Can I get an ISO/IEC 20000-1 Certification with Exclusions?

Introduction

A question that sometimes reaches auditors and members of the committee that develops the ISO/IEC 20000 series of standards is whether an organization can get certified while making exclusions to the requirements of ISO/IEC 20000-1. This question is probably inspired by experiences using ISO 9001, where it is permitted to exclude requirements, based on a good justification.

The short answer to this question is: no, you can’t.

ISO/IEC 20000-1:2018 states in clause 1.2 the following:

“Exclusion of any of the requirements in Clauses 4 to 10 is not acceptable when the organization claims conformity to this document, irrespective of the nature of the organization.”

However, there may be situations where an organization focuses on only a part of the service management lifecycle, for example a network operations centre, while many other aspects of service management are outside the direct scope of this organization. We will illustrate below a couple of cases that are common areas deemed fit for exclusion, but which can be shown as part of a service management system (SMS) when reconsidering their context.

Cases

General

A significant part of the ISO/IEC 20000-1 standard consists of requirements that come from the Harmonized Structure (HS), also known as Annex SL of the ISO Directives (Part 1). This text is common to all management system standards, such as ISO 9001, ISO/IEC 27001 and therefore also ISO/IEC 20000-1. These requirements are generic and there should therefore be no reason to exclude them in any management system. This covers most of clauses 4-7 and 9-10. ISO/IEC 20000-1 has added a small number of requirements to these clauses that we can look at more closely.

Most of the unique requirements in ISO/IEC 20000-1 are therefore in Clause 8, which is about half the text in the standard. In what follows, we will look at a number of requirements that organizations may think could be excluded but that we will show can easily remain included.

Documented information

“We are using an Agile framework and therefore don’t need to produce documents.”

There is a misconception about the need to use documentation in an environment where an Agile framework is used for service development and support. Agile does not demand or even suggest the abandonment of documentation – it only moves the focus from writing extensive service documentation to developing the services themselves in an efficient way. Therefore, the adoption of an Agile mindset does not mean any documentation should be done away with, it merely means looking carefully at what documentation is useful to achieve value for the organization and its customers.
ISO/IEC 20000-15 focuses on the integration of Agile and DevOps frameworks in an SMS. It includes guidance about the documentation requirements of ISO/IEC 20000-1 and how these can be achieved in an agile environment.

“All the required documentation by ISO standards serve no purpose for the services themselves.”

It is true that a certain number of documents are required to be produced by ISO/IEC 20000-1. These include such items as policies, processes, service catalogue and other documents. Basically, documents fall into two categories: those that the standard requires and those that your services require (and in reality, there is a grey area between these two categories).

The documents required by the standard are those that show that your SMS is functioning well. You need to know what the scope of the SMS is, what its objectives are, how to present the status to top management. These documents build the structure of the SMS and provide the framework in which people are working to provide services to your customers. They are also useful for audit purposes (as you should perform at least internal audits and, if you want to be certified, also external audits).

The second category are those documents that are needed to provide a way to consolidate knowledge, make it possible to transfer knowledge and allow for people to fall back on processes and procedures for their day-to-day activities. This category is in fact potentially larger than what ISO/IEC 20000-1 requires. The minimum set of this type of process documentation is in the standard (e.g. a Change management policy, work instructions for service request fulfillment, processes of the organization’s SMS etc.). Remember that documentation is not all lengthy word documents – they can be in any format as long as they contain the minimum information. Procedures and work instructions can be embedded into tools as workflow or event actions.

ISO/IEC 20000-2 Annex A has a list of all documented information required by ISO/IEC 20000-1.

Suppliers

“We don’t use suppliers.”

You do use suppliers. Unless you manufacture your personal computers and office equipment yourself, you always use suppliers to run your business.

The issue here is that in the context of services, “suppliers” are often interpreted as business process outsourcing (BPO) providers or other suppliers that actually run part of the processes or the services. The standard has been written in a way that also captures these BPO-type of suppliers, but the requirements can be applied to all types of suppliers.

In the simple case of using a supplier to provide you with laptops and their operating system and software, the requirements in Clause 8.3.4.1, Management of external suppliers, can be interpreted as follows.

