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# MANAGING EMPLOYEE COMPETENCY

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# MANAGING EMPLOYEE COMPETENCY.

As quality management software modules become more integrated, manufacturers must be able to train personnel, track skills and manage employee competency records in order to maximize the value-added potential of new systems. Quality management software modules are powerful tools that require skilled employees in order to yield the highest possible return on investment. In the real world, end users configure software to perform functions based upon the user's general technological expertise. IT personnel certainly possess the proficiency to use new software solutions efficiently, but this level of expertise should extend to the shop floor, as well. Automated employee skills and training software can help manufacturers ensure that quality management solutions return optimal results.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SKILLS AND TRAINING RECORDS:

An ideal quality management solution includes protocols for continuous improvement within the system. Employee competency is one of several facets of an effective continuous improvement program. As companies deploy new quality management systems in phases, the importance of creating and managing employee skills and training records becomes essential.

Primarily, the criticality of such record keeping relates to achieving and maintaining compliance with basic ISO 9001 standards. This series of standards explicitly states that companies must establish competency baselines, train employees accordingly, foster awareness, evaluate this training, and maintain records of employee competency. Satisfying these requirements at a low cost presents a daunting challenge when implementing a new quality management system.

To help overcome this challenge, manufacturers should aim to move beyond the idea of mere competency, toward the goal of true expertise. The method of establishing expertise requirements for incoming and current employees varies from one industry vertical to another. The principle applicable to all, however, is that of closing the "competency gap", the difference between current and ideal levels of expertise.

ISO 9001 extends competency requirements further by requiring companies to develop a system of evaluation (i.e. testing policies). These testing programs can benefit manufacturers as another form of internal auditing, albeit human resource auditing. Furthermore, keeping records of these results helps companies prepare for compliance audits. Today, automated quality management systems offer manufacturers novel solutions to these challenges.

## BENEFITS OF AN AUTOMATED SYSTEM:

Documentation is arguably the most critical component of regulatory or industry-specific compliance. Without proper documentation of employee expertise, manufacturers cannot receive certification. The benefits of deploying an automated system give manufacturers a means to achieve compliance at a low cost.

Employees who gain a high level of expert insight into the intricacies of a new quality management system will be able to quickly implement and utilize software efficiently. This expertise may lead to the development of novel cost-of-quality solutions in the future. Productivity (i.e. higher-quality output) increases with an automated training system as employees learn to yield maximum value from new software. Taken together, the benefits of a fully integrated, automated system of employee skills and training records afford manufacturers the agility to deploy human resources in the most optimal areas affecting quality.

Record keeping is one of the most rudimentary aspects of maintaining compliance with ISO standards. To anticipate the unforeseen challenges of lowering costs of quality, manufacturers should favor expertise over mere competency.

“ The biggest challenge in maintaining a **quality management system** is ensuring consistency in established practice, in a **consistently** changing business environment. ”



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