iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 8 **Issue:** VI **Month of publication:** June 2020

DOI: http://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2020.6068

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.429
Volume 8 Issue VI June 2020- Available at www.ijraset.com

Corona Virus Pandemic – are ISO Standards the answers to the Organisations?

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Abstract: ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established, has the right to be represented on that committee. In other words, it is an independent, worldwide federation of national standards bodies. Through its members, it brings together experts to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market relevant International Standards (Management Systems) that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges. Today we have standards for almost every field. The paper is on how integrating the requirements and guidelines of various ISO standards into business processes could be an answer to face workplace challenges post Covid-19.

I. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus outbreak has been labelled a pandemic by the World Health Organization. Due to this pandemic the world is facing an unprecedented situation. It has affected our families, businesses, communities and our daily life in many ways. The effects of the pandemic on economic activity are being felt in every sector, far beyond the airline, travel, tourism and hospitality sectors.
As we are aware that COVID-19 infection can easily spread within the workplaces and organizations. However, this catastrophe can be contained by implementation of various management system developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

II. PRESENT SCENARIO

For the last several months, the key questions on everybody's mind is how long the Covid-19 pandemic will continue. Many experts believe that the pandemic will not leave anytime soon. At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. Prevention is the only way and hence we have to have control measures in place to prevent and slow down transmission. As of now, most of the organizations have adopted various control measures as mentioned below:

A. Reducing physical contact with customers and employees and other stake holders by using electronic means of communication
B. Requesting employees to use alternative places to work, mostly from their homes.
C. Use alternative channels for delivery of their products through outsourced logistics services.
D. Starting to use specific PPEs for their employees and introduce rules for social distancing.
E. A comprehensive audit of organization's work culture, processes and methodology for preparing and reacting to the potential health hazard vis-a-vis COVID-19.
F. Communication and Participation of workers in order to educate them, increase their awareness as well as taking valuable suggestions from them on how to tackle an infection or other communicable diseases.

All above mentioned steps are welcomed steps. However, we do not know whether all these steps are adequate or not.

III. HOW ADOPTING ISO STANDARDS REQUIREMENTS CAN HELP?

Developing an appropriate workplace Health and Safety management system as per the guidelines of various ISO Standards could be the way to prevent the COVID-19 infection from interrupting the businesses and normal life. ISO standards can help address these challenges. For example, ISO 45001, Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems, Requirements is the first International Standard for occupational health and safety (OH&S) management, containing agreed good practice from around the world. It provides useful guidance and a framework to reduce work-related risks, protect health and increase safety at work.

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Workplace health, however, is not limited to physical safety and well-being. The stresses and fears due to Covid-19 pandemic impact everyone. Employees everywhere could be affected by the prevailing uncertainty and hence their working environment plays a vital role in reducing this.

