Applying Process Changes Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland

Match Making: Certification Requirements and Process Frameworks

Organizations need a process framework for benchmarking, managing processes, and improving performance. Additionally given that the 2015 updates to ISO 9001 standards have a significant process focus; organizations are looking for ways to align their process frameworks with certification requirements. By integrating or aligning their quality audits with internal process management, organizations are able to improve the ease of their external audits and reduce redundant or conflicting efforts for internal performance management.

More specifically, the definitions laid out in frameworks can help an organization with managing and naming documentation, reviews, updates, and compliance (e.g., Sarbanes-Oxley). A matrix structure can also benefit in addressing ISO 9001 section 9.1 (monitoring, measurement, analysis, and evaluation) to leverage frameworks for benchmarking and internal auditing.

However, that is easier said than done. Relevant questions arise such as:

- Who should lead the efforts?
- What should be included?
- How do we make sure people use it?

To answer these questions, APQC conducted a study to explore how organizations connect their processes to certification standards to improve the auditing experience and ensure process and quality efforts work toward the same goals.

The Team
Who leads the efforts is highly variable depending on the organization's culture and governance structure for improvement efforts and audits. For some organizations, it's a direct collaboration between their process management or continuous improvement teams and quality management. Meanwhile, for others, the responsibility is the province of their business or operational excellence team—which already has ownership of these two components. Who leads the effort and provides will depend on the organization's culture and norms. The key point is that you need to include subject matter experts from:

- business process management,
- quality or auditing, and

- process experts within the businesses.

The presence of process and quality of management representation on the team is logical, given that it's a purposeful collaboration between these two departments. Inclusion of process and subject matter experts within the businesses is also vital and serves two purposes: (1) subject matter expertise for verification and (2) buy-in for using the output of these integrated efforts.

Tool for Integration

A matrix is the most common method we've seen organizations use to connect their process frameworks with certification standards. The matrix is typically laid out in a spreadsheet listing all certification standard requirements (e.g., ISO 9001 requirements) and company processes and procedures, able to be cross-referenced in both directions. The simplest version of the matrix is usually organized by key and supporting processes, with hyperlinks to either the processes' repository or process owner contact information. The nice thing about the matrix approach is that it allows the organization to line up any process that is affected by a specific clause within an ISO standard or, conversely, line up certifications by process.

Such integrations need not be standalone documents. Once certification standards are aligned with processes, that matrix should be a central reference point for the organization moving forward. Some parts of an organization may not even be seeking certification, but seeing that alignment in the enterprise process framework can help a function understand the value of individual processes and make long-term plans to pursue quality standards and achieve higher levels of performance.

More process-focused organizations tend to embed the certification requirements into their process frameworks and models. For example, Tata Projects Limited indicates ISO 9001 requirements for its Level-3 operational processes in its enterprise process model manual. Tata chose its operational processes as the target of its integrations efforts because they describe what work is being accomplished, typically include their own KPIs, and have an associated SIPOC to provide detailed information on the stakeholders and information/materials involved in the process. The operational processes are also the ones associated with the regulatory compliance requirements and, thus, undergo audits.

Though the matrix or manuals are invaluable tools by themselves for identifying the relationships between certification requirements and processes, the collaboration between the process and quality groups to ensure that the process's repository includes all the relevant information necessary is even more important. The goal is to make sure that the processes' measures, documentation, control points, responsible parties, as well as detailed standard operating procedures, are at the organization's fingertips for audits.

Ensure Adoption

However, as we all know, just because you build something does not mean people will use it. Hence, the organizations in the study also stressed the need to engage employees. Most of the organizations in the study use an array of engagement tactics including training and frequent communications for target process owners and applicable functions.
As noted earlier, successful organizations also leverage employees within the businesses to help develop and validate the relevant processes and connections

between processes and requirements. This validation may be a quick or long process, depending on the process foundation and maturity of each business unit. Those units with documented, standardized, and rated processes will more easily make connections.

Conclusion

Developing an integrated manual or matrix ensures that preparations for internal and external audits are efficient, seamless experiences. For some organizations, the matrix becomes a map for the audit itself by correlating what the auditor (who will not know the company well) wants to know with what internal experts (who may not know well how to interpret a standard) know about the organization's processes and procedures. Though the exact output of integration efforts can vary from Excel spreadsheets to integrated repositories, there are a few things organizations should keep in mind:

- Make sure to have the right mix of expertise on the team.
- Use the opportunity to collate and centralize the necessary support materials for internal and external audits.
- Leverage communication and change management principals to ensure adoption and use.

About the Author.

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