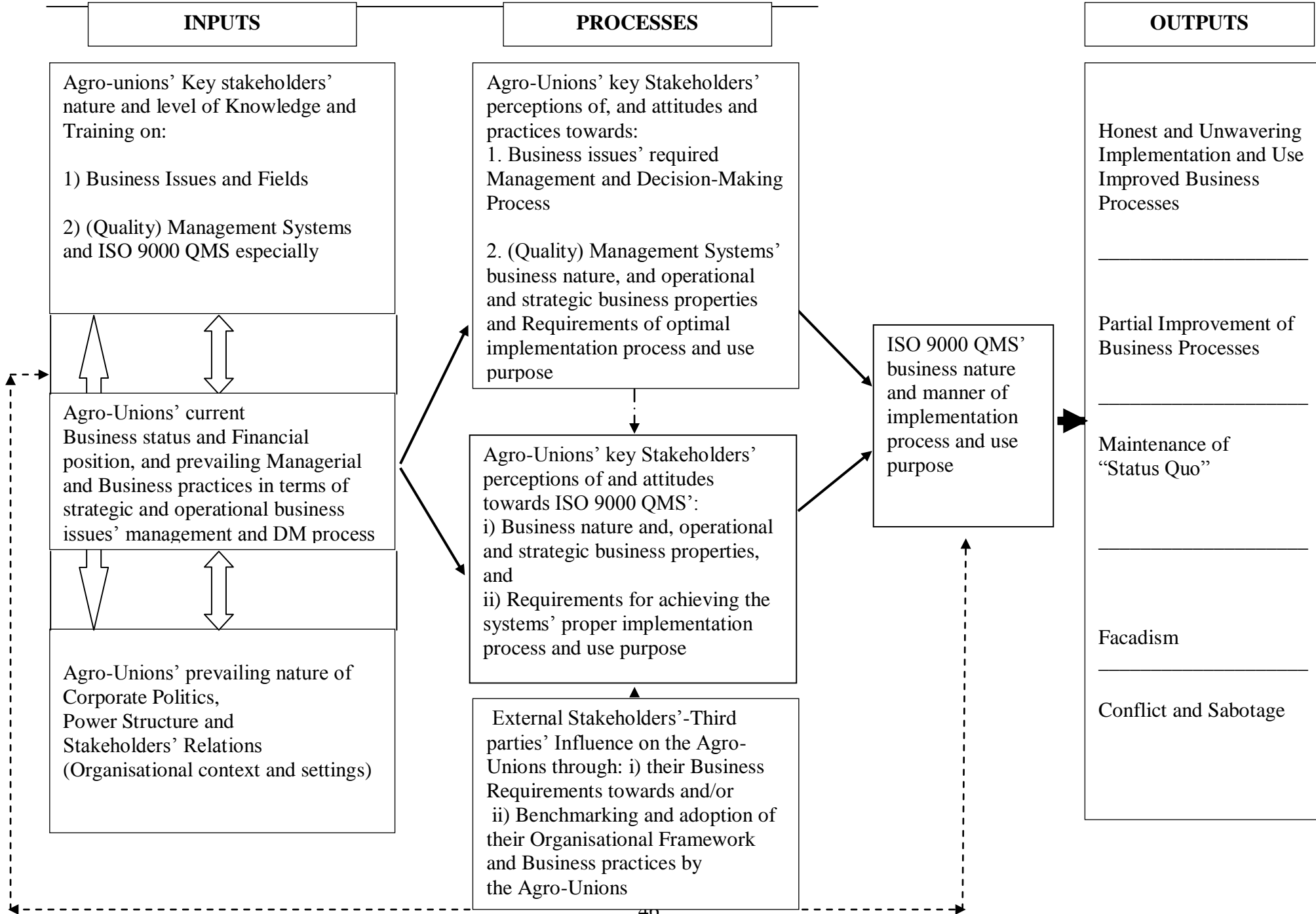


FIGURE 1: Final Thesis' - DOCUMENT 5 Conceptual Framework

The left hand boxes are presenting and examining the aforementioned key research themes/categories-codes (section 3.3.1) emanating from the relevant theoretical frameworks (section 2.1).

The arrows are representing the following linkages between these categories – codes:

A. Stakeholders' Knowledge of and Training on a) business issues and:

bi) Quality and Process management fields / Code: QPKNTR, and

bii) ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and, operational and strategic properties / Code:

IKNTR / IURRRP

affect their perceptions of and attitudes towards these topics-issues and their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS' deployment process and use purpose. They consequently affect their actual business practices concerning the business issues' management and decision making process / MDMBI and thus, ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose / Code: ISOIU.

B. the Greek agro-Unions': i) business status, financial position and managerial practices / Code: BFSMPIR and

iii) corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations / Code: CPPSR, and

C. External stakeholders' - third parties business influence, intervention and requirements / Code: EXTINFL

influence the actual management and decision making process of all business issues / Code: MDMBI , and consequently influence ISO 9000 QMS' business status, and nature and manner of the systems' implementation process and use purpose / Code: ISOIU.

Furthermore: All the aforementioned key business factors influence the Stakeholders' perceptions of, attitudes towards and actual use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic business development and change corporate resource and management system aiming to the business processes' and consequently organisational performance improvement / Code: STRBDCH.

Note: the left hand box constituent themes mean that these research independent variables - key business factors are influencing either positively or negatively (acting as either drivers and/or constraints) the related key business factors, which are hypothetically affecting ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose / Code: ISOIU, which is the dependent variable.

The arrows reflect this hypothetical direct and/or indirect relationship between these aforementioned independent variables and the dependent variable, which is the manner of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose and its resulting business status.

The various Greek agro-Unions and their key stakeholders are implementing and using ISO 9000 QMS with a different manner and degree of commitment. All the left hand Key Business Factors are supposed to influence the actual business status of ISO 9000 QMS' and the nature of these QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-Unions' business sector, through their impact on the center boxes' Key Business Factors.

As a result, these QMS' actual implementation process and use purpose may result to one of the boxes, shown in the right column of the Final Thesis' Conceptual Framework, where various ISO 9000 QMS & Process management and improvement business states are identified, ranging from the most positive to the most negative ones.

As referred in theory and other research studies' findings (sections: 1.1.1, 2.1, 3.1) the business processes' improvement could decisively support any corporation's business performance improvement. Therefore, ISO 9000 QMS could be used as a strategic business development and change agent by achieving its effective implementation and efficient use through the business processes' continuous auditing and improvement as the ISO Technical Committee Guidelines request.

Thus, the outcomes of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in terms of the resulting business processes' improvement (status and nature) can be characterised, as presented in the right hand boxes from top to down, as:

1. Improved business processes: achieved by the unwavering commitment and active

involvement of all stakeholders; thus the Key Business Factors: Stakeholders' business-managerial competence, operational framework and organisational context and settings have been operating mainly as drivers.

2. Partial improvement of business processes: as above, but to a lesser degree, since ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose confronted a fair number of constraints (the aforementioned Key Business Factors).
3. Business processes' "status quo", that is: the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose and consequently the resulting business processes' status and nature remain the same as before.
4. Facadism, that is: pretending an alteration of implementation process and use purpose and consequently claiming that business processes' status has been improved, but in reality none of the above has been really materialised. Thus, as in the previous box-situation the resulting business processes' status and nature remain the same as before.
5. Conflict and sabotage: Due to conflicting views, courses of action and interests of the agro-Unions' key stakeholders' groups, the resulting outcome is an innapropriate organisational context, rival key stakeholders' relations, and inadequate and outdated business status and managerial practices. These factors nullify any attempt of properly implementing and using ISO 9000 QMS.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

4.1 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS ADOPTED FOR THE THESIS

As it was previously referred, one of the most important aspects of research in business and management studies is to decide if the evidence that is collected will be of an essentially qualitative or quantitative nature and whether a phenomenological or a positivistic approach will be taken. In this study, the researcher, in order to carry out the actual research project, uses on the one hand his imagination and creativity, and on the other, well-established methods for analysing and interpreting the evidence that is collected (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998).

This chapter discusses the methodological strategy followed by the researcher, for the DBA research study final thesis - that is Document 5 - which represented a great intellectual challenge for him at doctoral level, because these methodological issues are not always well understood by the students. Especially in his case, these issues have been poorly articulated by academics in his previous management studies. The methodology design and structure refers to the procedural framework within which the research is conducted, i.e. it refers to the choices he makes about philosophical orientation, cases to study, methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis etc. in planning and executing the study. It describes an approach to a problem that can be put into practice in a research programme or process, which Leedy ((1989), in Remenyi *et al.*, 1998) formally defines as “an operational framework within which the facts are placed so that their meaning may be seen more clearly” (p.28).

4.1.1 MOVING BETWEEN THEORY AND EVIDENCE

Before the researcher began to conduct the research, he needed to consider the principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research. This research tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers, and the perspective of those being studied -what they see and think as important and significant - provides the point of orientation.

That is, rather than beginning with a particular theory and then looking at the empirical world to see if the theory is supported by ‘facts’, the researcher begins by examining the social world and, in that process, develops a theory consistent with what he is seeing. This view is called ‘inductive reasoning’ or ‘the grounded theory approach’, first outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), where concepts and theoretical elaboration emerge out of data collection.

In this study, the inductive nature of the relationship between theory and evidence can be seen in the way that the respondents’ - the key stakeholders’ perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and practices concerning ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-Unions’ sector derive from the researcher’s findings rather than being prior to the data.

4.1.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline. Since the subject matter - research main sample of this study comprises Greek agro-Unions’ sector’s key stakeholders, this requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans, as against the natural order. This doctrine, which is referred to as interpretivism, respects the differences between people and objects and requires the researcher to grasp the subjective meaning of social action.

The basic aim of this strategy within this study is the in-depth understanding and critical investigation, as well as interpretation of the Greek agro-Unions' key stakeholders' - directors and senior managers - perceptions, attitudes and practices towards the description, exploration and critical evaluation of the current business status and manner of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in this sector.

4.1.3 ONTOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

The central point of orientation here is the question of whether the object of investigation exists independently (realism or objectivism) or is the product of consciousness (nominalism or constructionism). The researcher follows the latter position, because he

believes that, this study does not present a static image of social reality. The organisations are not pre-given, and the researcher is part of what is observed. There is a human interest focusing on meanings, and he tries to understand what, why and how things are happening. Therefore, the researcher follows the philosophy, that is concerned with the question of how the Greek agro-Unions' (key) stakeholders' make sense of constructs, that is meanings and interpretations of their experience in terms of the 'external reality', which is consisted by objects, actions, behaviours and situations / notions of the experienced and interpreted by them 'reality'.

In terms of this research study these aforementioned constructs refer to such notions as: ISO 9000 QMS' business nature, and strategic and operational business properties; Agro-Unions' organisational context and settings, and operational framework and business practice; Quality and Process management and improvement business fields; Change management; Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on quality and process management and improvement business fields. In that way, the researcher follows the paradigm, that the world is socially constructed and subjective.

As Fisher (2004, p.17) noted: "this means that our understanding of 'reality' is not a simple account of what is. Rather, it is something that people in societies and groups form, that is "construct" from the following: i) Their interpretation of reality, which is influenced by their values and their way of seeing the world; ii) Other people's interpretation; iii) The compromises and agreements that arise out of the negotiations between the first two."

According to Gummesson (1991, p.17), the most important task for the social scientist is that of "emancipator: freeing ourselves from conditions and dependencies that we might so far have considered as given or fixed". In this sense, the qualitative material collected was a social construct.

4.1.4 PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Closely associated with constructionism is the phenomenological approach. According to Cohen and Manion (1987, in Remenyi *et al.*, 1998): “Phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality.” (p.95).

Therefore, the researcher follows this philosophical stance in order to examine how people (respondents/agro-Unions’ key stakeholders) interpret the world (the current business status of ISO 9000 QMS and the business nature of these systems’ implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops’ sector) and attempts to see things from those people’s point of view since he is exposed to their multiple stories, positions, and explanations.

In conclusion, the researcher believes that, this stance seems to make the most sense to him and therefore, it is influencing his entire research strategy and plan.

4.1.5. THE PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE WORK IN PRACTICE

In terms of this final thesis’ study, taking an interpretative stance means that the researcher’s basic belief is that the world is socially constructed and subjective, focusing on meanings and trying to understand what is happening in the field of ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation and use in the Greek Agro-Unions’ sector. Since few is written about the development of these systems in this sector, the purpose of this study is exploratory seeking these enterprises’ key stakeholders’ accounts of how they perceive, behave and act toward these systems’ implementation process and use purpose in their corporate entities.

Due to the fact that the world is complex, the researcher tries to map the range and diversity of views and positions that different key stakeholders and/or their groups take on the topic of the research. He approaches the research in as open a manner as he can manage and tries to let theories emerge from the research material, in what is known as the grounded approach to research. Therefore, within a non-positivist paradigm, it is acceptable for the generation of a research topic or question to come from experience, rather than reflection

on theory and concepts. In other words, an inductive process is appropriate where involves drawing generalisable inferences out of observations and theory is the outcome of the research.

Qualitative research design is commonly associated with more exploratory and descriptive forms of research design, though this need not be the case. Forms of grounded theory, where inductive exploration precedes more deductive forms of testing theories emerging from earlier exploration are also common. Qualitative forms of research have been advocated on the grounds that the more open-ended forms of data collection are ethically (as well as empirically) advantageous, giving those researched a stronger voice and opinion in the direction of the research. However, qualitative data collection techniques and the data itself also generate greater scope for intrusion upon privacy, non-informed consent and exposure to harm through the revelation of potentially damaging personal information either at the point of data collection or in subsequent publication.

4.1.6 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY

Following the above approach, the researcher seeks during the study close involvement with the people being investigated, so that he can genuinely understand the world through their eyes. He wants to be flexible and less structured, so that the possibility of perceiving managers' meanings, and of concepts emerging from evidence collection is enhanced.

Additionally, the researcher investigates the agro-Unions' directors and professional managers not in their artificial, but in their natural environments (during their work, in their offices and factory premises). He seeks rich, deep data in a fair number of Greek agro-Unions in order to understand, thoroughly examine and critically evaluate this sector's key stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, and practices, as far as the main research theme is concerned for providing a 'deeper' understanding of the research topic.

For these reasons, the researcher uses the qualitative strategy, sharing a set of preferences such as a preference for inductive, hypothesis-generating research, rather than hypothesis testing, attempting "to document the world from the point of view of the people studied", and preferring qualitative data and analysis of words, rather than numbers (Hammersley, 1992, in Silverman, 2001, p.38).

4.1.7 INTERVIEW AND CASE STUDY METHOD

Bryman (2004, p.319) points out: “the interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research...it is the flexibility of the interview that makes it so attractive. Although interviewing, the transcription of interviews, and the analysis of transcripts are all very time-consuming, they can nevertheless be more readily accommodated in a researcher’s personal life.”

By conducting a personal interview, the interviewer wants to feel a degree of intimacy with the interviewee and to visit several organisations, along with their premises. Additionally, the researcher uses the in-depth interview, which is open-ended and relatively unstructured (i.e. semi-structured type of interview), in questioning, in order to explore the topic in significant detail from the interviewee’s perspective. Although such an interview is informal in manner, the researcher will be following an interview guide that includes a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered. In that case, questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined in the guide. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked, as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees. This is mentioned, because in Document three, as the interview programme progressed, some interviewees themselves raised additional or complementary issues, which were evaluated as important and presented at later interviews.

As a qualitative researcher is interested not just in what managers say, but also in the way they say it, it is necessary for the interviewer to be alert to what is being said, following up interesting points made, prompting and probing where necessary, and drawing attention to any inconsistencies in the interviewee’s answers. For this reason, the researcher tends to record (if possible) and transcribe the interviews. According to Heritage ((1984), in Bryman, 2004), this procedure allows more thorough examination of what respondents say and permits repeated examinations of the interviewees’ answers. However, it has to be recognised that this procedure is very time-consuming.

Finally, the researcher, in terms of sampling, makes clear that the research sample is chosen in purpose to reflect and represent the majority of the existing different sub-groups of the

Greek agro-Unions' and Confederations of them business sector. The research sample's agro-Unions are operating either under the prevailing agro-coops' 'regime' or have been partially privatised. In this case, their business framework, and organisational context and settings have been influenced (at least partially) by these of the private sector's companies' ones, as Daoutopoulos (2006) and Karamichas (2009, 2008) state.

This sampling plan has been made in purpose, in order for the research process to entail elements of comparison among the different sample groups' agro-Unions' stakeholders' views on the research questions and themes.

Moreover, he selects interviewees, who are the most relevant to represent their corporation and are able to participate satisfactorily in answering the research main issues-topics. Furthermore, he has obtained relevant permission from their organisations, which ensured their availability and participation in this research study.

As a consequence, this sample selection is made to represent the entire population of the research study's business sector. Indeed, the researched agro-Unions and Confederations of them represent the 30% of the sector's population. They also represent the 70-80% of the sector's total business operations, activities and revenue, according to PASEGES (2007) and ICAP (2007) research data. Furthermore, their key stakeholders are considered to be the major source of the agro-coops' strategic and operational decision making process and actual business practice, as Karamichas (2008), the President of PASEGES, stated in his yearly public speech to the agro-coops' key stakeholders.

The researcher, in his attempt to minimise bias and to improve the validity and reliability of the research, uses a different source of evidence, the case study method. Since his research topic is contemporary and current in Greek agro-coops' business environment, this method helps to provide real-time information and a richer, focused and multi-dimensional picture of the researched topic. It is important to establish a definition of a case study. Yin (1989, 1993, in Remenyi *et al.*, 1998, p.165) states that a case study from a research strategy point of view may be defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." It is

particularly valuable in answering ‘who, why and how’ questions in management research.

According to Bell ((1993), in Remenyi *et al.*,1998, p.165), the case study method has also been used as “an umbrella term for a family of research methods, having in common the decision to focus on an enquiry around a specific instance or event.” The philosophy behind the case study is that sometimes only by looking carefully at a practical, real-life situation can a full picture be obtained of the actual interaction of variables or events. The case study allows the researcher to concentrate on specific instances in an attempt to identify detailed interactive processes which may be crucial to understanding, but which are transparent to other research tactics such as the large scale survey, focus groups, experiments and analysis of archival evidence.

Based on this focused view, the researcher undertakes twenty eight case studies researched independently and sixty two interviews, whose examination, analysis and critical evaluation are presented either independently or in a collective format, since they were conducted in such a format or the interviewees, although being the key stakeholders of different agro-coops’ Unions, stated almost identical views and in a similar manner.

The interviewees’ answers, which are provided by a research sample group of agro-Unions and/or the same stakeholders’ group - being it the: Directors’, General Managers’, Quality and Production managers’ group respectively - are also presented in comparison to the other research sample groups - being them: agro-Unions’ and stakeholders’ groups, respectively - for the research results being analyzed and evaluated comparatively, and in relation to the different organizational context and operational framework under which the researched agro-Unions and their stakeholders’ groups are most possibly operating.

Before the research can proceed, the researcher plans a protocol comprising a formal and detailed master plan, that specifies full particulars of the research, a summary of the questions to be asked, defining who should be interviewed, how to access the right people, and the structure of the final report. As the case study research method incorporates evidence collection, the researcher uses interviews and in some cases, company documents and press releases, to support interviewees’ verbal accounts, as well as the presented research data.

4.1.8 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS (QDA) - CODING

In qualitative research, data analysis is a process of discovering meanings in and out of the interviewees' offered answers. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one (Denzin, 1989), and the job of the researcher is to uncover the meanings that are embedded in interview transcripts, documents or notes. Analysing qualitative data generally involves several stages. First of all, the researcher arranges and organises the data so that he/she can begin to make sense of it. LeCompte and Schensul (1999b) call this process 'tidying up'. Then, he/she needs to immerse himself in the data and become familiar with what he/she has gathered. As he/she becomes increasingly intimate with the data, he/she begins to generate themes or categories or identify patterns.

The first step in making sense of data is coding. The researcher uses some version of grounded theory to work with his data and develop meanings (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This method involves a two-stage process of coding. In the initial stage, called open coding, the researcher works intensively with his data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest. Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p.29) suggest that "qualitative coding entails three basic procedures: a) noticing relevant phenomena, b) collecting examples of those phenomena, and c) analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures." The researcher does coding, by either writing codes in the margins of the transcripts or by using highlighters to note key phrases in conjunction with notes.

The second stage is the development of themes that seem especially interesting or relevant. The researcher is trying to identify some recurring themes that are starting to emerge. After these stages, the researcher is looking for patterns in the data. Different interviewees might deal with the same kinds of issues or handle different issues in similar ways. Once he has identified a few patterns with similarities and differences, he is starting to compare cases more systematically and the analysis leads to the construction of typologies which is simply a system for categorising types of things.

The researcher takes into consideration a number of shortcomings in qualitative research

that Miles and Huberman (1994) note. For example, the information may not be reliable, but all situations and organisations studied are different and thus the same results cannot be obtained again, and consequently reliability *per se* is not a central issue. As a phenomenologist, the researcher is more concerned as to whether the research is authentic and properly represents the events being studied.

4.2 ETHICAL AND POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section is concerned with the ethical issues that might arise in the course of conducting research. Related issues to do with the politics of research are also discussed.

Ethical issues cannot be ignored, in that they relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research and to the disciplines involved. Therefore, during the process of designing and implementing research, the researcher needs to consider the ethical implications of undertaking the research.

“Ethics is the science of morality: those who engage in it determine values for the regulation of human behaviour” (Homan, 1991, p.1). Collecting information about people raises ethical issues in the focus of attention chosen, the methods adopted and in the form and use of the findings.

The researcher’s concern has mainly been with relations between researchers and research participants within the context of collecting and analysing data. Firstly, the researcher recognises the need to conform to the principle of informed consent, so that research participants among others understand (Bryman, 2004, p.516):

What the research is about; the purposes of the research; who is sponsoring it; the nature of their involvement in the research; how long their participation is going to take; that their participation is voluntary; that the confidentiality of data relating to research participants will be maintained; and, that the interviewees’ anonymity will be maintained.

Therefore, the interviewer required the permission of the interviewees and their agro-Union’s supreme administration in order to conduct the interviews and case studies, and explained the purpose of the research and the time required. The interviewer also promised to submit a brief report of the research findings to the organisations, which facilitated his access. The aim of the research was explained to the interviewees, and the interviewer

asked for their help and cooperation. The researcher guaranteed their anonymity and confidentiality and promised that the transcripts of the field notes would remain anonymous within the thesis and any subsequently published work.

Beyond the ethical issues, there are political dimensions to the research process which connect to values and involve the role and exercise of power at the different stages of research. For example, some researchers are sometimes put in a position where they take sides. Related to this point is the issue of funding research. Gaining access is also a political process. Finally, issues like the restriction of the publication of findings and their use by others can further be the focus of a political process.

Based on these matters, the researcher made clear that the research was a self-sponsored project. The researcher agreed not to publish or circulate any information that was likely to harm the interests of individual informants. Special effort was made in order that consent was fully informed, as well as freely given. Also, by using the feedback loop, the interviewer avoided subjective selectivity in what he recorded.

In conclusion, due to the specific conditions of the qualitative research, the researcher acknowledges the dilemmas that he faced conducting a face-to-face interview, where true anonymity was impossible and where it was often difficult to maintain confidentiality. Nevertheless, he took all necessary steps to ensure that the interviewees would not be deceived about the research purposes, and is confident that the privacy of the people involved in the study will not be violated.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

As referred, the structure of this qualitative research study's review is based on a number of issues and themes arising from the two pillars of the entire research project:

the Greek agro-coops and the Quality management - and more specifically the ISO 9000 QMS - concepts and fields, plus the interrelated sub-pillars of business process management and improvement and strategic business development and change.

The main parts-sections of the qualitative research document comprise the critical examination, analysis and evaluation of the key research themes presented in section 3.3:

Interpretivism takes a nominalist view and more specifically argues that, the external world is not knowable, since people create their own social world. More specifically, the researcher has chosen an Interpretative stance with some elements of the ethnographic research approach for investigating and critically evaluating the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agricultural cooperatives.

Each agro-Union represents a corporate entity comprised by various groups of stakeholders, each one of which experiences the business world and situations in different forms and ways. The researcher adopts the Contingency approach for better perceiving and analysing the different perspectives the agro-Unions' stakeholders' groups may have on the DBA focus and on the relevant issues posed by the research aims, objectives and questions. Thus, all the stakeholders' groups have to be taken into account during the research process in order to formulate a valid research analysis and synthesis later on.

Because, the agro-Unions' stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes and business practice are of paramount importance for the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use in any company (Burnes, 2000). Therefore, they may be proven to be a key business factor (either a driver and/or a constraint) affecting (even indirectly) these QMSystems' implementation and use in the Greek agro-Unions.

More specifically, the Case study research method was used. This method is comprised by observation through mostly passive participation, in-depth open and mainly semi-structured

interviews, examination of case studies, critical incidents and content analysis.

The focus of the research is also on exploration and insight rather than experiment. Although the researcher is a member of the senior managers' group in the Union of agro-coops of Messinia / UACM and therefore, he could use his 'professional identity' to experiment with different approaches in some cases and issues relevant to the Research Topic, this advantage was not exercised in any case. To the contrary, it was avoided on purpose as the researcher's professional, managerial and personal ethics do not permit him to use his professional position in order to manipulate situations and persons in favour of his own interest.

This Final Thesis' Qualitative research covers the aforementioned main research aim, set of objectives and consequently answers the emanating anchor research questions, as these are presented respectively in the relevant sections 1.1.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

The term "Key Stakeholders" refers to the following key stakeholders of the agro-Unions and Confederations of agro-Unions:

- the Board of Directors' President and elected members / Directors - Code: DIR,
- the General Manager / Code: GM,
- the Quality Management Team, which, in most of the researched cases, is comprised by the Quality manager(s) only / Code: QM, and
- in a few other cases by the Quality and Production manager(s) / Code: Q&PM.

A representative set of the interrelated sub-questions contained in this Final Thesis' main research questions has been already presented in the Research Questions - Section 2.3 of Chapter 2. It is also presented analytically in Chapter 9 - Appendices, Section 9.1.

Finally, an in-depth survey with open and mostly semi-structured interviews, as well as formal and informal talking was attempted to take place with the BoDs' members (as far as possible), as their influence and power extortion, over the agro-Unions' current organisational context, operational framework and business practice, and as a result over the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use, are considered very important.

Therefore, the research process attempted to have an integrated picture, of as many as possible, of the sectors' key stakeholders, since their attitudes and practices may influence

notoriously the systems' actual and future implementation and use orientation.

The same research method, that is semi-structured interviews was applied to these agro-Unions' senior managers and more specifically the: General Manager, Quality manager and Production manager, as their professional engagement, power and influence in the business field's issues are also considered important and to a degree possibly shaping the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use.

Nevertheless, in both aforementioned cases, it has been proven very difficult to conduct all the pre-planned interviews, since most of the other senior managers and the other BoDs' members were very reluctant to participate, while they claimed that, either the President and the General Manager or the Quality and Production managers were in a better position to participate in the research process.

As a result of the aforementioned facts and by adopting the interpretative stance-methodology, the qualitative research in Document 5, being of an inductive theory approach, was conducted through the use of a cross-sectional case study research approach, while at the same time elements of the ethnographic research approach are traced, through the use of the participant observation research method.

This in-depth qualitative research has being conducted through a series of in-depth interviews based mainly on semi-structured interviews and in some cases on open-end ones for obtaining detailed in-depth evidence from a relatively small number of informants. The questionnaire was not used for allowing the informant to speak freely on the subject of interest to the researcher.

These interviews are applied in the present study in order to explore the manner in which a fair number of major Greek Agro-Unions and their key stakeholders implement and use ISO 9000 QMS, and investigate the key business factors that affect these systems' implementation process and use purpose in these corporate entities.

For the final thesis' research study, twenty eight Greek agro-Unions were selected out of the Greek Agro-Unions' and Confederations of them business sector. Their selection was based: upon size; business status; financial position and revenues; market presence; business infrastructure, resources and used quality management systems; their relevant

business importance in the agro-Unions' sub-sector; active business operations and exports activity; and finally willingness to submit to a detailed interview process and permit publication of results.

The most important criterion was to have: A) a representative group of agro-Unions comprised by: i) a sub-group of agro-Unions that either have been partially privatised and/or retain a strategic business partnership with the private sector's companies (1st sample group) and ii) a sub-group of agro-Unions that have a serious business cooperation with 'big' private companies of the agro-food industry (2nd sample group), and B) a sub-group of agro-Unions that have not any serious business cooperation with the private sector's companies.

The root-cause of this purposefully sampling was to identify if the 1st and 2nd sample sub-groups' agro-Unions have adopted and use elements of the business practices of the private companies that are their business partners-collaborators and if this fact influences their attitude and practice towards the actual management of the business issues and management systems in use, ISO 9000 QMS include.

Because, the private sector's companies and the agro-coops constitute two different sectors of the agro-food industry operating under a different legal, institutional and agency theory's framework. Thus, different operational framework and, organisational context and settings are generated and prevail and could lead to a different business approach in terms of the actual management and decision-making process of the business issues and the (quality) management systems in use.

A listing of these Greek agro-Unions and Confederations of agro-Unions is presented in the following TABLE 1:

1st Group / "Champions" Agro-Unions - Code: CHAU

UACArgolida, UACSitia, UWCNemea, SEKAP ASE, AGRO ASE, UACKrokos-Kozani, UACMasticha-Chios, PINDOS ASE, DODONI ASE, KSOS ASE and ELEOURGIKI ASE.

The first group of the research sample is consisted by Confederations of Unions of agro-coops (which are termed as ASE) and by Unions of agro-coops, which are considered to

represent the most upgraded and ‘healthy’ part of the Greek agro-coops’ Unions in terms of business status and financial position. Moreover, these corporate entities have been either partially privatised (e.g.: PINDOS ASE, DODONI ASE) or retain strategic business partnerships with private sector’s esteemed companies and/or MNEs.

2nd Group / “Moderate” Agro-Unions - Code: MTAU

ASEE Amykles-Lakonia, UACPreveza, UACArta, UACIraklion, UACPeza, UWCSamos, UACMesologhi. This group of the research sample is represented by Unions of agro-coops, which are rated as being in a moderate business status, for having achieved to overcome their past business state degradation and financial problems, and being now in a fairly ‘healthy’ business status and financial position.

3rd Group / “Problematic” Agro-Unions - Code: PRAU

UACLakonia, UACLarisa-Tyrnavos-Agia, UACChania, UACKorinthos, UACKomotini, UACRethimno, UACArkadia, UACLivadia, UACFlorina, UACKarditsa.

The agro- Unions of the third sample’s group are representing the majority of the sector’s population, which are facing serious financial and business problems. As Sotiropoulos (2009) and the Maraveyias et al. study (2003) report, these corporate entities are continuing to operate under the same business operational framework and organisational context and setting, as they were used to do over the last three decades.

Interview questions were developed drawing upon the existing literature as it was critically evaluated in Document 2, the researcher’s on-going working experience in the Greek agro-Unions’ sector and the conducted DBA previous qualitative and quantitative research studies presented in Documents 3 and 4 respectively.

The researcher had a prepared list of issues to use during the interview that is referred to as an interview schedule. He used four sources for the topics to be included in an interview guide: the relevant literature including also the questionnaires and findings of other relevant research studies findings (see: Document 2, relevant Chapters and Appendices); his own personal knowledge and professional experience on the area; the used questionnaires and the findings of the two DBA previous qualitative and quantitative researches; and informal

preliminary work, such as unstructured discussions with people, who have personal experience on the research topic, like quality consultants.

The qualitative research methodology for conducting the QDA is based on a research ‘paradigm’ called Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990 and 1998). As it was previously referred, this qualitative study’s research method is interview-driven and case study based. Therefore, twenty eight Greek agro-Unions and Confederations of Unions were selected and successfully approached for the researcher conducting a more in-depth review, to be carried out as a semi-structured interview. The interviews with the researched Directors and professional managers were held at the companies’ offices and factory. The data was collected via face-to-face interviews sixty to ninety minutes long.

Interviewees were asked for their permission for the interviews to be recorded and all of them did not agree. As a result, the researcher recorded detailed field notes for all the interviews. He assured all participants, that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. The interviews were based on a series of questions developed to obtain more detail about the current business status of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek agro-Unions’ sector. Another major research aim is the identification of the key business factors influencing the systems’ implementation process and use purpose.

The interviews were not taped, as it was considered an “unwelcome and dangerous” situation-event by the majority of the interviewed agro-Unions’ key stakeholders; this fact will be presented and explained in Chapter 6 – Section 6.1 of the Document.

Therefore, field notes on paper were held and later on they were transcribed in order to analyse these transcripts and to produce appropriate findings.

Profiles were developed for each firm and for each informant (see Appendix 2, which presents an indicative company profile of a researched agro-Union) and the three questions raised are in regards to the job title of the respondent, his/her main activities and responsibilities in the company, and the degree of his/her participation in the ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use in the agro-Union. The overall interview outline is

reproduced in Appendix 2 of Chapter 9.

The key stakeholders of each one of the researched agro-Unions, being them: the BoDs' President, the General Manager and the Quality and Production managers - plus some other key stakeholders, depending on the agro-Union and Confederation of agro-Unions under research - were personally interviewed for an average of 60-90 minutes each time on all the aforementioned topics-themes of the qualitative research.

Nevertheless, not all interview questions were answered completely, and some were answered inconsistently or not even at all.

A written company profile was also requested from each organisation and secondary source documents about each company. More specifically, articles and personal interviews of the BoDs' President mainly, presented in business magazines and newspapers, were used in the research themes of strategic business development and organisational change of the following Confederations of agro-Unions: PINDOS S.A., DODONI S.A., SEKAP ASE, Masticha-Chios ASEE and Krokos-Kozani O.Syn.P.E.

This fact directed the research process in adopting also the approach of the document analysis method in these case studies, which method was thoroughly presented in the relevant section of Chapter 4 - Methodology in the DBA previous Document three.

The qualitative research process lasted from two to three days in each agro-Union and/or Confederation of agro-Union. It was a multi-site research, as the researcher visited all the required sites and relevant premises - i.e. offices, factory, laboratories, product quality inspection and assurance premises - in all the entities he researched.

The entire research was conducted from March to September of 2007, because the majority of the researched companies' key stakeholders (the researcher, too) were rarely available during the research period, due to their heavy workload due to the new CAP work requirements concerning the farmers-producers' subsidies' management.

