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How to meet the demands of ISO/TS 16949 regarding “external” customer satisfaction.

ISO/TS 16949 is a technical specification specific to automotive industry. It is developed by IATF (International Automotive Task Force) which includes representatives from major OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) throughout the world. Consequently, the very essence of the specification itself requires attention to customer.

Two elements of ISO/TS 16949 specifically address customer satisfaction. These are :

5.2 Customer Focus

and

8.2.1 Customer Satisfaction

Some of the “highlights” regarding problematic issues will be explained below :

ISO/TS 16949 is not limited to the requirements listed in the elements of the specification. It also covers “customer specific requirements (CSRs)” and these are mandatory as well. Customer specific requirements may differ from customer to customer, and it is the responsibility of the supplier to obtain and implement the current version of the requirements, in addition to ISO/TS 16949 clauses.

Consequently, the very first step in meeting the customer demands will be “obtaining, evaluating and internalizing” the CSRs. This is a key issue and should not be overlooked. The method should be transparent including :

1.Which CSRs apply to the company

2.How are the current revisions identified

3.How are they obtained and by whom

4.Who checks the updates and how

5.After obtaining, who reviews the CSRs (more preferably a team review because most of the CSRs require the attention of more than one process)

6.After review, how are the findings deployed to the related personnel

7.After deployment, how does the company ensure that the related timely actions are taken by the personnel

Each item listed above requires deep thinking, and the evidence of this deep thinking should be clearly demonstrated at the audits.

The second critical issue is customer scorecards. As its name implies, these are scorecards issued by the customers. They shall be obtained and evaluated by the organization. If there are missing issues, the customer should be contacted. It is the responsibility of the organization to obtain these (if released) and/or check through necessary means (such as intranet). Consequently critical questions regarding this matter are :

1.Which customers issue scorecards

2.What is the method of obtaining

3.What is the method of regular re-checking of the past issues (electronically released scorecards may be subject to changes based on score correction requests of the organizations for example)

4.Are there any issues/volumes missing, is the customer contacted

5.Are they evaluated, if so at which periods, what is the method (regular meetings, reviews, etc. to ascertain timeliness)

6.What are the findings of the reviews, how are they followed up, how are the responsibilities assigned

7.How is the top management involved in all this

8.Are there signs of additional emphasis on repetitive problems

9.Are there signs of additional emphasis to “red lines” of the customer (such as customer notifications)

10.If there is an inconsistency between the customer scorecard and internal scorecards of the organization (as requested by element 8.2.1.1 – please note that internal scorecards will need to be evaluated by the organization just like the external scorecards), what is the method of resolution

11.How are the trends analyzed, which time domains are taken into account (some organizations will have different meetings for different evaluation scopes/perspectives)

The third critical issue is the communication with the customer. Please beware that communication goes far beyond complaint resolution. The organization is expected to assess the “perception of the customer”.

Successful complaint resolution can affect customer perception. However, there is not one to one relation. Because (when evaluated analytically):

1.The fact that a customer is not raising complaints may not necessarily mean that the customer is happy

2.The fact that a customer is raising too many complaints may not necessarily mean that the customer is very unhappy (this is not a perfect world after all!)

Consequently, the organization is expected to go beyond complaint resolution. Critical issues are :

1.How does the organization assess customer perception (ISO 9004:2000, ISO/TS 16949:2002 Guidance and APQP manual will be helpful in answering this question)

2.How does it ascertain the effectiveness of the methods it uses

Obviously, the argument above should not understate the importance of “complaint resolution”. It is a critical issue as well. Important aspects are :

1.How are the complaints obtained (which channels, how are they put together)

2.Who evaluates and how

3.Who assigns the responsibilities and makes sure about timeliness and effectiveness

4.Are the CSRs taken into account regarding the method and timeliness

5.At which stages is the customer contacted and by whom, is it clearly known

6. What is the understanding of the organization regarding “effectiveness” (i.e. does it include root cause analysis, timeliness, quality management system effect, repetition analysis, etc.)

7. What are the methods of deployment (lessons learned) to make sure that everyone learns a lesson and evaluates the complaint from his/her perspective

8. Are the effects to the quality management system considered effectively and how (eg. Effects on the product file components such as FMEAs)

9. Are they evaluated taking the “customer red lines – customer special notifications” into account and if so, are the effects traceable (whenever applicable) such as certification body notification (CB) or not

The requirements of ISO/TS 16949 may look short in text, however they imply a lot more. The listings above are simply an example of that. These should only be considered as “highlights” of the expectations regarding problematic issues rather than the whole picture.