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Knowledge Management and ISO 9001:2015



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Other News



KM Starter Offers

We have introduced a range of low-investment starter offers, for companies wishing to get started in KM.

The inclusion of Knowledge Management within ISO 9001:2015 (released 2 weeks ago) marks a huge change within the world of KM.

For the first time one of the global business standards explicitly mentions Knowledge as a resource, and specifies expectations for the management of that resource. This provides a long-awaited level of legitimacy for KM which could be a game-changer for the Knowledge Manager.

This newsletter explores the implications of the ISO 9001:2015 knowledge clause, and how this can impact Knowledge Managers (and their Quality department colleagues) worldwide.

ISO 9001:2015 and the new knowledge clause

to

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[Scan knowledge topics, to find those most in need of attention](#)

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ISO 9001 is the most widely applied standard for Quality Management systems, used by organisations of all sizes and in all countries to demonstrate that they have a management system to control the quality and consistency of goods and services. Over a million ISO 9001 certificates are awarded every year.

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An ISO 9001 certificate is not a once-and-for-all award, but must be renewed at regular intervals recommended by the certification body, usually once every three years. Similarly the ISO standard itself has been through many updates. In preparation for the 2015 update, ISO surveyed about 15000 people worldwide to see what was missing from the standard which needed to be included. The overwhelming answer was "you need to include the management of knowledge".

A new clause has therefore been added to ISO 9001:2015, as follows:

"Clause 7.1.6. Knowledge

- "Determine the knowledge necessary for the operation of its processes and to achieve conformity of products and services.
- "This knowledge shall be maintained and made available to the extent necessary.
- "When addressing changing needs and trends, the organization shall consider its current knowledge and determine how to acquire or access any necessary additional knowledge and required updates.

- "NOTE 1: Organizational knowledge is knowledge specific to the organization; it is generally gained by experience. It is information that is used and shared to achieve the organization's objectives.
- "NOTE 2: Organizational knowledge can be based on: a) Internal Sources (e.g., intellectual property, knowledge gained from experience, lessons learned from failures and successful projects, capturing and sharing undocumented knowledge and experience; the results of improvements in processes, products and services); b) External Sources (e.g., standards, academia, conferences, gathering knowledge from customers or external providers).

Thus for the first time, Knowledge and its management are a core part of one of the International Quality standards, against which manufacturing and services businesses around the globe will be audited.

How this clause may be interpreted



[Image from Boris Dzhingarov on Flickr](#)

Firstly we need to realise that this new clause is not a Knowledge Management standard, nor does it require an organisation to have Knowledge Management in place as a formal requirement. It is a clause in a Quality standard, and requires that sufficient attention is paid to knowledge to ensure good and consistent quality of goods and services. To comply, however, an organisation needs to have many Knowledge Management elements operating (as opposed to planned) as part of the Quality Management system.

The new standard offers the following commentary, which gives a little more guidance on the sort of things that an auditor might be looking for:

"In 7.1.6 the international standard addresses the need to determine and manage the knowledge maintained by the organization, to ensure the operation of its processes and that it can achieve conformity of products and services. Requirements regarding organizational knowledge were introduced for the purposes of:

- a) safeguarding the organization from the loss of knowledge, e.g. - through staff turnover - failure to capture and share information
- b) encouraging the organization to acquire knowledge, e.g. - learning from experience - mentoring - benchmarking".

We can see from the text above and in the previous section, that many of the common elements of Knowledge Management are implied or specifically mentioned. These include:

- an appropriate system for learning from experience, including the use of lesson learning;
- an appropriate approach to knowledge retention, including mentoring, tacit knowledge capture, and knowledge sharing;
- some form of KM audit, benchmarking and KM strategy, sufficient to identify the critical knowledge needed to deliver quality products and services, and the main knowledge gaps;
- a system (roles, processes and supporting technology) for maintaining knowledge and making it available to the extent necessary.

What this means for the knowledge manager



[Image from Steve Wilson on Flickr](#)

As Knowledge Manager, the new requirements under ISO 9001:2015 can make a massive change to the way you present Knowledge Management to your senior managers. From now on, Knowledge Management is an explicit requirement of a major international standard, and is no longer an optional extra. Instead of selling KM within your organisation as "a good thing to do" you should now be presenting it as "a requirement for ISO certification in the area of Quality".

Note however that others may not see this new clause as being as significant as you do. ISO 9001:2015 contains many changes from ISO 9001:2008, and the introduction of clause 7.1.6 is only one of many. Your Quality Management team may be more interested in the clauses on risk and opportunity management, for example. They may underestimate the significance of the knowledge clause, perhaps assuming that learning from experience and knowledge retention are simple matters.