The research study analysis comprise six major research themes and six research variables, which are shown as the variables-determinants of the ISO 9000 QMS' adopted practice in

the Greek agro-Unions' sector.

These research themes-topics are presented in the following relevant six sections comprising Chapter 6 of this document:

1. Stakeholders' knowledge of Quality and Process management and improvement business fields, and of their relation with ISO 9000 QMS (QPKNTR).
2. Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on, and resulting perceptions and practices towards ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties (KNTRIR), that is:
 - i) differences between the two versions (BNPRD: Business nature and properties' differences), and
 - ii) implementation and use reasons, requirements, results and problems (IURRRP).

In sections one/1 and two/2 the following variable is also included: Stakeholders' business and managerial expertise and competence (SBMEC).

3. Greek Agro-Unions' operational framework/OPFR (business and financial status', and managerial practices' impact on ISO 9000 QMS' manner of implementation and use (BFSMPIR).
4. ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property's use: root-causes, requirements and results (STRBDCH).
5. Organisational context and settings' (CPPSR/Corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations') status and impact on business issues' - ISO 9000 QMS, too - actual management and decision making process (OCS and MDM / management and decision making).
6. The sixth research objective and relevant key theme's is the External Stakeholders'- Third Parties' influence (EXTINFL) on the agro-Unions' business nature and manner of the: i) business issues' management and decision making process, and consequently ii) ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose - qualitative data collection and analysis is materialised, presented and critically evaluated in anyone of the five aforementioned key research themes – sections.

The content of these six sections has been already presented in section 3.3 of Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 5. A REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS DBA RESEARCH DOCUMENTS

The following sections provide a brief overview of the qualitative and quantitative research studies undertaken and conducted in DBA documents 3 and 4 respectively.

5.1 DBA PREVIOUS RESEARCHES' PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The major aims, conceptual frameworks, research methodology and method, and the main findings of these two research studies are presented, for the reader perceiving the researches' outcomes that indicate the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and manner of these systems' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sector.

Moreover, the previous research studies attempted to identify and critically evaluate the key business factors influencing the aforementioned systems' effective implementation and efficient use. This was achieved by a thorough and in-depth investigation and critical evaluation of the agro-coops' stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes and practices in terms of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in their agro-coops.

The DBA Document 3 was seeking to investigate the following working hypothesis:

ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems are considered by the Greek agro-coops (and their key stakeholders) as an organisational change management tool, that is effectively implemented and efficiently used for achieving improved business processes and organisational performance, despite their existing organisational, behavioural and operational settings and arrangements, that might affect and impair their business performance and consequently might influence these systems' effective implementation process and efficient use.

The Document's 4 working hypothesis is emanating and closely associated with the aforementioned one, and is presented in the relevant section 5.4.3 of this Chapter.

The research process, followed in Documents 3 and 4 respectively, is presented below:

	<u>Document 3</u>	<u>Document 4</u>
Research approach:	Phenomenology	Positivism
Research strategy:	Qualitative	Quantitative
Research philosophy:	Inductive	Deductive
Research methodology:	Grounded theory	Survey
Research method:	Interviews	Structured questionnaires

As it is presented in Document 3, the Qualitative research was conducted with the use of case studies based on in depth interviews, consisted mainly by semi-structured interviews. The research method produced qualitative research data, but at the same time some sort of quantitative data have been produced through the analysis of the material.

On the other hand, the main purpose of Document 4 research study was to develop a detailed and deep account of the agro-coop's other stakeholders' groups' (employees and foremen) perceptions and practices towards ISO 9000 QMS.

Thus, Document 4 was a largely positivistic part of the research, producing more quantitative data through the use of structured and semi-structured questionnaires.

The focus of the work was again on the main research questions. But, in this document the emphasis was on establishing a representative view of two particular groups of Greek agro-coops' stakeholders, by using recognised sampling techniques:

- The employees and workers of the researched agro-Unions in the DBA previous Document 3, and
- The researched first degree agro-coops' foremen and workers.

5.2 DOCUMENT 3 – QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

5.2.1 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The research presented the research objectives within a context of an interpretative/case/ethnographic study, critically examining and evaluating the nature of

and the key business factors affecting ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use in a fair number of Greek agro-coops from the whole spectrum of the sector.

More specifically, the Document's 3 research study's main aim and objectives are aligned to the DBA research project and the Final Thesis' ones presented in section 1.1 and 2.2. Its conceptual framework is presented in Chapter 9 – Appendix 4.

The overall approach to the research study was predominantly inductive. The research design was mainly influenced by a sociological research methodology referred to as “grounded theory” and more specifically of the Strauss and Corbin approach (1990, 1998), that emphasises the use of inductive reasoning grounded in the constant comparison of empirical observations. The goal was theory generation about the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in this sector, not theory testing. Rather than forming the basis for definite conclusions, the grounded theory approach clarifies the relevant questions to be asked and offers insight into possible future trends.

5.2.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In conclusion, the research process was based on a conceptual framework of key business factors that, indirectly but crucially, are influencing ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use. As a result a considerable amount of information was obtained concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' operational and strategic management, development and use by a fair number of important Greek agro-coops.

A) One of the most important findings of the qualitative research was a clear indication, that the majority of the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders, besides the Quality managers, have no real knowledge of and training on the: i) Quality and Process management and improvement fields, ii) ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties, and iii) existing interrelationship between the aforementioned topics.

B) i) All the respondents clearly revealed the existing rivalry between the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers. The interesting point is that both groups identify this rivalry as the root cause of the agro-coops' serious business and financial problems, but they express contrasting views regarding which group has to be held responsible and

accountable for the creation of this existing situation.

ii) The vast majority of the Quality managers highlighted the existing rivalry instead of cooperation among the various managerial groups in the Greek agro-coops.

C) Almost all the researched stakeholders consider the: outdated managerial practices; lack of Directors' accountability; key stakeholders' pursuing of their own interests instead of the corporate ones as serious drawbacks for achieving the proper implementation and use of any management system, thus ISO 9000 QMS, too.

i) On continuing a fair number of them claimed their preference to a co-operating approach concerning the agro-coops' actual management and decision making process.

D) Furthermore, almost all interviewees stated their preference toward an Integrated Quality Management encompassing all the existing quality management systems, as the only means for really serving all the corporate goals and through it achieving organisational change and development. Their majority claimed that such a system could definitely support these goals through the auditing and improvement of their business processes and activities.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Qualitative Research Methodology and Methods

This exploratory examination of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sector has limitations as well as strengths. A significant amount of information was gathered through the direct one-on-one interview process. Furthermore, the personal in-depth interview process gave to the researcher the chance to benchmark similar situations encountered in the majority of the agro-coops. This was a semi-random sample, but fairly reflective of the Greek agro-coops' sector, since it entailed a fair number of agro-coops of all degrees, geographical locations, size and product specification. Nevertheless, for the results to be generalised across the sector further qualitative and quantitative research was required and actually conducted.

5.3 DOCUMENT 4 – QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

5.3.1 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The DBA's quantitative research main focus was the same to the entire DBA's and the Qualitative research one. This research was held and materialised within a positivistic context by a cross-sectional, large-scale survey based study, using as research instrument a structured questionnaire.

It aimed at critically examining and evaluating the manner of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use as perceived, practiced and experienced by the biggest group of stakeholders (employees and foremen) of the agro-coops that constituted the research sample of the previous DBA qualitative research (Document 3).

This study's objectives, research questions and key research themes are aligned to the Document's 3 and this final thesis' ones, shown in sections 2.2, 2.3 and 3.3 respectively.

5.3.2 RESEARCH SAMPLE AND METHOD

Concerning the agro-coops' employees and production foremen, a structured questionnaire was used as research instrument, including mostly pre-coded, structured questions and a few semi-structured ones.

The researcher adopted this combination in the structured questionnaire in order to achieve the respondents' openness, trustworthy, clarity and true expression of their opinions and views (all questionnaires were returned unsigned in a carton box in the work place, for as long time as required and in the absence of the researcher).

5.3.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the critical literature review conducted in Document 2, the researcher's own working experience in the Greek agro-coops' sector, and the Document's three qualitative research and other researches' findings the following five testable hypotheses were formed out and investigated:

H1: Knowledge of Quality and Process management and improvement fields affects the

stakeholders' perception of these concepts interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS.

H2: Stakeholders' knowledge of ISO 9000 QMS business nature influences the system's deployment process.

H3: Greek agro-coops' business status, financial position and managerial practices affect the ISO 9000 QMS' development business status.

H4: Stakeholders' groups' relations, corporate politics & power structure, and Decision making process affect (Stakeholders' perception and) Greek agro-coops' use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organisational change corporate resource.

H5: Greek agro-coops' Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management fields, as well as, knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature, and implementation and use requirements affect the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

In addition, the agro-coops' current business status, managerial practices and financial position in relation to the existing decision making process and corporate politics & power structure influence the business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops.

The key concepts and variables drawn on are presented in Chapter 9 - Appendix 5, which depicts the conceptual framework used for the quantitative research data analysis. The anchor research themes and questions presented in it and the aforementioned research hypotheses are interrelated. The fifth research theme's - research hypothesis' issues are included in the previous four research themes and represent their concluding summary.

5.3.4 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The most important findings of this research study are the following:

1. Knowledge of and Training on the Quality & Process management fields and their interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature as perceived and practiced by the agro-coops' stakeholders

Only the Quality and Production department's employees and foremen have an adequate level of knowledge of and training on the: i) Quality and Process management and improvement fields, ii) these fields existing relationship with ISO 9000 QMS' business

nature & properties. And as a fair number of the respondents stated, the majority of all the agro-coops' sector's stakeholders are not well-informed and trained on these issues and this is a major drawback for the systems' proper implementation and use.

2. Agro-coops' Stakeholders' Knowledge of and Training on the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and deployment requirements

An identical to the aforementioned research finding was identified in terms of this research theme, too.

2a. ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organisational change corporate resource and competence

Furthermore, only the 25% of the respondents replied that, their agro-coops' key stakeholders consider ISO 9000 QMS as a corporate resource aiding strategic business development and organisational change.

This approach is further verified by the fact that, only the 15% of the respondents admitted the existence of quality policy, strategy and communication program incorporated in the corporate ones. The 77% of the respondents consider responsible for this practice the BoDs' President and the General Manager.

3. Corporate Politics, Stakeholders' relations and power structure, and Decision-making

The 84% of the respondents claim that the prevailing corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations and the decision making process affect negatively the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in their agro-coop, due to the existing rivalry: i) between the Directors, and the professional managers and employees, and ii) among the various groups of the agro-coops' employees, workers and managers.

Indeed, the 81% of them replied that, their agro-coops' degraded business status and financial position, and "bad and old fashioned" managerial practices have a negative impact on the ISO 9000 QMS' deployment process and use purpose.

3.1. Decision-making process

Concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' strategic and operational development, as well the corporate strategic business and operational development:

the 70% - 85% respectively of the respondents rate the BoDs' members and especially the

President as being the key decision maker(s), while only the 15% - 25% of them consider the General Manager.

On the other hand, the 40% of the respondents state that the BoDs and the President should be responsible for the strategic and operational development of ISO 9000 QMS. In relation to this outcome, the 32% of them require the General Manager, and the rest the Quality manager in cooperation with the Production foremen to.

4. Greek agro-coops' business status, managerial practices and financial position

The 75% of the respondents evaluate their agro-coops of having degraded business status and financial position and, inappropriate managerial practices, which affect negatively the implementation process and use purpose of ISO 9000 QMS and of any other (quality) management system.

In relevance to the aforementioned findings, the respondents replied by 72% that, their agro-coop's key stakeholders: insist on adopting and applying outdated managerial practices; have inadequate and inappropriate knowledge of and training on business and management issues; do not promote the required cooperation amongst the various stakeholders' groups for managing properly the business issues.

The 50% of them consider the BoDs' President and members and the 30% the General Manager as responsible and accountable for this situation.

5. Key Business Factors influencing the business status and nature of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops

Concerning the KBF that may influence ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose, the sample's respondents answered that the following KBF do influence the system's development and use (% of the sample):

- Greek agro-coops' business status, managerial practices and financial position: 26.33%.
- Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on the system's business nature: 29.33%.
- Corporate politics, power structure and adopted decision making process: 24.33%.
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the Quality and Process management and improvement business fields and perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS: 15.67%.
- Key stakeholders' perception of and attitudes towards the ISO 9000 QMS' business

property and potentiality of being used as a strategic business development and organisational change corporate resource: 4.33%.

On continuing, only the 17.33% of the respondents acknowledged a positive impact of any and/or all of the aforementioned KBF on the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in their agro-coop.

Again only the 16.67% of them acknowledged a positive impact of these KBF on their agro-coop's business processes' improvement and consequently performance in some selected key business areas.

The 60% of them offered as a reason for this negative interrelationship, the Directors' lack of the required managerial "know-how", educational background, professional experience and business issues' knowledge, although they are the major decision makers of their agro-coop's strategic and operational business issues and development.

6. Part F: The future development of ISO 9000 QMS

In this open-end question the respondents seem to be in accordance with the Document's 3 research findings. Moreover, they expressed their preference towards an Integrated Quality Management for their agro-coop enjoying the best outcomes of its implementation and use, which are: improved business processes and organisational performance. This was a semi-random sample entailing the agro-coops' employees and production foremen, but a significant amount of information was gathered, analysed and critically evaluated.

CHAPTER 6. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY IN PRACTICE

As it was previously presented in chapter 4, the final thesis' research methodology is based on a research 'paradigm', called Grounded Theory as developed by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998). It is predominantly inductive, but elements of the deductive theory can be traced, since it uses the existing literature.

Moreover, the research anchor themes and questions, as well as the research instrument – that is a semi-structured questionnaire consisted mainly by semi-structured questions and some open-end ones, are also based on: the existing research studies on this research business field and their findings; the previous DBA research studies' questionnaires and findings; and, the researcher's professional experience in the sector.

The research method for this final thesis' research study is in-depth interview driven and case study based. Twenty eight Greek agro-Unions and Confederations of Unions were selected and successfully approached for the researcher conducting a more in-depth review, to be carried out as a semi-structured interview.

The interviews with the research sample's corporate entities' Directors and senior managers were held at the companies' premises – office and factory location from mid-March to mid-September 2007. The data was collected via face-to-face interviews 60 to 90 minutes long. Interviewees were asked for their permission for the interviews to be recorded and all of them did not agree.

The use of a tape recorder was not recommended and even accepted during the research process conducted in all the research sample's agro-Unions and Confederations of Unions for two main reasons:

1. it was perceived as a means of recording the interviewee's opinions, attitudes, beliefs and expressed practices. This fact is perceived by the greatest majority as a threat, for it could be used against them in the future and even in the current state by their opponents and rivals, business and politics wise.
2. A part of them were ready to refuse to participate in the research out of fear of giving

corporate facts and “secrets”, which being taped could be easily used by competitors and rivals later on. So, they could be accused of releasing “corporate property”, as they said.

Thus, the researcher feared that taping the interview could generate an attitude and stance against the research in process and the researched could either refuse to participate or give false, partial and misleading answers which would have no validity and reliability.

Nevertheless, they were more eager to participate in a research based on in depth interviews, having both open-ended questions and a scheduled list of semi-structured questions, of which they were aware by communicating them the broad aims of the research and by assuring them that they could refuse to answer any question that would seem to them dangerous and/or peculiar.

This process, in itself, was interesting and may be more reliable, since the interviewees felt free to speak on the interview themes openly. Moreover, the researcher was able to conduct an open conversation and take field notes, as long as it was required, and without him fearing that, the interviewees will stop the interview due to time reasons.

As a result, the researcher recorded on paper detailed notes for all the interviews. He assured all participants, that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. The interviews were based on a series of questions developed to obtain more detail about the ISO 9000 QMS’ current business status in the Greek agro-Unions’ business sector. Another major research aim was the identification of the key business factors influencing the systems’ implementation process and use purpose. A full description of the interview discussion outline (guide) is included in Appendix 1 of Chapter 9.

In reviewing the available data, this study pursues three key objectives:

1. A description of the key stakeholders’ current business perceptions, attitudes and practices towards ISO 9000 QMS’ management, development and use in the Greek agro-coops’ sub-sector,
2. The identification and presentation of the key business factors influencing, either directly or indirectly the systems’ implementation process and use purpose, and
3. A discussion on the lessons the sector’s companies and key stakeholders may draw from the agro-Unions, that have acknowledged and used ISO 9000 QMS, as a strategic corporate resource for achieving strategic business development .

These general objectives address the need to gain a better understanding of the adopted and practiced business attitudes, behaviours and practices of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use in Greek agricultural sector in general and in the Agro-coops' sector more specifically. This is the initial step and at the same time a crucial process for recommending any improvements and identification of an outline or a blueprint for the agricultural sector's institutions and corporate entities implementing effectively and using efficiently ISO 9000 QMS for achieving their: organisational performance improvement; strategic business development; and, organisational context and settings and, operational framework improvement.

Because, the systems' implementation and use could have a different approach and outcomes if applied in different business contexts, which may generate various drivers and constraints affecting the systems' implementation process and use purpose.

6.2.1 METHOD OF QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS / CODING IN PRACTICE

To analyse the interview transcripts, the researcher used the method of analysis that is referred to as coding. Coding is analysis of your research data and at the same time it is an attempt to interpret it very broadly because, in the qualitative research analysis, the goal is to begin to focus on the potential meanings of your data.

For the qualitative research purposes it is not the words themselves but their meaning that matters. As a matter of fact qualitative coding entails the three basic processes of noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena and analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994): "codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to chunks of varying size - words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one (e.g. a metaphor)."

The proposed method of creating codes in this study is that of creating a provisional ‘start list’ of categories - codes prior to fieldwork. That list comes from the theoretical frameworks used for arriving at the conceptual framework, through the emanating research objectives and questions, and key research themes with their relevant codes. The process was to take a fair number of transcripts from interviews with the researched agro-Unions’ key stakeholders, trying to identify the narratives in terms of these categories.

This final thesis’ coding framework is based on the existing theory and literature concerning the constituent business topics - fields of the key research themes’ and their interrelationships, as these are presented more analytically in section 2.1 and briefly in sections: 1.1.1, and 3.1, 3.2, 3.3. Moreover, it is based on: the previous DBA research studies’ processes and relevant findings; the researchers’ own professional experience; and other research studies’ findings.

In that way, the final thesis’ research methodological approach emphasises the use of inductive reasoning grounded in the constant comparison of empirical observations, as these are experienced during the research process. It also takes advantage of the existing theoretical frameworks and other research studies’ findings in order to construct the theoretical propositions (section 2.1) out of which the research objectives, anchor questions and key themes are emanating. These key research themes and their interrelationships are represented in the Conceptual Framework (Chapter 3, section 3.3).

The Coding Framework used in this thesis’ QDA presents the collected and analysed qualitative data in a categorised and unified form. The Coding Framework and its constituent codes, related and referring to each key research theme and its sub-themes, are presented in Chapter 3, sections 3.2 and 3.3. They emanate from the set of key research objectives, questions and themes, presented in sections (2.2, 2.3 and 3.3) respectively. The key research themes and their interrelationships are presented as the Conceptual Framework’s themes-concepts and their interrelationships in section 3.3.

6.2.2 OPERATIONALISATION OF THE QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

As it was previously referred in the preceding sections 6.1 and 6.2.1 and in section 4.1.8, the researcher had a prepared list of issues to use during the interview that is referred to as an interview schedule and he used four sources for the topics to be included in an interview guide. The qualitative research methodology for conducting the QDA is based on a research 'paradigm' called Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990 and 1998).

This qualitative research study's method is interview-driven and case study based. Therefore, twenty eight Greek agro-Unions and Confederations of Unions were selected and successfully approached for the researcher conducting a more in-depth review, to be carried out as a semi-structured interview.

The interviews with the researched Directors and professional managers were held at the companies' offices and factory. The data was collected via face-to-face interviews sixty to ninety minutes long. The qualitative research process lasted from two to three days in each agro-Union and/or Confederation of agro-Union.

The entire research was conducted from March to September of 2007. It was a multi-site research, as the researcher visited all the required sites and relevant premises - i.e. offices, factory, laboratories, product quality inspection and assurance premises - in all the entities he researched.

Interviewees were asked for their permission for the interviews to be recorded, but not all of them agreed. As a result, the researcher recorded detailed field notes for all the interviews and later on they were transcribed in order to analyse these transcripts and to produce appropriate findings.

He assured all participants, that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. The interviews were based on a series of questions developed to obtain more detail about the current business status of ISO 9000 QMS in Greek agro-Unions' sector and the identification of the key business factors influencing the nature and outcomes of the systems' implementation process and use purpose.

Profiles were developed for each firm and for each informant (see Appendix 2, which presents an indicative company profile of a researched agro-Union). Secondary source documents about each company were also requested from each organisation.

More specifically, articles and personal interviews of the BoDs' President mainly, presented in business magazines and newspapers, were used in the research themes of strategic business development and organisational change.

The key stakeholders of each one of the researched agro-Unions, being them: the BoDs' President, the General Manager and the Quality and Production managers - plus some other key stakeholders, depending on the agro-Union and Confederation of agro-Unions under research - were personally interviewed for an average of 60-90 minutes each time on all the aforementioned topics-themes of the qualitative research. The researcher did coding, by either writing codes and their relevant sub-codes in the margins of the transcripts or by using highlighters to note key phrases in conjunction with notes.

Nevertheless, not all interview questions were answered completely, some were answered inconsistently or not even at all and thus, questions did not follow on exactly in the way outlined in the guide. Moreover, questions that are not included in the guide were asked, as the interviewer picked up on things said by interviewees.

This happened, because as the interview programme progressed, some interviewees themselves raised additional or complementary issues (i.e.: agency theory issues, topics relevant to the Stakeholders' authority, responsibility and accountability issues, change management issues) which were evaluated as important and presented at later interviews.

As a qualitative researcher is interested not just in what managers say, but also in the way they say it, he was alert to what had been said, following up interesting points made, prompting and probing where necessary, and drawing attention to any inconsistencies in the interviewee's answers.

For this reason, the researcher spent two to three hours right after each interview for conducting an initial interpretation and analysis of these paper hand notes. This procedure allowed more thorough examination of what respondents say and permitted repeated

examinations of the interviewees' answers.

He, then, presented this qualitative data initial analysis to the relevant stakeholder-interviewee for him assuring the validity, reliability and consistency of the recorded data and their relevant interpretation and analysis, as he also did with the final QDA findings.

He also used two matrices for better accomplishing the aforementioned tasks. The initial one is a conceptually clustered matrix, which is both conceptually ordered and role ordered (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 127-132). It presents the offered views of each one researched agro-Unions' three key researched Stakeholders, them being: the President of the BoDs, the General Manager and the Quality Manager (and in some cases with the Production manager) in terms of the six key research categories-themes which represent the in-depth and thorough examination of each relevant key research question.

The latter is a mixed matrix combining elements of a conceptually and role ordered clustered matrix and of a multi/variable-variable, case ordered matrix (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 127-132 and 219-222) for presenting a cross-case comparative analysis of the views on the research questions and themes of the researched three key stakeholders' groups of each one of the research sample's three sub-groups of agro-Unions. It is the product of the cross-case comparative analysis and synthesis of the 28 initial matrices' QDA findings, each one of which was used for each one of the 28 researched agro-Unions.

Thus, its content represents the content of all of them in a combined format by clustering them according to the sample group the researched agro-Union belongs. In that way and due to the aforementioned reason the content of the following Table 2, which is the latter matrix, offers an indicative example of the initial matrices' content. The format of them is presented by Tables 3A, 3B and 3C in the Appendices Chapter.

The research sample is chosen on purpose to reflect and represent the majority of the existing different sub-groups of the Greek agro-Unions' and Confederations of them business sector. The research sample's agro-Unions are operating either under the prevailing agro-Unions' 'regime' or have been partially privatised. In this case, their business framework, and organisational context and settings have been influenced (at least

partially) by these of the private sector's companies' ones, as Daoutopoulos (2006) and Karamichas (2009, 2008) state.

The research study analysis comprise six major research categories-themes and six research variables, which are shown as the variables-determinants of the ISO 9000 QMS' adopted practice in the Greek agro-Unions' sector.

These research categories-themes representing the key research questions are presented in the following relevant six sections comprising the two matrices used during the process of the qualitative data collection and analysis:

1. Stakeholders' knowledge of Quality and Process management and improvement business fields, and of their relation with ISO 9000 QMS (QPKNTR).
2. Stakeholders' knowledge of and training on, and resulting perceptions and practices towards ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties (KNTRIR), that is:
 - i) differences between the two versions (BNPRD: Business nature and properties' differences), and
 - ii) implementation and use reasons, requirements, results and problems (IURRRP).

In sections one/1 and two/2 the following variable is also included: Stakeholders' business and managerial expertise and competence (SBMEC).

3. Greek Agro-Unions' operational framework/OPFR (business and financial status', and managerial practices' impact on ISO 9000 QMS' manner of implementation and use (BFSMPIR).
4. ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property's use: root-causes, requirements and results (STRBDCH).
5. Organisational context and settings' (CPPSR/Corporate politics, power structure and stakeholders' relations') status and impact on business issues' - ISO 9000 QMS, too - actual management and decision making process (OCS and MDM / management and decision making).
6. The sixth research objective and relevant key theme's is the External Stakeholders' - Third Parties' influence (EXTINFL) on the agro-Unions' business nature and manner of the:
 - i) business issues' management and decision making process, and consequently
 - ii) ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose.

The Qualitative data collection and analysis is materialised, presented and critically evaluated in anyone of the five aforementioned key research themes – sections.

The content of these six sections has been already presented in section 3.3 of Chapter 3.

The following Table 2, presents the clustered cross-case analysis of the key Stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes and practices in terms of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the researched Greek agro-Unions' and Confederations of them.

TABLE 2

Key Research Questions – Themes / Categories	3rd Sample's sub-group of Agro-Unions ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use / traditional – operational approach	1st & 2nd Sample's sub-groups of Agro-Unions ISO 9000 QMS implementation and use / strategic approach
Stakeholders' Business and Managerial expertise and competence	Directors: Business competence and expertise based exclusively on their empirical business experience gained by their long-time engagement in the BoDs. Professional managers: as their counterparts of the 1 st and 2 nd sample sub-groups' agro-Unions. The Quality managers require business competence connection with the managerial position and role.	Directors: Acknowledgement of the need of enriching their business expertise by acquiring the required knowledge through information from the relevant managers and training Professional managers: More professional as it is based on adequate business issues' experience, academic knowledge and training and information provided by the relevant professional manager.
Level, source and nature of the key Stakeholders' Information in, Knowledge of and Training on Business issues and fields, and management systems in use (especially of Quality and Process mgt. & improvement business fields and their	Directors: Low to very low – Empirical due to position – inexistence of business training and academic knowledge due to: i) their unwillingness to acquire them according to the two professional managers' groups; ii) the incompetent managers who do not	Directors: Fairly adequate level of knowledge and training of business issues – information provided by the relevant professional manager Professional Mgrs' groups: High to very high depending on the issue - academic knowledge - business experience - managerial expertise and competence.

<p>interrelationship with ISO)</p>	<p>inform them properly and iii) “it is the job of the (relevant) managers and they have to be well informed” according to the Directors. They have a very limited knowledge of Quality & Process business fields, while the majority of them are claiming of the relationship between them and ISO, but without being able to articulate on it. Professional Mgrs’ groups: Moderate (the GMs on Q&P business fields) to very high (the QMs on Q&P business fields) depending on the issue – academic knowledge – business experience – managerial expertise and competence. The Quality managers’ group is complaining of the GMs’ ignorance & unwillingness “to become well informed on the quality and ISO issues. We are left alone to do everything and they blame us for any problem afterwards”.</p>	<p>All three Stakeholders’ groups’ members expressed the belief that adequate knowledge of business issues and mgt. systems is a prerequisite to manage and use them effectively and efficiently. Only some of the 2nd sample group of agro-Unions’ Directors expressed views aligned to these of their counterparts of the 3rd sample group of agro-Unions. In terms of the Quality and Process mgt. & improvement business fields and their interrelationship with ISO, the Quality managers of both sample groups seem to have a very high level of knowledge & training. The same holds true for the two GMs’ groups, while the 1st sample group’s Presidents possess a high level and their counterparts of the 2nd a fairly adequate one due to the informational and training courses they have received from the Quality managers mainly. Thus, they all acknowledge the existing interrelationship between these two business fields and ISO 9000 QMS’ issues.</p>
<p>Level, source and nature of the key Stakeholders’ Information in, Knowledge of and Training ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and operational and strategic business properties.</p>	<p>As above for the Directors’ and the General managers’ groups. A fair number of the Directors blamed the two professional managers’ groups of withholding information on business issues as a means for “playing power politics’ games”. Quality managers: very high - academic knowledge - business</p>	<p>As above for the Directors’ and the General managers’ groups. Quality managers: very high - academic knowledge - business experience - managerial expertise and competence. They are “the real experts” as they claimed.</p>

	experience - managerial expertise and competence. They express the same complaint as above for both Directors and GMs.	
Business behaviour and managerial practice of Directors	Authoritarian, coercive, paternalistic, withholding of authority but they refuse to accept accountability, 'daily' interference even in the operational business issues mgt according to the professional managers. Almost obliged to act in that way due to the professional managers' incompetence according to the Directors.	Towards adopting a mixed approach of the ones expressed by the professional managers of the three sample sub-groups' agro-Unions. That is more cooperative, accepting the requirement of having appointed process owners and delegating to them the relevant authority and responsibility and not only accountability in terms of the business issues' management. They accept cooperation through informational sessions in the decision making and accountability
Business behaviour and managerial practice of General Managers' and Quality Manager' groups	Reactive, passive and competitive towards each other. Indirectly in favour of the procedure ownership approach in practice, although they claim to be in favour of the process agent approach (especially the GMs).	More Proactive, Cooperative, Supporters of process ownership and agent approach accompanied by the relevant authority, responsibility and accountability approach.
Stakeholders' degree and nature of knowledge of ISO 9000 QMS' versions differences in terms of business nature and properties		
Stakeholders' perceptions and actual practice of ISO 9000 QMS' operational and strategic business properties' nature and implementation & use reasons and results-benefits	Directors: legal and state requirements, marketing posture, products' safety, production costs' savings, defaults minimisation. GMs: Legal and marketing requirements and benefits, products' safety and production costs' issues. Although, they claim of knowing the ISO strategic use benefits achieved by	Directors: they are moving towards the professional managers' views due to their own experience gained by the business partnership with the private sector companies (these of the 1 st sample sub-group's agro-Unions in a higher degree). GMs and Qms: Legal and marketing requirements and benefits, cost savings, corporate goals' achievement, business processes' auditing and improvement aiding the

	<p>the business processes' auditing and improvement, the Directors do not permit this use due to their ignorance of these business issues.</p> <p>QMs: same view as the GMs' one, but they blame the GMs of exhibiting such a behaviour, too.</p>	<p>improvement of the Agro-Unions' current status of their operational framework, organisational context and settings, Stakeholders' managerial practices in terms of actual management and decision making process</p>
<p>Stakeholders' perceptions and actual practice in terms of the requirements for achieving ISO 9000 QMS' proper use purpose & implementation process</p>	<p>All the Stakeholders state the improved operational framework, organisational context & settings; the active participation of competent and fully informed business wise Stakeholders; supply of the required technical infrastructure (SPC) as the absolute requirements. Moreover, they require clearly defined managerial roles in terms of authority, responsibility and accountability among the Directors and the professional managers, as well as between the managers' groups. Nevertheless, they blame each other for the absence of these requirements in their agro-Union.</p>	<p>All the Stakeholders offered same views as their counterparts of the 3rd sample group's agro-Unions. Moreover, they consider the aforementioned as the requirements for any agro-coop's Stakeholders perceiving and using in "real practice" the strategic business property of ISO for improving the agro-coop's business processes and consequently fulfill the aforementioned requirements. But, they all accept accountability for the absence of these requirements in their agro-Union and in the entire agro-coops' Unions' business sector (even the Directors in contrast to their counterparts of the 3rd sample group agro-Unions, who claim of having only the authority and responsibility to manage and decide and not the accountability for their decisions and actions).</p>
<p>Stakeholders' perceptions and actual practice in terms of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation & use problems and solution offered</p>	<p>They all refer to the bureaucratic nature of ISO, while they all consider the absence of the mentioned requirements as the major problems. They also blame each other for these problems, while they suggest the adoption of the private sector's companies' practices as the solution to</p>	<p>These agro-unions' Stakeholders also refer to the bureaucratic nature of ISO, while they too consider the absence of the mentioned requirements as the major problems. But, the solution was offered through their business partners' firm requirement to implement and use ISO properly. Thus, they proceeded to the appropriate course of action "by benchmarking and adopting their</p>

	the problem.	partners' best business practice" in terms of the 'problematic' business topics-fields.
Organisational context and settings (Corporate Politics, Power structure, Stakeholders' inner- and inter- group relations).	Everybody against everybody'- 'Balkanisation' Coercion among all stakeholders' groups and among the members of each group. Rivalry between the two professional managers' sub-groups. Pursuance of stakeholders' self-interests and/or third parties' interests rather than of the corporate ones.	Cooperative, participative and supportive. Improved business relations among the key stakeholders' groups (Directors and professional managers' groups) and among the members of each one of these three groups. Emphasis mainly on the corporate interests.
Decision making process and actual management of business issues & mgt. systems	Based on the Directors' empirical experience, autocratic, paternalistic and competitive. Mainly of an Operational and Administrative approach.	Clearly defined roles of authority, responsibility and accountability. Operational, Administrative, Strategic and Normative approach, with emphasis on the two last ones. Cooperative and based on business and managerial expertise and competence.
Decision making process and actual management of ISO 9000 QMS	As above	As above
Stakeholders' Key decision-making group	Board of Directors' members – emphasis on the BoDs' President's role for both the operational and strategic business issues	Mainly the President and the BoDs' members for the strategic and in a much lower degree for the operational business issues, but in both cases with the cooperation of the General Manager and the relevant manager, i.e.: the Quality and Production managers for ISO 9000 QMS' implementation & use
Operational framework (Business status, Financial position, Managerial practices)	Undermined-endangered. Outdated, inappropriate and competitive business & managerial practices. Based on 'isolated' work	Cooperative and based on business and managerial expertise and competence. Based on process approach and process agency. Cross-sectional and

	<p>tasks and duties. According to the Directors' view "the managers' incompetence is the root cause of this status and adopted practices", while the professional mgrs, blame the Directors for "interfering in everything without having the required academic knowledge, business experience/'Balkanisation'</p>	<p>interdepartmental synergies. Clearly defined lines of business issues' managerial authority, responsibility and accountability among the Directors and the professional mgrs, as well as among the latter, too. "Thank's God, we have solved this problem by adopting our business partner's – a private sector's company's business practices and organisational and operating 'business paradigm' as they said.</p>
Existence of Quality Management Strategy and policy	Negative and in most of the cases inexistence of business strategy, policy and plan	Positive and incorporated in the Corporate business strategy, policy and plan
Nature, degree and outcomes of External stakeholders' - Business partners' influence on ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose	<p>Mainly interference from political parties. Of a minimum importance any influence on business' issues' management and DM process' adopted practice, although all Stakeholders (especially the professional managers) acknowledge the need for adopting the private sector's companies' best 'operating' paradigm</p>	<p>From moderate (mainly the 2nd sample sub-group's agro-Unions) to very high (mainly the 1st sample sub-group's agro-Unions) influence from the private sector's companies having a business partnership with these agro-Unions. Mostly expressed as requirements by these business partners and in a lesser degree generated by benchmarking of their business practices. Affecting and improving the agro-Unions' operational framework, actual management & DM process, Stakeholders' relations, agency theory issues (corporate politics and power structure) and Stakeholders' (especially the Directors) perception and actual practice in terms of them acquiring the required level of KN&TR on business issues and management systems, ISO too. Use of ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property for improving business processes and consequently organisational performance. Interrelationship of all the aforementioned business topics.</p>

<p>Strategic business development and Change management process' nature, source and implementation agent</p>	<p>Although all Stakeholders acknowledge the need for an improvement of the Agro-coops' Unions' organisational context and settings, business practice and Stakeholders' business and managerial expertise and competence (mainly, the professional managers referring to the Directors), they favour the 'status quo' with their actual practice.</p>	<p>Mostly generated and driven externally by the business partners as their firm business requirements and in a lesser degree as a benchmarking process of their business 'paradigm' generated by the agro-Unions' Stakeholders'. Incremental development by the internal Stakeholders by using the ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property of continuously auditing and improving the business processes.</p>
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In the two triangulation questions referring to the Favoured Future Quality Management System (FFQMS) and the requirements for its effective implementation and efficient use, the vast majority of the researched Stakeholders of the three sample groups' agro-Unions stated their preference towards:

“an integrated QMS, like ISO 22000:2005, which covers all product quality and safety requirements from the 'farm to the stores' selves', while the requirements for its proper implementation and use are the same with the ones for achieving the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use for 'having' improved business processes and performance”.

