ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group

Guidance on:

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

An effective internal communication process contributes to the success of any organization's quality management system. Conversely, many problems that occur with an organization's quality management system can often be traced back to **poor** communication.

While ISO 9001, clause 7.4 *Communication* specifies requirements for both external and internal communications, this paper focusses on the auditing of an organization's internal communications.

REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDANCE

There are both stated and implied requirements in ISO 9001 regarding internal communications that are aimed at achieving effective quality management, e.g.:

a) the stated requirements of clauses
   5.2.2 Communicating the quality policy
   7.4   Communication

b) the implied requirements of clauses:
   5.1 Leadership and commitment (which specifies requirements for top management, many of which will require top management communication, e.g. those promoting relevant QMS concepts, such as the process approach, risk based thinking, improvement, and ensuring effectiveness of the QMS).
   9.2.2 d) on reporting the results of internal audits.

Additional guidance on communication can be found in ISO 9004:2018, clause 7.4: "The effective communication of the strategy and policies, with relevant objectives, is essential to support the sustained success of the organization.

Such communication should be meaningful, timely and continual. Communication should include a feedback mechanism and incorporate provisions to proactively address changes in the organization's context.

The organization's communication process should operate both vertically and horizontally and should be tailored to the differing needs of its recipients. For example, the same information can be conveyed in one way to people within the organization and in a different way to interested parties."

It is important to note that this guidance from ISO 9004 is not a requirement, but it does provide additional insights into the relevance of internal communication.

AUDITING INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Some or all the following means of communicating information within the organization should be examined by an auditor:

- Management led communication in work areas
- Team briefings and other meetings, such as those for recognition of achievement
- Notice boards
- E-mail, intranet, and web sites
- Company or in-house magazine/newsletter
- Staff meetings
- Individual notices or letters

The auditor may be able to judge the effectiveness of the organization's internal communication processes by:

- Interviewing top management, to gain their perspective on the internal communication practices and effectiveness.
- getting an overview of the determined structures for internal communications and examining their appropriateness.
- Interviewing persons to determine their awareness of the quality policy, objectives, and management system performance, as well as other relevant QMS concepts.
- Evaluating the organization's corrective action processes, to check if appropriate internal communication takes place.

- Evaluating the relevance and publication date of displayed information (the information that is being communicated is of no value if it is out of date).
- Examining the feedback mechanisms within the organization, e.g. one-to-one interviews or reviews, employee surveys, etc.
- Evaluating training and induction programs within the organization. These programs should contain information on how the quality management system operates.
- Viewing documented information (e.g. minutes of meetings) that should contain items of internal communication.

EVALUATION OF ORGANIZATION'S CONFORMITY TO THE COMMUNICATION REQUIREMENTS OF ISO 9001

It is doubtful if an auditor can determine the effectiveness of the organization's internal communication practices during a single audit session or "time slot". It requires a more comprehensive approach throughout the entire audit but may not need to be included as a separate item in the audit plan. Audit teams should plan for a collaborative review of this issue. Internal communication should be addressed during audits of every process and relevant functions of the organization.

Similarly, it is doubtful if the effectiveness of the organization's internal communication can be determined solely from one source in the organization.

A simplistic approach (by using questions for "yes" and "no" answers) may not be adequate to evaluate the effective implementation of internal communications within an organization.

Compliance with the ISO 9001 requirements on communication should only be determined at the end of the audit, after evaluation of the audit evidence and after reaching consensus with other audit team members.

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.

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www.iaf.nu
https://committee.iso.org/home/tc176/iso-9001-auditing-practices-group.html

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