



Integrated Management Systems—ask before you buy

It sounds obvious, particularly in the age of technology where everything seems possible, but do integrated management systems live up to the hype? There are plenty of software vendors making the case for integrated systems but do the costs involved outweigh the benefits.

The real benefit is not in the bringing together of two or three management systems into one system, saving on paperwork and system administration. The benefit must be the impact integration will have on business performance.

The questions to ask:

- ▶ Will integration impact customers positively or negatively?
- ▶ Which systems will be integrated – quality, environment, health & safety, finance, HR?
- ▶ What benefit will the company obtain from an integrated management system? Reduced costs? Improved sales?

There doesn't appear to be demand from customers. Also, it is unlikely that significant cost reductions will be obtained as a result of integration, however, there may be other reasons for integration:

- ▶ eliminate/balance conflicting responsibilities, relationships and objectives
- ▶ harmonise and optimise working practices
- ▶ create consistency
- ▶ improve communication



The availability of software package to handle quality, environmental and H&S documentation is a poor justification for integration.

The real benefit will only come when senior managers see that integration provides the opportunity to review all aspects of the business. The resulting changes in the way the organisation operates can provide validity to, and support the systems integration efforts.

Correction, corrective and preventive actions

One of the most common misunderstandings internal auditors and auditees have is the differences between correction, corrective and preventive actions.

In layman's terms correction is a quick fix of an actual problem, corrective action addresses the root cause of an actual problem and preventive action attempts to prevent a potential problem occurring.

If you want to see whether your internal auditors know the difference between correction and corrective try reviewing a sample of nonconformities which have been closed. You may be surprised to find that a number of actions have been taken as corrective whereas they were correction only. Does it matter? Well if you don't correct (no pun intended) auditor's understanding then nonconformities will persist, and auditees will continue to regard corrections as corrective actions.

Preventive actions are easy to understand when dealing with environmental and/or health & safety management systems. Assessing and managing risk is an essential and specific requirement of these systems. For quality however, there is some confusion, with many people seeing prevention as being the action taken after a problem has occurred i.e. to prevent recurrence. This is not the case; preventive action is needed in the design of products and processes. Typically, failure modes effect analysis (FMEA) is often used in support of preventive actions.

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