Corrective & Preventive Action

What's the difference?

by **Mickey Jawa, CEO, SatiStar Management Consulting**

The ISO9001 standard requires that organizations create and deploy documented procedures for each of Corrective Action and for Preventive Action. While Corrective Action seems to be well understood by most, Preventive Action is still a source of confusion.

In a 2007 survey of over 550 companies, almost 60% of respondents said that they have a single procedure that covers both Corrective Action and Preventive Action. The rest either already have two separate procedures or are in the process of changing to two. Just under 1% said that they have more than two procedures – Ouch!

The issue isn't whether or not you have one, or two procedures covering these two requirements. It is whether or not your people understand the difference between them.

Definitions

According to ISO9000:2005 (Fundamentals and Vocabulary):

Correction: Action to eliminate a detected nonconformity. There is a distinction between correction and corrective action.

Corrective Action: Action to eliminate the cause of a detected nonconformity or other undesirable situation. Corrective action is taken to prevent recurrence.

Preventive Action: Action to eliminate the cause of a potential nonconformity or other undesirable potential situation. Preventive action is taken to prevent occurrence.

It's important to note that there can be more than one cause for either a real or potential nonconformity.

ISO Standard Requirements

Section 8.5 of the ISO9001:2000 standard is all about Improvement. Within this section there are three sub-sections:

1. Continual improvement
2. Corrective action
3. Preventive action

The standard requires procedures for each of the latter two, but not for the first.

Corrective Action

Section 8.5.2 specifically states that:

> The organization shall take action to eliminate the cause of nonconformities in order to prevent recurrence. Corrective actions shall be appropriate to the effects of the nonconformities encountered.
>
> A documented procedure shall be established to define requirements for
>
> a) reviewing nonconformities (including customer complaints),
> b) determining the causes of nonconformities,
> c) evaluating the need for action to ensure that nonconformities do not recur,
> d) determining and implementing action needed,
> e) records of the results of action taken (see 4.2.4), and
> f) reviewing corrective action taken.

- Corrective action means that the problem has already occurred – you have already screwed up somewhere.

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- Now you need to fix this existing problem
- You also need to figure out what caused the problem
- Then you need to figure out how to prevent the cause of the problem from happening again
- You'll need to document all of your actions
- Finally, you'll need to review the results of the actions that you've taken.

Preventive Action

Of the two, this is by far the one that creates the most headaches in pursuing ISO9001 registration.

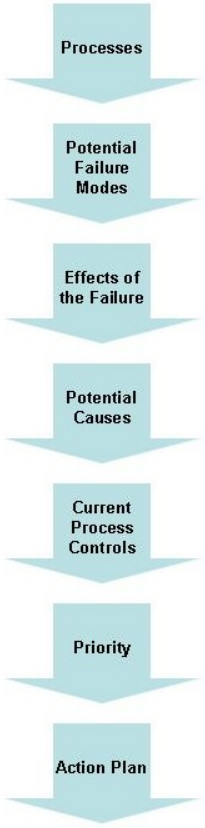
Section 8.5.3 specifically states that:

> The organization shall determine action to eliminate the causes of potential nonconformities in order to prevent their occurrence. Preventive actions shall be appropriate to the effects of the potential problems.
>
> A documented procedure shall be established to define requirements for
>
> a) determining potential nonconformities and their causes,
> b) evaluating the need for action to prevent occurrence of nonconformities,
> c) determining and implementing action needed,
> d) records of results of action taken (see 4.2.4), and
> e) reviewing preventive action taken.

- By definition, preventive action means that the problem hasn't yet occurred, but it could.
- This is tricky because there are an infinite number of bad things that could happen, so how do you decide which of those you'll address through preventive action? You'll need to develop some way of considering all of the most likely potential bad things that could happen within your processes. We recommend FMEA.
- You can't work on all of them now, so you'll need to prioritize somehow
- For each of the high priority potential issues that you've selected, you'll need to figure out what could probably cause the potential problem
- Then, you'll need to figure out how to prevent that probable cause and take appropriate action
- Again, you'll need to document and review the results of the preventive actions you've taken.

Failure Mode and Effects Analysis

This technology was developed by NASA as a mechanism to rapidly identify and prioritize the highest risk issues within their processes, and then determine appropriate actions to resolve these high priority issues.



- You start by looking at your process flow diagrams for each of your critical business processes.
- Assess what could possibly go wrong at each step of the process.
- Determine what the effect of that failure would be on your business, and for your customers. Determine the severity of the impact.
- Develop a list of the potential cause mechanisms for each of the failures you've identified, and estimate the probability of its occurrence.
- List the ways in which you currently prevent this bad thing from happening, and assess the probability of your current controls failing to detect the occurrence.
- Prioritize based on severity, probability of occurrence and your ability to detect the failure using your current controls.
- For each of the highest priority issues, create an action plan (including tasks, responsibilities, dates). This is your Preventive Action plan.
- Monitor progress on the action plan.

Mickey Jawa is the CEO of SatiStar Management Consulting, and has over 25 years of experience in a wide range of industries. He has assisted companies worldwide in implementing Business Performance Improvement, especially in the area of cycle time reduction.

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