



Understanding process effectiveness

One of the major changes to ISO 9001 in 2000 was the introduction of the process approach. The process approach is described in a manner which allows for a wide range of interpretations, particularly in defining the processes of the QMS. This lack of prescription was deliberate; the aim being to link policy and objectives with procedures by the use of processes, without specifying the level of complexity. The result is that some companies have identified as few as 6 processes whilst others have chosen to define 60 or even more.

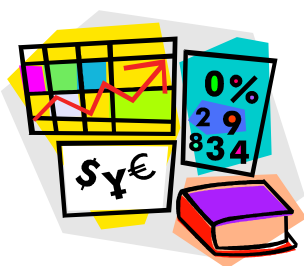


There is no right or wrong way of defining processes, providing that they relate to the scope of the QMS. However, having defined processes the requirement is to monitor and measure processes (clause 8.2.3). The requirement does not say that all processes have to have a measure, it says 'where applicable'. It is difficult to envisage why you would define a process without wishing to measure its performance! The chances are that those organisations which defined high level processes only have probably found it easy to identify meaningful process performance measures, whereas those that defined processes at a more detailed level may encounter some difficulty. Whatever approach was used some, if not all, processes will require a suitable form of measurement

Some key auditing questions

- if all processes have no measures what constitutes quality objectives, and how are they linked to quality policy?
- If a process fails to meet planned results what action is taken?
- If no action taken? Nonconformity against clause 8.2.3?
- If action is taken but results do not improve? Still a nonconformity against 8.2.3?

Will all processes 'demonstrate the ability... to achieve planned results'? It is hardly likely, unless the planned results are so easy to achieve as to make them meaningless. Consequently, as an auditor, you are faced with the task of assessing each process in terms of effectiveness.



The ability to interpret information is a useful asset in an auditor and therefore, it should be possible to find some clues from table, graphs, charts, etc. But the requirement reflects the manner in which performance data is used, that is, when results are not achieved what action is being taken to address the situation. So not meeting the planned results does not constitute a nonconformity, it is failing to analyse the data and take correction or corrective action which is at fault.

Don't

- Make assumptions about how the performance measures are used — ask
- Explain your interpretation of results — let the auditee do that

If delivery performance target is set lower than 100% - is it acceptable to plan for failure to meet customer requirements?

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