

## Five Step Approach to Management System Improvement

Many organisations have a (quality, OH&S, environmental or other) management system that is certified, or intended to be certified. Unfortunately, all too often the system is seen as too complex, is not understood well enough by staff, has too much overhead to maintain it, is not used well by personnel, does not add true value to the business, is not seen as a part of the business or is simply not maintained adequately as staff have other, more urgent priorities. If any of these or other, similar issues apply to your organisation then this 5 Step approach may offer some value for you.

The 5 Step approach is my developed and proven approach to identifying where a system's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities are and how to best address them. In this edition, I share with you Step 1.

### **Step 1 – Conduct a gap analysis against an appropriate standard or criteria, such as an ISO standard**

The gap analysis needs to be structured, well planned and conducted very objectively against defined criteria. For example; for ISO 9001:2015, 14001:2015 or 45001:2018 the defined criteria can include the requirements for “maintaining” and separately for “retaining documented information”, or for having established processes in place. Such requirements can be found in clause 4.3 Scope (maintain), clause 6.2 Objectives (maintain), clause 7.2 Competence (retain), and clause 7.3 Awareness (ensure that...) etc. Clauses that do not require information to be maintained or retained (such as 4.1 and 4.2) need to be audited carefully and objectively as the evidence of compliance may not be documented and certainly may not all be documented in the one place. If they are not documented at all does not however necessarily mean that they have not been considered and heeded by management. A well run gap analysis can determine this and can follow the audit trail to implementation.

Other criteria can include legal requirements and contractual requirements. Criteria should be broadly considered as that which the organisation is expected to comply with and ultimately be measured against, be it by management, auditors, customers, the government or other.

Against each criteria, identify:

- Gaps - that require addressing to comply with the criteria or standard
- Opportunities - which could add value to the business, simplify or strengthen the system
- Suggestions - possible approaches to take to improve the structure, effectiveness or the reliability of the system

### **Step 2 - Agree actions and priorities**

Not all findings require action, and those that do require action do not all have to be done immediately or at the same time.

Actions to take should include:

- Identify what is / are to be addressed
- A preferred sequence to address them
- A Gantt chart or other project plan to communicate the sequence, the time lines and the accountabilities
- Points along the time line to have those accountable reporting in on their progress, reviewing it as a team and together, ensuring progress.

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It is wise to consider that not all actions should be to “update documented procedures”. In fact, in many cases this is the least effective approach to take. After all, how does a written procedure influence staff on a day to day basis anyway? It is management being on hand, peers and established and maintained culture which influence behaviors the most. Documented procedures should be considered more as a reference for training, auditing against and perhaps for process review. More effective options can (likely) include:

- Changing forms (which in many cases define what the process sequence is and what information is to be collected), be they hard copy or electronic
- Changing or adding prompts and or fields in the computer system
- Changing or enhancing periodic reporting mechanisms such as monthly reports to include progress monitoring on a routine basis, be it until things bed in, or perhaps ongoing.
- Refresher, cross or upskill training.

### Step 3 - Map Business processes

The mapping of business processes is becoming or has become a quite common approach. The practical and important issue is in what way and to what level of detail do we map. Through experience, the most effective approach is to map the flow of information within the business and to use the *Process approach* (a concept which has been a requirement of ISO 9001 since the year 2000), or, as many are aware of, the *Turtle diagram*, in order to identify and clarify the important parameters associated with each process step. Mapping product flow is perhaps a common approach, but it is not sufficient. Mapping information flow and associated parameters identifies the communication channels, the drivers and the dependencies within the organisation. This is what moves products and services – information flow, be it electronic, on paper or verbally.

