

How to maintain your ISO 9001:2015-based QMS after certification

Dear Friends,

Implementing the ISO was not an easy task but we finally did it! The certification has been passed successfully!

Now, it might seem that the prime part of the job is done. But, let's not rest on our feats for long because the real job with our Quality Management System (QMS) is about to start.

Once we start maintaining the QMS, we will see that passing the certification was easier compared to all activities required by the standard to be performed. Next year during this time we will have our first surveillance audit and we need to excel ourselves in the activities to be performed.

What happens often is that, companies don't gather the prerequisite information or perform the required activities, and therefore ends up calling the consultant before the surveillance audit to make a fix and help them formally pass the audit. This is only a quick fix and doesn't really bring the company any value except having the certificate for formally complying with the standard.

But, since we have a strong base of documentation, as commented by the auditor Mr. Ziad Algburi, we need to build on it. True, we have completed one round of Plan-Do-Check-Act. But there are several areas which still need further development. The following steps will help us achieve it:

Go from Plan to Do phase

Developing procedures is easier than implementing them. We need to ensure that the procedures are followed. This would mean that we require filling in some additional records and keeping track of activities. But in the end, we will have more data to analyse during the management review and this will help us make decisions based on facts rather than assumptions.

Training and Competence

New activities will definitely require additional training of the employees. HR/QA department will soon be coming up with a framework on how to identify the needs and plan the training along with the requirements to measure training effectiveness.

The systematic approach to competence will help us not only comply with ISO 9001:2015 requirements but also for other processes as well. Measuring training effectiveness will provide us with information on how people are really competent instead of just collecting certificates.

Control of External Providers/Vendors

We already have a well-built Procurement procedure in place. Now the next step would be to ensure all our active vendors are registered in Salesforce. Then all vendors who has been with us for more than one year, irrespective of when we had sent them the New Vendor registration form, has to be re-evaluated. Re-evaluation can be done through salesforce. This is the time to define what you really expect from your supplier, and if they are meeting our standards.

Customer satisfaction

Customer focus, one of the most important principles behind ISO 9001, is demonstrated through monitoring and measuring customer satisfaction. Agreed, it is the customer's perception of the degree to which the customer's requirements have been fulfilled. Yet, we must define how we plan to handle it. In order to construct an effective framework for managing customer satisfaction and complaints, a holistic approach is needed and it should integrate different aspects of customer satisfaction including surveys. QA department in coordination with other departments with come up with a procedure to handle this.

Check and Act phases

Gathering relevant information about the system through auditing/inspection and following the process procedures will enable top management to use the last principle of ISO 9001, and that is evidence-based decision making. A detailed and thorough internal audit will provide additional information not only about the level of compliance, but also about the condition of the entire system. This information will enable the top management to conduct good, value-added management review and make decisions that lead to continual improvement of the system and the company.

We have planned to conduct 2 rounds of internal audits in a year. The first round was conducted by CSA consultants and the second round will start from September. Our trained internal auditors will be doing the audits supported by QA department.

External surveillance audit without stress

Having all these elements of the system in place means having the real QMS, the one that really works for us!