- You need someone that has a working relationship with the laptop provider. This is typically the person who buys the laptops.
- You need a contract with the laptop provider. This can be as simple as the general terms and conditions, including warranty, that you agree with when buying something, even if it is from a website.
- You need to verify the impact of using suppliers on your service level targets. For simple items such as laptops or office desks, there will be little impact, unless of course everything breaks down and the support for the services is made impossible.
- You need to monitor the performance of the external supplier regularly: this is important in the context of warranty of the products supplied. If, as in the previous case, the laptops break down and the supplier is unable to repair them in time, then the support for the services may break down as well and your customers will be impacted.
- Contracts with suppliers should be reviewed regularly: especially when it comes to online services, such as email, but also in the case of warranty and software updates, suppliers may send out updates to their
terms and conditions, which in turn may impact your organization and the way in which it uses the supplier’s products or services.

- Disputes should be managed: this is usually part of standard terms and conditions when purchasing something online and can therefore be handled in that way.

In short, there are suppliers in many different guises other than classic BPO providers. With a little reframing of the requirements in ISO/IEC 20000-1, you can easily apply these requirements to all sorts of suppliers.

Finally, ISO/IEC 20000-1 recognises two other types of suppliers: internal suppliers (a group in the same larger organization that provides services to your organization, so another department that is not certified, but supports your SMS) and customers acting as a supplier (a customer that is at the same time a supplier of products or services to you, such as a company you provide your services to and at the same time supports your SMS by running the change management process). Requirements for these types of suppliers are a somewhat simplified variation of those for external suppliers.

Processes performed outside the scope

“There is another group outside our scope that handles Design and Transition.”

It is possible that the organization that is in scope of the SMS does not perform all activities of ISO/IEC 20000-1. The standard has been designed to present a full view of a service management environment which means that it is required to perform all the activities, including Service design and transition, Release and deployment management and all other processes. If the organization in scope of the SMS does not perform all these, but only focuses on, for example, incident and problem management, then it is still required for that organization to have control over other groups that perform the other activities. Essentially, this means you are using suppliers for those activities, even if they are part of the larger company your organization is part of i.e. an internal supplier. In this case, you need to be able to show that you have control of and an agreement with the other groups to be clear on the requirements of the service and the responsibilities. An interface between your own organization and the supplying group in the form of an operational level agreement or an acceptance process would be a way to do this.

In short, you cannot get certified if you only meet part of the requirements of the standard, but you can use internal or external suppliers to achieve this.

“Technical” aspects

“The service my organization provides are not related to IT, so I cannot meet the more technical requirements.”

ISO/IEC 20000-1 is applicable to all kinds of services, whether they are IT services or IT-enabled services for any industry sector. In some parts of the standard, there are concepts that are derived from IT service management and may need slight reinterpretation to apply them to other sectors. For example:

- Demand management and Capacity management. These two processes are often interpreted as meeting customer demand for bandwidth, data storage or processor power. However, the requirements refer to all kinds of resources needed for the services, including human, technological, financial and information resources.
- Change management and Release and deployment management. These processes manage all kinds of modifications to the service you provide to your customers. Whatever change you want to make to your services needs to be managed in a controlled way. A change may be completely non-technical, such as an update to service desk hours or an increase in staffing. The impact of these changes to the services needs to be assessed using Change management and the change itself needs to be integrated into the existing services in a way that is non-disruptive and can be rolled back if it doesn’t work out as expected (Release and deployment management). These are the roles of Change and Release and deployment management, whether applied to technical or non-technical changes.
- Asset management and Configuration management. These two processes are sometimes considered technical but remember that an asset is anything that is part of the service and has value to an organization. This includes staff, office equipment, buildings, but also non-tangible items such as your brand, reputation and agreements with suppliers. The only requirement related to Asset management is to manage those and make sure they function well to meet the service requirements. For assets that can be configured somehow, such as personal computers, but also cashier desks and even menus, Configuration management makes sure that the configuration is controlled and can be verified to be correct at a later stage.

**Recommendations**

ISO/IEC 20000-1 is a management system standard that can be used to achieve certification for an organization. However, certification is not the only way in which the standard can be used. Especially for organizations starting their journey in providing services, ISO/IEC 20000-1 provides a clear overview of aspects of service management that should be considered to develop and manage the services in an optimal way. Your organization does not need to fulfil all the requirements of the standard from day one – rather, start with what you have today and use the standard to determine what elements to add next. Interpret the requirements in the context of your organization. Implementing an SMS is a journey that goes in stages, not in one big development. Only once you believe you have all elements in place can you consider getting certified based on ISO/IEC 20000-1, if that has value for your organization.

ISO/IEC 20000-5 has guidance on the implementation of an SMS and presents various ways to do this.

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