There are various ways of defining or breaking down the subject areas within a business in order to map them. A most effective way and one which aligns with business thinking and with ISO standards (in particular, to the high-level structure) is to firstly consider the business as comprising the following:

- strategic management – where the business is going, at what pace and how the associated risks and opportunities are managed,
- business activities, i.e. product and service streams, or offerings - what is sold or otherwise provided to the customer (including, sales, design, production and or service provision and after sales activities),
- support activities - those things which must be in place, (such as marketing, training, infrastructure maintenance and IT), in order that personnel can successfully provide the products and services to the customer,
- outsourced and or procured activities – those supplies, services or resources which are bought in, either to resource the business’s activities in providing the products and services or to resource the support activities,
- management system activities – typically internal auditing, management review and perhaps documentation management if it is not already addressed in one of the other categories above.

Utilizing the *Process approach* or *Turtle diagram*, identify:

- monitoring and control requirements,
- standards to be achieved and how performance is assessed against them,
- associated responsibilities and reporting requirements.

These parameters will provide much clarity on what is done, what is thought to be done and what should be done to improve processes, controls and consequently, outcomes.

Additional to the above approach, mapping can be done against the clauses of a relevant ISO or other management system standard, for example ISO 9001, some of (or all) clauses 4.1 through to

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10.3. Doing this will identify what is, or should be in place in a way which is much more succinct than developing numerous and detailed documented procedures and flow charts.

### Step 4 - Map communication processes and forums

As already stated, information flow is what identifies the communication channels, the drivers and the dependencies. An additional way to consider this is to map communication channels, forums or mechanisms. Communication channels can be considered:

- within the organisation, vertically (i.e. down and up through the management structure),
- within the organisation horizontally (i.e. the flow of products, services and information from department to department such as from sales to planning to production to despatch to invoicing and accounts receivable),
- with other organisations, (i.e. with suppliers and with customers).

Also:

- Identify controls, monitoring and reporting requirements for each of the above,
- Identify performance requirements and standards, as required for each of the above,
- Identify resources required.

These points are aligned with the *Process approach* or *Turtle diagram*. If reporting channels, reporting parameters and frequencies are adequately defined then these will likely drive performances against expectations.

Documented procedures can have a role but if the above is done well, their role is less significant. Who reads procedures? Procedures are most commonly read by the auditor and others as a result of audits. Incumbents often ask for guidance; too often they are not likely to read a procedure first if they are not sure. Work instructions on the other hand are more technical and can and in many cases do have a well-defined role to play. Often they are visible at the work station. SWMSs (Safe Work Method Statements) are an example.

With adequate process mapping as outlined above, the sequences and controls are well defined, the performances are tracked routinely and reported and thus documented procedures can have a lesser role. Documented procedures on their own are certainly not a tool which most effectively influence operations and personnel. What is, is management's expectations and these are groomed through higher management's expectations and through resultant reporting requirements against performance parameters.

### Step 5 – Implement changes as required

- Implement changes,
- Manage them through appropriate methodologies and reporting mechanisms and ensure that they are maintained as appropriate,
- Commence, or resume appropriate internal auditing,
- Commence or resume Management Review requirements.

Internal auditing should be seen as a process to verify that activities and processes are complied with and are effective. If done well it can also be a process for reflection and for identifying additional or alternative approaches that could be taken. It should not be seen as a way of ensuring that procedures are followed – if this were its role then internal auditing should be done much more often in order to catch deviations sooner. That is the role of supervision.

Management Review should be the process to reflect; to consider to what extent the system built is adequate (i.e. meets the requirements of the ISO standard), is suitable (i.e. for the current and anticipated needs of the organisation) and is effective (i.e. assists in achieving the results required). Management Review does not have to be a meeting, it does not have to be a dedicated meeting and does not have to be annual – perhaps all of these are myths. It can be integrated into other existing

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meetings, or existing reports. Of course one advantage of a meeting is that it involves a team of people and this assists enormously through the dynamics of teamwork and associated reflection and creativity.

In summary; process mapping, done for the whole organisation (or even for a single site) is a very powerful and very effective tool which clarifies processes, controls, monitoring, standards and expectations in ways that make a difference. Done well it is *Simple, Integrated and Effective*.