



Guide to auditing management systems

Firstly the standard which covers this (and is not very helpful) is ISO 19011 – you can get your own copy but I promise you don't want to read it!

Auditing is all about planning.

You need to agree a schedule of audits – which **areas** (which branch, department etc) are you going to look at, what is the **scope** of those audits (what standard / processes / procedures are you auditing against), who is responsible for that scope so you can ask them beforehand what the **planned arrangements** are. You then agree what you are auditing and when and record this on an audit schedule.

One the given day, you and your audit team (if applicable) will have a number of items you wish to establish – these are typically three things – and the question you need to be asking yourself all the time is this:

Is what I am seeing right now conforming with:

Planned arrangements? (processes and procedures these include document control, objectives and problem handling – do the people know about it – do they use it?)

Legislative requirements?

The requirements of the ISO 9001:2000 standard

And lastly, is it likely that the customers requirements will be met if the process operates in this manner?

One further requirement nowadays which always makes it difficult is that part of an auditors role is to look for improvements to the system. This is contentious since it then appears that the auditor is then tell you how to run your business. When is a auditor a management consultant and vice versa? At least this argument is better than the old box ticking stigma auditors had 10 years ago.

Independence of auditors and independence of process.

Auditors **must** be independent of the task being audited. This is why companies often use Activa to help with audits – we see a lot of systems and do this all the time, we can cut through a lot of the day to day to reach the process and understand it quickly. When you see a lot of processes they all look the same, except the differences, which stand out.

Audit the process

Next, the audit is principally of the process. You are not there to audit the people – they are just there to point the way on the process. For example if there is an established process and a person is clearly not following it, there is one of two problems – they are either inadequately managed, or inadequately trained. It should not be the role of the auditor to be to order dictats to management as to what they need to be doing, they merely present objective, demonstrable evidence for management to digest and put together corrective action plans.



Evidence

Evidence must be recorded – not just of problems which arise, but also of where you went, who you saw, what you saw which was compliant. This gives a record to show that firstly you did do it, but also that conformity was present in such and such a process at that point in time. Keep serial numbers, customer names, part codes, database entry record numbers anything that will allow you replicate / revisit the issue.

Your report should be balanced and highlight positive remarks as well as negative ones. Where Activa audit, we tend to use positive and negative observations, suggestions and non-conformities. Negative observations are likely to lead to non-conformities or underperformance even though they may not be doing so at the time of audit. Although you are not required to apply corrective action to a negative observation, you would be well advised to. Suggestions are usually applied to processes which are working fine, but could be better. Non-conformities are identified as issues which would either preclude registration by a certification body, or if a number of similar issues were discovered, would preclude registration.

Corrective actions.

The results of your audit must be brought to the attention of the person responsible for the process under audit and you must gain their agreement. This is where you objective evidence comes into play – if you cannot replicate the issue you saw, the person responsible for the process could dismiss it out of hand. This is where good recorded evidence is essential. Get it right and there is no doubt.

Once the issue is understood and agreed by the responsible owner, they need to agree the corrective actions they need to undertake. You need to establish that the action they undertake is likely to correct the problem you saw and assign a date to revisit this to ensure it has been effective. Consideration should be given to the wider picture – for example if a training issues has been identified in one office is it likely the same issue exists in another office? In another country?

Re-audit

On or before the given day, the auditor should revisit the process to ensure corrective action has been undertaken and *essentially* it has been effective. When re-auditing there is no reason to audit other issues – only those which have been planned – you speak to different people or look at different customers, or different products – but ensure it is still the same process you are auditing. Keep the same type of evidence you did with the original audit and close the audit down. Keep a record of this in your audit schedule and review the results of audits at management review meetings.

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