With these answers, they confirmed indirectly the validity, reliability and consistency of their views concerning the other key research questions and themes.

6.3. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

6.3.1. INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in Section 1.1.3 of Chapter 1 of this document, Chapter six includes a critical analysis and interpretation, as well as an initial evaluation of the Qualitative research data analysis and research findings.

Therefore, the Chapter's following sub-sections present a thorough and critical analysis of the offered answers by the researched agro-coops' key stakeholders, in terms of each one of the following anchor research theme:

- Key stakeholders' knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management and improvement fields, and their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS as perceived and practiced by them – 6.3.2 / Code: QPKNTR.
- Key stakeholders' opinion regarding the required future Quality Management System, that best serves the agro-coops' interests – 6.3.3 / Code: FQMS.
- Key stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use differences, reasons, results, requirements and problems, and these issues influence on the systems' implementation process and use purpose as perceived and practiced by them – 6.3.4 / Code: IKNTR / IURRRP.
- Greek Agro-coops' business status, financial position and managerial practices and these issues' interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS' business status and manner of implementation and use – 6.3.5 / Code: BFSMPIR.
- ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property as perceived and used in the Greek agro-coops – 6.3.6 / Code: STRBDCH.
- The external stakeholders' - third parties' influence on the business status and nature of:
 - i) ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and manner of implementation process and use / Code: EXTINFLISO,
 - ii) stakeholders' level of knowledge of and training on business issues and (quality) management systems - especially, ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties - agro-coops' operational framework, and organisational context and

settings / Code: EXTINFLAC,

- and iii) the related sub-theme of the adopted and offered solution to the problems experienced during the systems' implementation and use process and the corporate business issues' management and decision-making process / Code: SOL; its source / Code: SOURCE, its effects on the aforementioned themes / Code: EFFTH; its resulting impact on the systems' manner of implementation and use / Code: IMPISO; and outcomes of the systems' actual implementation process and use purpose / Code: OUTCOMES.

6.3.2 QUALITY AND PROCESS MANAGEMENT & IMPROVEMENT FIELDS

RESEARCH THEME 1 / QPKNTR

Stakeholders' Knowledge of and Training on Quality and Process management and Improvement fields and these fields interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS

First Sample Group

A1+A2: General Managers and Presidents

The SEKAP S.A. and UACArgolida General Managers offered an all inclusive answer similar to the ones presented by their other counterparts:

“My time is very limited due to the many job tasks and responsibilities I have.

Nevertheless, I consider important to be well and adequately informed on any business matter and management system thus, ISO 9000 QMS, too.

So, I asked the Quality manager to inform the BoDs' members and me on every issue relevant to these systems, before their introduction.”

I asked them what this information's content is about and they said:

“He explained to us that, the Quality and Process fields are connected with ISO 9000 QMS with the products' quality issue and process management issue. Unless, we had achieved proper business processes' management, we would not enjoy the intended benefits we wanted from the systems' use. Due to this excuse, we understood that, all business operations and activities are materialised by the relevant business processes.

Moreover, he elaborated by saying that, the ‘new’ ISO version, is process-centered and customer-focused and has a factual approach. In this way, it assists the internal managerial control on business operations by auditing the relevant processes.”

The relevant Presidents offered similar responses and added:

“The managers have to be thoroughly informed on these management matters.

We, the elected members, need to have a certain degree of knowledge on these management issues for properly deciding in cooperation with them. Thus, both the professional managers and the Directors undertook such a program.”

All the respondents’ answers are in consistency with the theory statements concerning this research issue. These require from all the key stakeholders involved in the actual management and decision making process to acquire the appropriate level of knowledge of and training on the Quality and Process management and improvement business fields, for them being able to perceive correctly these fields’ interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose and then proceed to the required action.

THEME 6 referring to and incorporated in Themes: 1+2+ 3+4+5

The SEKAP S.A. President being present in that part of the conversation agreed, while he presented another feature, by saying:

“I think, this is the only way and means, we have and can use for remain competitive and successful, business wise, since we cannot afford financially to adopt other means, like the private sector’s ‘big’ companies are doing”.

By his answer, he gave me the opportunity to ask him, which these other means are.

“Privately owned companies are able to proceed to the hiring of the most competent managers. The agro-coops’ Unions cannot do that, since they have a compensation scheme-salary upper level, which they cannot overpass, even for hiring the ‘most successful’ manager. Second, the BoDs’ decisions are a few times a product of compromise between the existing different Directors’ groupings in the BoDs. Thus, the prevailing decision-making process’ status is that of a compromise approach,

instead of it being based on favouring and choosing the decision, which is the most advantageous to the Union's business interests.”

It is the first time during the entire DBA research project, that rivalry relations between the BoDs' members were identified. This indicative finding portrays indirectly the existence of differentiated business aims, attitude and practice among the Directors in the BoDs of an agro-Union and/or Confederation of them.

“So, you do face the same problem ‘here’, don't you?” I asked him.

He replied having a smile in his face:

“We have solved this problem the last ten years I am the President of the Union. First of all, we, all the members of the BoDs, understood and agreed that we have to adopt and build a cooperative climate in terms of business behaviour and decision making process, as far as, the Union's strategic management and development is concerned. Second, we all agreed that, the General Manager and the senior managers are responsible for the operational management and decision making. Thus, we do not interfere, unless a serious problem emerges.

Third, we decide on each strategic business issue in cooperation with the General Manager and the relevant to the issue manager, who are supposed to be more informed and competent on management and business issues. This is the decision making process we have adopted and follow for the ISO 9000 QMS and the other Quality management issues' management.

Fourth, we have agreed to require thorough information sessions from the managers and the ‘General’, before the final decision we take on adopting and developing any management system. If it is required, we seek for help from external consultants, who are considered as experts on the business theme under question.

As a result of all these, we have achieved to ‘build’ and maintain the most effective and efficient decision-making and management system, both strategically and operationally business wise, we have enjoyed until now. So, why changing it?”

he concluded.

Parnell's (2000) and the E.U. Social Directorate's studies (2004) are both requiring from the agro-coops' stakeholders to proceed to the adoption of such a decision making process and management approach, for effectively and efficiently deploying their required

organisational change process. Because, the agro-coops are being suffering from an autocratic decision making process, which results to inefficient and ineffective operational and strategic management (Parnell, 2000). Moreover, it may contribute to the managers' disappointment and even worse, it may force them adopting the 'resentful and careless manager's business attitude and stance', as Watson (2003) believes.

A3: Quality and Production Managers

This sample group's Quality and Production managers seem to know thoroughly and in depth the issues of Quality and Process management and improvement, their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and the existing differences between the 'new' ISO 9000:2000 version and the 'old' ISO 9000:1994 version, because as their two counterparts of the UACSitia stated:

“Quality management is a major change and opportunity at the same time, for any corporation achieving multiple business aims. Besides the upgrading of products and services quality, Quality management systems and more specifically ISO 9000 QMS may contribute to the improvement of the internal business operations, which in modern management are called business processes and are considered as the core of any business activity and operation.”

Asking them what they mean, they answered as follows:

“All business activities aim at transforming effectively and efficiently inputs to outputs. Well, this activity is called process and moreover, since any corporation aims at being productive and competitive, it has to apply and operate effective and efficient processes in all its departments and functions for achieving this aim.”

I asked them, what is the source of their knowledge and they answered:

“The only way, to understand the business nature and properties of any management issue and system, is training and information on them for acquiring an in depth knowledge of it. Therefore, we have obtained a training and information program on these two aforementioned business fields, as well as, on the 'new' ISO 9000 QMS’

version. Thus, we ‘fully’ perceived these two business fields’ interconnection and consequently their interrelationship with ISO 9000:2000 QMS.”

It is an answer portraying very well the existing theory on the issue, as it can be identified in and proved by the work of Oakland (2001, 2003) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001), where it is emphasised that, for the proper introduction, development and use of any quality management system - the ISO 9000 QMS, too - extensive training on and information of the systems, as well as, of their inclusive business fields are prerequisites.

Moreover, by their answer, they affirmed the President’s previous similar statement, which seems to represent the existing business practice in the UACSitia.

Second Sample Group

B1+B2: General Managers and Presidents

The ASEE Amykles and the UWCNemea General Managers stated in the presence of their Presidents who agreed:

“Knowledge of every business field connected with any management system applied in our company is a prerequisite for having the ‘best’ results out of the system’s use. Therefore, and in relation to ISO 9000 QMS’ proper development and use, we required and achieved all involved parties having a fairly adequate level of knowledge of the Quality and Process management and improvement business field. The external consultant informed us of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS and therefore, we are in a better position to take the most optimal decisions on these issues. The Quality manager is in a better position to elaborate on the issue.”

These respondents’ views best represent their counterparts’ ones. They also confirm that adequate knowledge on the aforementioned business fields is a prerequisite for better perceiving the ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and properties, and their interrelationship with these business fields.

B3. Quality and Production Managers

On this research issue, the Quality managers claimed of having received informational courses and training seminars on these two business fields and their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS' business status and properties.

The UACArta and UWCSamos' Quality managers best expressed their views:

“ISO 9000 QMS is a ‘by-product’ of the Quality management and the new version is process-centered rather than emphasising the procedures as the previous version did. It is now more closely aligned to TQM, since they both emphasise the proper business processes’ management and require their improvement as a means for achieving upgraded quality in all business operations. Therefore, the interrelationship of ISO 9000:2000 with these aforementioned business fields is very obvious.”

Their views are in accordance with the ISO 9000 Technical Committee 176 (2000) ones, while they are also verified by Oakland’s (2003) statements of the ISO 9000 QMS’ relationship with the Quality and Process management and improvement business fields.

Nevertheless, the ASEE Amykles’ Quality manager expressed a grief:

“The other stakeholders have not undertaken informational and training courses of the same level with mine. Thus, I am the sole agent of the systems’ deployment and use.”

According to the researcher, this is the first indication that: First, the key stakeholders, besides the Quality managers, do not have a thorough knowledge of and training on the aforementioned business fields and therefore, they are not in a position to perceive their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS. Secondly, the prevailing relationship between the Quality managers’ group and the other key stakeholders seems to be a competitive one.

Third Sample Group

C1+C2: General Managers and Presidents

On this research theme, the UACLakonia’s and UACMessologi General Managers stated:

“My knowledge on these issues covers only ‘the typical side’ of quality, this being the production procedures’ assessment for being in compliance with our products’

quality standards. As far as, process management is concerned, I know that all our business functions are based on processes.

In the beginning, I knew these two business fields from articles and my own experience gained during the HACCP and ISO introduction and initial development phases in the 'Union'. Although, I wanted to learn more, I could not, since my job positions' duties obliged me but to concentrate on them only."

Their answers are in full contradiction with Oakland's (2003) and Tricker and Sherring-Lucas' (2001) doctrines on the necessity of corporate stakeholders' adequate knowledge on the Quality and Process management and improvement business fields, for them being able to perceive and implement and use properly any Quality management system, ISO 9000 QMS, too.

The Presidents fully agreed with these statements and added:

"Nevertheless, this is the Quality and Production managers' job. They have to be informed on these issues and then decide whatever is 'good' for the 'Union'."

This answer is a clear indication that, there exists a distinction between job positions' duties and operations and therefore, corporate interdepartmental and cross-functional cooperation and synergies do not exist and even more are not encouraged. But, as Parnell (2000) believes, these cooperation and synergies are a prerequisite, for the agro-coops achieving improved organisational performance. Moreover, the existing rivalry between this sample's BoDs members and professional managers is firstly identified by his point.

Similar views were expressed by the Presidents and General Managers of this sample group's researched agro-Unions: UACKorinthos, UACLivadia, UACKarditsa etc. They even offered the same excuse for not being able to learn more about these two business fields and their relationship with ISO 9000 QMS.

C3. Quality and Production Managers

All the researched Quality managers offered similar answers to the ones offered by the first and second sample groups' Quality managers and proved their thorough knowledge on the research issue, since they cover all the issues as referred also by Oakland (2001) and Foster (2001). These authors state with emphasis, the need for the corporate stakeholders' having a thorough and deep knowledge of the Quality and Process management, for them perceiving and properly developing and using the ISO 9000:2000.

Moreover, these respondents bring into the surface, the issue of rivalry and competitive relations existing among the Greek agro-Unions different key stakeholders' groups, while they insisted that their agro-Unions' other key stakeholders do not really possess an adequate level of knowledge of these two business fields.

6.3.3 Research Sub-Theme of FUTURE QMS incorporated in THEME 1 interviewing process– FUTURE QMS / FQMS

First Sample Group

A1+A2: General Managers and Presidents

Similar answers to these provided by the relevant Quality managers were offered by the majority of the respondents, while the President of SEKAP S.A. believed that:

“Thorough information has to be provided to all stakeholders' groups for deciding on the introduction and development processes, while adequate knowledge and training on the ‘new’ Quality management system has to be provided to the relevant and most engaged managers.”

And as, both the President and General Manager of the UACSitia added:

“Initially, we have to assess the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose for identifying and then altering any ‘false’ tactic we have adopted and practiced with these systems' implementation process and use purpose. Then, we will

be able to proceed.”

In fact, all quality issues’ authors urge the agro-coops’ stakeholders to adopt such an approach for enjoying the optimal results out of any Quality management system’s development and use.

A3: Quality and Production Managers / Future QMS/FQMS

Being interviewed on this theme’s issues the Quality and Production managers expressed similar views to those expressed by their Unions’ Presidents and General Managers, although as they said: “ISO 22000 is a Quality management system encompassing attributes and features of HACCP mainly and ISO 9000 QMS as well, which means that, its development is more demanding. As a result it requires: a higher level of knowledge of and training on the system; the active involvement of all senior managers and the General Manager too; a cooperative management style for the agro-Union achieving the ‘best’ outcomes out of the system’s implementation and use. Actually, we cannot develop this QMS on our own, without the support and ‘work’ of everybody else.”

As a matter of fact, this answer is similar to the one offered by the two other Unions’ key stakeholders and being closely aligned to theory suggestions and the requirements prescribed by the ISO relevant Technical Committee for each QMS’ series’ introduction and development. On the other hand, it seems as an indirect indication that, the Quality and Production managers have the feeling of ‘doing the work on their own’, without enjoying the required level of support and commitment by the President and the General Manager, as well as, the active and real engagement of all other involved parties.

It is an indicative research finding, reassured and expressed indirectly by almost all other quality managers, who more or less, state the need for having more aid, concerning the development of ISO 9000 QMS and/or ISO 22000. But, this indirectly expressed grief may not represent accurately the existing situation in the researched Agro-Unions.

Second Sample Group**B1+B2: General Managers and Presidents and B3: Quality and Production managers**

This sample group's interviewees' preferences portray the new QMS-ISO 22000, which incorporates features of both ISO 9000 QMS and HACCP, and the 'new' ISO 9000:2008.

Third Sample Group**C1+C2: General Managers and Presidents / Future QMS/FQMS**

The General Managers and Presidents-Directors of the third sample groups' agro-Unions did not answer in this research theme, since they considered the Quality managers to be more informed and 'accountable' to respond such questions, as their majority claimed.

C3: Quality and Production Managers

This sample group's Quality managers offered similar views to the ones expressed by their counterparts of the two other sample groups.

6.3.4 BUSINESS NATURE AND MANNER OF ISO 9000 QMS' IMPLEMENTATION AND USE / DIFFERENCES - REASONS - REQUIREMENTS - RESULTS: BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS / IURRR**6.3.4.1 Differences between ISO 9000:1994 QMS and ISO 9000:2000 QMS****First Sample Group: Differences****A1+A2: General Managers and Presidents**

The UACSitia General Manager elaborated on this issue:

“The new version is more process oriented and customer focused. We have also to

audit the systems' development and use by examining the prescribed goals in relation to the achieved ones. The Union's Quality and Production managers are responsible for this task in cooperation with the external Quality consultant."

The President agreed:

"The 'new' ISO 9000 QMS' introduction and development was an opportunity to establish an auditing system of our internal operations and where necessary the General Manager proceeded to corrective action and improvement of them".

It is a clear indication that, they both understand and know of the existing main differences between the ISO 9000 QMS' two versions. Moreover, they seem to have perceived and indirectly actualised the strategic element of ISO 9000:2000 QMS' development and use, by using these systems for auditing and improving the Union's entire business processes' framework.

The UACArgolida and the UWCNemea researched key stakeholders added:

"The involvement of all parties becomes a prerequisite with the new version. This is the only way, for the new version to be effectively implemented and efficiently used. For this reason, we have required that, all involved stakeholders have to possess a certain degree of knowledge in terms of the systems' business nature and properties."

All these answers best represent the major differences between the ISO 9000 QMS' two versions (the two versions' relative Handbook and Guidelines: 1994, 2000). In addition to that, these respondents are offering the strategic use of ISO 9000:2000 QMS as an indirect difference and, at the same time, benefit enjoyed by the Unions, whose stakeholders have 'real' knowledge of the systems' business nature and properties, as Goetch and Davis (2002) proclaim.

A3: Quality and Production managers

According to the UWCNemea and UACArgolida Quality and Production managers the main differences are:

"customer-focus and process-centered orientation; emphasis on measuring stated objectives; requirement of having the unwavering commitment and support of the

key stakeholders; and participation of all involved parties.”

They seem to have a thorough knowledge of the ‘new’ ISO 9000 QMS, since they almost referred to all differences between the two ISO versions, as stated by the ISO technical committee/ITC in the ISO 9000:2000 QMS’ handbook guidelines (2000).

The SEKAP S.A., PINDOS S.A., Eleourgiki S.A. and UACSitia’s Quality managers added as a main difference, the:

“close alignment of ISO 9000 QMS to the TQM, which if perceived and adopted by the agro-coops’ stakeholders may lead the agro-coops achieving improved business processes and consequently organisational context and operational framework. This is one of the main reasons we are now enjoying improved organisational performance.”

Oakland (2001 and 2003) and, Tricker and Sherring & Lucas (2001) agree provided that the ISO 9000:2000 business properties are properly perceived and used.

Second Sample Group: Differences

B1+B2: General Managers and Presidents

All the interviewees claimed that, they covered this topic by their answers in the Research Theme 1-QPKNI, where they referred indirectly to this research sub-topic. Therefore, they considered useless to repeat the same things, as they said

B3: Quality and Production Managers

These respondents also viewed this research theme as the continuation of the previous one, as the relevant General Managers and Presidents argued.

Nevertheless, some interesting answers are going to be presented.

The ASEE Amykles’ Quality manager:

“ISO 9000:2000 favours the factual and emphasises the management by objectives approach, since it requires the firm measurement of corporate performance in terms of production output defaults, sales volume increase, decrease of customers’ complaints

and minimisation of repetitive and obsolete business operations and processes. In that way, the new version favours business process improvement as a strategic means for improving business performance.

By the systems' emphasis on all stakeholders' active involvement and participation, both the Directors' and professional managers' training on and knowledge of the systems' business nature and properties become an imperative.”

The UACArta Quality manager added:

“The real problem lies on the fact, that except me, nobody else has this thorough and deep knowledge of and training on and thus, the systems' effective implementation and efficient use of ISO 9000 QMS is held under serious doubt.”

Actually, all quality issues' authors state the aforementioned differences between the systems' two versions and require: all stakeholders' active participation and unwavering commitment; and their deep and thorough knowledge of and training on the systems' business nature and properties, for them being able to properly perceive and actualise the systems' operational and strategic use capabilities (Foster, 2001; Oakland, 2001 and 2003; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001).

Third Sample Group: Differences

C1+C2: General Managers and Presidents

This group's key stakeholders admitted of not being adequately informed of and/or trained on ISO 9000 QMS. Therefore, they were not in a position to identify and state any other difference than the most known ones: the emphasis on business processes and customer satisfaction, because as the UACLakonia General Manager stated:

“scarcity of 'free' time and my position's work duties did not let me to spend more time on the systems' new version.”

The President agreed with him: “I think that, the General Manager's responsibility is to deal and handle more important business issues than this. The ISO 9000 QMS'

management is the work duty and responsibility of the Quality manager. We have to decide for issues concerning the strategic management and development of the systems and/or any other serious problem we may face.”

These expressed views seem in total contrast with the ISO 9000:2000QMS's firm requirements: of all corporate stakeholders' active involvement and not only of these of the Quality department; and of their adequate level of knowledge of and training on the systems' business nature and properties, for them being able to actively participate and support the systems' development and use processes (Oakland, 2001; Foster, 2001).

C3: Quality and Production Managers

Identical answers were provided by the majority of this sample group's Quality managers who seem to have a thorough knowledge of the systems' business properties, but they expressed a grief concerning the other professional managers' avoidance of participating in the systems' development best expressed by the UACLakonia Quality manager:

“I am the only one, who has an adequate degree of knowledge of the ‘new’ ISO version since I had a training course before its introduction. All the other claimed of not having enough time to spend on this issue. As a result I have to do everything on my own but this affects negatively the systems' proper implementation and use. ISO 9000:2000 is more closely aligned to TQM because: it is more process and customer focused; requires the active participation of all involved parties; its assessment is based on achieved goals and not on proclaimed ones. These features could better serve any agro-Union's strategic business interests.”

The most interesting point is that he recognises the possible use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic management system, whose proper implementation and use could aid the agro-Unions' strategic business development. Actually, Oakland (2003) and Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002) require all corporate key stakeholders' adequate knowledge for perceiving and using this strategic business property. A fact not happening in the majority of the Greek agro-Unions, as the last respondent argues.

6.3.4.2 Rational and Reasons for ISO 9000 QMS' introduction, development and use**First Sample Group: Reasons****A1+A2: General Managers and Presidents**

The UACArgolida General Manager and the President mentioned the following:

“the markets’ and customers’ needs and requirements; legal requirements; the products and services’ quality upgrading; our market presence enhancement; and our business processes and operations’ auditing and improvement.”

Their answer is in line with the reasons stated by quality authors (Oakland, 2003; Goetch and Davis, 2002), and the research findings presented in three quality forums held in Athens in 1996, 1997 and 1998 (see DBA Document 2, relevant Chapter).

He also mentioned the strategic aspect of the systems’ implementation process and use purpose, but his view will be more thoroughly and critically presented and analysed, in the relevant sub-section concerning this business property and usage capability of ISO 9000 QMS.

The UWCNemea General Manager referred to the systems’ strategic business property:

“The initial reason was to upgrade the quality of our standardised products. Nevertheless, as we had been informed by the external quality consultant, we would be able also to improve our business processes, if ISO 9000 QMS’ development was approached and materialised according to the systems’ standards. We achieved it and we are now enjoying: our products’ quality improvement; a decrease in operational costs; and improved processes in all activities. I think, this is and/or should be the major reason for the systems’ implementation and use.”

The President added:

“If the agro-Unions want to achieve organisational change and business development, This is the less costly and ‘smoother’ way to achieve these strategic aims. Otherwise,

we do not have the financial means and the required business and human infrastructure to proceed to more radical solutions.”

I asked him, what he meant with his last phrase. Instead of him, the General Manager answered:

“External consultants advised us to proceed to the adoption of a BPR program. But, we and the managers did not agree, since we could not afford its higher cost and manage successfully its development higher difficulty.”

Similar responses were provided by the majority of this sample group’s key stakeholders. According to the researcher, it is a clear indication of them adopting the cooperative approach in the actual management. This approach is following the Parnell’s directions (2000) and the E.U. study’s (2001-2004) findings on social cohesion in the agricultural sector, which both favour collaboration instead of authoritative management and coercion, among the stakeholders of any organisation in the agro-food industry.

A3: Quality and Production managers

Their answers are identical with the ones they offered in terms of the Results-Benefits of ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose in their agro-Union. Therefore, they are presented and analysed in this section.

Second Sample Group: Reasons

B1+B2: General Managers and Presidents

This sample group’s respondents’ answers are also similar to the ones offered in the Results-Benefits section. Therefore, they are exhibited there.

B3. Quality and Production managers

On this issue too, all these interviewees seemed to have a thorough and deep knowledge.

More specifically, the UACArta and UWCSamos Quality managers argued that:

“The certification under ISO 9000 QMS and the systems’ consequent implementation and use are a firm legal requirement of the E.U. and national legislation concerning food safety by assessing and improving the corporate business processes. This fact renders to the systems a possible strategic use, since improvement of business processes results to more qualitative products with less cost and defaults.”

The ASEE Amykles and UACIraklio Quality managers reported the following reasons:

“Ability to enter in new markets and gaining new customers, while retaining the old ones by upgrading the products’ and services’ quality. Second, operational and especially production costs’ decrease. Third, business processes’ continuous auditing and improvement which aids any senior manager to increase his/her managerial control over his/her job tasks.”

The Quality manager of the UACPeza concluded by saying:

“Therefore, a major reason for the Systems’ implementation and use is this strategic business property.”

All the respondents’ views and answers are in line with the theoretical proposed ones and other research studies’ findings (see DBA Document 2, relevant Chapter).

Third Sample Group: Reasons

C1+C2: General Managers and Presidents

According to the General Manager and the President, the UACLakonia became certified under ISO 9000 QMS because:

“First, it is a legal requirement. Secondly, during the nineties certification under ISO 9000 QMS became a necessity, due to: marketing reasons; easier acceptance of a company’s products by the customers; and easier entrance to new markets.

Thus, we had to follow our competitors’ practice and use ISO 9000 QMS as a marketing tool.”

Their counterparts of the UACKorinthos and UACLivadia reaffirmed this answer, which

represents the ‘then reality’, since “there was exhibited an ‘ISO-mania’ in the nineties” and many companies were claiming of having ISO 9000 QMS, even before becoming certified and registered (DBA, Document 2 – Appendices Chapter).

The most interesting thing is that, they did not mention at all the ‘possible’ strategic use of ISO 9000 QMS, as a reason for the systems’ introduction and development.

This fact is an indication of their lack of and/or partial knowledge of the systems’ business nature and properties. This could be a major obstacle for the systems’ effective implementation and efficient use, regardless the business industry and/or sector the corporate entity belongs to and operates in, as Foster (2001) believes.

C3: Quality and Production Managers

Almost identical answers were provided by the totality of the group’s Quality managers on this sub-issue and are in line with the reasons of ISO 9000 QMS deployment and use as stated by Semos (2003) and Foster (2001).

The UACKorinthos Quality manager offered the most representative answer:

“The main reasons are: markets’ and customers’ firm requirement for products and services of upgraded quality; legal requirement for products’ safety and conformity to health standards; reduced production cost and work due to the minimisation of defects and ‘replaced’ products, and of repetitive production functions and processes.”

According to the UACLakonia Quality manager:

“I have not noticed any substantial change in the way business processes are materialised [*sic*] in the Union. The root cause is that, the Directors are unfamiliar with the ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and properties, while the General Manager and other senior managers do not participate in the systems’ deployment.”

This view was expressed by the two thirds of the researched agro-Unions’ Quality and Production managers, although all of them stated, as a major reason for and benefit of the systems’ introduction, development and use, the business processes’ and consequently performance auditing and improvement.

According to them, another outcome of it could be an improved operational framework and organisational context, a belief very close to that of Kamenidis (2008).

6.3.4.3 Requirements of ISO 9000 QMS' proper implementation and use

First Sample Group: Requirements

A1+A2: General Managers and Presidents

Referring to the business requirements for any company achieving the systems' effective implementation and efficient use, the UACArgolida General Manager said:

“All involved key stakeholders' knowledge of and training on the systems' business properties, support and participation. Each quality management issue's management and decision making process have to be realised by the relevant manager in cooperation with the General Manager. Moreover, the issues of a strategic business nature have to be taken in cooperation with the Directors”

According to a member of the BoDs of Eleourgiki S.A.:

“The Quality manager must have 'full' knowledge of and training on the systems' business nature and properties, as he is responsible for the systems' proper development. The General Manager's and other senior managers' adequate level of knowledge and involvement are also important requirements. The Directors have also to be well informed on the issue, for them being able to make the proper decisions.”

As a matter of fact, all the quality experts state the same requirements (Oakland, 2003; Arvanitoyiannis, 2001).

A3: Quality and Production Managers

The UWCNemea Quality manager's main points:

“All key stakeholders' training and information on the systems' business nature and properties are the absolute prerequisites, followed by the senior managers' support and participation. Moreover, the relevant professional manager has to be the actual decision maker and implementer of the deployment process, while the strategic business issues have to be decided from the General manager and the President and in cooperation with him.”

His counterparts of the UACSitia insisted that:

“this ‘knowledge’ program has also to cover the Quality and Process management and improvement business fields, for these key stakeholders being able to better perceive their relationship with the ISO 9000 QMS.”

Although their statements are in full accordance with the Foster’s (2001) stated beliefs, the last part was an indirect clue for the researcher, to ask them to precisely indicate the President’s and General Manager’s level knowledge of and training on these issues. They consider the General Manager’s level of knowledge as satisfactory and the level of training as fair enough, thus both enabling him to act and decide properly in relevance to ISO 9000 QMS’ operational and strategic development and use issues.

On the other hand, they rated the President’s and the BoDs’ members’ level of knowledge as being limited and they stated for their degree of training: “it does not really exist, so they must not decide on their own since they do not even possess the appropriate knowledge on the business issue. Therefore, they have first to be accurately informed by the professional managers and then all together decide on the proper action.”

The existing rivalry between the BoDs’ elected members and the management staff came into the surface again.

Second Sample Group: Requirements

B1+B2: General Managers and Presidents

All the General Managers of this sub-group expressed similar views to the ones expressed by the first sample group’s General Managers. They required all key stakeholders’ adequate business knowledge and active engagement; the provision and existence of the required tools, machines, financial means and human resources; and the adoption of a cooperative approach in terms of the actual management and decision making process of the business issues.

According to the researched Presidents, the BoDs’ members do not have to possess a high

degree of knowledge on every management issue, because any management systems' operational business development is the professional managers' job task.

B3. Quality and Production Managers

This sample group's researched Quality managers expressed similar views to the ones previously presented by their counterparts of the first sample group. They also argued that, any corporations' business status, financial position and especially managerial practices have an important impact on any management system's deployment and use, thus, on ISO 9000 QMS too.

The UACArta Quality manager required:

“The use of Statistical Process Control/SPC system and an organisational structure that promotes cooperation and clearly defined lines of managerial authority, responsibility and accountability among all participating stakeholders.”

All the researched Quality managers consider the absence of any of these requirements as a constraint for a company achieving the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use. Moreover, the last respondent referred to the corporate politics and power structure research theme and to the need for using Statistical Process Control.

Third Sample Group: Requirements

C1+C2: General Managers and Presidents

The UACChania and UACPreveza General Managers and Presidents respectively expressed similar views with the ones offered by their previous counterparts.

“Training and knowledge are required for all senior managers and the General Manager, too. A fair level of information provided to and consequently knowledge of the President on quality management themes is also required, since he is a major decision maker”.

C3: Quality and Production Managers

The UACMesologhi and UACPreveza Quality managers:

“The ISO 9000 QMS’ optimal deployment and use requires: adequately informed and trained managerial and line staff, and Directors; financial resources and the key stakeholders’ support for procuring the required programmes for covering the production measurements and the recorded data storing and processing; the use of the Statistical Process Control for really assessing the production operations. Unfortunately, the majority of the agro- Unions do not really have them”.

It was the first time that this sample group’s Quality managers referred to the need of using a Statistical Process Control system.

As Logothetis (1992) states, SPC is required for any corporation aiming at reliably assessing its production processes and operations, and then, altering and improving them.

6.3.4.4 Results / Benefits of ISO 9000 QMS’ Implementation and Use

First Sample Group: Results/Benefits

A1+A2: General Managers and Presidents

The UACArgolida General Manager’ answer best represents the other stakeholders:

“First of all, we enjoy products and services’ quality upgrading. Secondly, our business processes were improved and also my managerial control on them which is the most important benefit. Out of these two, we have reduced operating costs and defaults and the company’s image was improved. Moreover, we are consistent with our major clients’ requirements and with any matter concerning the products’ safety and consequently the public’s hygiene and safety”.

The President added the gaining of new markets and customers and consequently the improvement of the financial position.

Also, the SEKAP S.A. General Manager pointed out another indirect benefit:

“We learned the importance of keeping detailed and well-informed records for our business processes and operations. This fact helped us to improve them and provide our customers with products and services of upgraded quality.”