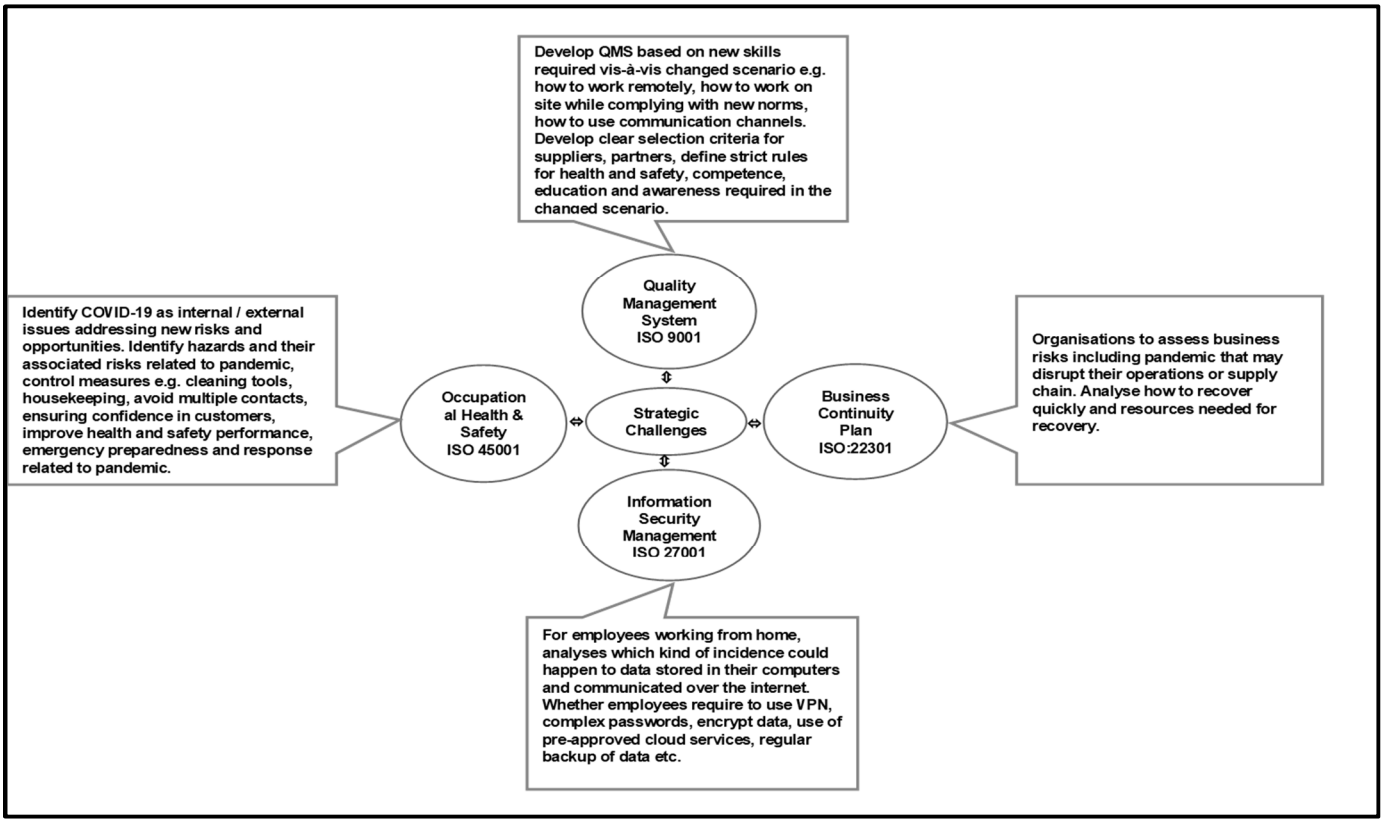
Recognizing this fact, work is underway to develop a complementary standard that addresses psychological health. The upcoming ISO 45003, Occupational health and safety management – Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Guidelines, will provide guidance on the requirements of ISO 45001 with respect to managing psychological health and safety risks within an OH&S management system. The standard will address the many areas that can impact an employee's psychological health, excessive pressure. It is expected to be published sometime in 2021.

ISO 22301 is the international standard for business continuity. It helps organizations to protect against and recover from disruptive incidents. It provides a systematic approach to business continuity management, and it's applicable to any organization, regardless of type, size and sector. This standard is designed to help organizations prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from unexpected and disruptive incidents. It provides a framework which enables an organisation to ensure that its operations continue and that products and services are delivered at predefined levels, that brands and value-creating activities are protected, and that the reputations and interests of key stakeholders are safeguarded whenever disruptive incidents occur.

ISO 9001 is an international standard dedicated to Quality Management Systems (QMS). It helps businesses and organizations to be more efficient and improve customer satisfaction. The primary focus of the ISO 9001 standard is to meet customer requirements and strive to exceed customer expectations through continual improvement.

ISO 27001 is an international standard that specifies a management system that is intended to bring information security under management control. Organizations can develop and implement a framework for managing the security of their information assets, including financial information, intellectual property, and employee details, or information entrusted to them by customers or third parties. Now, we are slowly moving towards a gradual removal of the lockdown. The biggest challenge businesses will face will be restarting their operations. In the post covid-19 scenario, organisations needs to derive Strategic Objectives through re-mapping of stakeholder wise challengese e.g. challenges with respect to customers, suppliers, employees, Government, community etc. Once these challenges have been identified, framework provided by ISO standard requirements could be incorporated into the business processes to overcome these challenges as shown in the model below:

Model: Integrating various ISO standard requirements into the business processes



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In the context of post COVID-19 business environment, the organizations need to determine external and internal issues that relevant to its vision and strategic direction, requirements of its key stake holders, risks and opportunities that need to addressed to achieve intended results considering impact of Corona Virus Pandemic.

The leadership system and strategic planning should take into account the framework provided by ISO standards mentioned above. Strategic planning should cut across all the functions, systems and processes. Various functions within the organization have to be aligned and integrated with the Context of the Organization (overall strategic plan), highlighting all internal and external factors with their resulting impact on the organization. In other words, to ensure organizational sustainability and continual improvement in the present circumstances, organizations need to adopt an integrated framework considering various ISO Standards requirements as mentioned in the model.

IV. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

These standards mandate monitoring, measurement, analysis and performance evaluation and effectiveness of implemented management systems of the organisation. It highlights periodic audits and management reviews, documented information as evidence of the nature of nonconformity and any subsequent corrective action taken. These periodic audits provide an opportunity to identify problems with disaster recovery processes, to ensure organisation's processes actually work in practice. Whenever these audits reveal problems, these are documented and then corrective action is taken to prevent the this from recurring.

