



ISO/TS 16949 Certification Myths: Busted!



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Introduction

Take a look at your quality system's audit through your auditor's eyes!

In this article, I will provide some common myths, misconceptions, and problems that I have encountered as a lead auditor for ISO/TS 16949:2002. While this is far from being a totally comprehensive recounting, organizations that are registered or considering registration to ISO/TS 16949 will find this information to be helpful.

Myths on who should be certified to ISO/TS 16949

"My organization can't be certified because we do not make parts for DaimlerChrysler, Ford, or General Motors."

If your organization can show that your parts are used on an automobile, then you meet the applicability. ISO/TS 16949 is for organizations that have value-added manufacturing processes which produce products for cars, trucks (light, medium, and heavy), buses, and motorcycles. If you are Tier 1, shipping direct to the OEM, or Tier 14, tracing a path of your parts to the vehicle will show your Certification Body (CB) that you are indeed eligible.

"My organization must be registered to ISO/TS 16949."

If you have contracts with DaimlerChrysler, Ford, and/or General Motors, then this is true. But before you make this declaration, you should consult your direct customer on what they desire and when. Most large Tier 1 organizations have supplier quality manuals stipulating what they require of their suppliers. If you are in doubt, consult the authorized customer representative.

A myth on the audit process

“The auditors need to see every single sheet of paper in the building!”

I can't stress enough that you need to carefully prepare for the audit. However, while your organization needs to show how it operates through the process approach, this doesn't mean that your auditors want to audit your business plan or involve themselves in your strategic plans. Their primary focus is on how you satisfy your customers. They will collect evidence of conformance to provide justification for granting the certificate, which consists of:

- Acceptable customer performance reports
- Resolved customer complaints
- A completed internal audit and closure
- A full management review, including a review of the internal audit
- Progress on continual improvement targets
- Effectiveness of achieving organization objectives
- Closure of all corrective actions from the audit

Your auditors will sign confidentiality agreements with the CB, and with your organization if necessary. If there are documents that are highly proprietary, be sure to tell your auditors – they do not have to take these documents with them. The intent of the process approach is explained in the TS specification; further information can be obtained from ISO 9004:2000.

A myth on the quality manual

“The standard has changed, so we have to prepare another quality manual.”

This myth proliferates because many organizations think ISO/TS 16949 is just like QS-9000. You can use your existing quality manual, but it needs to include all the

requirements for TS. Compared to an ISO 9001 manual, an existing QS manual would need more work, since the TS specification differs from QS.

The quality manual must contain:

1. The scope of the system, with details of any exclusion. The only exclusion is for product design.
2. The documented procedures, or a reference to them. There are only seven required procedures, and if you have been QS-9000 certified, you probably already have them.
3. A description of the interaction of your processes.

Let's review these points in more detail:

Procedures

Only seven procedures are mandated, but your organization may want or require more. A problem that can arise during the assessments (either the initial certification or subsequent surveillances) is that there are some strange requirements that process owners impose upon the organization. Scrutinize your procedures before any assessment, and justify or remove any superfluous or non-value added items.

Processes

The quality manual must contain a description of the interaction of the quality management system's processes. Probably the most frequent non-conformance auditors write is for a lack of identifying and describing these processes. The processes of an organization describe how work is performed by groups of functions. Your process description should reflect how these various functions come together to form a process to achieve a desired output.

Design Responsibility

There are only two answers to this, and they are: you are responsible, or your customer is responsible. A common misconception is that since your customer has to approve your design, you are not responsible for the design. This is incorrect: your customer, no matter what Tier you are, must always approve your design. If you have been granted the ability to change dimensional characteristics, material

composition, or functional requirements, then you are design responsible. If your customer uses your drawing and puts their name and part number on it, you are design responsible. Even if you subcontract these functions to an outside source, they must have the capability to meet the requirements of your customer and TS.

