International Organization for Standardization   International Accreditation Forum

Date: 13 January 2016

ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group
Guidance on:

Checklist

Introduction

This document provides information on the purpose and use of audit checklists to actively support the audit process.

Whilst the document is primarily directed to external auditing organizations (including registration and certification bodies), the information can also equally be used by any organization conducting internal audits.

Need for checklists:

In looking at current auditing standards, ISO 19011 makes reference to "Preparing work documents" in Clause 6.3.4. The following is an extract from this clause:

"The audit team members should collect and review information relevant to their audit assignment and prepare work documents, as necessary, for reference and for recording audit evidence. Such documents may include the following:
- *checklists;*
- *audit sampling plans;*
- *forms for recording information, such as supporting evidence, audit findings and records for meetings.*
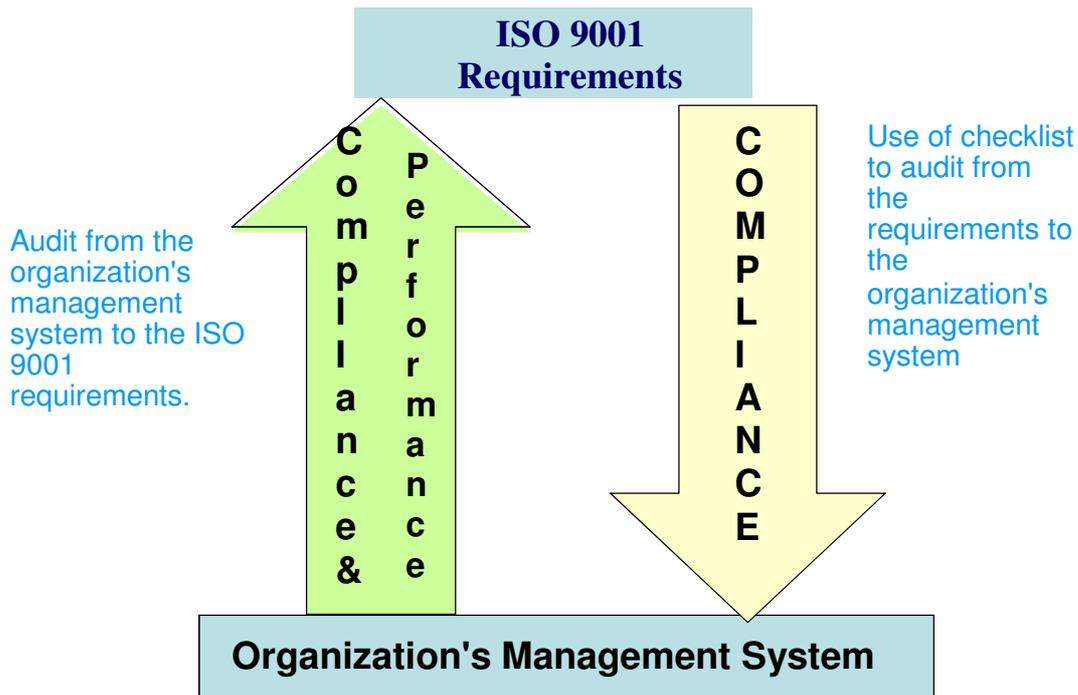
The use of checklists and forms should not restrict the extent of audit activities, which can change as a result of information collected during the audit"

NOTE: Guidance on preparing work documents is given in ISO 19011 Clause B.4.

The use of audit checklists:

Whilst not always required in management system standards, audit checklists are just one tool available from the "auditors toolbox". Many organizations will use them to ensure that the audit at a minimum will address the requirements as defined by the scope of the audit.

An example of an auditing approach is shown below:

ISO 9001 Requirements

Compliance & Performance

COMPLIANCE

Audit from the organization's management system to the ISO 9001 requirements.

Use of checklist to audit from the requirements to the organization's management system

Organization's Management System

It is beneficial to audit from the organization's quality management system up to the requirements. A checklist may be used to ensure that all relevant ISO 9001 requirements are addressed

Advantages:

Literature available in the marketplace notes the following with respect to the use of audit checklists:

1. Checklists if developed for a specific audit and used correctly:
    a. Promote planning for the audit.
    b. Ensure a consistent audit approach.
    c. Act as a sampling plan and time manager.
    d. Serve as a memory aid.
    e. Provide a repository for notes collected during the audit process (audit field notes)
2. Audit checklists need to be developed to provide assistance to the audit process.
3. Auditors need to be trained in the use of a particular checklist and be shown how to use it to obtain maximum information by using good questioning techniques.
4. Checklists should assist an auditor to perform better during the audit process.
5. Checklists help to ensure that an audit is conducted in a systematic and comprehensive manner and that adequate evidence is obtained.
6. Checklists can provide structure and continuity to an audit and can ensure that the audit scope is being followed.
7. Checklists can provide a means of communication and a place to record data for use for future reference.
8. A completed checklist provides objective evidence that the audit was performed.
9. A checklist can provide a record that the QMS was examined.
10. Checklists can be used as an information base for planning future audits.
11. Checklists can be provided to the auditee ahead of the on-site audit.

Disadvantages

In contrast, when audit checklists are not available, or poorly prepared, the following issues/concerns are noted:

1. The checklist can be seen as intimidating to the auditee.
2. The focus of the checklist may be too narrow in scope to identify specific problem areas.
3. Checklists are a tool to aid the auditor, but will be restrictive if used as the auditor's only support mechanism.
4. Checklists should not be a substitute for audit planning.
5. An inexperienced auditor may not be able to clearly communicate what he/she is looking for, if they depend too heavily on a checklist to guide their questions.
6. Poorly prepared checklists can slow down an audit due to duplication and repetition.
7. Generic checklists, which do not reflect the specific organization's management system, may not add any value and may interfere with the audit.
8. Narrow focused checklists minimize unique assessment questions/approach

Conclusion

There are advantages and disadvantages in using audit checklists. It depends on many factors, including customer needs, time and cost restraints, auditor experience and sector scheme requirements. Auditors should assess the value of the checklist as an aid in audit process and consider its use as a functional tool.

For further information on the ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group, please refer to the paper: *Introduction to the ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group*

Feedback from users will be used by the *ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group* to determine whether additional guidance documents should be developed, or if these current ones should be revised.

Comments on the papers or presentations can be sent to the following email address: charles.corrie@bsigroup.com .

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