Actually, the respondents presented all the possible benefits that could improve the strategic and operational business performance of any corporation as mentioned by all quality management issues’ authors and researchers.

A3: Quality and Production Managers – RESULTS/BENEFITS and REASONS

The UACArgolida Quality and Production managers:

“First of all, ‘our’ intended benefits are identical with the proper reasons. The actual benefits are the following: business processes’ auditing and improvement upgrading of the products’ quality with less cost; covering satisfactorily all key accounts’ requirements; gaining new customers and markets; and production costs’ decreasing due to less defects, returned products and repetitive operations”.

The UACSitia Quality managers:

“the business processes’ improvement is the most important one and of having a strategic business nature and property. It ‘leads’ to the Agro-Union’s organisational performance and consequently financial position improvement”.

These answers are covering every possible benefit any corporation could achieve out of the systems’ implementation and use, as presented in all quality management books

Second Sample Group: Results/Benefits

B1+B2: General Managers and Presidents

The UACIrakion and UACPeza General managers and Presidents referred extensively to:

“The managerial control and consequent improvement of undermanaged business operations and processes permitted us to improve ‘our’ business performance”.

When, I asked them how these (hypothetically) improved business processes contribute to

the organisational performance improvement, the General Manager seemed to have a more thorough knowledge by replying:

“Improved business processes results to improved business operations and practices, which result to more competitive and qualitatively better products and services. These two effects, combined with the decreased production and operational costs, permit us to sell products with ‘more value for money’. This is the essence of competitiveness and strategic business development. It is also some kind of organisational change”.

This answer is closely aligned to the views of Parnell (2000), Hammer and Champy (1993) and Oakland (2003). They suggest that, organisational change and strategic business development may be achieved by a management system, which is aiming at the business processes’ continuous auditing and improvement, i.e.: ISO 9000:2000 QMS, TQM, BPR. Moreover, they require corporate stakeholders’ adequate knowledge of and training on it, adoption and use of updated managerial practices, and the existence of cooperative business relations among the stakeholders.

B3: Quality and Production managers of 2nd group

The Quality managers of this sample group offered similar answers to the first sample group’s Quality managers’ ones.

The ASEE Amykles’ Quality manager offered another perspective:

“The most important benefit is that the General Manager or the Quality manager knows exactly by the business processes’ auditing what, how and to what degree to change and by whom it has to be changed. This ability of continuous business processes’ results to their consequently to organisational performance improvement. In this way, we do not blame each other for false operations. This was the prevailing attitude before the business processes’ gradual improvement we have achieved with the ISO 9000 QMS’ proper implementation and use”.

These Quality managers seem to be adequately informed of the systems’ operational and especially strategic business property, which could aid any company’s strategic business

development and organisational change through its business processes' auditing and improvement (Oakland, 2003; Kamenidis 2008).

Third Sample Group: Results/Benefits

C1+C2: General Managers and Presidents

Concerning the intended and the actual outcomes of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use in their Union, the UACLakonia President and General Manager stated:

“The intended benefits coincide with the actual ones we had enjoyed out of the ISO 9000:1994 and ISO 9000:2000 development and use: upgraded products' quality; entrance to new markets due to it; improved key customers' service; less defects and 'returned' products”.

This answer represents the other stakeholders' views and it refers to almost all operational benefits. Nevertheless, the strategic aspect of the systems' development and use, which is the business processes auditing and improvement is not mentioned at all.

According to the researcher's view, the third sample group's key stakeholders' lack of knowledge and consequently negligence of using ISO 9000 QMS' strategic property, may be explained by their identified lack of knowledge of and training on: i) ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties, both the operational and strategic ones, and ii) Quality and Process management and improvement business fields, and their connection with ISO 9000 QMS.

C3: Quality and Production Managers

This sample group's Quality managers expressed similar views with the other two sample group's Quality managers by offering all the operational and strategic business benefits a company may enjoy out of ISO9000 QMS' implementation and use. In that way, their adequate knowledge of the systems' business nature and operational and strategic business

properties was reaffirmed.

The UACChania Quality manager referred to the strategic business development:

“ISO 9000 QMS obliged us to audit and improve our business processes, due to the systems’ implementation and use requirements, as these are described in the ISO 9000 Handbook and Guidelines. In that way, we gradually improved our business processes to a certain degree and we are able to offer qualitative products with less production costs. This fact permits us to sustain and/or increase our sales volume and income”.

His answer and the negligence of the other Quality managers to elaborate on the issue led the researcher to hypothesise that, either they and/or the other key stakeholders have partially or not at all perceived the ISO 9000 QMS’ strategic business property through which strategic business development and organisational change could be achieved. This issue will be further examined, analysed and presented in the relevant research theme.

6.3.4.5 ISO 9000 QMS’ Implementation & Use Problems-Drawbacks-Difficulties

First Sample Group

A1+A2: General Managers and Presidents

The UACArgolida General Manager and an Eleourgiki S.A. BoDs’ member pointed out as major problems the following, while they indirectly referred to Theme 6, too:

“The bureaucratic nature of ISO 9000 QMS asking all the involved parties to keep detailed and informed records. The UACArgolida staff considered ISO a bureaucratic and time consuming system too, but only in the initial stages, since later on, we overcame this problem by providing the required information and training to all staff involved, even me included. Moreover, the Directors were thoroughly informed on the systems’ nature and business properties for them being able to properly decide on the strategic business issues and in cooperation with me and the Quality manager. In that way, they do not interfere in the operational business issues and our relations

have been improved, since there exist clearly defined lines of authority and responsibility between them and the professional managers. As a matter of fact, this organisational behaviour “paradigm” was adopted with the beginning of our strategic business partnership with COCA COLA S.A.”

The researcher considers the employees’ resistance in becoming informed and trained on ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature and properties as an initial indication of the prevailing stakeholders’ business attitudes and practices as these are affected by the existing operational framework and organisational context and settings. This possible indicative research finding is examined and evaluated in the proceeding relevant research themes.

The UWCSamos President and the General Manager consider as a major indirect drawback, the absence of all the requirements as these are presented in the Requirements research sub-theme. The same opinion is expressed by all the quality management field’s authors, i.e. Beckford (2002), Arvanitoyiannis (2001).

A3: Quality and Product Managers

The UACArgolida reaffirmed the General Manager’s previous statement, while the UACSitia Quality Managers added:

“Most of the managers and the totality of employees and foremen were very reluctant to adopt a “new” business behaviour and managerial practice required for the systems’ proper implementation and use. We overcame it with the satisfactory support of the General Manager and the President, who required all the stakeholders, including themselves, to undertake training and informational seminars.”

This view was further reassured, either directly and/or indirectly, by the statements of the other respondents of the research sample groups. It is a statement, which can be traced in the E.U. Social Dialogue research program’s (2001-2004) Proceedings and findings, where it is suggested that, only through information provided to all involved stakeholders,

employees' resistance may be overcome.

The researcher's opinion is that, the other (senior) managers and employees' resistance to become informed of and trained on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties, as well as, on any other developed and used management system, is due to the fact that: 'they will ask them to work, without appraising us for our effort and work accomplished', as a fair number of foremen of the researched agro-Unions conveyed to the researcher.

It is an indication of the 'bad and old' management approach adopted and practiced by the majority of the agro-coops' Unions and Confederations of them.

The totally opposite behaviour, attitude and business practice are identified in the vast majority of the first sample group's agro-Unions and in a few ones of the second one.

Second Sample Group: Problems

B1+B2: General Managers and Presidents, and B3. Quality and Production Managers

All the interviewees referred to the absence of any of the aforementioned requirements as a major problem and constraint for any company trying to achieve the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use.

Third Sample Group: Problems

C1+C2: General Managers and Presidents

All the respondents' views were better expressed by the answer offered by the UACLakonia and UACLivadia General Managers:

“The inexistence and/or negligence of all these stated requirements of ISO 9000 QMS' proper implementation process and use purpose are the major problems we encounter during the systems' development and use.”

The UACLakonia General Manager added:

“The Greek agro-Unions' key stakeholders - besides the Quality managers - do not

obtain and consequently have adequate knowledge of and training on the: i) Quality and Process management and improvement business fields, ii) ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties. This happens in our Union and in many other ones.”

“This is the reason that, they are observed so many discrepancies between the required manner and the intended outcomes and the actual ones of the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose.”, as the UACChania General Manager said on this identified problem.

These views represent adequately, the already stated theoretical arguments and research findings presented by Arvanitoyiannis (2001), Foster (2001) and Oakland (2003).

C3. Quality and Production Managers

According to all the interviewees' views, the absence and/ or the misuse in practice of any of these aforementioned requirements create problems in the systems' implementation and use. This is also verified by the findings of a research study conducted and presented by Kechribaris (Athens - Quality Forum, 2006).

As the UACLivadia Quality manager most characteristically mentioned:

“The effective implementation and efficient use of any adopted and used (Quality) management system is under question, unless the Directors and senior managers: are all adequately informed on the systems' business properties; participate in the actual management and not only in the decision making process; accept to be held accountable for their own business decisions and actions. Actually, I have been left on my own, to handle all the problems encountered in the systems' deployment.”

This is a well-documented belief portraying the other quality managers' views.

6.3.5 GREEK AGRO-UNIONS' BUSINESS STATUS AND ITS INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH THE BUSINESS STATUS OF ISO 9000 QMS / BSIR.

First Sample Group: THEME 3-BSIR

A1+A2. General Managers and Presidents

On this research theme, the UACSitia General Manager replied:

“The majority of the Greek agro-Unions face a gradual degradation - which in the last two decades became a radical one - of their business activities, market presence and financial position. According to me, the root causes of this undermined business status and position, are the ‘bad and old’ business practices and organisational behaviour, which are emanating from the inexistence of a clear distinction between the BoDs’ elected members’ and the professional managers’ relevant business roles. This lack results to uncertainty, ambiguity and a clash of interests, which consequently lead to rivalry among these two stakeholders’ groups. As a result, both this organisational framework and business practice affect negatively the implementation process and use purposes of any adopted and developed business system, ISO 9000 QMS too.”

This statement is in full accordance with the Parnell’s (2000) remarks on the required distinction between the agro-coops’ Directors’ and Managers’ business strategic and operational roles, in terms of management and decision making process.

Moreover, it is closely aligned to Daoutopoulos (2006) and Kamenidis (2008) views referring to the Greek agro-coops’ undermined business status and financial position and the interrelated issues of their prevailing organisational context and settings, and operational framework.

The UACArgolida General Manager and the President and the UACSitia President express the same view:

“The majority of the Agro-Unions are facing serious business and financial problems,

and we all are responsible. First, we allowed external stakeholders, such as the political parties to have a decisive role in the internal affairs. Second, we have not proceeded to the required organisational change, by not adopting ‘modern’ management practices and restructuring our organisational context.”

THEME 6/EXTINFL included in THEMES 3 and 5

I asked them, if the UACArgolida experiences such a business situation and if not, how they handled this stated problem. The General Manager said:

“The optimal solution for overcoming the aforementioned business situation was the adoption and practice of clearly defined business roles and duties between the Directors and the professional managers in terms of the actual management and decision-making process. This fact contributed to: the creation of a cooperative business climate among them; and to the appointment of authority, responsibility and accountability to specific stakeholders in terms of the decided and implemented course of action. Only by adopting and using such a ‘technocratic’ managerial approach, business wise, ‘you can save’ an agro- Union from the bankruptcy.”

I asked him how they came out with this solution and he replied as follows:

“The real source of this business approach was the example offered to us by our strategic business partners, the 3E S.A. They requested us to properly implement and use ISO 9000 QMS by following the guidelines and they proceeded to a frequent auditing. When they verified the systems’ mal-functioning, they related it with the Union’s existing organisational framework and context.

Therefore, they requested us to proceed to the required corrective action, having as an example their own and other ‘big’ companies’ ‘best’ business practices, otherwise our business cooperation-partnership was ‘in danger’. This was the root-cause of our solution to the problem.”

His answer reminds the research findings and recommendations of the E.U.’s Research Program (2004) on Social Dialogue and Change Management in the Agricultural sector, which are emphasising the value of adopting and using a cooperative business practice in terms of strategic and operational decision making and management.

It is noteworthy to mention that, all the other researched agro-Unions General managers and Presidents expressed similar views on this research issue which are covering both the research themes referring to the agro-Unions' business state and the prevailing corporate politics and stakeholders' groups' relations in terms of the adopted and practiced decision making and actual management processes.

A3. Quality and Production Managers - **THEME 6/EXTINFL included in THEMES 3 and 5**

All the researched Quality and Production managers believe, as best expressed by the UACArgolida Quality manager, that:

“The Greek agro-coops' outdated business practices and organisational behaviour are the root cause for their problematic financial position, degraded business status and 'poor' organisational performance. Unless, the agro-Unions adopt and use in practice the private sector's companies' actual management and decision making practices their operational framework and organisational context will not be improved”.

This is the view of Arvanitoyiannis and Kourtis (2002) who insist that, unless the Greek agro-coops adopt the best [*sic*] business practices and behaviours of the privately owned companies, they will not be able to properly develop and use any management system they adopt and introduce.

The UACSitia two Quality managers reported:

“We have solved this problem in our Union by adopting our 'big' clients' cooperative business approach, which favours the business knowledge and experience of the relevant managers, who are experts on the business issue under consideration.

In all quality management issues, we are responsible for the initiation of the proposed solutions. If the theme is of a strategic nature, then, we have to consult with the General Manager, arrive to an agreed solution and course of action and then, we present our induction in the BoDs' meeting for final decision.”

According to Daoutopoulos (2006) and Doutsias (2003), this is one of the proposed optimal

solutions, for the agro-coops achieving strategic business development and change, through rationalisation and consequently optimisation and improvement of their decision making process and actual management practice.

Second Sample Group: THEME 3 –BSIR

B1+B2. General Managers and Presidents - THEME 6/EXTINFL included in THEMES 3 and 5

On this research issue, the ASEE Amykles and UWCSamos General Managers offered an integrated response:

“The Greek agro-Unions face a lot of business and financial problems. As a matter of fact, the outdated business mentality, organisational behaviour and managerial practices of the Directors is the root cause of all these problems.

They insist to interfere in the actual management and decision making of every operational and strategic business issue. The decision making system is autocratic and organised around the Directors’ wishes and interests, while they do not possess the business experience, academic knowledge and management expertise and competence to manage successfully the business issues.”

His counterpart of the ASEE Amykles argued:

“This problem has been partially solved in our Union, by adopting a cooperative approach and achieving the authority of decision making and actual management to pass over to the hands of the General Manager and the relevant senior managers.

The strategic business issues are handled by the President in cooperation with the General Manager. We have benchmarked our business partner’s-3E S.A. practice.”

All the respondents’ statements fully portray the existing business situation of Greek agro-coops, as this is presented in the collective research study of Maraveyias et al. (2003). According to this study, half of the Greek agro-Unions and Confederations of Unions are facing serious financial problems, due to the existence and use of outdated business practice in terms of the decision making process and actual management of the corporate affairs.

The continuous intervention of inexperienced and incompetent - business wise - Directors in the operational and strategic management is identified as one of the major root causes for the agro-Unions' degraded business and financial state.

On the other hand, the E.U. research study on Social Dialogue in the agro-businesses' sector (2001-2004), requires the cooperation of all involved parties and corporate stakeholders, as the only means for the agro-coops achieving their required strategic business development and organisational change.

Business development through strategic change of their organisational context and setting and operational framework is considered as the most required course of action for their business survival, according to Karamichas (2008) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001).

The researched Presidents accepted openly part of the responsibility and accountability for the agro-Unions' existing degraded business state.

More specifically, the UACIraklio and UACPeza Presidents admitted:

“We are also responsible and accountable for the agro-coops' undermined business situation. Nevertheless, the managers have part of the accountability for this situation, since they never oppose our decisions by presenting their own stance being based on technocratic, business criteria. Instead, they are trying to manipulate the internal situation by conducting alliances with some Directors.”

As a matter of fact, this statement is in close relationship with the UACArta General Manager's one, who presented this stance as a means the professional managers are using for dealing successfully with the micro-politics 'games' exhibited in all agro-Unions.

The ASEE Amyles President presented another issue:

“The proper planning, organisation and implementation processes of all business activities require the cooperation between a President and a General Manager having an adequate level of business and managerial competence. As a matter of fact, this is not so easy to happen, because it is difficult to have these business attributes in both of them and the other senior managers. Therefore, in some cases the Directors are obliged 'to do the work' of incompetent managers.”

The Presidents' statements were quite similar to the General Managers' ones but, both stakeholders' groups try to avoid accepting the biggest part of the accountability for the agro-Unions' degraded business and financial state, and outdated managerial practices. They are trying rather to blame, even indirectly, the other group for this situation.

The root cause of this behaviour is that although, they understand that both groups have to cooperate for their agro-Unions' business survival, they have not yet fully renounced the 'old' competitive business behaviour, attitude and practice each group exhibited in the past. This behaviour and practice was exhibited in a higher degree by the third sample group's General Managers and Presidents.

B3. Quality and Production Managers

The UWCNemea Quality gave an integrated answer representing his counterparts:

“The operational management has been improved, since we all have clearly defined roles and work duties and the Directors can not interfere, at least not in the degree they did it before. After all, they do not have the required academic knowledge, professional experience and training for managing effectively and efficiently.

Therefore, their intervention in the entire business operational framework and practice may prove to be catastrophic, as it has already happened in the past.

Best examples are: the Northern Greece Confederation of agro-Unions, which was led to bankruptcy and insolvency, and Dodoni S.A. which was saved by its partial privatisation. Actually, they are not accepting any accountability for their own decisions. To the contrary, they blame the managers of not having the managerial competence to properly implement their decisions.”

The ASEE Amykles Quality manager added:

“Outdated managerial practices and the intervention of incompetent and inexperienced Directors are the root causes of the agro-coops' degraded business status and financial position. Moreover, the lack of cooperation among the Directors and the professional managers, as well as between the General Manager and the other managers is another major problem. These factors undermine any managerial effort for implementing and

using optimally any management system - ISO 9000 QMS, too.”

All this group’s interviewees’ answers are similar to the ones offered by the Quality and Production managers of the first sample group, while they reaffirm the findings of the E.U. research study (2001-2004) on Social Dialogue in the agro-industries’ business sector and Kokkinos’ (2009) similar views.

Third Sample Group: THEME3 –BSIR

C1+C2. General Managers and Presidents

The interviewed Presidents’ views seem to be more closely aligned to the SKOS ASE and SYKIKI SynPE Presidents’ interviews (see: Document 3 - Qualitative research), while the General Managers’ responses are similar to the ALMME GM’s interview (see: Document 3 - Qualitative research), as well as, to the one offered by the UWCNemea General Manager (1st sample group of the Final thesis’ research process).

The UACLakonia General Manager offers the most precise answer, representing in that way the views of his counterparts:

“The business situation we are experiencing is the result of the insistence in using outdated managerial techniques and practices, while the real source of the agro- Unions’ decision making and strategic management are the Directors, who are characterised by: ignorance of the present business environment and the resulting operational framework; inexistence of business experience and knowledge of management issues; adoption of an autocratic decision making process; which in many cases aims at serving their own and/or external stakeholders’ interests, rather than these of the agro-Union. As a result of this prevailing business attitude and practice the internal business relations’ climate can be characterised as coercive.”

The UACKorinthos General Manager concluded on the issue:

“This previously described business framework does not permit the proper

introduction, development and use of any management system. Thus, ISO 9000 QMS could not aid the agro-Unions' strategic business development.”

As mentioned before, these views are in line with the E.U. research study's findings (2001-2004) and the aforementioned authors' views, which require cooperation among the various stakeholders' groups for the agro-businesses achieving strategic business development and organisational change. These two corporate strategic aims are prerequisites for the Greek agro-coops' business survival, as Tolios (2003) supports.

On the other hand, the Presidents of the third sample group's researched agro-Unions adopt and present a totally different approach, concerning who is responsible for the degraded business status of the agro-Unions.

For example, the UACLakonia President stated:

“We are all accountable and responsible for the degraded business state and financial position of our companies. But, the inexistence of competent managers is the real root cause. They are responsible to select the most viable business solution and course of action for any business problem we face. Then, the General Manager has to present it in the BoDs' meeting and he and the other senior managers have to properly execute our decision.”

The UACLvadia and UACMesologgi Presidents presented a more radical view:

“Since, the managers are not competent to properly materialise our decisions we are obliged to deal with even 'daily' business issues.”

So, I asked them, if they think that, they are competent to deal with the strategic and operational management of an agro-Union.

And the UACChania President argued that:

“I participate in the Union's BoDs for quite a few years. It does not matter that, I do not have the academic knowledge, since I have gained the practical knowledge to handle these business issues with my continuous presence in the Union's BoDs.”

His opinion, representing also the other Presidents' views, is very characteristic of the Directors' perception and attitude concerning the operational and strategic decision making

and management business fields. As Parnell (2000) and Maraveyas et al. (2003) state, this behaviour and practice are characterising the majority of the Directors and they do not permit the induction and practice of updated management.

These Presidents' beliefs are also totally different to the ones expressed previously by the General Managers concerning this issue. They reaffirm the existing clash of perceptions, attitudes and practices between the Directors and the professional managers, in terms of the business issues' management.

C3. Quality and Production Managers: THEME 3 - BSIR and THEME 5- CPPSR.

This sample group's Quality managers presented identical views with the ones offered by their counterparts of the second sample group's researched agro-Unions.

The only major difference identified in these two groups' views lies on the following identified research finding, which is best reported by the following answer.

The UACKorinthos Quality manager:

“In my opinion the Directors' decisions and actions are based on and guided by their own interests and/or external stakeholders' interests, rather than the agro-Union's ones. As a result of this situation, they do not permit to adopt a more cooperative decision making and management approach, because this could have a negative impact on their own interests and position in the agro-coops.”

The interviewees' aforementioned statements best portray the prevailing agro-Unions' organisational context and operational framework and the interrelationship between these issues and the agro-coops' stakeholders' interests (Parnell, 2000).

Moreover, it is referred by Karamichas (2009) and Doutsias (2003) as inhibiting any business decision and practice aiming at the agro-coops' strategic business development and organisational change. It also motivates conflict among the stakeholders' groups and differentiates their interests from the corporate goals and interests (Tolios, 2003).

**6.3.6 ISO 9000 QMS' USE AS A CORPORATE STRATEGIC RESOURCE –
COMPETENCE / STRBDCH****First Sample Group: THEME 4 - STRBDCH****A1+A2. General Managers and Presidents - THEME 6/EXTINFL included in
THEME 4**

The UACArgolida General Manager stated:

“ISO 9000 QMS’ strategic business property is very obvious to us, because we have been using it for assessing and improving the corporate business processes, as our big clients required, i.e.: VIVARTIA S.A., AB-VASILOPOULOS S.A., METRO S.A. This requirement, in connection with the assessment by them of our ‘then’ business status, managerial practices and financial position, motivated us to adopt and use private sector’s companies’ other business methods, such as: cooperative decision-making process; organisational chart with clearly defined job positions, duties, authority and accountability; long-term business policy and plan incorporating each department’s one. As a result, Quality management plan and strategy exist and are incorporated in the Union’s strategic business plan. They are both supporting the achievement of the corporate goals and strategic business development.”

The same opinion was expressed by the SEKAP S.A. General Manager:

“The perception and use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic management tool, is a prerequisite for all Greek agro-Unions achieving their required strategic business development through the improvement of their business processes and consequently organisational behaviour and performance.”

This business property could also aid improving their operational framework and organisational context and settings as the majority of the General Managers expressed, provided that:

“The BoDs’ members cooperate with the General Manager and the Quality Manager

on these business issues. This is the reason we require from the Directors to obtain a thorough knowledge of, and also some kind of training on current managerial practices and business fields, for them being competent and able to properly decide on such strategic management issues.”

the UAC Mastiha Chios’ and Eleourgiki S.A. General Managers referred.

Their beliefs and attitudes are very closely aligned to the suggestions of Semos (2003) and Parnell (2000) concerning both the: i) required cooperation between the agro-Unions’ Directors and professional managers in terms of actual management and decision making process; ii) necessity of all key stakeholders having an adequate level of knowledge of and training on the business nature and properties of any developed and used management system, for them being able to make the optimal decisions on these systems strategic and operational implementation and use.

A3. Quality and Production Managers

This sample group’s respondents’ views are identical with their: i) responses concerning the Results-Benefits sub-theme (see: relevant sub-section) and ii) agro-Unions’ General Managers and Presidents previously presented beliefs. Therefore, the researcher presents only an interesting point offered by the Eleourgiki S.A., Krokos-Kozani SynPE and Masticha-Chios S.A.’s Quality managers:

“The perception and use of ISO 9000 QMS’ strategic business property presupposes and requires the key stakeholders’ training on and knowledge of the systems’ business nature and properties. The General Manager and the President should have an adequate managerial knowledge and business experience on the strategic and operational management and decision making topics.”

This view could be a very important managerial recommendation and research finding, since these interviewees combine the required key stakeholders’ adequate business competence with managerial knowledge and business experience, as Parnell (2000) and Senge (1994) also combine.

Second Sample Group: THEME 4 - STRCH**B1+B2. General Managers and Presidents - THEME 6/EXTINFL included in THEME 4**

The ASEE AMYKLES General Manager has pointed out that:

“We understood during the ISO 9000:2000 QMS’ deployment course that, the ‘new’ version can be used as a strategic management system, because: i) the products’ quality upgrading permitted us to gain new customers and enter new markets, ii) I could better assess the business processes and operations and then, to interfere requiring from each one responsible their improvement.

These two intended benefits were presented by the Quality manager in the BoDs’ meeting, before the systems’ introduction. They contributed significantly to our business performance improvement and facilitated ‘our’ long-term cooperation with COCA COLA – 3E S.A. and PEPSICO S.A., which apply the same practice, as they have said to us.”

The President concluded:

“Therefore, recently, we have decided to have a quality business plan and try to incorporate it in our general business plan.”

All the respondents seem to be in line, with Oakland’s (2003) and Beckford’s (2002) suggestions, in which they emphatically ask from all corporations’ stakeholders to use the strategic aspect of ISO 9000 QMS’ business nature, since it can contribute decisively to their organisational performance improvement, both strategically and operationally, business wise. The other researched agro-Unions’ General Managers and Presidents expressed same opinions on the issue, as their counterparts of the first sample also did. Most probably this is an indication of a gradual shifting of these key stakeholders’ perception and attitude towards adopting and using the ISO 9000 QMS’ strategic business property.

B3. Quality and Production managers: THEME 4 - STRBDCH and THEME 5 - CPPSR and THEME 6 - EXTINFL

The offered answers by the interviewed key stakeholders of this sample group covered both research themes 4 and 5. As the vast majority of these respondents claimed, in the words of the UACArgolida' Quality manager: "My answer in this Theme 4 –STRCH covers satisfactorily the Theme's 5 issues". Therefore, the researcher presents their views, concerning both research Themes 4 and 5, in this sub-section.

This sample group's agro-Unions enjoy and use this strategic benefit and aim to a satisfactory degree, as indicated by the ASEE Amykles' Quality Manager's argument:

"In our Union's departments business processes have been gradually improved. As a result, we experience a gradual improvement of the business performance too, since we are able to offer the market products to a lesser cost and 'work' materialised through improved processes.

Moreover, we realised that the business processes improvement is a source for and product of, at the same time, improved and more cooperative internal relations, business wise. Effective and efficient implementation of business operations is achieved by a supporting and guiding style of management and not by the authoritative one, that represents the Greek agro-Unions' practice."

I asked him to portray the prevailing situation in terms of the agro-Unions' stakeholders' groups' relations and power structure and these issues impact on the actual management and decision making process.

He presented the situation as follows:

"Until our first cooperation with our multinational key accounts - COCA COLA S.A. and PEPSICO S.A. - we were operating without having defined clear job positions' responsibilities, authorities and work tasks. Anyone could and did actually interfere in the other person's business tasks and/or was not cooperating for achieving the corporate goals.

When this business collaboration began, we all understood that, the entire business behaviour and practice had to change in order to satisfy their requests.

Moreover, the Production and the Quality management departments had to secure continuously the preset by these customers, quality standards, quantity volumes and time deadlines. Thus, they demanded to assess without any prior notice 'our' ISO 9000 QMS and HACCP. This request obliged the President and the General Manager to adopt a cooperative business attitude by requesting our information and cooperation in all matters, concerning production and quality matters.

This behaviour and practice was gradually adopted by all other departments' senior managers, who have also to cooperate with the aforementioned key stakeholders. In that way, decision making process and management of operational functions and activities has been gradually delegated to the relevant managers.

Decisions concerning strategic management business issues are also taken after the President and the General Manager have an informational and consultation process on these issues with the senior manager, who is responsible for the materialisation of these business tasks and assignments. Of course, the strategic business issues are decided by the BoDs' members and the General Manager."

The respondent portrays a superimposed change process, which is implemented through the already existing ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process, which is gradually unfolded. This results to an incremental change management process, which minimises the stakeholders' resistance to the change process, due to its gradual advancement.

This is the change process' deployment that Oakland (2001) and Parnell (2000) favour and consider to be the most advantageous, when organisational change process occurs in fragmented business frameworks, and organisational contexts and settings, such as these of the agro-Unions according to Parnell (2000) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001).

All the respondents' answers are similar to the ones offered by the Quality and Production managers of the first sample group, while they reaffirm the findings of the E.U. research study (2001-2004) on Social Dialogue in the agro-industries' business sector and the aforementioned authors' request from the agro-coops to abandon the 'old', outdated business practice and attitude for achieving strategic business development and organisational performance improvement.

Third Sample Group: THEME 4 - STRBDCH**C1+C2. General Managers and Presidents**

To the contrary, another business attitude and practice is identified in the UACLakonia General Manager and President common answer. The ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property is partially perceived used, due to: the inexistence of competent middle level managers; low level of knowledge of management systems, ISO 9000 QMS, too; and the inadequate and outdated management methods "we are using in the Union."

These reasons were also offered by the UACArkadia, UACKarditsa and UACKomotini Presidents and General Managers, who claimed:

"Of course, if ISO 9000 QMS was properly implemented and used, it could aid the achievement of such corporate strategic goals, as the products' quality and the continuous business processes improvement. But, this is very difficult to be achieved, since Greek agro-coops suffer from a scarcity of human and financial resources, and business planning."

It is another indication that, in a fair number of the Greek agro-Unions' business strategic planning is in its infancy steps and furthermore, it is affected by the existing management practices and business attitudes, that prevail in the majority of this group's agro-Unions.

The UACChania General Manager offered another explanation for not using the ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property:

"The main decision making group, which is the Unions' Directors, want to control everything. Therefore, they do not wish any development that could mean loss of their power and interests, as they perceive it."

His answer reaffirms the already identified rivalry among the agro-Unions' Directors' and professional managers' groups and the Parnell's (2000) statement that, the agro-coops' Key stakeholders could not favour the alteration of the 'status quo', because this could endanger their business interests and 'position'.

C3. Quality and Production managers : THEME 4-STRBDCH and THEME 5-CPPSR

Regarding the research issue-theme of the ISO 9000 QMS' use as a strategic management system - research issue, a totally identical approach, with the one offered by the second group's Quality managers, has been presented by the vast majority of the third sample group's Quality and Production managers.

The only major difference in their views was best reported by the UACLakonia and UACKorinthos Quality managers:

“The business processes improvement, due to ISO 9000 QMS' proper development and use, has been experienced in our Union, but to an inferior degree. Furthermore, it has been mainly experienced in the Production and Quality departments' functions and activities because, the other key stakeholders have not a thorough and in depth knowledge of and training on the systems' business properties”.

As a result, the interdepartmental and cross-functional synergies, which are assumed by Oakland (2001), can not be achieved, while the key business process' agent - the Quality manager - feels disappointed and demoralised. This is an indicative finding, which is in line with Parnell's (2000) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001) arguments concerning the results of such a negative business attitude and practice exhibited by the agro-coops' Unions' other key stakeholders.

Moreover, according to the researcher's view, the failure of achieving these strategic aims is a hint of three indicative research findings, which will be further investigated in the proceeding research theme' s critical analysis:

First, quality strategy and business plan do not really exist and if they exist, they are either not actualised and/or pursued or they are not incorporated in the corporate business plan (if this exists also). Second, the inexistence of interdepartmental and cross-functional business synergies lead the researcher to hypothesise that, the stakeholders' groups' relations are fierce. Third, this inexistence is an indirect proof that, these agro-Unions have not yet adopted the ISO 9000:2000 process orientation and remain functions driven in contrast to Dale's (2003) and Oakland's (2001) suggestions.

6.3.7. CORPORATE POLITICS, POWER STRUCTURE AND STAKEHOLDERS' RELATIONS IN THE GREEK AGRO-COOPS / CPPSR

First Sample Group: THEME 5 – CPPSR and THEME 6 - EXTINFL

A1+A2. General Managers and Presidents

On this research issue, the UACArgolida General Manager offered the following reply:

“Corporate politics, power structure and internal groupings play a very important role in the agro-coops’ ‘daily business life’. Groupings among the Directors and among the staff members having and exhibiting contradictory interests is a very common phenomenon in any company, but in the agro-coops tends to be the norm. The danger lies in the fact that, such groupings affect the actual management and decision making process concerning both the strategic and operational business operations.

This fact and in connection to the stakeholders’ inadequate knowledge of business issues may lead to inappropriate decision-making and implementation process concerning any business issue. Moreover, it reinforces the existing rivalry among the stakeholders’ groups, in terms of power structure and the consequent stakeholders’ authority and accountability issues. The solution to this problem has been already presented by me in Research Theme 3 - the Greek agro-Unions’ business status and its relationship with the ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose.” ”

It was an integrated response and in accordance to theory and previous researches’ findings.

Thus, I only asked him:

“Is there any other root cause for adopting these business processes and managerial methods, besides the aforementioned ones?”

He openly answered that:

“It was also a firm requirement of our key accounts and other clients for adopting and developing a quality management system, which would guarantee the products’ consistent quality level, in-time production and delivery, suppliers’ business status and behaviour assessment, suppliers’ registration to ISO 9000 QMS. Of course, they have required the Union to become registered and certified to ISO 9000 QMS and HACCP

and they were continuously and in irregular time periods assessing them. These requirements of them forced us to adopt these business practices and methods.”

His is very close to Lewin’s (1951, 1997) Force Field Analysis theory, which suggests that, outdated and inappropriate business practices may be overcome and change by assessing them, unfreezing the existing business situation, adopt the best ones and then adapt them in to your own business environment, for them being gradually embedded in the company’s organisational and operational framework.

