

Internal Auditing – the most radical change of all?

If you think that internal auditing is no more than following written procedures then think again!!!

Under ISO9001: 2000 the skill requirements of the internal auditor are about to change in a radical manner. Just consider the following:

- Not all requirements can be satisfied by a written procedure
- Process effectiveness, continual improvement and top management commitment have to be assessed
- A greater emphasis is now placed on improvement identified during the internal audit process



Those who have attended internal auditing training courses to the new standard have found the task very demanding. However, if those who have attended Batalas courses are typical, then there is good news, with attendees excited by the prospect of being involved in a genuinely beneficial process of business improvement.

Internal auditors now have to understand and interpret the requirements of the standard. Whilst some may see this as a time consuming activity others identify tremendous benefits. Those who understand the requirements will have a greater insight into good management practice, a cornerstone of the standard, with lasting benefit to the organisation.

Not everything has to be documented!

The new standard requires a minimum of 6 documented procedures to be documented but, except for the smallest organisations, the need to maintain control will dictate far more written procedures. Compliance auditing against the organisation's own procedures will still be a significant feature of the internal audit. However the proportion of this traditional auditing approach in relationship to other factors must change.

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Some requirements need judgement

The requirements of some clauses of the standard are open to interpretation and therefore auditors need to exercise judgement. An example is the requirement for continual improvement. Obviously the standard does not require simultaneous continual improvement in every aspect of the quality management system (QMS). No evidence of continual improvement anywhere within the QMS suggests that the organisation does not meet the requirement. But it is not likely to be a 'black and white' situation, with many grey areas testing the resolve and judgement of the auditor.

Those who have conducted audits to the 2000 standard have noticed an increasing use of observation /improvement reports. This is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the standard. There could, however, be barriers to this approach, particularly from senior managers, who may see quality auditing as an unwelcome intrusion into the way they run the business. This leads to the final point, and that relates to the selection and training of auditors.

The Auditor

The effectiveness of your internal auditors is probably more closely linked to organisation performance than you think!

Involving senior managers

Senior managers, preferably 'top management', need to participate within the audit process. This will have distinct advantages:

1. It will send the message that ISO9001 impacts all areas and levels within the business

2. Senior management commitment will be demonstrated, a vital element of the standard
3. Peer group assessment will be possible, and this will make for more meaningful findings, and in so doing improve the credibility of the audit process
4. Senior managers will gain confidence that the standard, combined with the skills of the auditors, will enhance business performance

Optimising the benefits

Internal auditing can significantly improve staff competence and benefit organisational performance. Those organisations, and quality managers, who take selection and training of audit staff seriously, will reap these benefits. The effectiveness of your internal auditors is probably more closely linked to organisation performance than you think!

What those who have been trained say....

"I thought analysing data, particularly graphs, was a strength, but it is more challenging when you audit in other people's areas"

"I did not think that quality covered so much of the business as it does"

"Even though I think I understand the requirements it's still going to be difficult to assess management commitment"

"It's surprising how easily you accept a process is effective when it clearly isn't"

"Many areas of the standard are open to interpretation and therefore having a broader business background certainly helps you to make judgements"

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+44 (0)1527 525250
enquiries@batalas.co.uk

www.batalas.co.uk