

Internal Quality Audit – What, Why and Who

By ATCEN

Organization which implements a Quality Management System (QMS) is required to carry out an Internal Quality Audit exercise. Majority conduct this exercise annually though some organizations do it twice yearly. Internal Quality Audit is a systematic examination to determine activities carried out in the organization are accordance to the documented quality procedures and processes.

Internal Quality Audit is carried out to ensure that the organization's quality system complies with the requirements of the relevant Standard. Other objectives include to determine if the quality systems is effective in meeting the quality objectives; to identify improvement areas; and monitor corrective and preventive actions.

The individual who is responsible to carry out an Internal Quality Audit is called an Internal Quality Auditor, or in short IQA. Ideally the IQA team should consist of representatives from different departments in an organization. This will enable inter-department interaction and foster understanding of other department's functions during the process of carry out the internal audit. The appointed or assigned IQA will first undergo the necessary training to perform a quality audit. He or she is independent of the work being audited.

A professional IQA should possess good communication skills; is analytical and has sound knowledge of the Standards requirements. Most importantly the individual should have the key intention to help in process improvement and not find fault in the work of another colleague. The IQA must be objective and make decisions based on the documented evidence.

The approach of conducting an internal audit is very important as it determines the success of the internal audit exercise. Throughout my experience working with IQA teams of different organizations, the common area of improvements for IQAs is inter-personal skills. It was found that the auditee (i.e. the individual being audited) felt that the IQA was too task-oriented and structured in performing the audit. Most of the time there was no personal touch which resulted in lack of cooperation and buy-in from the auditees.

It is a common fact that many employees are not receptive towards internal audit. To encourage participation and obtain acceptance, it is vital for the management to communicate clearly the key objective of the exercise. In addition, the IQA needs to play his or role well to ensure that the entire internal quality audit exercise is a success.