This change management process could be characterised as a radical superimposed one, but being followed and complemented by an incremental, voluntaristic one. It is the effect of adopting a combined TQM and BPR type of organisational change.

A similar change management approach was also described by the Pindos S.A. and Dodoni S.A. General Managers (which are both Confederations of agro-Unions being partly privatised a few years ago, due to their financial problems and debts).

In both cases, private companies bought a significant portion of their shares capital. Thus, they had to:

“adapt to private sector’s business practice and behaviour and continuously trying to implement effectively and use efficiently the adopted management systems and methods. I could say that, after a period of time, this business attitude and practice, if followed properly and continuously could become a part of your own business practice”, as they reported.

The Krokos SynPE President and General Manager reaffirm the need of the agro-Unions changing their organisational behaviour and business practice and adopting the private sector’s companies’ ones. In continuing, they stated their Union’s preference to a preventive and gradual change management method. This can be achieved:

“by forming a strategic business partnership and consequently establishing a business unit in cooperation with privately owned companies, which have the know-how in terms of commercial activity and new markets entrance. Then, we have been proceeding to a gradual adoption of our partner’s best management practice.”

It is very important to state here that, more aspects of this sample group's researched General Managers and Presidents' views are presented and identified in the research theme 3 - the agro-Unions' business status and its impact on the ISO 9000 QMS business status and nature of the systems' implementation process and use purpose.

Another important research indication is that, the Presidents seem to agree with the General Managers on these research issues. They express similar beliefs concerning the root causes of the agro-Unions' degraded business status and they both proceed to admit that responsibility and accountability lie in both groups.

Moreover, both groups present the adoption of a cooperative business attitude and practice as the initial means for the agro-coops proceeding to the introduction, development and use of updated management systems and business practices for gradually improving their business and financial state.

This view-business solution has been also provided by a fair number of General Managers and mostly Quality managers in the previously undertaken qualitative research study - Document 3.

It has been also partially identified in the research findings of the Document 4 - quantitative research, where it was expressed as a grief and firm requirement by the researched employees and foremen of the sample's agro-Unions.

A3. Quality and Production Managers

The first sample group's Quality Managers' answers in this topic have been already presented in the Research Theme 3, since they cover both topics. Moreover, similar views had been also presented by the Quality managers in the previous DBA qualitative research – Document 3 (see: SYKIKI SynPE Quality manager's answer on this issue - relevant section in Chapter 6).

Second Sample Group: THEME 5 – CPPSR and THEME 6 - EXTINFL**B1+B2. General Managers and Presidents**

According to the Presidents and General Managers of the second sample group's researched agro-Unions, this research theme has been already covered by their previous responses in the research themes concerning respectively the agro-Unions' business status and the strategic use of ISO 9000 QMS.

The UWCSamos and UACArta Presidents offered a summarised, all inclusive response in the presence of the General Managers, who affirmed them:

“For achieving business survival and development in the present business environment, you have to adapt to the privately-owned businesses' practices. Thus, the BoDs' members and I decided collectively to delegate to the General Manager and the senior managers the relevant authority, responsibility and accountability for managing and implementing properly their work duties and tasks. Of course, the BoDs' members still have and acknowledge the relevant responsibility and accountability for their decisions, especially these of a strategic nature.”

All these offered responses and adopted approaches are very closely aligned to Daoutopoulos (2006) and Parnell's (2000) suggestions for the agro-coops achieving their strategic business development through the adoption of a proper management and decision making 'paradigm' supporting: cooperative relations among the various agro-coops' stakeholders' groups; clearly defined lines of authority, responsibility and accountability between the stakeholders' groups; delegation of authority and responsibility to the managerial staff; and finally, as Beckford (2002) demands the establishment and provision of normative management emanating from and actualised by the agro-coops' key stakeholders.

Because, the existence and practice of normative management are very much required in the Greek agro-coops. The main reason is that, the agro-coops' organisational context and

settings, and operational framework have to incorporate a fair degree of business ethics required in the current internal and external business environment, as he states.

B3. Quality and Production managers: THEME 4-STRCH and THEME 5-CPPSR

As it was previously referred, this sample group's interviewees' views on this research theme have been already presented in the previous research theme under the following headline: 'B3. Quality and Production managers: THEME 4 - STRBDCH and THEME 5 - CPPSR. Therefore, the representation of their statements is considered unnecessary.

Third Sample Group: THEME 5 – CPPSR

C1. Presidents

In comparison to the General Managers' statements, the Presidents of this sub-group's Unions express a totally different view on this research theme, as the one offered by the UACChania President:

“There is not actually sufficient ‘managerial staff’ in the Greek agro-coops’ sector and this is the main root cause of all the sector’s business problems. Even the main cause of the inexistence of the appropriate information, knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS is a result of the inexistence of qualified personnel, in terms of academic background, professional experience and managerial competence. This situation prevents even the hiring of competent managers from the private sector’s companies, as they are not willing to operate in such a context.”

I asked him if the BoDs’ members have any accountability for the described situation and he replied as follows:

“The Directors are responsible for deciding on the strategic planning of the agro-coop. The responsibility of the managers is to implement effectively and efficiently the decided course of action. Nevertheless, we are obliged to handle business problems and issues, due to the incompetence of the managers. ”

Again, this answer is a clear indication of this sample group's Directors' beliefs concerning the roles between them and the professional managers and which one should be the real decision making and managing group in the Greek agro-coops. This view reinforces the identified expressed rivalry on any managerial issue between these two groups in the Greek agro-coops. His view is in complete contrast to the suggested cooperation between these two groups, as it reveals from theory and the research findings of the E.U. (2001-2004) research on "Social Dialogue in the agricultural sector".

C2. General Managers

The respondents' answers have an identical content. According to them the prevailing agro-Unions' organisational context and operational framework status are characterised by coercion and rivalry amongst the Directors and the professional managers.

This rivalry is considered as one of the major root causes of all the organisational inefficiencies identified in the (Greek) agro-coops' organisational context and operational framework, as Kokkinos (2009) states.

The other one, which is affected by the former, is the inadequate and inappropriate actual management and decision making process, concerning the operational, normative, administrative and strategic management of the agro-coops. These two major issues of corporate internal business management are interrelated and they could be both considered as by-product of the Directors' lack of business experience and management knowledge, as well as the inexistence of any clearly defined lines of authority, responsibility and accountability, as the UACLakonia General and UACKorinthos General Managers claimed.

Actually, Doutsias (2003) and Parnell (2000) argue that the inexistence of the aforementioned business factors results to decreased organisational performance

The aforementioned respondents' views, referring to the Corporate politics and stakeholders' relations are in contrast to the gradual shifting observed in the first group's and in a lesser degree to the second group's agro-Unions' stakeholders' ones.

C3. Quality and Production managers

The UACKomotini and UACKarditsa Quality managers best expressed the others' views:

“The prevailing internal business climate is mainly characterised by competitive relations amongst the different stakeholders' groups. Strategic management business issues are decided mainly by the President and the BoDs' members with the cooperation of the General Manager, whose view on many issues is disregarded, if it is not in accordance with the Directors' prevailing one. The same practice is exhibited by the General Manager in relation to the other managers. Rather the strategic and operational business issues' management is characterised by an autocratic style mixed with some elements of a paternalistic behaviour.”

The adoption and existence of an autocratic management style, instead of a supportive-coaching one is the root cause for the staff's becoming unmotivated, unproductive and indirect 'saboteurs' of all corporate leaders' business decisions and projects undertaken. This is an important research finding concerning the existing business situation in Greek agro-Unions (Maraveyias et al, 2003).

The professional managers' views are in contrast to the ones expressed by their agro-Unions' Directors, proving the existing 'schism' between these two key stakeholders' groups' business attitudes and practice.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION

7.1. DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

As a consequence of the previously presented Qualitative research data analysis and its indicative findings and as it was previously referred, the research objectives were investigated and presented within a context of a qualitative, interpretative study, which was based on in-depth interviews, case study method and used the Grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990 and 1998) as the methodological approach for the QDAnalysis and collection processes.

Therefore, it is mainly of an inductive nature but it uses elements of the deductive theory. The research instrument is a semi-structured questionnaire comprised by semi-structured questions and a few open-end ones.

This final thesis' qualitative research main aim, set of specific objectives, anchor research questions and key research themes with their relevant codes have been outlined in sections 1.1, 2.3, 2.4 and 3.3 respectively.

The main research outcomes, being accompanied with a critical evaluation, are the following:

A) THEME 1 – Key stakeholders' knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management and improvement business fields

Ai) The majority of the third sample group's researched agro-Unions' Directors and General Managers have not a thorough and in-depth knowledge of and training on:

i) the Quality and Process management and improvement fields, and ii) ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties, and implementation and use requirements. As a consequence of the aforementioned: iii) they seem to ignore any existing interrelationship between all these aforementioned concepts, due to lack of time as a result of their numerous work duties and tasks.

This business attitude and practice is in contrast with the arguments of all the quality issues' authors, i.e. Oakland (2003), who require the (key) corporate stakeholders to have a

thorough knowledge of and training on these two business fields, because:

- i) ISO 9000 QMS could be considered as a sub-field incorporating business properties of both the Quality and Process management fields, thus
- ii) an adequate level of knowledge of and training on them offers to the agro-Unions' key stakeholders the business competence to perceive and implement properly ISO 9000 QMS and any other Quality management system, and
- iii) the key stakeholders' - Directors' and General Managers' - lack of thorough and in-depth knowledge of and training on the systems' business nature and properties could be a Key Business Factor for any company -the Greek agro-coops, too - not achieving the optimum outcomes from the system's implementation and use

The Directors' and General Managers' lack of thorough and in-depth knowledge of and training on the systems' business nature and properties could be a Key Business Factor for the Greek agro-coops not achieving the optimum outcomes from the system's implementation and use.

Aii) On the other hand, a different business attitude from the first sample group's respondents' answers, who although their available time may be very limited due to their work duties, they consider important to be adequately informed on any business matter and system that is in use in their agro-Union.

Thus, they asked the Quality department manager to inform them on every aspect relevant to ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties including the relationship with the Quality and Process management business fields, as they claimed.

It is the first time that, the key stakeholders of an agro-Union and/or Confederation of Unions acknowledge the necessity of having and state their knowledge on these two business fields. Moreover, they understand and know these business fields existing interconnection with the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties. A fact considered by Tolios (2003) and Arvanitoyiannis (2001) as important, for the systems' effective development and efficient use.

The same business attitude and stance is identified in the responses of a fair number of the second sample group's key stakeholders, them being the relevant Presidents and the General Managers. The only difference lies in the fact that, as they claim, they are lesser in number and their knowledge and training levels are not so strongly held and practiced, as the ones exhibited by the first sample group's stakeholders.

Aiii) The Quality and Production managers of all researched agro-Unions of the three sample groups proved to have a thorough and in-depth knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management business fields and to know the existing relationship between them and ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties.

B) THEME 2 - Key stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties

Similar research findings were identified, as far as, the researched agro-Unions' key stakeholders' knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties, them being of both an operational and/or strategic nature, are concerned.

Bi) The first sample group's agro-Unions' stakeholders acknowledged the necessity of having a thorough and in-depth knowledge of the systems for them being able to fully support the proper implementation process and use purpose, as they claimed. Thus, they proceeded to the actual acquirement of it (or at least, of a part of it), by requiring their agro-Union's Quality manager and/or the external consultant to offer them the required informational sessions and training courses.

The second sample group's respondents argued of having exhibited the same business behaviour and practice for them being able to fully exploit the systems' operational and strategic benefits.

The most important element is that both the Directors' and General Managers' groups consider knowledge and training on Quality and Process management and improvement business fields, as well as, ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties, as a part of their

work and duties. Because, this practice could aid their proper decision making and actual management practice in terms of these systems implementation process and use purpose, as they claimed. This is also the Kamenidis' (2008) belief regarding the required action for the agro-coops' achieving their business performance improvement.

Bii) To the contrary, the third sample group's stakeholders, with the noticeable exception of the Quality and Production managers' group, argued that knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties are not required, since "this is the 'job' of the Quality manager and he has to inform them in summary, when a problem arises".

Therefore, they did not mention the firm requirements for any company achieving ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use.

Moreover, their majority seemed to acknowledge only the operational aspect and benefits of the systems' use and not the strategic one - the business processes' improvement.

Biii) Another indicative research finding is identified more clearly in the third sample group's agro-Unions' Presidents' answers and in a lesser degree in the arguments of their counterparts of the second sample group.

They disregard academic knowledge and replace it with practical knowledge gained by their continuous and long presence - in terms of years - in the agro-Unions' BoDs. According to them, this fact can provide them the required business experience and consequently competence to handle successfully any business matter.

This view was offered as the rational excuse for their decisive and influential role in the operational and strategic decision making process and actual management of the agro-Unions' business issues.

Biv) Moreover, they consider the managerial staff as incompetent, business wise and according to them, this is the root cause of the agro-coops' degraded business position. Similar beliefs were expressed by their counterparts researched in the previous Qualitative research presented in DBA Document 3. As stated by Doutsias (2003) and the USDA paper (2002), these business attitudes and practices are characterising the majority of the agro-coops' Directors, while they do not permit the proper implementation and use of updated

management approaches and business practices in them.

C) THEME 3 – Greek Agro-Unions’ prevailing business status, financial position and managerial practices, and their impact on ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose

Another important research finding, concerning the root cause of the agro-Unions’ prevailing degraded business and financial state and inappropriate managerial practices, and their negative impact on ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose, is revealed by the contrasting views of the Presidents’, General Managers’ and Quality managers’ groups, respectively.

Although, all the interviewees acknowledged and accepted a part of their accountability, they differentiated on the main root causes for the creation of this situation.

Ci) On the one hand, the Directors (especially these of the third sample group and in a progressively lesser degree these of the second and the first sample groups) presented the inexistence of competent managers as the main root cause of: i) the agro-Unions’ degraded business state, undermined financial position and outdated managerial practices, ii) their decisive role and involvement in the actual management and decision making process of even the operational business issues and not of the strategic ones only.

It is a belief expressed also by the researched Directors in the previously conducted qualitative research in DBA Document 3.

Cii) On the other hand, the Quality managers and the General Managers of all three sample groups (these of the first sample group in a lesser degree) stated that, the main sources are: i) the outdated and inappropriate business practices and behaviour, whose cause is the ‘old and bad’ business mentality generated mainly by incompetent and inexperienced Directors, who “insist to intervene in and decide on every business matter” and ii) the adoption of an ineffective and inefficient decision making process system, which permits the Directors to decide on their own on every operational and strategic business issue. Moreover, iii) this decision making system is “autocratic” and organised for servicing the Directors’ and/or third parties own interests rather than the agro-Union’s ones, while iv) they do not possess the required business experience, academic knowledge and management expertise and

competence to manage successfully such issues.

Ciii) As a result of these prevailing business attitude and practice of the Directors: i) the stakeholders' groups' relations can be characterised as competitive, and ii) the proper introduction, development and use of any management system - ISO 9000 QMS, too - are restrained, as a fair number of the second and mainly of the third sample groups' agro-Unions' General Managers stated.

Civ) Furthermore, the vast majority of the third and in a lesser degree of the second sample groups' agro-Unions' Quality managers argue that "they are left alone to 'do' the hard work, while the other managers and the General Manager do not really participate in the systems' deployment process". Nevertheless, "they are held accountable for the systems' proper implementation process and use purpose, as well as, for any problem that arises", as they stated. This expressed grief portrays the existing rivalry, instead of cooperation, among the different managerial groups in the Greek agro-Unions.

With their offered statements, all the interviewees clearly reassure their belief: i) in the other stakeholders' business inexperience and management incompetence, ii) the existing rivalry between the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers, iii) the existing rivalry between the various managers' sub-groups, and iv) the stakeholders' lack of process ownership and relevant accountability. As a matter of fact, this prevailing Greek agro-Unions' operational framework, and organisational context and settings are considered by Karamichas (2009, 2008), Apostolopoulos (2009) and Doutsias (2003) as the major root-causes of their serious business and financial problems.

D) THEME 4 – Stakeholders' perception and use of ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property

Di) An important research finding, concerning the use of ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property reveals from first sample group's agro-Unions' key stakeholders.

The vast majority of them believe that if the business processes' improvement is perceived

and used properly by the Greek agro-Unions' key stakeholders, it can contribute decisively to their strategic business development, and organisational context and operational framework improvement.

Because, business processes' improvement can lead to their companies' organisational behaviour and performance improvement, as they said.

Dii) The first and second sample groups' agro-Unions' General Managers and Quality managers associated the acknowledgement of the ISO 9000 QMS strategic business property with the agro-Union's external stakeholders.

More specifically, they stated that, initially they used ISO 9000 QMS for assessing and improving the production department's business processes, according to their strategic business partners' firm requirement.

Later on, this requirement led them to assess their agro-Union's business status, managerial practices and financial position, which proved to need improvement. This identification obliged them to adopt and use the following private sector's companies' business methods: Cooperative decision-making process; Organisational chart with clearly defined lines of work duties, authority and accountability between the Directors and the professional managers; long-term Strategic Business policy and plan incorporating each department's ones.

As they said, the end-result was the existence and use of a Quality management strategic business plan incorporated in the corporate one and the agro-Union's achievement of its strategic goals and business development, through all business processes' continuous assessment and improvement. They argued that by adopting and practicing this stated approach, their companies have been operating as the private sector's companies are.

Their statements revealed indirectly three indicative findings, which refer to their strategic business development and organisational change process: i) this process was a superimposed, external one, ii) it led the agro-Union's key stakeholders adopt and use their business processes' continuous assessment and improvement aiming at the organisational

performance improvement, and iii) it directed them to conduct a benchmarking process for identifying and consequently using the private sector's companies' best practices, business wise. These research sub-findings affirm the usefulness of: i) benchmarking in the strategic business development and organisational change process and ii) the business processes' continuous auditing and improvement.

Diii and features of Theme B

The same beliefs were also offered by the totality of the third sample group's researched agro-Unions' General Managers and Quality managers. Their only doubt refers to the BoDs' lack of knowledge of this ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property.

They added that, the main reason the Directors should obtain and have a thorough and in-depth knowledge of, and also some kind of training on these management and business issues, is "for them being competent and able to properly perceive and decide on such strategic management issues". They also expressed another doubt concerning the Directors' willingness to cooperate with the managerial staff in order to overcome this lack of knowledge (if it really exists) in this issue.

Div) To the contrary, totally different business attitude and practice are identified in the third sample group's Directors and General Managers. They acknowledge the possible use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic corporate resource but, it is partially and/or not at all used, due to the Directors' and professional managers': inexistence of the required business and management competence; lack of and/or partial knowledge of and training on the ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties; and the resulting outdated and inadequate managerial practices and decision making process adopted and used in the agro-Unions, as they claimed.

The first and second sample group's agro-Unions' stakeholders really seemed to believe in the ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property. Moreover, for the first time, the agro-Unions' stakeholders claimed of having and using a Quality strategy and policy, being incorporated in the corporate ones.

An interesting point is that, the first sample group's agro-Unions' General Managers and Presidents expressed the same opinion on the issue. This is an indication of a gradual shifting of the Presidents' business perception and attitude towards adopting and using the ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property. This is also identified in the second sample group's Presidents but in a lesser degree because, their agro-Unions' Directors have not yet fully perceived this business property, due to the inferior degree of their knowledge of and training on this issue.

E) THEME 5 – Corporate politics, power structure and Stakeholders' relations' nature and status and their impact on ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose

A fair number of the three sample groups' agro-Unions' researched stakeholders argued that, the corporate politics and internal groupings play a very important role in the agro-coops' organisational context. Moreover, both the Directors and the professional managers create various groupings having and exhibiting contradictory interests, as these interviewees presented.

According to them, such groupings affect the actual management and decision making process of the business operations. They also reinforce the existing rivalry among the various agro-Unions' stakeholders' groups, since their ultimate aim is to influence the corporate power structure and authority issues.

These views are in accordance with Doutsias' (2003) and Parnell's (2000) remarks on the agro-Unions' prevailing stakeholders' relations and power structure, while they affirm the USDA (2002) and E.U. studies' (2001-2004) remarks on the required cooperation among the agro-businesses' stakeholders.

Ei) According to the first and second sample groups' General Managers and all the Quality managers, the agro-Unions are operating without having clearly defined job positions' responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities, and work tasks. In this way, the Directors interfere in all business issues' management. This organisational context generates competitive business relations between the Directors and the professional managers, while

it does not reinforce the cooperation even among the managers' groups. Moreover, it nullifies the stakeholders' cooperation for achieving the corporate goals.

They continued by connecting the agro-Unions' existing degraded business and financial state with this prevailing organisational context and settings. Because, as they stated, rival relations among the agro-Unions' stakeholders' groups create and reinforce an inappropriate decision making process and actual management approach.

The Directors, being inexperienced and incompetent, business and managerially wise, generate this approach. But, adopting and using in practice a cooperative approach in terms of the business issues' actual decision making and management is the solution to this problem, according to them.

Moreover, they associated it with the establishment of clearly and precisely defined job positions and work duties, as well as, authority and accountability for each staff member. This fact could provide a clearly defined relationship between the BoDs' members and the professional managers, and mainly between the President and the General Manager.

As the respondents claimed, the resulting effect could be a cooperative business relationship between the Directors, the General Manager and the senior managers, as far as, the actual decision-making process and management of both the strategic and operational business issues of the agro-Unions are concerned.

According to them, the decision making process and actual management of the strategic and operational business issues have to be based only on professional criteria, which should include: business experience, academic background, and an adequate level of knowledge and training on business and management issues.

It is very important to state here that, same views of the General Managers and Presidents of the first sample group's researched agro-Unions are also identified in the research theme concerning the agro-Unions' business status and its impact on the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and nature of these QMS' implementation process and use purpose.

Another important research indication is that, the Presidents seem to agree with the General Managers on these research issues. As a matter of fact, these two groups of stakeholders

expressed similar beliefs, concerning the root causes of the ‘bad’ business status of the agro-coops’ Unions and they both proceeded to admit that responsibility and accountability lie in both groups.

Moreover, both groups presented the adoption of a cooperative business attitude and practice as the initial means for the agro-coops proceeding to the introduction, development and use of updated management systems and business practices for gradually overcoming these business difficulties they face.

This view-business solution has been also identified in the answers provided by a fair number of General Managers and mostly Quality managers in the previously undertaken qualitative research study, whose findings were presented in Document 3. It has been also partially identified in the research findings of the Document 4 quantitative research, where it was presented as a grief and firm requirement expressed by the researched foremen of the research sample’s first degree agro-coops, as well as, by the researched employees and foremen of the sample’s agro-Unions and Confederations of them.

Eii) The General Managers of the second sample group’s researched agro-Unions expressed similar views. They stated that, the inexistence of a clear distinction between the Directors’ and the managers’ authority, accountability and responsibility undermines the organisational context and operational framework of any agro-Union.

As a result it leads to the adoption of an outdated, ineffective and inefficient decision making process, which influences negatively the actual management of the business issues. Moreover, as they argued this lack ‘poisons’ the internal business climate and relations among the professional managers and the BoDs’ elected members, as well as, amongst the various employees’ groups.

Because, as the UACSitia’s General Manager argued, the inexistence of clearly defined business roles and job positions results to uncertainty, ambiguity and a clash of interests, between the aforementioned stakeholders’ groups. These consequently lead to the creation of a rival internal business environment, which in connection to the aforementioned outdated business practices affect negatively the introduction and implementation

processes, as well as, the use purposes of any adopted and developed business management system. Therefore, as they stated, ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose are also affected negatively by this internal business environment and due to the presented causes.

As the ASEE Amykles and UWCSamos Quality managers argued, the entire business behaviour and practice had to change and it really changed, when their agro-Unions had to fulfil satisfactorily and on time their business obligations towards their key customers, them being MNEs and/or big retail chains, such as the super market chains are.

All the aforementioned respondents' answers are similar to the ones offered by the Quality and Production managers of the first sample group, while they reaffirm the findings of the E.U. research study (2001-2004) referring to the Social Dialogue in the agro-businesses' sector. In this study, the most important findings referred to the need of the establishment and constant use of a cooperative business climate among the agro-businesses' stakeholders, for the agro-businesses achieving effective and efficient business performance and through it improving their business and financial position.

Moreover, they affirmed Doutsias' (2003) and Parnell's (2000) suggestions on the required distinction between the Directors' and the managerial staff's business authority, work duties and accountability, in terms of the decision making process and actual management of the operational, administrative, strategic and normative business activities. Because, it may generate a negative business climate among the corporate stakeholders and indirectly nullify any attempt of optimally introducing, implementing and using any management system in any corporate entity.

Eiii) In comparison to the aforementioned researched stakeholders, the researched Presidents of the third sample group's agro- Unions expressed a totally different view, concerning the research issue-theme of Change Management and the related sub-issues of corporate politics and power structure, decision making process and stakeholders' relations. They stated that, the President and other members of the BoDs are responsible for deciding on the strategic and operational business issues of the agro-Unions. According to their

view, the managers have to implement effectively and efficiently the decided business action and strategy and this can be successfully achieved only if they are competent, a fact that they doubted. Thus, the BoDs' members have to be the actual decision makers and even implementers, if needed, as they claimed.

This view reinforced the research finding of the existing rivalry and differentiated approach concerning any managerial issue between these two stakeholders' groups.

Eiv) Moreover, the vast majority of the aforementioned researched Directors seem not wanting to admit any responsibility for not properly behaving and practicing, business and management wise. An interesting point of view was presented by the UACLakonia President and the General Manager: "If we have to admit that, we exhibit and are accountable for such a negligence and ignorance on the business nature and properties of any Quality management system adopted, introduced, developed and used in the Union, then we have to state that, we are responsible for any business matter in the Union, a fact that is unattainable by anybody."

It is a commonly exhibited and identified key stakeholders' attitude in rigid and bureaucratic business environments, as Parnell (2000) believes. This authoritarian and paternalistic managerial behaviour and practice is exhibited by the Directors mainly and the General Managers in a lesser degree in the majority of the Greek agro-Unions, according to Karaiskaki (2003) and Semos (2003).

Eiv) The UACKorinthos General Manager offered another important research finding: "The most interesting element in the decision making process, as adopted and practiced in the agro-coops' Unions, is the non-existence of the BoDs' members' 'real' accountability for their business decisions".

His counterparts of the other researched agro-Unions added on this issue that, the result of such a management attitude and practice is that, the Directors do not cooperate with the General Manager and the senior managers' group on any business theme, or even worse, they do not worry for the impact of their decisions on the Union's business activities, as well, financial and market position."

It is an indirect clue on the existing Agency theory's 'paradigm', as this is practiced in the

Greek agro-Unions' sector. It seems to be in contrast to the suggested theoretical model, because as Karamichas (2009, 2008) and Apostolopoulos (2009) argue, in any corporation the key stakeholders' authority on actual management and decision making processes has to be accompanied by accountability too. According to the aforementioned authors and Arvanitoyiannis (2001), the existence of control, as well as, accountability of the actual decision makers and implementers is a firm requirement for the proper accomplishment of any business issue and/or project. This attitude represents one of the major root causes for the mismanagement and under-management of the agro-Unions' business activities and operations, as Parnell (2000) and the aforementioned believe.

Evi) In relation to the aforementioned research finding, the statements of the Quality managers of the third sample group reassure the existing coercive business climate in this sample group's agro-Unions, who consider mainly the Directors' group and in a lesser degree the General Managers' one, as the root cause of this rivalry.

They offered another indicative research finding by presenting their belief in the continuation of this situation. Because as the UACLakonia Quality manager said: "you cannot expect these aforementioned stakeholders' business attitude, behaviour and practice to change because, this could endanger their well-established personal interests."

As Kokkinos (2009) states, cooperation among the different stakeholders' groups in the decision making process and actual management of the corporate business issues results to the improvement of the organisational performance and internal corporate relations. According to Parnell (2000) the adoption and existence of an autocratic and paternalistic management style, instead of a supportive-coaching one is the root cause for the staff members' becoming uninterested to and indirect 'saboteurs' of all the business leaders' decisions.

Evii) The SEKAP S.A.'s General Manager offered another important indicative research finding by stating that, the private sector's companies are able to hire the most competent managers, because they can offer them higher compensation schemes and the hiring process is based only on professional criteria, business and management experience and

competence wise. On the other hand, as he claimed, the agro-Unions can not do that, since they have a compensation scheme's upper level and because "the BoDs' decisions are quite often the product of a compromise between the existing different Directors' groupings in the BoDs". In this way, the agro-Unions' decision-making process is characterised by a compromise approach, instead of being based on an approach that favours the Union's business interests.

It is the first time that rivalry relations among the agro-Unions' Directors' various groupings are identified. This indicative research finding portrays indirectly the existence of differentiated business aims, attitudes and practices among the Directors' groups in the BoDs of an agro-Union and/or of a Confederation of agro-Unions. It also affirms the existence of various and differentiating interests among the agro-Unions stakeholders' groups, as well as inside a stakeholders' group, more specifically the Directors' one.

Eviii) Most paradoxically, a limited number of the Presidents of the third sample group's researched agro-coops' Unions accepted openly a part of the responsibility and accountability they have, for their companies existing business status and financial state.

As they admitted, all the agro-Unions' stakeholders' groups should be considered and held accountable for the existing degraded business state and the endangered financial position of the majority of the agro-Unions. Nevertheless, as they claimed, the General Managers mainly, and the other managers too, are equally responsible and should be held accountable for this situation, since they never oppose the Directors' decisions. To the contrary, they compromise and even worse, they are trying to influence the internal organisational context and stakeholders relations' settings "...by conducting alliances with some Directors", as the UACIraklio and UACPeza Presidents argued.

Eix) As a matter of fact, this statement is in close relationship to the one presented by the UACArta General Manager, who admitted that the managers are participating in the internal power structure 'game' too. Because, they have to accommodate and defend their position in the company, as he claimed.

It is an initial indication that, both the agro-Unions' Directors' and senior managers' groups

are participating in the corporate politics 'games' exhibited in their agro-Unions.

Ex) Being closely related to the aforementioned research finding, another equally important one reveals from the research interviews. It is the first time that, a fair number of the agro-Unions' Directors and General Managers (mostly these of the first and second sample groups' agro-Unions) admitted the existence of external parties-stakeholders influencing negatively the agro-Unions' business status, managerial practices and financial position. Consequently and according to the respondents, the interference of external stakeholders affects negatively the development and use of any adopted management system being in use in the agro-coops, the ISO 9000 QMS included.

As a concluding remark and by critically evaluating the aforementioned interviewees' statements, the researcher believes that, groupings among the Greek agro-Unions' stakeholders may affect negatively the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use. The underlying reason is that, these systems' actual implementation process and use purpose may become indirectly the object and/or means of coercive behaviour and action of any of the stakeholders' groupings against the other ones.

According to the researcher, all the above presented issues of corporate politics', power structure and stakeholders' relations' issues best represent the stated by Wilson (2000), Burnes (2000) and, Johnson and Scholes (1993) interrelationship between corporate stakeholders' interests and the favoured by them organisational context and settings.

Moreover, this existing internal business environment is referred by Maraveyias et al. (2003), as representing the prevailing agro-coops' organisational context and operational framework. He considers it as inhibiting any business decision and practice aiming at the required strategic business development and organisational change of the Greek agro-Unions. It also motivates conflict among the stakeholders' groups and differentiates their interests from the common corporate goals and interests (Daoutopoulos, 2006).

Therefore, it rather favours mismanagement and improper decision making and has a negative impact on the implementation process and use purpose of any adopted management system, ISO 9000 QMS' too, whose proper implementation process and use purpose could support the agro-Unions' strategic business development and change.

F) THEME 6 – External Stakeholders and Third parties’ direct and/or indirect influence on ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose

Fi) A fair number of the aforementioned interviewees also offered another indicative research finding by openly admitting that, their decision concerning the adoption and development of an integrated and well-planned and managed quality management system, was mainly a firm requirement of their key accounts. These demands forced their agro-Union to become registered and certified to ISO 9000 QMS and HACCP and try to properly implement and use these QMS.

On this issue, the President and General Manager of Krokos SynPE, Pindos S.A. and Dodoni S.A. reaffirmed the need of the agro-Unions changing their organisational behaviour and business practice and adopting the private sector’s companies’ ones for implementing effectively and using efficiently any introduced, developed and used (quality) management systems - ISO 9000 QMS, too - and management methods.

They stated their Union’s preference to a planned, preventive and gradual change process and method through the formation of a strategic partnership with privately owned companies and the gradual adoption of their best business practices. As a matter of fact, they were obliged by their business partners to proceed to this approach, since this was a firm requirement of them.

The Eleourgiki S.A., Krokos-Kozani SynPE and Masticha-Chios S.A.’s Quality managers, reaffirming their Unions’ Directors and General Managers’ views, stated that: “The perception and use of ISO 9000 QMS’ strategic business property presupposes and requires the key stakeholders’ training on and knowledge of the systems’ business nature and requirements of usage”. Moreover, “managerial knowledge and experience on the strategic management and organisational change issues” is a prerequisite for the key stakeholders acquiring the required competence to decide and manage properly the business issues. In relevance to the aforementioned, they referred to the agro-Unions’ need to proceed to the adoption of the private sector’s companies’ ‘best’ practices for achieving the business issues’ proper management and decision making course of action.

This is a very important research finding, since as presented before, the key stakeholders' adequate and proper knowledge of and training on any quality management system, ISO 9000 QMS too, is considered as an absolute requirement by all the researched agro-Unions' key stakeholders, for these QMS' effective implementation and efficient use.

Fii) This change management process could be characterised as a radical, externally superimposed and breakthrough one, which is being followed and complemented by an incremental, planned organisational change approach. It seems to be the effect of adopting and developing a combined TQM and BPR type of organisational change. Wilson (2000), Oakland (2003 and 2001) and Hammer and Champy (1993) characterise this change management type, as the most probable to occur, when viable business solutions can not be provided and/or achieved by the corporate stakeholders, due to the existing organisational framework, setting and context.

On the other hand, the external business environment' conditions are demanding such a 'quick' business solution. Thus, the only solution is the introduction of a superimposed, radical change process, whose deployment process has to be based on an incremental, process, for each phase's results being fully 'absorbed' by the corporate stakeholders.

Fiii) A similar incremental change management approach was also described by the General Managers of Pindos S.A. and Dodoni S.A., whose agro-Unions had to: "adapt to private sector's business practice and behaviour and continuously trying to implement effectively and use efficiently the adopted management systems and methods". "After a period of time, this business attitude and practice, if followed properly could become a part of your own business practice", as they reported in their press interviews.

