



International Organization for Standardization



International Accreditation Forum

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ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group **Guidance on:**

ADDED VALUE AUDIT VERSUS CONSULTANCY

1. Introduction

This paper provides guidance on how third party management system audits could add value to an organization without compromising impartiality. Note: Also refer to the ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group paper “Adding value”.

Activities that may be of value for the organization but could lead to potential threats to impartiality, include the provision of advice or suggestions as to how conformity can be achieved and maintained.

The areas where a threat to impartiality is likely to occur are:-

- Activities prior to the certification process (e.g. visits, meetings, correspondence)
- Resolution of nonconformities
- During audit

For the definition of management system consultancy see ISO/IEC 17021-1.

2. Activities prior to the certification process

Activities prior to certification may be of value for the organization since they may help the certification body to provide an optimized certification service in many respects. It is essential, however, that the activities prior to certification are not understood to be a substitute for an internal audit, where the findings can be used by the organization to better prepare for the successive stages of certification.

The certification body may conduct introductory visits which are generally used to determine the needs of the clients and explain the certification process. These visits are generally at the request of the client and can be effective in clarifying the certification process.

The purposes of these visits should therefore be:-

- the commencement of direct communication by the auditors with the organization, as an exchange of documentation might be insufficient to enable the auditors to “feel the pulse” of the situation;
- an understanding of the business and operational processes of the organization is much better than simply reading documents which is often inadequate;
- an explanation of the certification process and possibly answering the auditee’s questions regarding application of the requirements of the standards.

3. Resolution of nonconformities

The correct approach to the handling of nonconformities is for auditors to encourage the auditees to find their own solution, by raising questions and stimulating understanding and awareness, but not providing direct advice as to how problems should be solved.

Organizations would often prefer auditors to provide a quick solution for resolving nonconformities. This may give short-term satisfaction to organizations, but may not result in long-lasting, substantial improvements. Therefore it is recommended that auditors should not provide such quick solutions.

In order to improve and enhance an organization's management system, auditors need to enable the auditees to determine the reason for a nonconformity. The auditees will then be able to conduct their own root cause analysis, decide how to approach the problem and identify an appropriate solution. Such an approach will provide added value to the audit.

4. During Audit

The most significant added value to the audited organization is provided during audits.

Instead of simply looking for formal compliance with the requirements of the standard, auditors should look at the real effectiveness of the management system and find out the benefits that the adoption of the system gives to the organization and to its clients. In other words, they should try to determine whether the management system is applied to maintain and continuously improve the performance of the organization and its ability to deliver the expected outcomes by meeting customer expectations and addressing legal and regulatory requirements. To this purpose, auditors should have real knowledge and understanding of the technical and managerial issues concerning the business and industry sector in which the audited organization operates.

Auditing should be carried out by:-

- examining the organization’s processes;
- discussions with the process owners and other relevant personnel;
- prioritizing the assessment of critical areas and highlighting the associated risks.

Without compromising the impartiality and integrity of the audit, open discussions with people who are primarily responsible for management of the organization could allow the effective use of audit resources and time and may provide major benefits for the organization.

The output of such audits is usually a report which covers the issues going beyond mere compliance with the requirements of the standard and identifies opportunities for business performance improvement in general without offering specific solutions. These reports should be addressed to the top management of the organization.

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.

The other ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group papers and presentations may be downloaded from the web sites:

www.iaf.nu

www.iso.org/tc176/ISO9001AuditingPracticesGroup

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