

UNDERSTANDING  
THE REQUIREMENTS  
OF ISO 9001:2008  
CLAUSE 6.2.2  
COMPETENCE,  
TRAINING AND  
AWARENESS



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## INTRODUCTION

Many organizations worldwide have implemented quality systems based on the ISO 9001 quality management system standard. Some organizations implement the standard but choose not to seek certification, still realizing the benefits that conforming to the standard brings to them and to their clients. However, over a million organizations have chosen to have their quality management system independently certified as conforming to the requirements of ISO 9001. Organizations are sometimes challenged to meet the requirements of Clause 6.2.2 Competence, Awareness, and Training and demonstrate compliance to auditors conducting audits to the standard. This paper is aimed at organizations wishing to learn how to get the most out of ISO 9001:2008 Clause 6.2.2. It explores the intent of the clause, and provides examples for its implementation. The paper also provides insight into what to consider in a Talent Management System that will support your quality system. Evaluating and choosing a Talent Management system in the context of the ISO 9001 standard will help you to meet the requirements of Clause 6.2.2 and provides an infrastructure to reduce the time required for HR to prepare for the auditor's onsite visit.

Since its original publication, ISO 9001 has contained a component of ensuring employees have what it takes to perform their jobs in a manner to support the quality management system. In earlier versions, the standard used the word **training** as the standalone title to the clause. In the 2000 version, a step forward was made to include **competence**. When ISO 9001:2008 was published, it included the fact that conformity to product requirements can be affected directly or indirectly by personnel performing any task within the quality management system. With that said organizations continue to focus on the training aspects of this requirement and not competence.

This has been further complicated by the surge of learning management systems (LMS). Many organizations have migrated to a LMS or a talent management system that includes LMS or are considering these tools as their record for the competence requirement. However, many organizations simply track training in the LMS or talent management system and do not leverage these tools to include the competence of an employee or the evaluation of the employee's ongoing competence. For this reason, it is important to evaluate selection or implementation of the learning and talent management systems in context of the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard.



Since frequently the human resources department or those individuals who are involved in selecting or implementing a learning or talent management system are not familiar with ISO 9001 requirements, it is important that the technical experts on the standard in your organization be consulted within the organization to ensure the system can incorporate as many of these requirements as possible.

There are several requirements that need to be included in an ISO 9001 compliant system for competence, awareness, and training. These need to be considered when selecting or implementing a learning or talent management system.

**Determine what employees must have competence established for them in the organization.** Organizations can choose to implement this requirement in one of two ways. They can implement it across the organization or they can implement it by applying it to only those employees who affect conformity to product requirements. Keep in mind that conformity to product requirements can be affected directly or indirectly. An employee who directly affects conformity to product requirements would be a fabrication worker or an inspector on the manufacturing floor. An employee who does not affect conformity to product requirements would be a maintenance worker picking up trash in an office area. An employee who affects conformity to product requirements indirectly would be a maintenance worker that picks up trash in a clean room.

**Determine the necessary competence for employees.** Organizations shall determine that employees are competent based on education, training, skills, and experience. It is important to understand this to avoid using a training database to alone meet the intent of this requirement. Wherever possible, an organization needs to incorporate each of these categories into their methods for determining competence.

- **Experience** – Employees document years of experience performing a certain task or activity.
- **Education** – Any higher education requirements to establish competence in a certain task area. That might be bachelors, masters, or PHD.
- **Skills** – Skills that an employee must have. These frequently include “soft skills” such as communication but can also include skills that have been gained as a result of training.

## WHAT TO CONSIDER

*Look for a system that can identify competence requirements for either every employee in the organization, or those employees who affect product quality either directly or indirectly, depending on how you choose to implement this requirement.*



## WHAT TO CONSIDER

*Look for a system that can be adapted to capture all of the components of competency (e.g. education, skills, training, and experience) as determined by the organization. For example, ensure that the system is flexible enough to incorporate or link to job descriptions and resumes, and can also assign and track different types of training.*

• **Training** – Training that an individual needs to be competent in their job. This training can be formal or informal. The most frequent mistake made by organizations is that they lump all training into one category and track it the same. In reality there are several types of training that an organization conducts. These include:

- **Competence Training** – Training that is needed for an employee to perform certain tasks or activities. This could include weld training for a welder or training on purchase acquisition law for a buyer.
- **Mandatory Training** – Training that is required by the organization but the lack thereof does not prohibit the employee from performing tasks in the organization. Examples would vary from one organization to another but could include diversity training or training on how to use a software package such as time reporting.
- **Development Training** – Training that will further develop an employee in their existing job or prepare them for a job in the future. It is not needed for an employee to perform certain tasks or activities in their job function. It is important to remember that development training for one employee could be competence training for another employee based on job duties and assignments.

Let's look at the example of project management training. If an employee is a project manager, then this training would be considered competence training for that employee. If the employee is a forklift driver that is looking to become a project manager, then this training would be considered development in nature.

### **Determine what method(s) will be used to identify competence needs.**

The organization needs to determine what method(s) will be used to identify competencies for an employee. This can be done either by job position or individual employee. When an organization chooses to identify competency by job position, they indicate what each employee in that job position must meet. Organizations will frequently use existing job descriptions to identify competencies. It is important to remember that when an organization is identifying competency based on a job position that some employees may have special assignments that they are working on. These special assignments also need to be incorporated as a competency if appropriate. For example, a buyer that is assigned additional responsibilities as an internal auditor would need to meet the competency requirements of the buyer position and have the additional training required for internal auditors.