It is a clear indication, that benchmarking process can be used as the incremental change management tool, affirming in that way, the close relationship of the Quality management business field with the Benchmarking business field. As it is proved by the aforementioned respondents' answers, both these business fields are interrelated with the Change management business field.

Summarised Concluding Remarks

As the concluding part of the interviews' critical evaluation, the summarised arguments of the researched three stakeholders' groups are presented:

The researched ASEE Amykles and UACArgolida Quality managers offered an all inclusive presentation of the possible Key business Factors, that may affect either positively or negatively - operating either as drivers or constraints - ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro- Unions' sector.

In concluding their interviews, they stated that, by adopting and operating under a cooperative climate, in terms of the decision-making process and actual management, the organisational performance of their agro-Unions has been improved.

The ratification they offered is that, since all management staff have clearly defined roles and work duties, the Directors can not interfere, at least not in the degree they used to in the past, in the operational business issues' materialisation. Moreover, it is easier to attribute authority, responsibility and accountability to any business decision maker and implementer. In this way, business issues are decided cooperatively between the Directors and General Manager, while they are managed by the senior managers having the management competence, and business knowledge and experience for materialising effectively and efficiently these business matters, as they argued.

They continued by stating that, most of the agro-Unions' Directors do not possess the required business experience and managerial competence. Therefore, as these interviewees claimed, the Directors intervention may affect negatively the organisational settings by generating competitive relations among the stakeholders, and the operational framework by resulting to ineffective and inefficient management and decision making of the strategic and operational business issues.

As a proof they presented the example of the Confederation of agro-Unions of Northern Greece, which was led to bankruptcy and insolvency, and Dodoni S.A. which was saved by its partial privatisation.

According to them, although these two agro-unions' Directors' interference to their

business affairs was the root cause of their endangered financial and business position, they did not accept any accountability for their own decisions and actions.

Instead, they blamed the ‘then’ senior managers of being incompetent to properly implement their decisions and manage the aforementioned companies.

The majority of the three sample groups’ researched General Managers had this view too.

Gi) Concluding the entire research process, the vast majority of the researched agro-Unions’ stakeholders stated their preference to an Integrated Quality Management system encompassing features of ISO 9000 QMS and HACCP, as the ISO 22000 does.

They also favour the ‘new’ ISO 9000:2008, whose business nature and properties are almost similar to the ISO 9000:2000 version, thus it will be more familiar to them.

It is interesting that even the Directors stated that, such a system could definitely support the strategic business development and organisational change process through the agro-Unions’ business processes’ auditing and improvement.

ISO 22000-HACCP is the new international QMS covering both Products’ Quality assurance and Consumers’ Health/Hygiene issues. It refers and covers mostly aspects and issues of the existed HACCP system, while it entails and/or could be combined with elements of ISO 9001:2000 including the system’s continuous improvement. This new series of standards is available from 2005 and refers to all Food Industry’s corporations.

Gii) The professional managers, on the other hand, believe that the effective implementation and efficient use of such a QMS requires all stakeholders’: i) adequate knowledge of its business properties and ii) active participation and unwavering commitment, while iii) it could direct their organisations towards adopting a proper operational framework and organisational context and settings.

It is an important remark portraying the aforementioned key business factors as being drivers and/or constraints for the agro-Unions achieving the optimal implementation and use of any deployed and used (quality) management system.

7.2 MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In a nutshell and as a concluding remark for critically evaluating the above presented research findings: all the first and second sample groups' respondents' views, as well as these of the third sample group's Quality managers represent an initial shifting of these key stakeholders' business attitude and practice. This alteration concerns the adopted and practiced decision making process and actual management of the strategic and operational business issues, including ISO 9000 QMS.

Moreover, they seem to adopt gradually - mostly by an externally imposed change process and/or benchmarking - the best practice (as they perceive and interpret the term 'best practice') of the private sector's companies' management and business approach, in terms of the following:

1. Establishment of clearly defined lines of authority, responsibility and accountability between the Directors and the professional managers, as well as among the latter.
2. Cooperative decision making process concerning the operational and administrative business issues, as well as the strategic ones, but the latter to a lesser degree.
3. Acceptance of all the key stakeholders' responsibility and accountability, as far as the decision making and actual management of business issues are concerned.
4. Proactive management and decision making, instead of a reactive and spontaneous one, especially for the business issues being of a strategic and normative nature. This attitude has also to be applied for the decision making process and actual management of the operational and administrative business issues.
5. Key stakeholders' acknowledgement of acquiring the required level of business Knowledge, experience and training for managing successfully any business issue faced and/or management system adopted, developed and used in the sector.
6. Key stakeholders' perception and use in actual practice of ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property aiming at the agro-Unions' business processes' improvement and ultimately strategic business development and organisational change.
8. Adoption and use of an incremental organisational change process following a superimposed, emergent one, which is resulting from their strategic business partners'

firm requirements and needs.

According to their views, the aforementioned business factors and issues could lead the agro-Unions achieving a proper organisational context and setting, and operational framework required for their strategic business development and change process.

On the other hand, the third sample group's agro-Unions' Directors mainly and in a lesser degree the General Managers presented opposite views to the aforementioned ones. This approach highlighted the lack of an objective auditing mechanism by an external body-institution, and the Directors' interference in every operational, administrative and/or strategic, business issue, which reveals the:

1. issue of agency theory and practice in the Greek agro-coops' sector, and the related with it inexistence of the Directors' accountability,
2. existence of coercive relations and differentiated interests between, as well as inside the Directors' and the professional managers' groups,
3. existence of an outdated, inappropriate and inadequate organisational setting and context, and operational framework, in terms of the prevailing management and decision making process,
4. inexistence of the key stakeholders', these being mainly the Directors and in a lesser degree the General Managers, adequate level of knowledge of and training on the business nature, properties, and implementation and use requirements of any adopted and developed management system, the ISO 9000 QMS too.

These aforementioned business factors are considered as crucial for any agro-Union achieving improved organisational performance, through improved organisational context and settings, and operational framework, as Daoutopoulos (2006) proclaims.

Maraveyias et al. (2003) and Kamenidis (2008) suggest the effective implementation and efficient use of QMSystems, ISO 9000 QMS too, as a serious means for achieving the aforementioned business goal, through the agro-Unions' business processes' improvement.

CHAPTER 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 FINAL THESIS' SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarises the research findings. In addition, managerial recommendations, contributions and limitations of the study are identified and recommendations for further research are discussed. Moreover, elements of this research study's originality in connection to policy issues are presented.

The lack of existing evidence, as to how agro-Unions' Directors and senior managers make sense of the ISO 9000 QMS business nature and properties, led us to undertake an exploratory study. A Grounded theory methodological approach was adopted with the purpose of further developing knowledge and theories from a broad investigation. These theory or frameworks emerge through the systematic analysis of the data collected, emphasising the interactive nature of these processes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998).

However, as it has been already presented the final thesis' qualitative research process was also based on: current literature on the research business fields; other researches' findings conducted in other business sectors and countries; and the previous DBA research studies' findings.

As a result, it is mainly of an inductive theory and nature, while elements of the deductive theory can be traced in the critical comparison between the final thesis' research findings with these of the previous DBA qualitative and quantitative researches.

Given the exploratory nature of this qualitative research and the use of the methodological approach based on Grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998), the identification of the agro-Unions and Confederations of them, that should participate in the study, was based on having a representative number of the agro-Unions' sector's different groups (see: section 4.2: Research Design in Chapter 4: Methodology).

The research sample totals to twenty one agro-Unions and seven Confederations of agro-Unions, while three groups of them consist it.

The researched agro-Unions' key stakeholders belong to the following three groups respectively: 1. Presidents of the BoDs-Directors / Code: PR, 2. General Managers / Code:

GM and 3. Quality and Production Managers / Code: Q&P.

Using the Grounded Theory methodological approach meant that the interviewer had to allow the respondent the freedom to examine each of the issues in a way he/she felt was most appropriate. This approach resulted in detailed interview notes from which the analysis evolved. Likewise, the personal interview process provided a better opportunity to explore thoroughly and in-depth the perceptions and attitudes, and consequently the behaviour and practice of these agro-Unions' key stakeholders towards ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in their organisations. The final aim was to critically evaluate this process' manner and the KBF affecting it.

Since, the research sample is purposefully selected for properly and adequately reflecting the Greek agro-Unions' and Confederations of agro-Unions' business sector, the results could be fairly enough generalised across it. This process has to be accompanied with the requirement, that further research will be conducted in the aforementioned sector concerning the business manner of and the KBF affecting the ISO 22000 and ISO 9000:2008 implementation process and use purpose by this sector's companies.

Moreover, the primary focus of the study was to establish the validity of the operational and strategic corporate added value that, ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use could contribute in the Greek agro-Unions' sector especially, rather than to draw conclusions for the entire Greek economy's business sectors.

The Greek agro-Unions' organisational performance improvement is a requirement for their business survival and development and consequently for being in a position to support the agricultural sector and its stakeholders. We believe that ISO 9000 QMS could be used as a corporate strategic resource-competence for the Greek agro-Unions achieving their required strategic business development and change process.

This use of ISO 9000 QMS could offer a viable alternative to the traditional operational framework, stakeholders' behaviour and practices, and organisational context and settings characterising the majority of them. These factors are considered the root-cause of their undermined business and financial status, and outdated managerial practices.

8.2 FINAL KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FINAL THESIS AND THE ENTIRE DBA RESEARCH PROJECT

8.2 KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, the researcher summarises and presents the key conclusions emerging from the DBA final thesis' findings, and from the research results identified in the previous DBA research studies conducted in Documents three and four respectively. The entire DBA research study's main aim regards the critical examination and evaluation of the ISO 9000 QMS' business status and manner of these QMSystems' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-Unions' business sector. Moreover, the research aims at investigating and critically evaluating the Key Business Factors affecting ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose by acting as either drivers or constraints.

A series of the research main findings and resulting managerial recommendations is presented in the following paragraphs:

- i) tensions between the BoDs' elected members and professional managers;
- ii) tensions between the various professional managers' groups;
- iii) not clearly defined and in some cases not even existing separate roles and lines of authority, responsibility and accountability between the various stakeholders' groups;
- iv) Stakeholders' lack of knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMS' business nature and properties, and business issues and topics in general (exhibited especially by the BoDs' members);
- v) business competence is associated with empirical knowledge gained over time engagement with the agricultural issues according to the Board of Directors' members, without them referring to the necessity of having also the required educational knowledge and/or business experience as professional engagement (inductively arrived finding);
- vi) existence and use of outdated and inappropriate management practices by the BoDs' members mainly and the professional managers in a lesser degree;
- vii) autocratic and coercive style of actual management and decision making (practiced mostly by the BoDs' members and in a lesser degree by the General managers);
- viii) the prevailing stakeholders' group in terms of strategic management and decision

making is the BoDs, while they intervene in operational management and decision making, too;

ix) agro-Unions' stakeholders have a paternalistic view and in many cases give priority to personal and/or external - political interests (even by "allying" with political parties), which may be contradictory to the organisational ones (inductively arrived finding);

x) any organisational change - concerning both operational and strategic business issues - is more easily accepted if it is externally imposed and out of need, especially as a firm requirement of the agro-Unions' major clients and strategic business partners (inductively arrived finding); thus,

xi) the nature of a "successful" change process seems to be a breakthrough, superimposed one, being followed by an incremental, planned one, which is based on the ISO 9000 QMS' guidelines, as these are implemented and used by the private sector's companies "partners" of the agro-coops' Unions (inductively arrived finding);

xii) BoDs' members restrict the professional managers from the decision making process by virtue of their institutional legitimate authority, while the professional managers restrict the dissemination of information on business issues to the BoDs' members. Each group uses respectively these tactics for decreasing the organisational power of the other one (inductively arrived finding).

A basic conclusion can be drawn from the research interviews' results. The actual ISO 9000 QMSystems' management, implementation process and use purpose are fragmented, due to the aforementioned main research findings. In practical terms, fragmentation implies that criteria, unrelated to the literate requirements (as expressed by ISO Handbook Guidelines, 1994 and 2000) of ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation process and efficient use purpose, influence and direct the decision making process and actual management of these QMSystems to an under-management and misuse approach of these QMS. The Greek agro-Unions are not implementing effectively and using efficiently ISO 9000 QMS, thus a change in the practiced approach is required.

8.3 MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the aforementioned DBA Final Thesis' study's key research findings, the researcher proceeds to the following recommendations. These constitute this and the entire DBA research study's conclusions and are in terms of policy and legal changes concerning the:

- a) improvement of stakeholders' authority, responsibility and accountability issues by:
 - i) a new statute referring to the election process for anyone becoming an elected member in an agro-Unions' BoDs. This process is characterised by the interference of political parties and/or persons, who want to intervene and control the agro-Union for serving their own and/or third parties' interests instead of the agro-Union's ones,
 - ii) the use of an independent external agent-body for auditing the agro-Unions' business operations and financial results, and attributing accountability to the relevant involved stakeholders – the key policy and decision makers of the business issues, and not only to the implementers of their decisions, as the professional managers accuse the BoDs of acting in such a way,
 - iii) clearly defined and established by PASEGES and the legislation lines of authority, responsibility and accountability between the BoDs' elected members and the professional managers in terms of actual operational and strategic management and decision making process;

- b) adoption and practice of a “new” scheme concerning the continuous training in business issues, as well as in cooperative issues of all the stakeholders, them being: the BoDs' elected members (who claim to base their business knowledge and “know-how” only on empirical knowledge gained by their long term occupation in cooperative issues as elected members of the BoDs) and the professional managers in order for them becoming competent enough to decide and manage the operational and strategic business issues. This training programme could be provided by the PASEGES and/or university schools in the form of educational programmes and actual business training for periods of two weeks to six months each time, depending on the business issue;

c) recruitment and advancement of professional managers based on managerial and business competence and on achievement of objectives, and not in ‘friendly’ relations and/or alliances and/or family relations with members of the BoDs. This practice could be forbidden by law for the BoDs’ members’ first degree relatives for not disturbing employees’ relations and not experiencing practices of ‘nepotism’;

d) auditing of ISO 9000 QMS’ management and development processes, and actual practice by an independent external agent – body and in cooperation with state agencies. In that way, the systems’ actual development process and use purpose could be continuously assessed to be in accordance with the ISO 9000:2000 Guidelines and the agro-Union’s quality and corporate business plan;

e) adoption and practice of a “new” ownership scheme concerning the agro-coops’ key stakeholders’ (that is the BoDs’ members) ownership of an agro-Union’s shares. The current actual practice is to own them in a collective way together with the members of a first degree agro-coop and be elected as their representative in the agro-Unions’ BoDs. This fact, and in relation to the low price and consequently the required low amount spent for owning an agro-coops’ and indirectly an agro-Union’s shares, makes possible for the BoDs’ elected members to pursue differentiated to the organisational interests.

In concluding, the researcher identifies, presents and discusses some of the theoretical, practical and policy issues, as regards the ISO 9000 QMSystems’ implementation process and use purpose in the Greek Agro-Unions’ sector, by the critical analysis, interpretation and evaluation of this final thesis’ research findings.

8.4. ORIGINALITY AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE FINAL THESIS' RESEARCH STUDY

Since, and as it has been already referred in sections 1.1.5 and 2.5, no previous studies regarding the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose have been conducted in Greece (according to the data available from the National Documentation Centre of Greece and the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Foods), the researcher believes in the significance and originality of this research and its theoretical and practical contribution to the Agricultural and the Agro-coops' sectors' business practice in Greece. The results of this study provide one of the few in-depth pictures of the management activities and organisation of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek agro-Unions' sector. This empirical investigation into the previously unexplored business field of ISO 9000 QMS' management, implementation and use in the agricultural sector's businesses in general and in the agro-coops' sector in particular is a significant contribution to the Quality management systems' theory and practice for a number of reasons.

First, this study identifies the nature of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use process and the KBF affecting it and indirectly shaping its outcomes. Second, the research findings provide the necessary documentation to reveal the management approach and methods required for achieving the systems' effective implementation and efficient use. Third, it confirms the expectation that, a fair number of agro-Unions' administration's key stakeholders have not yet adopted and therefore, they are not using updated decision-making and management methods and practices. To the contrary, it is identified that, they exhibit paternalistic and autocratic behaviours and practices towards the ISO 9000 QMS' management, development and use in their organisations.

On the other hand, a tendency is identified in a fair number of agro-Unions' key stakeholders for proceeding and/or having already proceeded to the use of ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property for achieving their required strategic business development and change, mainly through their business processes' continuous auditing and improvement, as ISO 9000 QMS Guidelines, theoretical texts and research studies' findings claim.

Finally, this research forms a building block to facilitate the construction and development of theory, as well as creating the impetus for further empirical research to advance our understanding of how and what for the agricultural sector and more specifically the agro-coops' Unions' sector's business entities introduce, develop and use any adopted quality management system and/or even any other management system.

Therefore, this research study has answered the question 'What is currently taking place?'. It has mapped out a picture of the current situation, has developed a number of business issues and frameworks concerning quality management systems' development and use, which could be used as a basis for further inquiry, and finally made a valid and interesting contribution, providing a lesson for future research. Business research concerning the intended, as well as, the 'real practice' of (ISO 9000) Quality management systems' implementation and use are in their initial stages in the Greek agricultural and agro-Unions' sectors.

This study shows that, ISO 9000 QMS is misused and/or under-managed in a fair number of Greek agro-Unions, despite the significant operational and strategic management benefits, that these agro-Unions could enjoy out of the systems' effective implementation process and efficient use. Nevertheless, a fair number of the researched key stakeholders were identified to have perceived the importance of the systems' optimal implementation and use. Thus, they have proceeded to achieve them by adopting and using the private sector's companies' most optimal business practices and organisational behaviour for improving their operational framework and, organisational context and settings, since as this research study indicated all the aforementioned business issues are interrelated.

However, for this business research field to move forward, a more extended and in-depth critical investigation and evaluation of the 'why and what is the root cause' questions need to be further developed. These are by far the most difficult to answer and are likely to require more detailed information and a longer-term involvement from the participating researchers and, the agro-Unions and their stakeholders under research.

These questions also require the continuous application of qualitative research methodologies, with which the agricultural and agro-coops' sectors' researchers are less familiar. Nevertheless, answering some of the more fundamental questions, that this research has started to uncover, is a significant goal for the "survival" and strategic business development of the sector's companies.

Because, as the vast majority of the researched agro-Unions' respondents stated, the majority of the Greek agro-Unions face serious business problems due to their prevailing organisational context and settings, and operational framework, as well as their key stakeholders' business practices and organisational behaviour.

All these key business factors result to: ineffective and inefficient actual management and decision-making of the agro-Unions' operational and strategic business issues and operations; the creation of conflict among and in the stakeholders' groups and the differentiation of the agro-Unions' stakeholders' groups' interests and goals inhibiting the agro-coops' strategic business development and required organisational change.

Moreover, as the majority of the two researched professional managers' groups stated, they act as constraints not permitting the proper introduction, development and use of any management system - ISO 9000 QMS, too – although, these systems' proper implementation process and use purpose could aid their agro-Unions' successful strategic business development and change, as they claimed.

This research could be also of interest and potential benefit to the professional and the other stakeholders of the other business sector's corporations, since it could enhance their understanding of ISO 9000 QMS' strategic business property and consequently potentiality of being used as a strategic development and change management resource - agent for improving their companies' business processes and consequently organisational performance. This ISO 9000 QMS' use has not been thoroughly researched until now in the Greek agricultural sector and in any other business sector of the Greek economy.

Moreover, it would facilitate the effective implementation and efficient use of the new ISO 9000:2008 version, as well as, of ISO 22000-HACCP which combines elements of both

ISO 9000:2000 and HACCP. The registration and certification under these two ‘new’ QMSystems is an imperative for all Food Industry’s organisations.

The rationale lies to the fact, that companies already registered and certified under ISO 9000:2000 would have to adopt and develop the same implementation and use requirements, as the ones required for the proper deployment and use of the two aforementioned QMSystems. Therefore, the identification and critical evaluation of the Key Business Factors (drivers or constraints) influencing the ISO 9000 QMS’ effective implementation and efficient use may point out indirectly the Key Business Factors influencing (at least fairly enough) the ISO 22000 QMS’ or the ‘new’ ISO 9000:2008 effective implementation and efficient use, which is due in the short term.

This view is further supported by the identification of a fair number of inductively arrived research findings, achieved through the inductive nature of the Grounded theory methodological approach for the Qualitative Data collection and analysis’ processes. These inductively arrived research findings in connection to the other key research findings, presented in section 8.2.3, add also to this final thesis’ research (and the entire DBA’s one, too) originality and contribution in terms of both theory and practice, as far as the research focus, main aim and objectives are concerned. They indicate that the ISO 9000 QMS’ mere implementation is not enough for any company - Greek agro-Unions, too - achieving the optimum outcomes from these QMSystems’ implementation process and use purpose. Rather, the corporate stakeholders should critically examine and evaluate the KBF that could affect the ISO 9000 QMS’ - and any other management systems’ - effective implementation and efficient u

8.5 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES / LIMITATIONS OF THE FINAL THESIS' QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

This exploratory examination of the business nature, manner and resulting outcomes of ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' Unions' sector has limitations as well as strengths. The researcher takes into consideration a number of shortcomings in qualitative research, although as a phenomenologist, he is more concerned as to whether the research is authentic and properly represents the events being studied (see: relevant topic in section 4.1.8, Qualitative Data Analysis - Coding).

Given the fact that qualitative research is, by definition, stronger on long descriptive narratives than on statistical tables, the problem that then arises is how such a researcher goes about categorising the events or activities described. This is sometimes known as the problem of reliability. As Hammersley (1992, p.67) puts it: "reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions".

As a phenomenologist, the researcher is more concerned as to whether the research is authentic and properly represents the events being studied.

A second criticism of qualitative research relates to how sound its explanations are. This is sometimes known as the problem of anecdotalism, revealed in the way in which research reports sometimes appeal to a few, telling 'examples' of some apparent phenomenon, without any attempt to analyse less clear data.

Anecdotalism questions the validity of much qualitative research. Validity is another word for truth. Sometimes one doubts the validity of an explanation because the researcher has clearly made no attempt to deal with contrary cases.

This was tried to be counterbalanced by using the triangulation method, an indirect research method, which uses multiple but independent measures (Easterby-Smith, 2002:146) for assessing the validity and reliability of all the preceding interviews' offered answers through the critical examination and evaluation of their consistency.

This was achieved by his resetting quite similar questions in a later phase of the interview

for comparing the offered answers by the same respondent in both phases of the same interview.

The comparison of the consistency and statistical aligning of variant answers' content permit the researcher to render to the specific interview a fair degree of consistency and therefore, validity and reliability (see: Research Questions – Section 2.3).

Moreover, the researcher, in his attempt to minimise bias and to improve the validity and reliability of the research, uses a different source of evidence, the case study method. Since his research topic is contemporary and current in Greek agro-coops' business environment, this method helps to provide real-time information and a richer, focused and multi-dimensional picture of the researched topic.

Furthermore, the case study research method and the personal in-depth interview process gave to the researcher the chance to benchmark similar situations encountered in a fairly enough number of agro-Unions and to gather a significant amount of information through the direct one-on-one interview process.

The research sample is chosen in purpose to reflect and represent the majority of the entire population and of the existing different sub-groups of the Greek agro-Unions' and Confederations of them business sector.

Indeed, the researched agro-Unions and Confederations of them represent the 30% of the sector's population and the 70-80% of the sector's total business operations, activities and revenue (PASEGES and ICAP, 2007).

The research sample's agro-Unions are operating either under the prevailing agro-coops' 'regime' or have been partially privatised. In this case, their business framework, and organisational context and settings have been influenced (at least partially) by these of the private sector's companies' ones, (Daoutopoulos, 2006; Karamichas, 2009 and 2008).

Moreover, the researched key stakeholders (Presidents of the BoDs, General Managers and Quality & Production managers) are considered to be the major source of the agro-coops' strategic and operational decision making process and actual business practice (Karamichas, 2008) in terms of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose.

Despite this fact, it has been proven very difficult to conduct all the pre-planned interviews, since most of the other senior managers and the other BoDs' members were very reluctant to participate, while they claimed that, either the President and the General Manager or the Quality and Production managers were in a better position to participate in the research process.

This sampling plan has been made in purpose, in order for the research process to entail elements of comparison among the different sample groups' agro-Unions' stakeholders' views on the research questions and themes.

The interviews were not taped, as it was considered an "unwelcome and dangerous" situation-event by the majority of the interviewed agro-Unions' key stakeholders. According to Heritage ((1984), in Bryman, 2004), the interviews' taping allows more thorough examination of what respondents say and permits repeated examinations of the interviewees' answers.

Nevertheless, the interviewer was alert to what is being said, following up interesting points made, prompting and probing where necessary, and drawing attention to any inconsistencies in the interviewee's answer, because as a qualitative researcher he is interested not just in what managers say, but also in the way they say it.

Therefore, paper and field notes were held and later on they were transcribed in order to analyse these transcripts and to produce appropriate findings. Moreover, they were presented to the interviewees for them assessing and verifying the validity, reliability and consistency of these field notes and their relevant transcriptions.

Despite the above presented course of action to minimise the limitations of this research study, for the results to be generalised across this sector and in other business sectors further qualitative and quantitative research is required to be conducted, as it is presented the following Section 8.6.

8. 6 FURTHER MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS RESEARCH

As it was previously referred, further business research is required to be conducted in the business field of Quality management systems' - ISO 9000 QMS' , too – implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-business' sector in general and in the Greek agro-Unions' business sector in particular.

A brief set of the possible research studies and their object research field is presented below, as follows:

1. A longitudinal study is required for reinvestigating these researched agro-Unions' key stakeholders' views, perceptions and attitudes, as well as, behaviours and actual practices concerning this research study's main themes-questions.
2. Moreover, further research - mostly a quantitative approach one – required for identifying, and critically analysing and evaluating these researched agro-Unions' other stakeholders' groups' (i.e.: employees, foremen and workers) views, perceptions and attitudes, as well as, behaviours and actual practices concerning this research study's main themes-questions.
3. A qualitative, as well as, a quantitative research studies should be conducted in the agri-food sub-sector's private companies on the same research themes-questions, for critically comparing these studies' research findings with the DBA research findings, as well as with the research findings of the two previously suggested research studies.
4. A comparative research study on the Greek agro-coops; business experience and practice on the implementation and use of Quality management systems and on other countries' agro-coops' relevant experience and business practice has to be conducted, for identifying best practice in terms of the research study's themes.
5. A quantitative research study is needed for identifying the first degree agro-coops' stakeholders' attitudes and practices on the DBA anchor research themes – questions.
6. Finally, as a result of the aforementioned proposed business research studies, a thorough research study, comprised by both a qualitative and a quantitative part, has to be conducted for critically examining, identifying and evaluating the Key Business Factors affecting and at the same time 'producing' the prevailing organisational context and settings, and operational framework of the Greek agro-coops.

Overall, we arrive at the following conclusion:

By critically examining and evaluating ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process' and use purpose's various models and approaches, the agro-Unions' business sector could learn by benchmarking and adoption of other sector's corporate entities' 'best' business practice and experience to effectively implement and efficiently use these QMSystems.

The ultimate aim of such an approach would be for the Greek agro-Unions improving their business processes and consequently their organisational performance.

Such a development could also support the improvement of their: stakeholders' business knowledge, managerial practices and organisational behaviour; operational framework; organisational context and settings for achieving their proper strategic business development and organisational change, which are required for their business 'survival' in the today's fast changing economic and business environment.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW OUTLINE

To be filled out by the interviewer during the interview.

1. Union of agricultural cooperatives name:
2. Interviewee:
3. Title:
4. Background:
5. Years with organisation:
6. Date interviewed:
7. Interview duration:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do the Agro-coops' key stakeholders perceive the terms and issues of quality and process management and their interrelationship with the ISO 9000 QMS? What is the practice of these issues in their Agro-coop?
2. How the Agro-coops' key stakeholders perceive the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in their agro-Union?
3. How do they perceive the current business situation, financial position and managerial practices of their corporation? Do they affect and how the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose?
4. What are their knowledge and perceptions considering the ISO 9000 QMS' nature and manner of its implementation and use, as well as, the system's requirements (according to theory and them) for achieving a proper development?
5. What are the reasons for a company - the Agro-coops included - to introduce and develop the ISO QMS?

6. Which do they consider as being the major problems and drawbacks of ISO 9000 QMSystems' implementation and use?
7. Which do they consider as being the most important outcomes- benefits of ISO 9000 QMSystems' implementation and use?
8. Is there any difference between the ISO 9000:1994 and the ISO 9000:2000 QMSystems? And if yes, in terms of what and which ones?
9. Could and/or should the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use lead to improved Business Processes and ultimately Organisational Performance and if not, why not?
10. Could and/or should the ISO 9000 QMS be considered and used as a corporate resource - business tool aiming at the business operations' and managerial practices' auditing and improvement for achieving strategic business development and change?
11. Are a Quality strategic plan, policy and communication program necessary and why? Do they have to be incorporated in and interrelated with the corporate ones?
12. Do they believe that the company has to change its organisational structure, operations and practices for improving its business processes concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' development?
13. What specific aspects of the ISO 9000 QMS application processes and operations have to change, why, when, how and to which direction?
14. Will and/or should this change lead to the development of customer-focused and market-oriented business processes and activities? Has the agro-Union to develop such business operations? And if yes: Why?
15. Who should plan and lead the ISO 9000 QMS implementation process and decide on its use purpose/goals?
16. Are these key stakeholders aware of other companies' - including competitors - manner of ISO 9000 Quality system's implementation process and use purposes? How do they consider and evaluate this approach?
17. Do internal operating problems and the stakeholders' relations nature (e.g. micro-politics, power structure, groupings, personal interests), as well as, external stakeholders – third parties affect the nature of the implementation process and use of any management system – the ISO 9000 QMS included – in the Greek Agro-coops?
18. How do they rate and evaluate the decision making system as it is practiced and

experienced in the Greek Agro-coops' sector?

Which managing group should be the key decision maker group: the professional managers or the Board of Directors' members or both groups according to the issue?

19. According to their opinion which is the most preferable Quality management system for the Agro-coops enjoying the optimum results out of its implementation and use?
20. Are these key stakeholders aware of the ISO 22000 QMS' and/or ISO 9000:2008 business status, nature and properties, and the required manner of the systems' implementation process and use purpose?

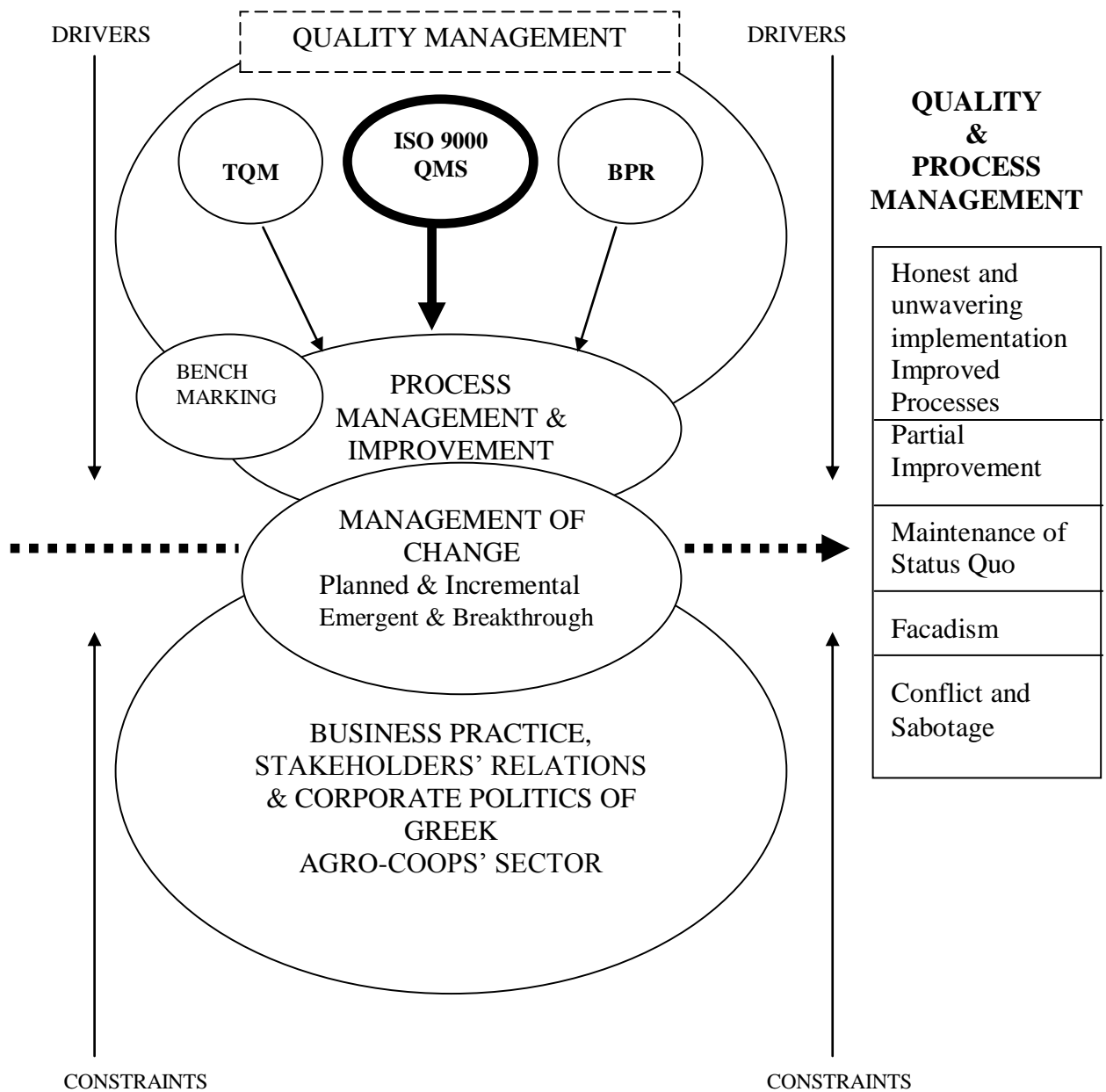
APPENDIX 2 – Companies’ Profiles**UACArgolida/1st Sample Group – Company Profile: an indicative example**

The Union of the Agricultural Cooperatives of Argolida / UACArgolida processes, standardizes and bottles fruit juices, having and using as supplying resource the prefecture’s producers’ raw material. It has a general business strategy for standardizing, bottling and distributing all the prefecture’s producers’-farmers’ fresh fruits and it has also proceeded to the standardization, bottling and distribution of other regions’, local and international ones, fruits as raw material. Its income revenue is 15-20 million Euros approximately and has a market presence in Europe, North America and Far East Asia.

