FAQs – Expanding a quality system into an integrated management system

There is a growing trend for organisations to incorporate their compliance and risk management activities into one integrated system – perhaps with certification for multiple topics. This article answers some of the frequently asked questions on the subject.

Q: We currently have ISO 9001 certification for our quality system, and intend to expand that system to also cover health & safety, and environmental management. What standards should we base the system on?

A: For environmental management, there is one obvious choice; ISO 14001 is the mostly widely recognised standard. For health & safety, it’s a little more complex. The ISO (International standards organisation) does not have an official standard for the subject. Many countries have established their own standard – for example, AS/NZS 480 1 in Australia and New Zealand. The plethora of national standards can cause a problem for multi-nationals and other organisations trading across borders. So, in the absence of an official international standard for Health and Safety management systems, representatives from various interested parties (such as national standards bodies, academic bodies, accreditation bodies, and certification bodies) set up the OHSAS project to create a unifying standard. The result – OHSAS 18001 - is now used in over 80 countries, and might be considered as a de-facto international standard. It has also been adopted in some countries as their national standard.

So, your choice of health & safety standard to address might take into account whether you do business internationally or just locally, and the requirements (if any) of international customers. Some organisations make the
choice of addressing their national standard and OHSAS 18001. The requirements are quite similar (in some cases, they are virtually identical).

One factor you might take into account is that the current lack of an ISO standard for Health & Safety is being addressed. ISO has set up a project committee with the aim of releasing a standard (ISO 45001) by 2016. This is based on OHSAS 18001 standard and the high-level structure and terminology now becoming common to many other ISO management system standards. A committee draft was released in June 2014. A further draft is scheduled in 2015 - before the final release.

The Qudos Safety Manager toolkit is based on the requirements of OHSAS 18001 and AS/NZS 4801. We will increasingly be adding references to the forthcoming standard before eventually switching over to it completely.

Q: What does an integrated management system really mean?

A: It means having one management system that addresses multiple compliance and risk management topics e.g. Quality, Health & Safety, and Environment. Depending on your industry sector and the nature of your business, the system may also address other topics, such as food safety and information security.

There should be one person with overall responsibility and authority. They may be assisted by a team with specific skills and knowledge. There is typically a ‘Compliance Manual’ or over-arching document that explains the system, a set of common administrative procedures, and common methods of addressing similar requirements of different standards. Increasingly, software applications are used to aid efficiency of integrated management systems – enabling shared methods to be used, and assisting record collection and data analysis to improve decision-making.

Q: What are the major benefits of integration?

A: Probably the greatest benefit is eliminating duplication of effort. All the standards have requirements that can be planned and managed using the same methods and resources. Examples include documentation, document control, setting objectives, internal audits, and management reviews. It is generally more cost-effective to handle these and other requirements in one system, rather than in multiple separate ‘silos’. Let’s take a look at potential cost savings related to just some of the possible examples:

- Documents - Your IMS may have a common documented procedures for subjects such as records management, induction, training, internal audits, dealing with nonconformances, and corrective action. There would also be many other potential areas for common procedures.
- Document control – Your IMS may have a common method of making documents available (e.g. through a common server folder structure, or a dedicated software application with filter / search facilities).
- Management review – Your top management team could conduct their periodic review of the IMS using an agenda just slightly expanded from a standard QMS agenda – instead of carrying out separate reviews.

Getting an integrated system certified will also cost less than getting 3 separate systems certified.

Having a single, integrated compliance and risk management system can also make it easier to build awareness, and increase the understanding, and participation of your workers.

Q: We have a Quality Manager and a Safety Manager. If we build an integrated system, who should be in overall charge of it?
A: There are no set rules about that. People with a Quality systems background tend to be strong on document and records control and general administration. While people with a Health & Safety background tend to have a greater understanding of risk assessment and management. That is of course, a sweeping generalisation, and the answer for your organisation would depend on the capabilities of the individuals, and other factors. Many larger organisations have someone like a ‘Compliance and Risk Manager’ in overall charge of the system, supported by a team of specialists in various topics as applicable – such as environmental, information security etc.

Q: We already have existing ISO 9001 certification. Can additional certification to ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001 be added to that?

A: Yes. Additional standards can be added to your existing certification – even if your systems are not integrated across the standards.

Q: Will we save money on certification by having an integrated system?

A: Having an integrated system can reduce the audit time by up to 20% and reduce the cost of your audit.

Ben White, GM of leading certification body, Sci Qual says. “We are finding that more and more clients are opting for an integrated management system for quality, environment and Health & Safety as a means of achieving greater efficiencies. However if your system isn’t integrated from the outset, you can still work on integration, and then we can reduce your audit time accordingly when the system is integrated. Any level of integration can contribute to reduced audit hours”.

Q: Can our existing auditor / certification body do the additional audits?

A: If your existing certification body is accredited for the additional standards they will be able to add these to your normal audit schedule. You will find that most Certification Bodies offering Management System Certification will offer all 3 standards.

Your existing auditor may be able to conduct audits with the additional standards but if not, the certification body should be able to arrange for another auditor to assist.

Q: Can we use a single software application to manage our integrated management system? And if so, how will it do that?

A: Yes, you can. Qudos 3 is designed on a modular basis. Those modules are based on common requirements across a wide range of management system standards e.g. Objectives, Document management, Internal Audits, Actions for improvement and to address nonconformances, Risk management etc. Records within those fields may be categorised as you wish. This allows you to maintain a single integrated system, but to create records, query the database, and generate reports related to the subject matter you are interested in at any given time. It also contains toolkits for Quality, Health & Safety, and Environmental management.

Thank you for reading this article. If you have any questions about an integrated management system for your organisation, we would be pleased to help. Contact info@qudos-software.com.
Qudos3
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