You need to make your organisation aware of any impact clause 7.1.6 may have on their ISO 9001:2015 qualification, and any actions that need to be taken. As a Knowledge Manager you will have to take the lead in this, and specifically;

- introduce the new clause to your sponsor and steering committee so they are aware that the management of knowledge is now becoming an expectation in international standards;
- determine whether any part of your organisation is currently certified under ISO 9001:2008. or has plans to apply for ISO

9001:2015 certification;

- speak to the quality manager of this part of the business, and explain the new Knowledge requirements under the ISO 9001:2015 revision (perhaps [forward](#) this newsletter to your quality colleagues as a first step);
- go through clause 7.1.6 with the quality professionals line by line, and offer your support in ensuring the required KM elements are in place;
- work with the quality professionals to prepare a plan to get ready for audit, as described in the next section.

How to prepare for an audit of ISO 9001:2015 clause 7.1.6



[Image from www.public-domain-image.com](http://www.public-domain-image.com)

An organization applying for ISO 9001:2015 certification is audited based on an extensive sample of its sites, functions, products, services and processes. The auditor identifies and presents a list of problems (defined as "non-conformities", "observations", or "opportunities for improvement") to management. We do not yet know how clause 7.1.6 will be audited, but the text of the ISO standard document suggests that the auditors may be looking for evidence that the following are in place:

- You need to have "determined the knowledge necessary" for the operation of processes and to achieve conformity of products and services. You therefore should conduct your own knowledge scan of key knowledge topics, and create a critical knowledge list.

- The knowledge needs to be "maintained". Make sure each critical knowledge topic has a topic owner, and an appropriate maintenance procedure.
- The knowledge needs to be "made available". There needs at the very least to be an effective way to find the knowledge, such as a good knowledge base and search engine. Even better if the knowledge is "pushed" to those who need it.
- You need a strategic knowledge plan, with identified actions to fill knowledge gaps from external sources.
- You need an effective system for learning from experience and for lesson learning, including embedded roles, consistency lesson capture processes, a lessons management system, and good governance. This system should also cover lessons from process, product and service improvements.
- You need a Knowledge Retention and Transfer program.

If you have prepared well for the audit and there are no major non-conformities, the certification body will issue a certificate. Where major non-conformities are identified, you will need to present an improvement plan to the certification body showing how the problems will be resolved, and once it is satisfied that the organization has carried out sufficient corrective action, it will issue a certificate. As knowledge manager, your role will be to help the quality function avoid non-conformance with clause 7.1.6.

Other relevant clauses

Although clause 7.1.6 deals specifically with knowledge, there are other clauses which knowledge management may impact or support. Clause 7.2 for example deals with organizational competence, requiring the organization to ensure staff have the necessary competence to perform their role.

Knowledge Management plays a part in competence, and the KM team can work together with HR and Learning and Development to build a process for ensuring that the necessary knowledge required for building capability and acquiring competence is in place. Review your knowledge management strategy and see whether it is

adequately designed to support the acquisition of new knowledge that will be required to underpin future competence requirements. You may need to build stronger links to people and teams responsible for organisational development and tailor your KM processes to support them.

Clause 7.5 is about documented information, and the ways in which the information necessary for the effectiveness of the Quality system is managed. This includes how the information is created, stored, controlled, distributed, accessed, used, retained and disposed. The ISO authors are therefore clear about the distinction between information and knowledge, and the two are treated in separate clauses.

How Knoco can help



As experienced Knowledge Management practitioners with a global brand, we can help you prepare for compliance with the new requirements of ISO 9001:2015, and can provide you with an audit trail. Specifically we offer the following.

- As an ISO audit focuses on the existence of, and evidence for, procedures, we can help you determine the KM procedures which need to be in place, how they can be embedded in the PDCA (Plan Do Check Act) cycle, and the KPIs by which they are measured.
- We can provide you with [a scan and assessment of your critical knowledge areas](#). This will determine the knowledge necessary for the operation of your processes and to achieve conformity of products and services, assess how well maintained and accessible that knowledge is, and identify an action plan for improvement.

- We can work with you to create [a strategic plan for KM](#), including a list of actions to close knowledge gaps.
- We can recommend [a framework](#) for effective maintenance and management of critical knowledge.
- We can provide an [assessment of your lesson learning](#). This will not only identify the current status of learning from experience in your organization, but will also provide you with a recommended [lesson learning framework](#) including a [lessons management system](#) (if appropriate).
- We can work with you to create a [Knowledge retention and transfer strategy](#) to safeguard the organization from the loss of knowledge.

[Contact us](#) for advice in preparing your organisation to meet the requirements of ISO 9001:2015 clause 7.1.6.

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