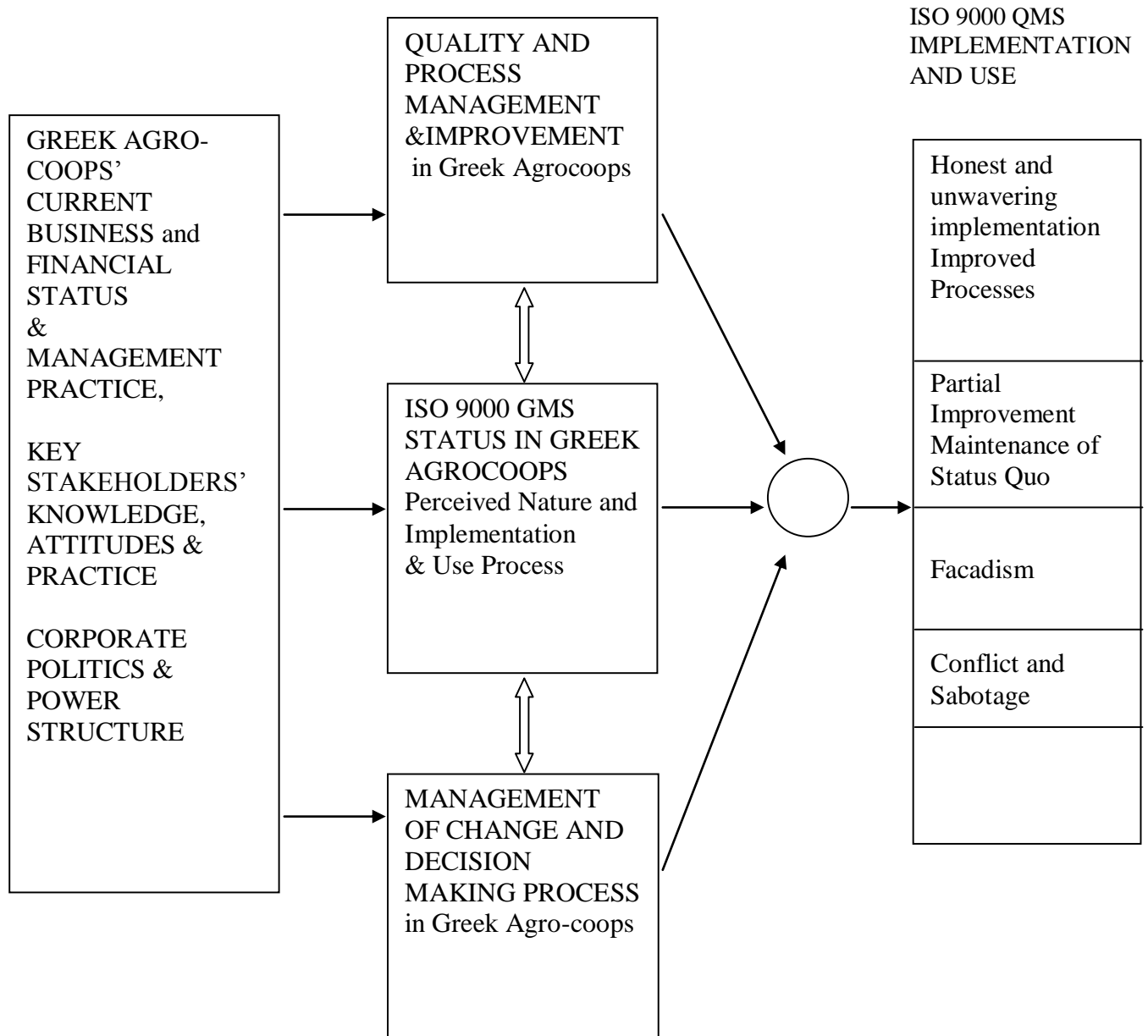
The most impressive thing is that, due to its ‘then’ very bad financial position, the Union was threatened with bankruptcy and nullification of its existence as a business entity.

Despite that and in the short-time course, the Union ‘recovered’ and is one of the most successful Agro-coops’ Union, out of the entire 92 Unions and Confederations of Unions, which are active and constitute the Greek agro-Unions’ business sector (PASEGES, 2007). According to its key stakeholders, this ‘miracle’ can be only attributed to its organisational restructuring and its people. These two factors permitted the adoption and optimal development and use of updated management systems, managerial attitudes and practices, which enhanced the achievement of improved business processes and operations. These resulted to improved organisational performance. As it will be revealed by the respondents’ answers, this achievement is closely related to an incremental change process, as the Union’s General Manager conveyed.

APPENDIX 3: THE INITIAL DBA PROJECT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



APPENDIX 4: THE DOCUMENT'S 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



APPENDIX 5: DOCUMENT'S 4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Stakeholders' Knowledge of and training on Quality and Process management fields + Stakeholders' Perception of their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS' business practice

-

&

Stakeholders' knowledge of ISO 9000 QMS' business nature + Stakeholders' attitudes and business practices concerning ISO 9000 QMS' deployment

-

and

Greek agro-coops' business status, financial position and managerial practices + ISO 9000 QMS' business status and operational practices

-

&

Corporate politics& power structure and Decision making process mgt. + Perception&Use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic development and organisational change corporate resource

-

= influence the actual business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in Greek agro-coops

Note: these research variables - key business factors are influenced either positively (+) or negatively (-) the related key business factors, which are hypothetically affecting ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the researched Greek agro-coops.

APPENDIX 6 – INITIAL MATRICES OF THE QDC&A

The content of the following matrices has been already presented in a summary form in Table 2 which is a mixed matrix combining elements of a conceptually and role ordered clustered matrix and of a multi/variable-variable, case ordered matrix in pages 85-91.

The form of the Initial conceptually clustered matrices is showed in the following indicative tables:

TABLE 3A**1st Sample sub-group / Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Argolida**

	THEME-Q1	THEME-Q2	THEME-Q3	THEME-Q4	THEME-Q5	THEME-Q6
President						
General Mgr						
Quality Mgr						

TABLE 3B**2nd Sample sub-group / ASEE AMYKLES-Lakonia**

	THEME-Q1	THEME-Q2	THEME-Q3	THEME-Q4	THEME-Q5	THEME-Q6
President						
General Mgr						
Quality Mgr						

TABLE 3C**3rd Sample sub-group / Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Lakonia.**

	THEME-Q1	THEME-Q2	THEME-Q3	THEME-Q4	THEME-Q5	THEME-Q6
President						
General Mgr						
Quality Mgr						

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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY
NOTTINGHAM BUSINESS SCHOOL

DOCTORATE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

DOCUMENT 6
A REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

EXARCHOS DIMITROPOULOS
31 January 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to offer DBA students the opportunity to reflect on their research project exploratory adventure in more detail. Based upon a personal log or diary that I have maintained throughout the course, the main objective of this document is to report on my personal development and learning, both as a doctoral-level researcher and business manager in action over the duration of the DBA programme.

More specifically this report includes:

- Reflections on the process of conducting business research.
- The learning gained from studying at doctoral level and putting this learning against some formal theories of learning.
- Changes to my perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and actual practice concerning both the subject of the research and the process of doing research.
- Problems (theoretical, practical and technical), issues (philosophical and methodological) and dilemmas between the managerial and academic perspectives, which have been part of my intellectual and actual research practice development during the DBA programme.
- Managerial and organisational implications and ethical considerations, that I faced during the entire DBA research study process.
- Finally, a concluding section written right before the end of the course, that summarises the overall learning experience gained from studying at this higher educational level.

From the beginning of the course, a surprise emerged. The course leaders told us that the final document deals with reflection and those students should keep records in order to describe the whole research journey. Greek students are not accustomed to keep a reflective journal, because Greek universities ignore its use and purpose.

As Schön states (1987) surprise is at the heart of any reflective activity. He notes: “Surprise leads to reflection within an action-present. Reflection is at least in some measure

conscious, although it need not occur in the medium of words. We consider both the unexpected event and the knowing-in-action that led up to it, asking ourselves, as it were, “What is this?” and, at the same time, “How have I been thinking about it?” Our thought turns back on the surprising phenomenon and, at the same time, back on itself.” (1987, p.28)

Suddenly, I wondered how important it was to keep records, what was the purpose of keeping notes and finally what was the reflective journal. So, I started to read in order to find answers to these questions. According to Cryer (2000, p.97) “it is crucially important for all students, irrespective of the nature and level of their research, to keep full and detailed records. How to do so is a matter of personal preference, guided by the norms of the field of study ... and the requirements of the supervisor or department.”

At the end of this story, I can admit that keeping records enabled me:

- To document interactions with my supervisor.
- To preserve information that I collected for later processing.
- To keep on track and to suggest ways of improving my time management.
- To provide ideas for future directions of the work.
- To provide information for setting targets, possibly including provisional dates and planning schedules (Cryer, 2000, p.97-98).

So it seemed to me that the most obvious way of keeping records is logbooks or diaries. From my point of view, a reflective journal, sometimes called a learning log, was a personal record of my learning emanating from my research study activities and experiences. It was a space where I could record and reflect upon my observations and responses to situations, which could be used later to explore and analyse ways of thinking.

Therefore, my reflective journal was a means to reflect on my learning and actual research experiences in different ways. It was used to:

- Record the development of my ideas and insights including concepts, ideas and main points from experience and theory.

- Reflect upon the subject content and personal experiences as a means to increase my understanding.
- Analyse my own learning in and for self-development.

More specifically, the journal recorded such things as:

- What I did, and where, how and why I did it.
- What I read, what data I collected, how I analysed it and what the outcomes were.
- Particular surprises, thoughts, feelings, achievements, supervisors' reactions and comments.
- Anything else that was influencing me.

I kept this reflective journal as a memory aid to learn documentation, and as a method of problem-solving to better understand myself (issues of “what am I for?” at work), and to provide a way for me to focus on reactions, that I might want to think about, before expressing them verbally.

In the following sections, I provide the decisions made about the programme that seemed likely to be most suitable for me and identify the challenges and problems that, I faced during the whole process. I also explain in what ways the course has affected my way of thinking, as well as the changes that occurred in my views on research methodology.

I discuss my reflection activities to explore my experiences and situations from a personal perspective in order to lead to a new understanding and knowledge. Then, I place emphasis on the learning process and examine the relationship of the reflective process and the learning experience.

Furthermore, I reflect on the implications that my research might have for me, as well as for the (ISO 9000) quality management systems' research discipline and business topic. Moreover, I present the benefits that, this study might have for business managers in Greek economy and business environment, the Greek agricultural sector as a whole and more specifically the Greek agricultural co-operatives' business sub-sector.

Finally, I present the emotional aspect of this research and learning process and my feelings as a business researcher and manager in terms of my familiar, personal and professional life roles, obligations and problems encountered.

Generally speaking, this paper explores these issues and questions, looking back over the adopted process of the past five years of undertaking this course, drawing together some of my reflections within the conducted previous five documents of my DBA research project.

In other words, this journal is used to reflect *on*, *in* and *for* action, giving rise to questions such as: what happened? (Reflecting on actions); why did it happen? (Reflecting in actions); and what can be learnt from this for future actions? (Reflecting for actions).

2. EXPLORING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DOCTORAL STUDY

In preparing this document, I have been thinking a great deal about how I started down the researcher path and what has influenced my development since then. Since my previously undertaken training in research, i.e. my MBA degree at Plymouth Business School, I was thinking of ways to fulfill a lifelong aim: to undertake doctoral study.

I had already been a junior, middle and senior sales and marketing officer in the Greek business environment for almost ten years and was looking for motives and reasons for doing a PhD. I was already aware that PhD programs are characterised by and based on the independence and the persistence of the researcher.

As a manager looking for a doctoral program that would be professionally oriented, I needed a course with a target to meet the needs of professionals seeking to extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding of contemporary management and business issues.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of this program would be the development of my appropriate skills in research processes and enquiry and to carry out research aiming at contributing to professional knowledge and practice.

When I saw in a Greek newspaper advertisement that, Athens Graduate School of Management (AGSM) offers a doctorate distance-learning, part-time program in the field of Business Administration (DBA), which is in direct cooperation with the Nottingham Trent University / Nottingham Business School, I thought: “this is a good opportunity to materialise my goal”.

I preferred this program, because in my opinion it is primarily designed to enable a significant contribution to the enhancement of professional practice in the business area, through the application and development of theoretical frameworks. I said that this may be contrasted with the PhD, which places more emphasis on the development of new knowledge and theoretical perspectives.

My last question was answered by the course leader Professor Colin Fisher during the last interview for becoming a DBA student. He assured me that the DBA is a professional practice doctorate and is concerned with researching real business and managerial issues via the critical review and systematic application of appropriate theories and research approaches to professional practice.

Therefore, a research-taught oriented doctoral programme could be seen as a more appropriate vehicle for my academic and professional development, than the traditional PhD.

So, the day I received the letter of acceptance of my candidature from the university, I was really satisfied. I was now an official DBA student. I had long wanted to further my education and to proceed to the doctorate level, but all kinds of obligations (family health issues, professional needs) had held me back for quite a long time after finishing my MBA course. Nevertheless, I had the opportunity to achieve it now.

Thinking of undertaking doctoral study, it is important to examine my motives before going ahead. The three main factors for me completing a DBA research study was for:

- my own educational and professional learning,
- research practice in terms of business experience improvement, and consequently
- my own professional advancement, as a result of the two aforementioned goals.

Being more explicit, the first main reason was an intellectual one: developing a trained personality; satisfying intellectual curiosity; improving my business research competence; experiencing another British academic community and learning environment; being able to contribute to business knowledge and managerial practice.

Secondly, I decided to undertake this doctoral research, because I was interested in the business topic, since it is a part of my professional engagement's business field.

My professional engagement and the resulting experience, which I gained as:

a) Sales and Marketing manager responsible for the strategic development and overseas expansion of an esteemed Greek international group of companies,

b) Project manager of the leader private company engaged in the agricultural seeds production and trading and then on,
c) Commercial manager of a well-known Union of Greek agro-coops being responsible for the accounts of big companies in the food industry and the Union's commercial and business development,
have made me familiar with and alert to the business operations, managerial practices and operational needs and, most importantly, the way of thinking of corporate stakeholders in these aforementioned various business sectors.

In the Greek agro-coops' organisational context and setting, as well as operational framework and practice, I soon realised that the adopted, introduced and developed quality management systems were quite neglected and rather "mechanically" deployed and used, when they came to their business and management agenda.

Quality management strategy, business practices and policies, which were normally used in other business sectors were barely known and moreover practiced in the Greek agro-coops' business sub-sector and by its corporate entities' (key) stakeholders.

Therefore, the need for thorough information and a deeper knowledge of this business sector's companies' know-how, concerning these quality management systems' optimal management, development and purpose of use, were more than obvious to me.

As Hammersley (2000) argues, research in a broad sense is an activity carried out by all of us, when we are faced with a problem, whose solution seems to depend on obtaining accurate, deep and thorough information.

The third reason was related to the anticipated career advancement and "exploitation-use" of my business competency and "potential". Then, I was a middle level manager, who was aspiring to more senior posts in the same and/or other business sectors.

Therefore, I focused on the development of advanced business practices and conceptual frameworks, as well as, managerial competencies required by the corporate senior executives within the business fields and contexts of strategic business development and

organisational change management, as well as management systems - especially ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems' - implementation process and use purpose.

This is the underlying reason my DBA main research topic and working hypothesis contain respectively the aforementioned business concepts and fields, as these are represented in the phrase: "strategic business development and organisational change management via ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use".

My main conclusion in terms of the career focus of the DBA is that, whereas the traditional PhD is intended to develop professional researchers, the DBA is designed to provide the business community with researching professionals and/or "management practitioners".

Thus, based on the above acknowledgement, as well as my will, persistence and determination to achieve this educational and business goal, the good health and the right sort of interpersonal support from my family, my active engagement in this business research field started.

When I first began my DBA course, I had not arrived at the final selection of the research topic. I was just thinking about the broader area under investigation, which was strategic management in the Greek agro-coops' business sector.

Initially, I had thought of two topics for my doctoral research study/project:

- a. Organisational change and strategic business development, as an emergent and absolutely required business method, for the Greek agro-coops' business survival and growth.
- b. The acknowledgement and use in practice of ISO 9000 QMS, by the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders, as a strategic corporate business resource and management system for the Greek agro-coops achieving the aforementioned aims.

But first of all, I needed to ensure that, these proposed research topics would be of value and interest to the supervisor and were appropriate for research at the level, for which I was registered. In other words, I expected the university to accept a topic that would relate

closely to my own current field of professional practice and previous business background and experience.

As regards the first topic, I was motivated by the identified and stated need, that, the Greek agro-coops have to proceed to the accomplishment of a successful strategic change process. This could be achieved, as suggested by a fair number of writers, by implementing more effectively and using more efficiently any adopted and developed (quality) management system - the ISO 9000 QMS, too. The final aim is to improve their organisational performance and consequently their business state.

Concerning the second topic, my initial idea was to investigate if the Greek agro-coops' key stakeholders, that is directors and senior managers, had acknowledged the use of ISO 9000 QMS as a strategic resource-competence or at least as a management system-tool for auditing properly the internal business operations and processes.

As theory and previous researches' findings (conducted in other business sectors and in other countries) state, the ultimate goal of such an implementation process and use purpose approach, that is actual business practice, would be enjoying improved achieving improved business processes that could contribute to the improvement of the corporate business performance.

Therefore, anyone could hypothesise that, if such an approach was adopted by the key stakeholders of any corporation, it could be an important means for them achieving their required strategic business development and optimal organisational change management. Consequently, the ultimate result of such a business approach and actual management practice would be the upgrading of the corporate - the agro-coops', too - business status and financial position, as theory and evidence from practice have proven (at least, in a fair degree).

As a result, my proposed research topic was a combination of the two above presented ones. It emanated by the identified and stated need to come up with an answer to the aforementioned business problem, that the Greek agro-coops are facing.

I found the proposed combination of the two initial ones as being the main research topic, more interesting in terms of business research, because I believed that the underlying reasons for conducting such a business research exist in a fair number of enterprises in both the private and public sector in Greece.

The root cause of such a belief is that, it incorporated elements of the following business fields and contexts: the Greek agro-coops and the Quality concepts and topics, plus the interrelated sub-topics of business process improvement and organisational change management.

Therefore, I believed that its research findings could be broadly implemented and used in both the private and public sector in Greece, as valid and reliable managerial recommendations.

The DBA final thesis' research study is a qualitative, case study method based and in-depth interview driven one, as it was the research study conducted in a previous stage of the entire DBA research project and presented in Document three. The main research tool is and was respectively semi-structured interviews, consisted mainly by semi-structured questions and a few open ones. The research questionnaire was influenced by the:

- current literature and its critical review,
- findings of other similar research studies conducted in other business sectors,
- research findings of the DBA previous qualitative research study and of the quantitative one (this fact regards the final thesis) and finally
- the researcher's professional experience, as well as his reflective experience gained gradually by the research process itself and the resulting findings, as these were experienced during each research stage of the entire DBA research project.

The quantitative study of the entire DBA project was a survey based positivist research, which used as research instrument a semi-structured questionnaire, which was also based on and influenced by the aforementioned factors.

Then, I thought of thoroughly investigating and critically evaluating both the current, as well as the required business framework, that could enable the Greek agro-coops' stakeholders proceed to the proper management and development of ISO 9000 QMS.

In pursuit of the aforementioned identified DBA research studies' main research problem, as well as main research aim undertaken, I focused mainly on critically examining the Greek agro-coops' (key) stakeholders' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes, and consequently their actual business behaviour and practice, in terms of ISO 9000 QMS' operational management, decision making process and strategic development.

The ultimate goal was to thoroughly investigate and critically evaluate the current manner and consequently business status of ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' Unions' business sector.

As a concluding remark, I have to state that, the main aim of the entire DBA research project was also to critically investigate, identify and evaluate the most important drivers and constraints that affect the effective and efficient manner of corporate ISO 9000 QMS' implementation and use.

Because the identification and critical evaluation of the key business factors/KBF, that might influence the corporate stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and practices in terms of the ISO 9000 QMS' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector, could become an important element that would enable such a business research in other business sectors.

Thus, it could render indirectly to this DBA research study findings a fair degree of validity, reliability and consistency. In that way, these research findings could be generalised across other business sectors and in their relevant corporate entities.

3. THE REFLECTION PROCESS

There are many definitions in the literature of reflection. Most however agree that, it is an active, conscious process. Schön, in his seminal books, *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987), presents a model for reflective practice and the education of reflective practitioners.

Schön's great contribution was to bring "reflection" into the centre of an understanding of what professionals do. Schön, in his work (1987), identifies two types of reflection; these are reflection-in-action ("thinking on our feet") and reflection-on-action ("retrospective thinking").

He suggests that, reflection is used by practitioners when they encounter situations that are unique, and when individuals may not be able to apply known theories or techniques previously learnt through formal education.

From my point of view, reflection is initiated when the individual practitioner encounters some problematic aspect of practice and attempts to make sense of it. As far as I remember, when I was faced with a problem during the course, I worked through it instinctively and, being based on previous similar experiences, I tried and tested out various possible solutions, until I resolved the issue.

I usually worked through the problem using a mixture of previous experience and actual practice. I think, I mostly learned by the exercised practice, and the knowledge was gained not only in the midst of action itself, but also by reflecting unconsciously on action after the event.

Schön (1987) proposed that, this type of problem-solving action was an intuitive rejection of the textbook approach that effective practitioners had been taught in their professional training. He termed this formalised approach "espoused theory", against the professionals' theories-in-use or tacit theories of action.

He proposed that by evaluating this type of event afterwards -'reflection-on-action'-, professionals enhanced their learning and added to their 'repertoire' of experiences, from

which they could draw in future problem situations. The learning by doing was identified by Schön as an alternative epistemology of practice and is directed against the “technical-rationality” or otherwise positivist epistemology of practice.

The reflective process requires time however, an issue which Schön does not sufficiently address, according to Eraut (1994, in Smith, 2001, p. 12). Eraut argues that, when time is extremely short, decisions have to be rapid and the scope for reflection is extremely limited.

The time element is an issue I encountered and acknowledged in my own practice as a business researcher, where problems arising during the course could not always be satisfactorily resolved in the time available. Nor is it possible to reflect-on-action after the event. In such cases, delay compromises the reflective process and may impact on learning potential for the researcher.

In addition, Usher *et al.* (1997, in Smith, 2001, p.13) are critical of Schön’s model for “neglecting the situatedness of practitioner experience.” Again, with reference to my own research study context, the ability to deal effectively with an interviewee’s lack of understanding of an issue proved to depend on my knowledge of the subject, my repertoire of relevant experiences and my ability to employ appropriate theories-in-use at that juncture.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Schön left an enduring legacy that has had a significant impact on continuing professional education, teacher training programs and adult learning. His main accomplishments consist of: highlighting the importance of practical experience in the learning process; challenging the view that theory is a privileged form of knowledge; and bringing theory and practice together in ways that enrich learning and inform change.

Over the last decade, as people have moved from quantitative research methodologies toward naturalistic inquiry, many new and interesting forms of research have emerged. Variously identified as teacher research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, in Newman,

2000), action research (Winter, 1987; Carr, 1989, in Newman, 2000), reflective practice (Schön, 1983, 1987), at the heart of all of these investigative enterprises has been a common focus on practice-as-inquiry (Newman, 1992, in Newman, 2000).

There are as many variants of practice-as-inquiry as there are people exploring its possibilities. There is no one “right” way of doing action research, of being a practicing researcher, of engaging in critical reflection.

As far as I was concerned, the inquiry began with an effort to solve the problem as initially set. More specifically, the initial main problem was framed as a problem of critically identifying the existence or not of Key Business Factors that affect either positively and/or negatively - acting as drivers and/or constraints, respectively - ISO 9000 QMS’ development and use process in the Greek agro-coops’ business sub-sector.

These identified KBF would have also to be critically investigated and evaluated in terms of their exercised or not influence towards the:

- i) effectiveness and efficiency of ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose, respectively,
- ii) organisational change and strategic business development orientation of ISO 9000 QMS’ implementation process and use purpose in the aforementioned companies.

These aforementioned research aims were depicted in the initial conceptual framework, as well as in each research stage’s relevant one. Then on, they were materialised through a thorough and deep critical investigation, as well as analysis and evaluation of the research findings.

As I perceive it, reflection involves a critical examination of our experiences in order to derive new levels of understanding and determine possible courses of action. It took me time to study this experience and to understand what is under the surface. Nevertheless, the ongoing interactions between thought and action both deepened my understanding and changed my research practices.

Thus, I understand researcher's reflexivity as the capacity of researchers to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry.

Reflexivity requires self-awareness, but it is more than that, because it creates a dynamic process of interaction within and between us and our participants and the data that inform decisions, actions and interpretations at all stages of research. Reflexivity recognises a circulating energy between the contexts of researcher and researched.

As I perceive it, it has to do with our understanding of how we create meaning, how we become ourselves, how we perpetually constitute others and ourselves of the world.

Overall, for me reflexivity means that I am aware of the way, in which research is a co-creation, that the postmodern notion of multiple selves and the influences of selves upon each other make very good sense to me. Something tells me that a part of me might have known something for a very long time, but was not able to put it into words.

We need to be reflexive in research, because everything that happens is constructed by those involved in it. Therefore, not to be reflexive, not to self-examine and not to put that process and its results out there, is to withhold and/or hinder some of the information that exists about the context, which we are examining.

4. THE LEARNING ACTIVITY

4.1 Learning Theory and Practice

My starting point with regard to how to act in situations and problems during the course was to study Argyris and Schön's argument (1974, in Smith, 2001, p.3), that people have mental maps. This involves the way they plan, implement and review their actions. Furthermore, they assert that, it is these maps that guide people's actions, rather than the theories they explicitly espouse.

These authors have made a significant contribution to pragmatic learning theory (following in the line of Dewey, 1933; Lewin, 1948, 1951; and Kolb, 1984, in Smith, 2001). First, by introducing the term "theories of action", where there are two contrasting theories, the theories-in-use or tacit theory, and the espoused theory.

The former can be described as those theories (assumptions about self, others and environment) that are implicit in what we do as practitioners and managers. On the other hand, the latter ones can be presented as those behaviours that we use to convey what we do or what we would like others to think we do.

For example, during the interview process, some interviewees avoided or cancelled the already scheduled meeting with me by saying that "a crisis had risen with one of our clients". The theory-in-use might be quite different. They may have become bored or tired of their work, and for this reason they wanted to avoid our meeting and felt that an excuse would bring welcome relief.

To fully appreciate theory-in-use, Argyris and Schön (1974, in Smith, 2001) developed a model that initially looked to three elements: governing variables, action strategies and consequences. Where the consequences of the strategy used are what the person wanted, then the theory-in-use is confirmed. When they may not match, or work against the person's governing values, then the authors suggested two responses: single-loop and double-loop learning.

Single-loop learning seems to manifest itself when goals, values, frameworks and, to a significant extent, strategies are taken for granted. Any reflection is directed toward making the strategy more effective. Double-loop learning, in contrast, involves questioning the governing variables themselves and the role of the framing and learning systems which underlie actual goals and strategies.

In other words, unlike Kolb's experiential learning curve (above), where one had to make a mistake and reflect upon it - that is, learn by trial and error - it is now possible, thanks to Argyris and Schön's conceptualisation, to learn by simply reflecting critically upon the theory-in-action. It is no longer necessary to go through the entire learning circle, in order to develop the theory further. It is sufficient to readjust the theory through double-loop learning. This significant development had important implications for me, because it helped me as a manager or professional to reflect upon my theories-in-action.

4.2 The Process of Learning

The process of learning that takes place within human beings and between human beings and their environments is systemic (Senge et al., 1994). Our bodies, families, societies and our universe form "an ecology" / a network of complex systems and sub-systems, all of which interact and mutually influence each other. It is not possible to completely isolate any part of the system from the rest of the system. Learning is state-dependent. It involves the whole person, feelings, as well as intellect.

This is the reason I think that, my learning was more likely to be effective, because I felt no external threats, and there was a climate of support, commitment, enjoyment and imagination. Table 1 shows a sample of my reflections as part of my reflective learning activity. The reflections have been grouped into three categories, which I express more colloquially.

TABLE 1: THE REFLECTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITYLearning is an emotional activity

“It’s a painful experience, but at the end there is a real sense of achievement.”

“The things I’d say about learning are the things I’d say about a love affair: fun, stimulating, crucial, painful, rewarding, passion.”

“I was on an emotional roller coaster-good one day, bad the next.”

Learning about learning

“I think I’ve learned how to learn. I get to a level of anxiety and arousal; I ask lots of people, lots of questions, dip into books (the anxious part of me is getting information). This leads on to assimilation, sorting it out. Then I get a message from within to get on and so I write.”

“I’ve discovered I can learn from me, not just from books.”

“My learning is the breadth of me; the broader you are the more you have come to know.”

“I’ve found new routes into my head-rich pictures, stories, collages, mind map.”

Learning about the process of reflection

“It has not been an easy piece of work to do. I usually keep things in elephant-sized pieces; putting them all together is painful.”

“The time out having cups of tea is when I reflect. I used to feel guilty, but it’s not just cups of tea: you need to stop and think about what is happening.”

“Learning comes out of the blue.”

“Better late than never.” I was finally at the point where I could study a chosen subject that would be of great professional and personal interest to me, and I was all ready to be faced with this new challenge.”

4.3 Learning Styles

In his classic book, *The Design of Inquiring Systems*, C. West Churchman (1971, in Kienholz, 1999) identified five traditions of inquiry basic to Western philosophy ascribed to Hegel, Kant, Singer, Leibniz and Locke. These traditions were later operationalised as inquiry modes by Mitroff and Pondy (1974, in Kienholz, 1999, p.2) and others, and were then applied to be used in situationally appropriate ways by agencies in public policy analysis and decision-making.

These inquiring systems are: the Synthesist (Hegel), the Idealist (Kant), the Pragmatist (Singer), the Analyst (Leibniz) and the Realist (Locke). Kienholz (1999, p.8) summarises how the five inquiring systems apply to the five disciplines of the learning organisation, as they have been described by Senge et al. (1994, pp.6-7) in his seminal book, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building A learning Organization*.

These disciplines are: Systems Thinking, Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Building Shared Vision and Team Learning. Senge et al. (1994, p.7) point out that, by understanding and being aware of one's own relative preference for each of these aforementioned five major inquiring systems, organisational members have a greater awareness and understanding of the way in which they, individually and collectively, go about gathering data, asking questions, solving problems and making decisions.

As regards my learning style, I believe that there is no right or wrong. It is a matter of personal preference, dictated by the purpose behind the task. However, during this nearly five-year period, I realised that my work could be made much more efficient by using a repertoire of learning styles that could be called on according to the situation. The approaches I preferred to use allowed me time to mull things over and to develop and improve my thinking. For this reason, I prefer to think in two learning styles in combination.

Specifically, I selected the strategy that brings together the idealist mode of inquiry, which assumes that there is not only one way to define a problem, but that there are multiple realities that differ from inductive or deductive inquiring systems; and the pragmatist mode of inquiry, which relies on “facts” and expert opinion, seeks solutions that meet current needs, is serious about getting concrete results, acts with efficiency and correction and prefers data over theory.

In practical terms, I am focusing on seeking ideal solutions maintaining an ideal goal, without leaving the reality. This theory, according to Nonaka (1995), is referred to as ‘Idealistic Pragmatism’ and describes the way in which I actually go about gathering, acquiring and sharing information and how the whole field of knowledge acquisition, creation, sharing and management can be better informed through an inquiring systems approach. This theory leads to the highest goal, enabling us to overcome our restrictions and change our mental models from the ‘either or’ logic to the logic of ‘both and more’. This way is a dialectical form of learning and it is ‘my own way’.

Senge et al., (1994, pp. 235-293, Chapter for Mental Models) identify reflection and inquiry as the two types of skills central to this work of mental models, that can explain why two people can observe the same event and react it or describe it differently. One of the more popular mental models used by Senge et al. (1994, pp. 246-252) is referred to as the “Left-Hand Column”, which is described in the next paragraph.

4.4 The Learning Framework

The beginning is always hard, even when the subject is already chosen. Too many thoughts, too many paths to take and the danger of getting lost are always there. Sorting out the ideas and putting them in order would prove to be a very difficult task. At that point, there are too many perspectives to look into a matter, and this can be confusing for the researcher. The safe way to proceed is to set a map with the key ideas.

I therefore considered it may be beneficial to summarise the framework by which the chosen action research process to be adopted may be represented, bringing together ideas discussed on the previous pages and summarising the tools and processes actually to be employed. Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991) offer a useful tool to support learning (or what the authors describe as “Self-Organised Learning”), which can be employed in the current context, i.e. strategic and operational quality and process management, change management, real estate management etc. This may be most clearly summarised as follows: Purpose > Strategy > Outcomes > Review (P-S-O-R)

The authors stress that purpose cannot be a ‘once-and-for-all’ activity, and that exact purposes cannot be declared fully in advance: they will necessarily be provisional and possibly require updating. In order to be flexible and innovative, the authors argue, we must vary our strategies appropriately, and outcomes must be evaluated critically. Review involves appraisal of the whole learning process, enabling the learner to be reflective and analytical about personal strengths and weaknesses, most likely resulting in the suggestion of new purposes and repetition of the whole process, thus, endowing it with a cyclical nature.

Thus, I identified my (provisional) purpose as to investigate the phenomenon of ISO 9000 QMS’ management, development process and use purpose in the Greek business context, or, more specifically, in the Greek agro-coops’ Unions’ business sector. I had located a series of possible strategies to do this, such as reviewing some key texts in the associated body of literature on this topic, examining important methodological concepts such as phenomenology and inductive-reasoning and, in order to gather and analyse my evidence, rejected the traditional scientific method in favour of a personally more meaningful new paradigm action research approach, employing qualitative research tools.

The review stage would thus comprise appraisal of the whole process, relating outcome to purpose, possible revisions in purpose, strategy and outcomes, and the potential regeneration of the P-S-O-R process again with new, changed purposes.

