

Competence Trick

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Live Topics

If you need accreditation under the new ISO9000 standards, it's time to review your competence management strategy

People and process

The old version of ISO9000 hardly mentioned people or skills, but its replacement (ISO9000:2000) involves two major changes:

- it focuses on business processes, not procedures
- it recognises that competence of people is at the heart of quality and continual improvement.

The first of these has received lots of publicity. The second may be less familiar, but its impact is every bit as significant.

The revised standard imposes onerous new competence requirements on organisations - BUT it also allows them to use proven competence as a valid control mechanism for business processes, avoiding the old paper trail of endless procedures.

Competence sets a new standard

The resource management section of the new standard requires the organisation to:

- define the necessary competence for personnel performing work affecting product quality
- provide training or the actions to satisfy these needs
- evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken
- ensure that its personnel understand how their activities contribute to achieving the quality objectives
- maintain appropriate records of education, training, skills and experience.

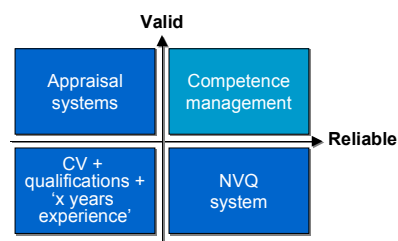
This means that any company wanting ISO9001 certification needs a Competence Management strategy.

This differs from compliance-based competence assurance. It covers *everyone* with a direct influence on product or service quality.

The key problem is to strike an effective balance on competence. On one hand there is a need for robust assessment and recording processes, to satisfy the requirements of the standard.

On the other, the business imperative is to avoid bureaucratic procedures and inflexible structures that consume resources but add no value.

Valid, reliable – or both?



Competence methods must meet two tests: validity (i.e. how directly they relate to job requirements), and reliability (i.e. how consistent are the assessment results).

Conventional approaches based on CVs, qualifications and experience fail on both counts.

The 'NVQ' approach offers high reliability, but validity can be a problem outside mainstream roles – especially for experienced or specialist personnel.

Appraisal systems based on personality characteristics are notoriously unreliable in assessment.

There is an alternative. Competence management systems can be valid for the business *and* reliable in delivery.

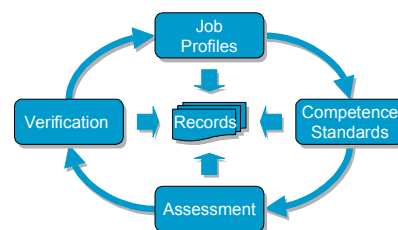
The trick is to align competency standards rigorously to critical business processes, use 'slimline'

assessment processes, integrate existing records and systems, and avoid huge evidence portfolios.

Problem or opportunity?

Putting people at the heart of your quality system is an opportunity too good to miss – especially if you need to prove their competence anyway. Just follow seven simple steps to avoid being swamped in procedures:

- Build a framework of competencies that affect product/service quality
- Apply these to job profiles in your organisation
- Define clear standards for all the key competencies
- Develop an assessment strategy including regular update checks
- Put in place simple checks and balances to control the process
- Use a straightforward system to track records (eg **CompeTrak**)
- Plan how you will involve staff and communicate with them.



To complete the competence trick, integrate competence assessment fully with the performance management process, so that it becomes embedded into continual improvement, and helps to build a learning culture in the organisation.

Find out more

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