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Steps to implementing and certifying a Quality Management System

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The 4 principles of a successful implementation of a Quality Management System

The 4 critical principles that will allow you to successfully implement a Quality Management System in your business are:

1. Keep your system simple and documenting how you are already operating your business;
2. Ensure strong leadership and management commitment to the process;
3. Assign the right person as a system coordinator; and
4. Involve all staff in the process.

When developing your system, it is important to keep in mind that there is no need to re-invent the way that a business operates just because you are implementing a Quality Management System.

Yes there will probably be some changes you will need to introduce in the business, and there may be things that you can improve on, but changing the way you operate is not what you need do.

10 steps for developing and certifying a Quality Management System

Before you embark on developing a Quality Management System, it is essential to ensure that senior management is fully behind the need for a Quality Management System and is committed to supporting the development, implementation, ongoing maintenance and continuous improvement of the system.

Consistently positive communication about the Quality Management System from management to all staff will affect the way staff perceive the new system and will directly influence the success of the system's implementation.

Management commitment is also critical to ensure that adequate time and resources are allocated to development, ongoing maintenance and continuous improvement of the system.

When working with a consultant, fewer resources are required as the consultant should develop the system for you.

If you decide to develop a system yourself these are the steps you will need to follow:

1. Appoint a project leader who has an interest in Quality Management and the authority within the business to drive it forward.

This person should ideally have a leadership / senior management role within the business. This will allow them to ensure that the processes needed for the Quality Management System are established, implemented and maintained and that an awareness of customer requirements throughout the organisation is promoted.

It is vital that they are a good communicator and have the respect of their co-workers.

The coordinator should fully understand the management system and will steer the implementation by assigning tasks to relevant management and staff.

If you decide to develop the system internally this person will also need to be able to unpack the requirements of the standard and apply them to your business.

2. Identify the major functions within the business and list the related processes for each function.

This forms the basis of the structure of your management system which should describe how your business operates.

3. Document each process, identify responsibilities and related records. This includes:

- a. the steps of the process
- b. who is responsible for critical steps of each process
- c. what records are kept to document progress through the process
- d. who completes them and
- e. where and for how long are they stored and who has access to them.

4. Having documented the processes, the procedures need to be reviewed against the standard to ensure all of the requirements have been met.

5. Ask the process manager and staff involved in the process to review the documentation. It can be enlightening to find out how different the way the work is actually performed is from management's perspective of the way it should be performed. Ensure that management review and approve the whole system. Management approval needs to be documented and recorded for the certification auditor.

6. Now the system documentation can be formally released to the staff. The staff will need to be trained in using the documentation and made aware of their responsibilities with regards to the Quality Management System.

7. Everybody should understand the parts of the Quality Management System that are relevant to them. The benefits of the system should be understood and staff should be encouraged to give feedback and suggestions to improve the parts of the system that affect them. Once the system has been successfully implemented an internal audit of the system has to be conducted. The standard indicates what the audit should cover and states that the person conducting the audit should have a clear understanding of:

- a. the standards requirements,
- b. the business's requirements of the Quality Management System and
- c. be objective and impartial.

8. Hold a management review meeting. The meeting has to review the results of the internal audit, any changes to the business, and any changes to the Quality Management System, customer feedback and other areas as indicated by the standard.

9. Engage a certification body to conduct the certification audit. The certification audit is in two stages. The first stage checks that your documentation meets the requirements of the standard. The second

stage checks that the business is following the documented procedures and keeping appropriate records. The stages can be consecutive but may also be separated by a period of time.

Not sure about developing the system by yourself?

If you are not sure whether to develop the system internally or to engage a consultant, here are some things to consider:

1. Time to certification

In our experience clients who develop their own system take much longer to achieve certification. Sometimes up to 2 years. There is usually more than one reason for this, but the main issues are:

- a. The project leader has other duties and the development of the system may not be seen as a high priority. An external consultant is dedicated to the development of your system.
- b. Lack of knowledge – previous involvement with a management system and some knowledge of the standard do not necessarily give you an understanding of how to apply the standard. An experienced consultant has experience in applying the requirements of the standard to hundreds of businesses and has the methodologies and efficiencies to develop and certify a system within a very short period of time.

2. Sense of ownership

The sense of ownership is an important factor in the success of implementation.

When developed internally, and with a high level of management commitment, it is likely that staff will have high level of ownership.

However an experienced consultant has the tools and ability to ensure management commitment and staff engagement with the advantage of being seen as independent.

3. System usability

Our experience shows that systems developed internally tend to be larger in volume. An experienced consultant is able to develop a concise, user friendly system which meets your business needs.

On the other hand, some consultants may impose their own ideas and concepts on your business, which will lead to the system not reflecting how your business operates, which in turn will lead to lack of acceptance of the system in your business.

4. Meeting the requirements of the standard

If you want to develop the system internally you need to ensure that at least the system coordinator has a good understanding of the standard to ensure your system will meet the requirements. There are training programs available.

5. Success in certification

Working with a reputable consultant ensures that the requirements of the standard are met. When auditors audit a system developed by a reputable consultant, the level of trust they place in the system

is high, and most certification bodies therefore tend to shorten the timeframe between stage 1 and stage 2 of certification, sometimes conducting the two stages consecutively.

A consultant also has the experience and knowledge to be able to represent you when either an auditor makes a finding that you believe is unreasonable, or asks you to implement a change that does not meet your business needs.

6. Resources and cost

The issue of cost is one of the more critical factors when considering developing and certifying your business. When engaging a consultant, you should do your research; ask for quotes from different consultants. When comparing quotes, try to evaluate, amongst other things, the following:

- a. Is the consultant certified? Whilst you would expect that all consultants would be certified to ISO 9001, this is not the case, it is not a requirement and in fact most consultants aren't. You may be surprised to find that there are no regulations governing this and anyone can declare themselves to be quality consultants.
- b. Are you dealing with an individual consultant or a company with a team to support your consultant? Unfortunately we have seen cases where clients came to us with un-finished systems, because the consultant was not able to finish the job.
- c. How much experience does your consultant have? Ask how many clients they have successfully certified and how many certification bodies they have worked with.
- d. The level of support you will receive, not just during the development. Many customers don't realise that after certification there are on-going requirements to maintain the system and so the certification.
- e. What level of customer service are you getting from your consultant?
If you wait for days to get a quote, or a reply to your question, or your call returned, this is the service you can expect when your system is being developed and when you need support for years to come.

When a system is developed internally, the business saves spending money on the external consultant. Whilst this is an immediate saving on the bottom line, it does not mean that there are no costs involved, which could make the system more expensive. Here are other costs to consider:

- a. The cost of your staff spending time developing the system rather than focusing on their job.
- b. The cost of the extended interruption to your business – a good consultant can develop the system with minimal interruption to your daily operations.
- c. The cost of delaying certification – there are financial gains to certification ranging from winning tenders to winning client's confidence. Our experience shows that systems developed internally take much longer to reach certification.

- d. The cost of not gaining certification – certification bodies charge by audit days. If the auditor finds that your system does not meet all the requirements; this may mean additional time for the auditor to review the changes, and possibly additional audits. With a consultant that guarantees certification, you have the peace of mind.

ISO Global is a leading Australian Quality consulting firm.

Contact us today to discuss your business needs