V. CONCLUSION

A pandemic does not happen quite often. But when they happen, there are unpredictable situations and we need to develop guidelines and strategies to respond to the crisis. However, ISO 22301, ISO 27001, ISO 9001, and ISO 45001 requirements are ready-made frameworks that can be applied effectively even in adverse and pandemic situation.

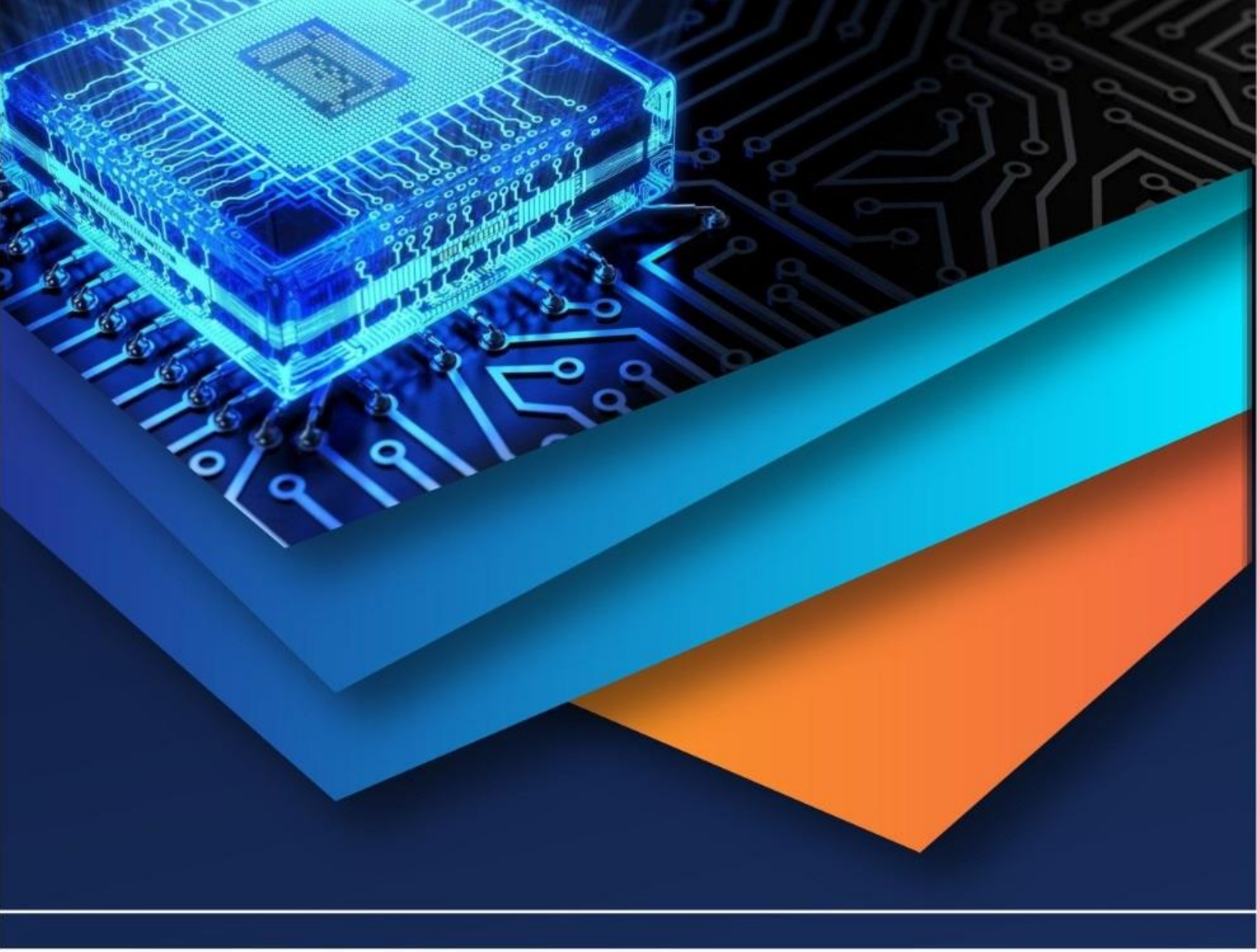
Also, there has to be change in the mindset from "We are ISO certified company because our customers require it," to "We have implemented a management system to provide a framework on which we can face various challenges, including the current pandemic and achieve continual improvement."

Environment Management System (ISO 14001), Food Safety Management System (ISO 22000) could also be included by replacing any of the above-mentioned standard depending upon the type of the organization.

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