



The Power of Peer Assessment in IQNet

The IQNet Peer Assessment process stands above the typical “I’m OK, You’re OK” syndrome.

IQNet

IQNet is an expansive international Network of 36 partner certification bodies incorporating over 200 subsidiaries worldwide. Approximately one third of all management system certifications issued globally are estimated to have been delivered through IQNet partners (over 300,000 certificates in total).

From the beginning, all IQNet partners have recognised the importance of an effective Peer Assessment system to ensure consistency amongst partners. It is a key element in the process of mutual recognition between the partners; and this mutual recognition system allows IQNet partners to recognise each other's certifications.

This provides the basis for a co-certification process where a management system certified by one IQNet partner is accepted globally throughout the Network. This co-certification process greatly facilitates trade for organisations certified by any IQNet partner. This is achieved because there is no need for audit duplication where a conformity proof is required by a certification body from a foreign market in order to comply with local rules. This also facilitates service delivery to international clients with global certification programmes.

The value of peer assessments to IQNet

An effective peer assessment system serves as a tool to advance partner performance and in doing so, strengthens and harmonises processes within the Network. It is also fundamental in the support of mutual recognition between partners with respect to the integrity of conformity assessments. Peer audits expedite the elimination of weaknesses and they support the transfer of knowledge and best practices throughout the Network, thus contributing to practical continuous improvement. This provides the trust and transparency necessary for an effective partner cooperation process, which leads to mutual recognition and its intrinsic trade facilitation for IQNet certified clients.

The IQNet Peer Assessment process has evolved over the last 17 years into a rigorous system which at present:

- consists of a specialised team of 29 assessors from 17 countries
- includes formal annual auditor training
- incorporates a system for regular performance measurement
- consists of a web-based process systems
- has delivered over 300 audits involving more than 2000 auditor days
- is the basis for the implementation of the mutual recognition of partner certificates and audit results

Performance criteria

The IQNet Peer Assessment System requires IQNet partners to periodically demonstrate their proficiency and performance level and to be in line with all IQNet criteria. In doing so, the IQNet Peer Assessment System has become a highly effective management tool, demonstrating remarkable performance results. There are eight criteria on which the performance levels are measured:

1. Auditor preparation
2. Communication during the audit
3. Audit focus (essential issues)
4. Motivation of management and employees
5. Business understanding
6. Identification of improvement potential
7. Professional competence of auditors
8. Added value component

In 2005, the IQNet Peer Assessment System was brought in line with the requirements of ISO/IEC17040:2005 “The general requirements for peer assessment of conformity assessment bodies”. When implementing this newly established international standard, all respective processes were examined with regard to their compliance and adjusted where necessary. The importance of this standard is to provide credibility in peer assessment for users of such tools and results.

Beyond the usual peer assessment process - Best practice sharing

Some five years ago, the IQNet Peer Assessment system was complemented by the Best Practice Evaluation process (BPE). This assessment model is intended for best practice identification and sharing. The new model is intended to better focus certification processes on customer loyalty, value creation and success; and to measure partner performance. On the basis of 250 criteria, the performance level is measured against defined benchmarks and best practices in the ten categories of excellence described in Figure 1.

This allows performance profiles to be generated for each partner; identifying relative strengths and weaknesses in their processes.

Figure 1: Best Practice Evaluation - Profile

Example BPE-Performance Profile											
Evaluated elements	Result	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Quality on business planning and control	8.0								●		
2 Focus on customers and interested parties	7.0							●			
3 Management of product portfolio	7.0							●			
4 Management of competence (for auditors and personnel)	8.0								●		
5 Management of business processes	6.0						●				
6 Use of improvement tools	7.0							●			
7 Use of partnerships	8.0								●		
8 Financial results	6.0						●				
9 Non financial results	8.0								●		
10 Promotion and communication	7.0							●			
Result	7.2										

The BPE model has already been applied more than 20 times since its introduction and has demonstrated its strategic value to IQNet partners. Users of the model receive an individual performance profile, a list of strategic improvement elements and strengths, which all are part of the assessment report. Sharing of best practices accelerates performance improvements across the network and ultimately delivers better output for certification clients.

An IQNet strength

In summary, the collaboration between IQNet partners is facilitated by the adoption of a harmonised approach towards assessment and certification. Confidence in conformance to the IQNet harmonised approach is gained through a peer evaluation system, which also enables partners to share best practice.

The global peer evaluation process implemented by IQNet transcends geographical and cultural boundaries; being a significant catalyst for consistency, improvement and innovation throughout the network. IQNet can be contacted for further information via the website, www.iqnet-certification.com



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