When determining competency by individual employee, needs are identified on an employee by employee basis. In this case, a list of the necessary skills, education, training, and experience needs to be identified for each person in the organization who can affect conformity to product requirements. This method is frequently used in smaller organizations or organizations that do not have formal job descriptions in place. These organizations might use the description of job duties that was listed in a job posting or newspaper ad to assist in analyzing competency.

**Provide training or take actions to ensure the necessary competence is achieved.** While most organizations focus on providing employees training to meet the intent of this requirement, it is important to remember that the necessary competence can be achieved in a variety of ways.

- Train employees – formal or informal
- Move employees to another position where they do meet competence requirements.
- Mentor the employee
- Develop an oversight plan. In this situation, the organization might determine that even though the employee does not meet requirements that under certain situations the tasks of the position can still be performed. For example, an employee can perform work under the direction of their manager. It is also possible to determine the employee competent for all activities other than those specified (e.g. employee can perform all tasks of the position other than operating a fork lift until training on operating a fork lift is completed).

**Evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken.** In the past, many organizations have implemented this clause to mean that when training is provided that the training course is evaluated. In reality this means that when an organization has taken actions such as training, mentoring, or reassigning an employee that the actions taken have been effective. This effectiveness can be determined by several different methods that include:

- Testing at the completion of training
- Assessing competence through the manager monitoring performance
- Determining competence through monitoring performance during internal audits
- Evaluating competence during performance reviews

## WHAT TO CONSIDER

*Look for a system that is flexible and can support the method you are using to determine what the competence requirements are for a specific employee.*

*When using performance reviews as a method to assess competence, ensure that the system is flexible enough to allow for special competence requirements for particular employees who have been assigned additional responsibilities not in their job description.*

*Look for a system that helps to identify individual competence and skill gaps, and assign targeted actions such as training to improve competence. Choose a system that includes the ability to create development plans as part of the evaluation process or independently and link development plans to particular competencies where a gap has been identified.*

*In addition, look for a system that lets you initiate a competency assessment outside of your scheduled performance appraisal process in order to assess competence whenever required.*



## WHAT TO CONSIDER

*Look for a system that can evaluate and demonstrate the effectiveness of the actions taken to improve competence.*

*Linking training and other developmental actions to performance management ensures that competence gaps can be identified and targeted actions assigned. Performance evaluations or competency assessments conducted later on can reassess competence and determine whether those gaps were closed. Choose a system that includes built-in reports that demonstrate that actions assigned to achieve employee competence were completed and were effective.*

*Look for a system that enables both the manager and employee to see how individual goals link upward to support the higher level quality objectives, promoting a better understanding and buy-in of the organization's quality objectives. The system should also be able to provide evidence of the review.*

It is important when determining if the actions taken have been effective that there be a means to record and track this information.

**Ensure employees understand how their activities support the organization's quality objectives.** This part of the clause emphasizes the need for employees to be aware of the quality policy and quality objectives and the relevance to them in their job. In Clause 5.4.1 Quality Objectives, the organization has established the quality objectives of the organization and communicated those to employees. This clause is building on the communication to make sure that employees are aware they know how they contribute to the achievement of these objectives. Frequently organizations use departmental (staff) meetings or bulletin boards to communicate this information. However, the most successful organizations link these objectives to an employee's overall performance as well as their performance review.

**Provide objective evidence of appropriate education, experience, skills, and training.** Throughout the history of the standard, one of the most critical pieces of this requirement are the records for Competence, Training, and Awareness. This requirement indicates that an organization maintain appropriate records related to education, training, skills, and experience that demonstrates the competence of employees. This objective evidence can be provided in any format including paper records, electronic records, or any combination. Examples of records that the organization could require include:

- Training Records (formal/informal)
- Certifications (soldering/welding)
- Resumes
- Diplomas of Education
- Experience (past jobs or current)
- Special Training
- Medical Records
- Licenses (Drivers, Nursing)



In summary, when organizations focus on all aspects of competence and just not training, they will have a more comprehensive program. This also enables the organization to avoid the costs associated with a training only program. Furthermore, while an organization can implement the requirements of ISO 9001 Clause 6.2.2 in either a paper or electronic system, those that use a learning management system as part of a talent management solution will frequently see efficiency improvements. By understanding ISO 9001 requirements when evaluating learning or talent management systems, organizations will be able to determine if a potential system is flexible enough to suit their needs.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lorri Hunt is the owner and president of Lorri Hunt & Associates Inc. She has fourteen years of experience in implementing quality management systems in diverse businesses such as Honeywell, the Department of Energy, and small businesses. She is an active member of the U. S. Technical Advisory Group to ISO Technical Committee 176. She serves as the chair for the United States group responsible for developing consensus positions related to ISO 9001 and 9004. She also served as the international Deputy Task Group Leader to the amendment to ISO 9001:2008.

Lorri is an RAB accredited author. She frequently contributes to quality publications and journals and is a co-author to The Insiders' Guide to ISO 9001:2008. She also conducts webinars through Paton Professional on a variety of topics including "Making the Most of Employee Competence."

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## WHAT TO CONSIDER

*Look for a system that can include formal and informal training records such as compliance training, classroom, e-learning, seminars, mentoring, and on-the-job training. Make sure that the system can track certifications and deliver insight into all expiring certifications, licenses and learning.*

*Choose a system that can incorporate evidence that employees actually attended the training that they were registered for. For example, the ability to scan and link to the certificate of completion or class sign-in sheet. In addition, look for a system that can link to employee records that have been scanned such as resumes, diplomas of education, and licenses.*

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