Problems arise when an organization states that they are not design responsible, and the auditors later discover that they are. In some cases, this has even happened during a surveillance assessment, well after the initial assessment has taken place. The auditor will write a major non-conformance for not describing this process to the CB. The cause could be that the organization did not understand the definition of “design responsible” – or it could be because of the 15% reduction in certification costs for not being design responsible.

Myths on non-conformances and corrective action

“We got a major non-conformance on our audit, so the auditors will leave and we will not be certified.”

According to the TS Rules, if your organization does obtain a major non-conformance, then you may elect to stop the audit in consultation with the audit team – but it is not wise to do so. If the audit team leaves at your decision, you will not gain the full benefit of the audit. There could be other areas that have potential major or numerous minor non-conformances, which your organization would have to spend more money to correct. The audit team should tell you to continue with the audit so that you gain its full value. If you complete the audit and successfully perform any corrective actions, the audit team will recommend your organization for certification.

“If the auditor wrote a non-conformance, then it is mandatory that we accept it.”

Auditors are human beings, and they make mistakes just like anyone else. Per ISO/IEC 17021, if you do not agree with a non-conformance, you have the right to appeal. Your CB must have an appeal process, and it’s the obligation of the lead auditor to explain it to you during the opening and closing meetings. Usually the appeal goes to the certification manager of the CB.

“To perform a corrective action, all I have to do is to provide a plan to the audit team.”

The requirements must have root cause analysis and systemic corrective actions. These must be closed within 90 days of the end of the site audit. The audit team leader should provide you with a list of requirements for completion of corrective action and the time frame. Some CBs provide 45 or 60 days, which builds a cushion in the event that your corrective actions are rejected and need to be resubmitted. If you go beyond 90 days, you will have to start over at Stage 1 (Readiness Review) and you will lose valuable money and time.

“We can talk the audit team into giving us Opportunities For Improvement so there will not be too many non-conformances.”

There are only two things that the audit team can write during an audit: major and minor non-conformances. Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs) written in lieu of non-conformances are only hiding the fact that things need to be corrected in the system. The final report to the organization may contain recommendations for improvement, but these cannot be deficiencies to the system and TS.

Auditors are continually cautioned that making recommendations for improvement could be considered consulting. The audit team will not consult in any way, as this affects the CB’s status as an impartial third party.

“We got more non-conformances at the surveillance audit than at the initial assessment... we’re going backward!”

The number of non-conformances on an audit is due to many things. Remember that the variation in all things brings about a deviation from the norm, which needs correction to return to the norm. This is a learning experience for your organization and the audit team. Embrace it and it will make you rich in wisdom.

Myths on interaction with the CB's head office

"Our certificate will be issued as soon as the audit is over."

Many organizations believe that when the audit is done, the certificate will be immediately issued. However, the audit team will not recommend your organization for certification until all corrective actions have been successfully completed. "Successfully completed" means there is documented evidence that the non-conformity has been eliminated. Your organization will be notified of this closure and decision, and you'll receive a supplementary report to be notified of this fact – this varies among CBs, but it is usually a status letter of completion or another similar document.

"We can stretch out the timing of our surveillances a little bit."

The interval between surveillance audits is somewhere between 9 and 13 months. Your organization should be notified within at least 8 months of an impending surveillance audit. If you are not notified, contact your registrar to find out when your audit will occur. If you go beyond 13 months, your certificate will be invalid and you will have to start over at the Readiness Review phase. This can be very costly! Be aware of when your audits should occur.

Conclusion

The future of your certification and good business practices will keep your organization in good standing with your customers and the CB. Remember, this is a performance audit of your processes to see how well your organization satisfies your customers' requirements. There is a careful balance in your business to stay in the propitious niche you have chosen. To have the certification process become a value to your organization, you must use it as an augmentation to your daily operations.



About the author

Ray Ness is a lead auditor and project manager for Intertek. With over 40 years of experience in the automotive, commercial, and aerospace industries, his areas of expertise include Automotive Quality Systems, Plant Management, Purchasing and Supplier Management, and Process Engineering. He is a certified lead auditor for the ISO/TS 16949, ISO 9001, and ISO 14001 standards.