**Britannia Chambers
181/185 High Street
New Malden
Surrey UK
KT3 4BH**

Tailoring SQMS to Company Needs

By the team at SMaRT

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Contents

Introduction

This paper is one of a series offering an insight into the benefits of a quality management system and exploring the realities of implementing and maintaining a living system within your business.

SQMS operates using software and web-based applications. These are tailored according to various options/issues/terms encountered which call for resolution/clarification/understanding.
These topics, outlined below, are important in establishing and operating a quality management system. SQMS minimises the effort required of small to medium businesses in addressing them.

Business Classification

Business Classification means applying the appropriate Quality Manual Questionnaire to suit your Business operation which may vary from Supply and Support to Design and Manufacturing or a variation in between. It is important to be clear as to what is meant by Design in the context of your company, the ISO 9001 standard and SQMS. The Design process dictates *manufacture* as opposed to, for example, the interconnection of modules to meet a customer requirement. Module interconnection is managed by the supply process and is not considered to be design by ISO 9001.

Subcontracting

Subcontracting part of your business (eg. Installation, Support) needs to be considered and it is usually best to generate your own process Policy and Procedure to ensure that your subcontractors adhere to these. An exception to this could be when you have a single subcontractor undertaking, for example, Installation and they are able to demonstrate that they themselves are operating a fully externally certifiable QMS.

Product/Service

In quality terms there is no distinction between the supply of Products and Services. However in the interest of clarity within your quality system a distinction is recommended.

Forms/Charts

These must be completed so as to record your business transactions and they provide the means by which all process inputs and outputs are captured. For example a proposal would be generated from a customer request whilst a contract would be generated from an accepted proposal. Forms/charts could be adopted from your own company documentation.

Supplier

Supplier(s) is the company or companies supplying your business with a product or

service. Suppliers to your businesses, need to be able demonstrate that they either operate their own quality management system or adhere to the relevant part(s) of yours. Supplier management is part of SQMS enabling you to judge poor supplier performance and take appropriate action.

Customer Supplied Product

A customer supplied product is where the customer provides you with a product or service to be added/integrated to that which you will supply. It is important that customer supplied products are managed through your SQMS.

External Documents

These are printed or electronic documents which are generated outside the business, such as statutory and regulatory requirements, and are essential in the supply of your products/services. Such documents need to be version controlled and registered together with their location in your SQMS.

Support to the customer

It is helpful to distinguish clearly between the different levels of support you offer so that both your and any subcontracting resources can be put in place.

Working Environment

The appropriate working environment ensures that your products/services are supplied and supported without performance detriment to people and/or equipment due to the working environment. Statutory and regulatory requirements may apply.

Secure Environment

A secure environment ensures that the operational environment is sufficiently secure from unauthorised access and failure, such that your products/services are supplied and supported without any adverse effect.

Goods In and Out

Goods In, handling, storage and testing, refers to items received to create your product/service and is covered by SQMS. Goods Out, testing, handling and storage, refers to the product/service being delivered to the customer and is also covered by SQMS.

Financial Accounting

Financial accounting has its own accounting rules and regulations which are subject to independent Financial Audit. It is therefore considered outside of the Quality Process and therefore not part of SQMS. However, invoice management is part of your SQMS.

Processes

These identify and clearly define required business functional activities together with inputs and outputs leading to business excellence. In any business there are two types of processes, namely Business processes which deal directly with the customer through sales, supply, installation, service and Support processes. Support processes include provision of suitably qualified human resources, adequate IT and quality audit to confirm quality compliance and contribute to continuous improvement.

Policies and Procedures

These comprise a brief statement on company policy for each process and the procedure to be followed when discharging that process. The procedure should be kept as short as possible consistent with converting the inputs and securing the required outputs. Where a high level of technical content has to be followed or repetitive activity is involved then the procedure should point to a relevant Work Instruction. SQMS provides exemplar policies and procedures.

Work Instructions

Work instructions form part of SQMS but should only be used when the process calls for a detailed series of activities such as that encountered in assembly, installation and service. Usually Work Instructions are very much Business dependant and can change quite often. Thus there are advantages in decoupling them from the policy and procedure. The number of Work Instructions liable to arise in a small to medium company is not expected to exceed two or three and for some possibly none at all.

Quality Training

Upon the introduction of your SQMS there will be some need to train all personnel, if only to review the documented processes they are already familiar with. New employees and those changing jobs within the company will require some measure of ongoing quality training. Most will only need to review those aspects in the Quality Manual relevant to their responsibilities but will be required to understand and act in accordance with the policies and procedures relating to their responsibilities as detailed their Job Description. Where individuals outside the company are involved with company business they should also complete the appropriate policy and procedure training. This is particularly so for subcontractors.

Competences

Competences relates to the skill sets individuals need to acquire, in order to undertake their work satisfactorily. Competences as identified in the job description, are expressed in terms of

what is required to complete the work, such as computer keyboard skills, product understanding, product installation, technical support, invoicing. For a particular job the prescribed competences are scored 1 to 10 and this becomes part of the job description. Thus when individuals are assigned the job they either already possess the required level of competence or they are required to achieve it through training. The achievement of competences beyond that required for the job can be regarded personal development. Progress in securing the required level of competences and beyond can be monitored as part of the personnel review process. SQMS provides facilities for defining and tracking competences.

Job Descriptions

These are required for all individuals fulfilling roles involved in the delivery of your products/services. SQMS Job Descriptions are designed to give maximum flexibility so as to easily accommodate changes in work requirement without the need to rewrite the Job Description. They also reflect the required range of competences.

Record

A record is the documented outcome of a process whether Business or Support, for example, a Customer Contract. It is important that the Record is contained in a registered file indicating its location, title (eg. Customer file), record retention period and whether or not printed or electronic.

Registration

Registration comprises both the registration of files containing records and the registration of the quality system documents so that authority to produce and release new or updated versions can be tracked. Application software with the SQMS is available to do this.

Quality Audit

Quality audits assess the level of compliance to the SQMS the company is achieving as well as recording any shortfalls and securing correction plans. For any Small to Medium Company the initial internal audit should not exceed a day with subsequent internal quality audits being less than one day. Such audits can be undertaken by suitably qualified personnel within the company or SMaRT personnel. Once the Business is satisfied that their SQMS is working across the company, then this is the time to seek external certification through a third party audit. Generally, if there is clear commitment to SQMS across the whole company, certification is possible within six to twelve months.