This process is based on Senge’s mental model of “Left-Hand Column”. It consists of two columns, where the “Right-Hand Column” contains the record of what you actually said and the “Left-Hand Column” records what you were actually thinking in the process of resolving a difficult problem. The purpose of this model is to make us aware of the tacit assumptions which govern our conversations and block our purpose in real-life situations, and to provide for a way of talking about those tacit assumptions more effectively (Senge et al., 1994, p. 30 and pp. 246-252).

The process, as perceived at this point, can be summarised in Table 2:

TABLE 2: ‘P-S-O-R’ FRAMEWORK

	<i>What is my purpose?</i>	<i>What actually was my purpose?</i>	<i>Describe essential differences</i>
Purpose	To investigate ISO 9000 QMS’ business status and manner of implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops’ Unions’ business sector		
	<i>What actions shall I take?</i>	<i>What did I do?</i>	<i>Differences</i>
Strategy	Literature review, interview managers, does qualitative analysis, make managerial recommendations, keep reflective log		
	<i>How shall I judge my success?</i>	<i>How well did I do?</i>	<i>Differences</i>
Outcomes/Review	More “enlightened” views		

5. THE INTELLECTUAL / LEARNING PROCESS' ADVENTURE

5.1 The Development of The Research Study

As outlined above, I proposed to conduct my DBA research study within my own wider working environment, that is the Greek agro-coops' Unions' business sector. I initially needed to identify a means of gathering data, and to keep the research within manageable limits, as time and resources were both limited. I already had several themes in mind, such as responses, follow-up ideas, motives, feelings, which I wished to explore, and realised that I wanted my potential respondents to express themselves at some length and in some depth, focusing on these themes.

Questionnaires as a means of data gathering in this instance would obviously be unsatisfactory, as they are generally used to gather large amounts of simple non-contentious information, with no opportunity to probe. The way in which a response is made (the tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation etc.) can provide information that a written response would conceal. Questionnaire responses have to be taken at face value, but a response in an interview can be developed and clarified.

Having decided the most appropriate format for gathering data would be the interview, a decision concerning which type of interview had to be made. A structured interview format would not be satisfactory insofar as far more than simple "yes/no" answers were required, and time constraints made the unstructured interview difficult - neither I nor my proposed respondents could afford perhaps two to three hours per interview, and I did not feel sufficiently skilled in the necessary techniques for this style of interview.

The choice was therefore narrowed down to the semi-structured form of interview, and I allowed respondents to express themselves at some length, but offered enough structure to prevent aimless rambling.

Having identified research sample and participants, as well as manner, means and instruments of data-gathering, I next had to identify themes for my semi-structured

interview. Having conducted a reasonably extensive critical literature review, I had many research areas I could focus on during such an interview.

Nevertheless, in consideration of my interviewees' professional position and recognising the constraints of time and the possibility of "interview fatigue", I decided to thoroughly examine, analyse and critically evaluate the manner and business nature of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems' implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops' Unions for and by:

- critically identifying, analysing and evaluating the key business factors influencing these Quality Management Systems' effective implementation process and efficient use purpose in the aforementioned business environment.
- investigating and critically evaluating their key stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes and actual practice concerning ISO 9000 QMS' ability, role and degree of contribution in the development and sustainable application of improved business processes aiming at organisational performance improvement, and successful strategic business development and organisational change process, and

As a result of the above mentioned main research aim, the following working hypothesis was examined and tested throughout the whole DBA research project and the final thesis' research study respectively:

ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems are considered by the Greek agro-coops (and their key stakeholders) as an organisational change management tool, that is effectively implemented and efficiently used for achieving improved business processes and organisational performance, despite their existing organisational, behavioral and operational settings and arrangements, that might affect and impair their business performance and consequently might influence these systems' effective implementation process and efficient use.

As a conclusion of the aforementioned analysis, I adopted and investigated the following set of specific research objectives throughout the entire DBA research project and the previous research studies, as well as the final thesis' qualitative research process.

More specifically, these were the following:

1. to analyse and critically evaluate the current business status of the ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems in Greek Agro-coops in relation to the agro-coops' current business status, managerial practice and financial position.
2. to investigate the Greek Agro-coops' Key Stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions, as well as their actual practice towards the Quality and Process management business fields and their interrelationship with ISO 9000 QMS' business field.
3. to investigate the Greek Agro-coops' Unions' Key Stakeholders' level of knowledge of and training on ISO 9000 QMSystems' business nature, and i) operational and ii) strategic business properties and these issues' interrelationship with the manner of these QMSystems' implementation process and use purpose.
4. to examine the impact of the agro-coops' Unions' existing operational framework (Decision Making and actual management processes), and organisational context and settings (Corporate Politics, Power relations' structure and Key stakeholders' groups' relations) on ISO 9000 QMS' business status and manner of implementation process and use purpose.

A concluding objective emanating from all the four aforementioned ones is the identification and critical evaluation of the driving and constraining forces influencing the implementation process and use purpose of ISO 9000 QMSystems in the Greek agro-coops' Unions' business sector.

Therefore, a thorough auditing of all the Key Business Factors, that influence the implementation and development process of the ISO 9000 – Quality Assurance and Management Systems in the Greek Agro-coops, was a main task of this Research Process. More specifically, a critical examination, analysis and evaluation of all the Critical Success Factors, which were viewed as the Driving Forces, as well as of the Critical Failure Factors which took the place of the Constraining Forces, that affect and influence the effective implementation and efficient use of ISO 9000 QMS in the Greek Agro-coops' Unions, was conducted.

Having identified this set of specific objectives and the emanating relevant key research themes, I then went on to construct a fair number of anchor questions or “prompts” to use during the proposed semi-structured interview sessions. I also issued printouts of these draft questions to each of my interviewees several days before their proposed interview, to enable them to start thinking about the areas, I would want to discuss during the interview.

Each one reacted positively to this “preliminary informing”, by saying they had devoted to the research issues more thought and time. Therefore, they felt more able to give fuller responses than coming to the interviews with no or very little idea of what was to be discussed, as their majority conceived. I was, after all, looking to obtain a fairly full discussion on the research topics from these respondents, rather than obtaining ‘yes/no’ answers to the questions.

During this period, I was also recording my personal reflections focused around this area and these themes in my personal log/learning journal, trying to make entries after most working days, or at least those working days when I considered something worthy of recording had occurred.

After consultation with the individuals concerned, mutually convenient times and locations were agreed for these interviews, which were to take place over a six month period (at least) and in the interviewees’ corporate premises and offices.

To analyse the interview transcripts, I used the method of analysis that is referred to as coding. Coding is analysis of your research data and at the same time it is an attempt to interpret it very broadly, because in qualitative research analysis, the goal is to begin to focus on the potential meanings of your data.

For the qualitative research purposes it is not the words themselves, but their meaning that matters. As a matter of fact qualitative coding entails the three basic processes of noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena and analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994): “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes are usually attached to chunks of varying size - words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one (e.g. a metaphor).”

The proposed method of creating codes in this study was that of creating a provisional “start list” of codes prior to fieldwork. That list came from the conceptual framework, the list of research questions and the preliminary work the researcher had done in relation to the qualitative research.

The start list contained and was based on the aforementioned key research topics and the process was to take a fair number of transcripts from interviews with the key stakeholders of the agro-coops under research, trying to identify the narratives in terms of these five anchor research themes.

The use of a tape recorder was not recommended and even accepted during the research process conducted in all the research sample Greek agro-coops’ Unions and Confederations of Unions because it was perceived as a means of recording the interviewee’s opinions, attitudes, beliefs and expressed practices. This fact was identified by the greatest majority as a threat, because it could be used against them in the future and even in the current situation by their rivals, business and politics wise.

A part of them were ready to refuse to participate in the research out of fear of giving corporate facts and “secrets”, which being taped could be easily used by competitors and rivals later on. Therefore, they were afraid of being accused of releasing “corporate property and/or valuable know-how”.

As a result, I feared that taping the interview may generate an attitude and stance against the research in process and the researched could either refuse to participate or give false, partial and misleading answers which would have no validity and reliability.

Nevertheless, they were more eager to participate in a research based on in depth interviews, having both open-ended questions and a scheduled list of semi-structured questions, of which they were aware by communicating them the broad aims of the research and by assuring them that they could refuse to answer any question that would seem to them dangerous and/or peculiar.

This process, in itself, was interesting and possibly more reliable, since the interviewees felt free to speak on the interview themes openly. Moreover, as a researcher, I was able to conduct an open conversation and take field notes, as long as it was required, and without him fearing that, the interviewees will stop the interview due to time reasons.

5.2 The Postmodern Approach

The principles that underlay my own thinking as I set out on this study were based on the notions of postmodernism and social constructionism, as well as of realism. I have to admit that although, I initially had a positivist stance and in the research process I adopted an interpretivist stance, I now tend to be a critical realist. I believe that I now see the world from a less narrow point of view, than I used to do. Following this course, I learned for the first time in my life one of the basic tenets of post-modernity: that there is no “right way”. What does seem important is that I describe what it means to me (at this point), and the assumptions upon which my ideas and practices are based.

Furthermore, this study uses also the notion that we are constantly changing and developing our identities, and that they are never fixed. Reality is socially and personally constructed. There is no fixed and unchanging “Truth”. This is the thinking that underpins my own beliefs and I know that what I write today on these matters may modify what I might have written yesterday or will write tomorrow, although I think that some central, less changeable tenets do emerge. Mine, too, is a story of its time.

Therefore, from the interviews' analysis, I produce my version and not "the facts". I point out things that have struck me as significant. But the significance of some things might vary, according to the reader's point of view. From this perspective, the fact that the whole course gave emphasis to the postmodern approach and way of thinking was a pleasant surprise for me. The main reason is that, this approach is inconceivable in Greek universities and hardly, as well as rarely it is followed, recognised and accepted as a credible research practice.

As I now recall, during the literature review, I was reading very much. I spent hours surfing on the Internet for relevant literature. I thus became aware to a large extent of literature relevant to the notions and topics of Quality and Process management fields, as well as in the Change Management business area and the Agricultural cooperatives' business sub-sector.

Reading and evaluating the literature that was related to the main themes of my research topic, was a time-consuming procedure. But it enabled me to start thinking in a different way, and I came to realise aspects that had never crossed my mind until then.

Rather than searching for the best or most authentic answer, the aim was to systematically activate applicable ways of knowing - the possible answers - that respondents can reveal, as diverse and contradictory as they might be. I only set the general parameters for responses. In Silverman's (1993, p.108) terms: "By analyzing how people talk to one another, one is directly gaining access to a cultural universe and its content of moral assumptions."

The procedures for developing the interview guide, carrying out the interviews and analysing the transcripts were highly time-consuming activities. Conducting the interviews was a very tiring procedure, as they required considerable concentration by me, as interviewer-researcher.

It was also difficult for me to select the most useful material out of the rich material produced. In some cases, the interviews corroborated my own assessment of the situation, whilst in others they offered a different interpretation that helped me re-evaluate my

analysis. Each interview was for me like an exploring adventure. I was anxious in the beginning, but in the process each one proved to be a fruitful and beneficial experience.

I further had to overcome the following problems:

- a. In-depth interviews taken from small samples are not good for generalisation about populations.
- b. Interpretative research is not good at coming-up with solutions.

In order to overcome these two aforementioned problems, I followed overwhelmingly the DBA curriculum, which pre-supposes any DBA researcher to carry out a quantitative research study in Document 4.

In that way, I followed a combination of strategies, in order to heighten the certainty that the research questions would be answered to a satisfactory degree.

I decided to use both quantitative and qualitative methods, given that as a professional practitioner and business researcher in the human sciences, who is interested in exploring human experience and relationships, only the former methodology would not suit my purposes.

I am interested in researching the richness, variety and complexity of human beings and do not seek to reduce that in any way. McLeod (2001, p.199) reminds us that: “On the one hand, qualitative research is indeed personal and the promotion and communications of the reflexive awareness of the researcher’s expectations and experiences contribute to the meaningfulness of a research report. On the other hand, the subjectivity of the researcher does not command a privileged position.”

The quantitative research outcomes identified in Document 4 confirmed the findings of the qualitative research conducted and presented in Document 3. So in Document 5 I had to critically assess and if necessary reconfirm the DBA previous research studies’ findings and conclusions.

I had two options, in terms of critically investigating, analysing and evaluating the entire DBA research study’s main aims:

- 1) Conduct quantitative research in a larger number of Greek agro-coops and Unions of them, researching their stakeholders' views, beliefs and stated action.
- 2) Conduct qualitative research in a fair number of Greek Unions of agro-coops and Confederations of Unions of agro-coops, in order to critically investigate and evaluate these key stakeholders' perceptions, behaviour and actual practice, in terms of the DBA main research aims and questions.

By that time, I honestly did not know what to choose. Greek academics are fans of numbers and quantitative techniques, because they are not familiar with interview analysis and qualitative research.

If I have to choose to conduct quantitative research, the results could be generalised on the one hand, but boring and predictable on the other, whereas, qualitative research could provide information concerning the ISO 9000 QMS' management, development and use.

I finally decided to take the risk and proceed with the latter choice. I considered it a risk, because I did not know if this would lead me to an important finding or if, on the contrary, it would prove to be meaningless. I really felt confused. But, it was the only chance I had to make a contribution to knowledge.

This research led to an important finding: the elected members of the BoDs and the managers in the Greek agro-coops' Unions' business sector appear to have a neglectful approach (under-management and/or mismanagement, depending on the case study under research) of the adopted and applied quality management systems.

By the use of a structured survey questionnaire, I could not have investigated this area in-depth, and thus could not have reached such a finding. I consider myself fortunate to have reached such a conclusion.

I have also to admit that by then, I had thought for a moment of also conducting a quantitative research in a fair number of Unions of agro-coops in addition to the chosen qualitative one, which would be the main one.

But at this stage, I realised that my project would need to be less ambitious, if I were to manage it within my time constraints. So I abandoned the idea of distributing survey questionnaires.

If I had had more time available, I would have undertaken quantitative research in order to focus on the concepts under research in the undertaken qualitative research study, in order to maximise the percentage number of the researched agro-Unions and consequently of these agro-Unions' key stakeholders.

In this way, I intended to have extracted research findings that could be easier and better generalised, as being representing a larger number of research population.

Nevertheless, a fair number of Greek Unions of agro-coops' and Confederations of Unions of agro-coops' key stakeholders were thoroughly, deeply and critically researched. In that way, I believe that this research study was rendered by a fair degree of reliability, validity and objectiveness and therefore its results could be considered as being able to become fairly enough generalisable.

6. A PERSONAL / EMOTIONAL ADVENTURE

During our early meetings in Nottingham, I was really impressed by the relationship between researcher and supervisor that our teachers described to us. Greek university professors have a completely different mentality, adopted approach and behaviour, as well as actual practice in terms of business and academic research.

At this point, I have to state the serious problem of not having supervisors, both a Greek and an English one, which I faced till the middle at least of the research process. For this reason, I had to carry out the research process-project on my own, especially in the initial stages, where I spent and lost a substantial and valuable amount of research time and energy.

Nevertheless, I concluded with an appropriate and acceptable research “roadmap”, initial conceptual framework, as well as research methodology, methods and instruments, and actual practice for my entire DBA research study and its compiling stages.

I am satisfied and consider myself lucky enough that, the DBA course leader - Professor Colin Fisher understood the serious problem I was facing by then, and decided to undertake unofficially the role of my DBA supervisor, trying to help me guiding my research process to meaningful and researchable paths.

Moreover, a Greek supervisor - Dr. Nickolas Logothetis – was officially appointed (with the aid of AGSM officials) by the middle of my entire DBA research study process. This fact facilitated the satisfactory completion of my DBA project, since his guidance and aid have been proved serious and valuable during the last two and half-year period.

More specifically, I would like to recognise his very positive advice and useful suggestions about methodologies and methods used, as well as the structure of each one of my DBA research studies undertaken in the subsequent stages of the entire DBA project. He is an excellent man and teacher and I owe him a lot, because he was always eager to guide and support me.

Furthermore, I have now to admit that, such a relationship with both my supervisors was and still is a pre-requisite for the optimal completion of my entire DBA project, since during the entire research process, I frequently needed my supervisors' support and guidance. Whenever I needed their help, they were always there, kind, encouraging and supportive.

They were very positive about what I have done. The comments they made concerning things that needed changes and alterations were very much from a position of being critically positive. I felt that all their comments and criticisms were justified, rather than critical for the sake of it – they were constructive.

I think they aided me satisfactorily, because they had a great knowledge of the whole and thus, they could both support me by offering the proper guidelines. Also, I think that they understood my insecurity and tried in a discerning way to put me at ease by starting with a comment about something they liked.

They always proposed realistic ways forward. However, every time I met them, I left his office with contradictory feelings. On the one hand, I was happy because they gave me guidance, provided answers to my questions and always kept me in the right direction. On the other hand, I felt under stress because I was constantly realising that, I had a lot of work to do within a limited period, in order to improve my business research practice and especially my academic writing.

I have to admit and state at this point, that a serious research learning problem of my own - that I now identify - is that, I used to work on my own and exchange feedback with my two supervisors only when each research stage had been completed.

I was in more frequent contact with them when I faced a problem, especially with time constraints, as I was lagging behind from the initial stage of the DBA project, due to the above stated problem of my DBA study supervisors' inexistence at the initial stages of the project.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can see how the stages of a heuristic process had unfolded, and I can make sense of my experiences in a different way.

I would characterise this almost five-year adventure as neither linear, nor coherent, nor on a steady gradient, but unsteady, at times polarised or contradictory, but ultimately a journey with meaning and purpose, even if most of the time I was not sure what that purpose was.

A dilemma that I faced was whether I should move from a managerial perspective, having neat conclusions, to an academic perspective, with confused, broad and unclear conclusions. Thus, I had a constant debate with myself and I made a constant effort to combine the two. I am sure that anyone starting a new project will feel insecure, doubtful and daunted, as well as excited and hopeful, like me.

I conclude by stating that, I have produced this account “all by myself” and in order to be able to do it and meet the deadlines, I had to rely on:

- my persistence in my aim to become a Doctor of Business Administration
- my commitment in hard work and continuous learning,
- my belief in my competence to carry out successfully the DBA project,
- the goodwill and encouragement of my family and
- the valuable support and of my two supervisors and their belief on my ability to fulfill successfully the entire DBA research study project.

I am sitting in my office desk now, surrounded by the books, files and papers I have been using until now and I have a sense of liberation and relaxation. I look forward to starting “living” again with my family, to spending more time with them, to walking near the coast with my wife and enjoying the sea with them.

My family’s support was great, given that I usually had to work late into the night as well as at weekends, always trying to meet the deadlines. In the same spirit, I kept on working, even during the Christmas and Easter holidays, days that are normally considered to belong to the family. Fortunately, they were patient and encouraging. I am grateful to them for everything. In addition, I was not paid by anybody to conduct this research. I am not getting

funds or a grant. I am also doing the research in my own time. In fact everything I did came out of my free time. I do believe in people learning more about things because they want to, not necessarily because it is going to lead to anything.

However, following this course, I had the chance to study interpretative research, which is concerned with meanings and interpretations. These sound to me more logical and at the same time more human and realistic, given that I am occupied with social sciences. I am particularly interested in exploring how people make sense of their world, both influencing, and being influenced by others (Fisher, 2004), since in any working environment, as well as in any social environment, this fact represents a very crucial factor.

Throughout the DBA project, my enthusiasm was sustained, but my interest in the topic grew steadily. I overall tried to create an open and frank relationship with the interviewees, simply because this attitude is in accordance with my character.

Key to this, I think, was the fact that by the use of the interviews, I uncovered those managers' perceptions that are related to sensitive issues. But I was surprised to notice some time later that, by allowing myself to be known and seen by others, I was opening up the possibility of learning more about my topic and myself, and in a greater depth.

In this way, the entire DBA project's research process became a personal exploratory adventure, whose results and findings were very important for my own "self-discovery".

As I recalled in my mind and wrote down these thoughts, I feel that, I had a chance to make sense of my own and other people's experiences in new and different ways (Frank, 1995).

Consequently, I now see things from a quite different perspective. I consider myself in a way more "open-minded" and eager to accept that different viewpoints exist and that all of them are important. Therefore, they deserve to be taken into consideration in any business life, as well as in any real life issue's decision making process and actual practice.

7. PROBLEMS-IMPLICATIONS-CONSIDERATIONS OF RESEARCH

7.1 Problems of Doing Research

Initially, I wanted to explore managers' perceptions as regards the areas involved in the conceptual framework. I had faced the problem of access, a problem that most researchers face when researching in Greece i.e. the participants are usually reluctant to provide information. They avoid opening their hearts and revealing their thoughts to interviewers.

Due to this reluctance and the neglected nature of the topic, research concerning the agro-coops' sub-sector's adopted and applied quality management systems' field is rarely published. At this point, I must also mention that as regards the research conducted in the Greek agro-coops' business sector, the access problem is larger than in any other business sector, due to the idiosyncratic characteristics of the agricultural sector in general and the prevailing business climate of the agro-coops' sub-sector.

Therefore, I had to use my professional identity by stating that I am a colleague of the interviewees and all the direct and/or indirect relations I had with the sub-sector's stakeholders for overcoming this difficulty and being able to conduct an acceptable and meaningful research project, as far as, the entire research process is concerned in terms of: gaining access to a fair number of the population under research, sample construction, validity, reliability and findings importance.

Before starting the DBA course, I believed that doctoral research is mainly related to inspiration and creativity and being able to research vast numbers of research sample populations. I now sincerely believe that, "depth" in business research is as much important as "extent" is, this having to do with the importance attributed to qualitative research.

Moreover, I re-assured that, self-discipline and effective time management concerning routine work are also very important and crucial for the well-completion of any research project. Reading around the subject, reviewing the existing literature, gathering material,

keeping records, writing drafts and then rewriting in the light of my supervisor's feedback and/or if requested so, were also important and time-consuming.

I must also mention that, I took advantage of periods such as Christmas, Easter and the summer holidays, as well as, all the week-ends during these four and half time-period, in order to focus and elaborate on my research. Needless to say, that I have spent numerous sleepless nights thinking about the whole project, reading and writing the various documents.

Furthermore, my initial intention was to conduct quantitative research, because I thought my previous work and academic experience made it easier for me, whereas conducting qualitative research seemed to be much more difficult and an unknown research "path", given that it is not a widely applicable method in Greek universities.

Nevertheless, having the experience of conducting both qualitative and quantitative research in Documents 3 and 4 respectively, I decided to conduct qualitative research in Document 5 among the key stakeholders of a considerable number of Greek agro-Unions and Confederations of them, by the use of in-depth interviews.

My aim was to focus on meanings and try to understand the existing situation and the adjustments that need to be made in the years ahead. Emphasis was given to how Greek agro-coops' Unions' directors/elected members and senior managers interpret and practice very contemporary management and business issues, such as: quality and process management and improvement; change management; strategic business development; decision-making process; corporate politics and power relations' structure and so on.

For this purpose, I had not only recorded what happened, but also recorded the development of a new understanding. Understanding how the meaning-making process unfolds in the interview is as critical as apprehending what is substantively asked and conveyed. A dual interest in the how and what of meaning production goes hand in hand with an appreciation of the constitutive activeness of the interview process.

So, I transcribed the tapes personally in order to remain close enough to the speakers' meanings. Thus, I had the opportunity to pick up on nuances, hesitations, emphasis and all the ways that people add meaning to their words. Furthermore, my professional engagement as a sales and marketing manager involves a lot of travelling. So, I took advantage of these long hours, and while traveling, I was re-thinking the "tale-stories" of the people I had interviewed.

As I was reconsidering the stories contained within the conversations, I was very aware of the impact of gender, culture, education, business experience and the socio-political context of these individuals.

Moreover, I felt becoming involved in their own business reality and social "world" actual experiences and better perceiving how all of these influenced the way people ascribed meaning to their experiences and consequently to their own action.

The above-mentioned created further a feeling of material overload which was due to the huge volume of rich material produced by even a moderate-sized interview. Through writing my analysis (creating themes or finding meanings), and as I began to arrange the interviews on the page, further insights developed that fed into what had gone before and shaped what followed.

After a spell of writing (which was intermittent because ordinary life and its obligations continue to exist), there was space for reflecting again on what had emerged, and further ideas and shapes were formed. I considered it as a continuous learning loop that fed back on itself.

7.2 Academic and Professional Implications

In my case, I naively assumed that producing new knowledge would be the hard part of my DBA and that the methodology would be simply a matter of adopting and following a set of procedures already available in the literature. Similarly, the question of ethics seemed to represent no problem, as I had no intention of cheating or harming anyone. The further I have gone in this DBA process, however, the more I realised that the construction of

knowledge, the methodology used, and ethical considerations are all intimately connected. The DBA has become a journey for me, a search for the research methodology which is capable of allowing me to participate fruitfully in the construction of new knowledge in the field of real estate management in a way which is just and equitable to other participants.

Consequently, I argue that the fact that so far I have seriously adopted, questioned and distanced myself from several distinct schools of thought, should not be seen as a sign of superficiality on my part, but rather as progress along a dimension of awareness of what knowledge is, how meaning is constructed by humans, and what diverse purposes research can serve.

In so doing, I could be said to be aiming to fulfill a fourth objective of the DBA, to raise questions about the meaning of the knowledge being produced or constructed. Because I see the DBA in these terms, I see my own task of making an original and substantial contribution to knowledge as being a larger process than that of undertaking and reporting some process of research, from a supposedly subjective or at least stable viewpoint. For me, the research is much more of a hermeneutic process, with its meaning being rewritten many times along the way, as the whole is continually being re-conceptualised in the light of new learning.

I saw a need to openly report, through a personal diary, relevant aspects of my personal context, such as my beliefs, values, biases and issues. I understood that subjectivity was impossible to avoid and that I should decide how to use it as a feature of the research project itself. Also, as I started to apply my theory of learning to my own research process, I began to see myself as part of the context of knowledge construction and began to adopt a critical, self-reflexive stance in relation to my research, a narrative inquiry research design. Following the DBA course, I came to the conclusion that innovative and non-traditional methodologies that encourage us in research-writing provide us with many opportunities to be creative. When we use all aspects of ourselves in research, including imagination and feelings, the free flow of interactions between all parts can spark creative ideas and their expression.

According to this perception, creative thinking was an essential component in the whole process, since the identification of originality in research depended on it (Cryer, 2000). Talking things over with my DBA colleagues not only provided me with the benefit of their views and ideas, but stimulated my own thinking as well. I tried to keep an open mind and was prepared to hear more than I already knew.

For example, the use of a mind-mental map helped me to decide whether I should proceed to quantitative research or qualitative research in Document 5. The map freed my mind from the constrained and ordered viewpoint from which I saw the issue. It provided me with an overview, which showed at a glance all the components of the issue and the links between them. It also gave me an idea of the potential benefits.

I believe that, the skills I developed during my doctoral research will prove to be invaluable for the rest of my professional life. Given the fact that, I am now working in the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Messinia, as a sales and marketing manager, and central cashier officer, skills like research competency, communication and literacy are important. The first implication is that I improved my writing style to a large extent during the whole process, given that English is not my native language.

Overall, I believe that the DBA has helped me in a broad sense, by providing me with new horizons in my way of thinking. As regards my professional life, I certainly hope that, it will permit me to be also occupied with consulting and lecturing in the fields of quality management systems, and process management and improvement, and organisational change and strategic management (a combination of business and management fields which has limited theoretical knowledge and actual business practice in Greece).

As for me as a practitioner, I had the chance to benefit from business research on the process of reflection-in-action itself. I suppose the greatest gift I have gained from this study is that of helping to bridge the gap between business research and actual management practice. I am the same person, with the same mind and heart, wherever I am. The discipline of research is just that. It helps me to be rigorous, but it does not take over my emotions.

During this almost five-year period, I gradually realised that DBA research has both an academic and a practical purpose. Academically, such a research process should contribute to knowledge and understanding about management. Practically, it should help managers to do their job more effectively and efficiently. Business and management research is about both knowledge and action, but this relationship is not straightforward.

I believe that, it changed me as a person and as a professional and, as I explained earlier, I now see things from a different perspective. But it is difficult to persuade agricultural sector's corporations to adopt reforms and/or to convince their key stakeholders to implement organisational changes corresponding to this business research results.

Nevertheless, I think that, it will be worth writing and publishing articles critically presenting the strategic management factor as the most important for the ISO 9000 QMS' effective implementation and efficient use in the Greek agro-coops' sub-sector, the broader agricultural sector, as well as the food and beverages industry.

Moreover, the identification and critical evaluation of the key business factors, which could act as either drivers and/or constraints of the effective and efficient operational and strategic implementation process and use purpose of the aforementioned Quality Management Systems, could enable the optimal management of organisational change and strategic business development of any corporate entity.

7.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical choices nearly always involve a trade-off and a compromise among competing practices. Nevertheless, during the whole process, I tried to use ethical principles such as respect for human dignity, respect for free and informed consent, respect for vulnerable persons (we ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing about ourselves, we make others vulnerable, but we remain invulnerable), respect for anonymity and confidentiality, respect for justice and inclusiveness, and balancing of harms and benefits.

Being open is also an attempt to balance the power relations between those, whose thoughts and experiences I have used in this study, and myself. Both as a professional and

researcher, I have a guiding principle against manipulating people to achieve my purposes, no matter which those purposes are. It underlies the ethical requirement to obtain the fully informed and freely given consent of participants before conducting research.

The French poststructuralist historian and philosopher, Michel Foucault, focused attention on the ways in which the interweaving effects of power and knowledge shape our understandings of what and whose knowledge is valued (Foucault, 1977/1980, in Coupal, 2005). According to Foucauldian thinking, the ability of practitioner-researchers to derive alternative meanings from situations in which they are immersed cannot be addressed without also considering the effects of power. Research is a political act and the choice of research purposes and methods is tied to both power and knowledge relations.

During the different stages of this research, I realised that, when we enter into relationships with our research participants, it is inevitable that issues of power come into focus and require us to constantly scrutinize and interrogate our own positions, views and behaviours, turning back onto ourselves the same scrupulous lens through which we examine the lives of our participants, always looking for tensions, contradictions and complexities (Olesen, 2000, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Power is a word that often evokes discomfort. If we accept that we are powerful when we write about other people's lives, we can constantly monitor the ethical issues that emerge as the research unfolds.

Thus, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is not balanced, given that the first has greater power to circulate the story through access to outlets, such as publication. In order to minimise this influence, I gave the interview analysis to interviewees in order to ensure that, I would be as close to the truth as possible. So in the end, these themes are mine and do not imply a "Truth".

8. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this document, I have used the metaphor of an exploratory adventure to describe and link my exploration of emergent learning and change, with its implications for personal improvement, change and enlightenment. This resemblance to an exploratory adventure journey has helped bring into being my emergent understanding of knowledge.

In my early career I saw knowledge as fixed, quantifiable and dominantly externally located in academia. This kind of knowledge was a commodity that was accessed to strengthen a particular enterprise or performance. Its integrity rested on reliable empirical investigation.

This intellectual adventure was the means of generating knowledge; it was the means through which I came to know. That knowledge was not fixed; it was fluid, changing with the perspective of each participant possessor. It was embedded in each participant. It had dimensions of ethical deliberation. I had to re-conceptualise my understanding of knowledge and expand my earlier understanding of it to accommodate my findings.

This fact “in Greek agro-coops’ Unions’ stakeholders’ managerial know-how and actual business practice” tended to be related to participants’ experience and the outcome of reflection on the Quality management systems’ - ISO 9000 QMS included - implementation process and use purpose in the Greek agro-coops’ Unions’ business sector. It was a form of personified wisdom, accessed through dialogue. My emerging understanding of this knowledge was also related to my experience and reflection.

I believe my research approach and findings have implications for future research in the: i) strategic mostly, but the operational as well, management of ISO 9000 QMS in both the private and public sectors’ companies, and

ii) these QMSystems’ implementation process and use purpose interrelationship with organisational change management in the Greek agro-coops’ Unions’ business sector.

This form of scholarship was new to me. It is of the post-modern era. This view of knowledge in the strategic context of Quality Management Systems - ISO 9000 QMS

and/or the “new” ISO 22000 QMS - carries implications for the organisational context and settings, as well as operational framework of the future.

I believe that further use of my approach in Quality Management Systems’ implementation process and use purpose will yield further insights. But these insights cannot be accessed unless the process and practice of the researcher changes to accommodate the nature of the new scholarship.

I am certain also that, I have demonstrated one possible pattern of approach for others to consider. I am aware that there are implications for other managers in these discoveries.

I am also aware that - as with all changes - there will be resistance.

The reflective journal provided opportunities for me to explore specific issues in greater depth, link theory to practice, further develop my writing skills, and to read and think in a more critical manner. It allowed analysis of my experience and facilitated learning from the experience. The reflective approach to learning provided a structured opportunity for me to recognise and value those past experiences.

This course encouraged the development of critical thinking, a questioning attitude that leads, potentially, to greater learner autonomy. In addition, it is anticipated that learnt skills promote professional competence by developing the ability to continuously improve what one is doing by reflecting on effectiveness or ineffectiveness of actions taken, and adopting or modifying them to new situations.

Also, throughout this course, I reinforced the integration of theory with practice and enhanced ongoing professional development and life-long learning, regardless of the content that needs to be learnt.

There is no question in my mind that I look at the world through different eyes and, consequently, see different things. This study is only a first step in expressing my understanding about what it means to walk a significantly different path of personal and intellectual development in thinking and practice.

My overall thought about this DBA course and project was that, it is an exciting and powerful, but nevertheless a difficult and lonely journey. I was lucky to enjoy the support of my family, supervisors and colleagues.

In my own perception and belief, the DBA course conferred the following benefits:

- a) It helped me to reflect on and articulate my experience and knowledge. It therefore increased my understanding of my professional practice.
- b) It enabled me to examine habitual ways of thinking and acting that I had taken for granted.
- c) It enabled me to acknowledge my strengths and skills, as well as my weaknesses.
- d) It initiated the process of looking for alternative ways of working professionally and improving my practice.

In addition I believe that, compared to the traditional PhD, the structure of six documents helped me. I had a feeling of progress, and the feedback I received, facilitated the next steps that I had planned. Thus, there was not the same sense of isolation that the PhD candidates experience, as they claimed when I asked them. Every time I submitted a document successfully, I felt encouraged to continue.

In conclusion, I can say that it took me time to become a reflective researcher, moving in and out of research and practice careers. As Schön (1983) points out, the roles of practitioner and researcher have permeable boundaries, and research and practice careers intertwine as a matter of course.

While the relative weight given to reflective research or to practice might vary considerably in the course of a career, one would normally expect practitioners to function on occasion as reflective researchers, and vice versa. This concept constituted for me one of the major benefits of following this course.

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