

Corrective vs. Preventive Action

Corrective and Preventive Actions are key elements in a Quality Management System (QMS) that is focused on Continual Improvement and Customer Satisfaction. Any business using ISO 9001:2008 as the core of its QMS should have this type of focus. Unfortunately many do not.

The difference between a Corrective Action and a Preventive Action is often misunderstood and in fact many people don't see any difference between the two

A corrective action (CA) deals with a nonconformity that has occurred.

Example:

Buying a new tyre after getting a puncture. The problem has already occurred. Trying to minimise the likelihood of it occurring again could involve checking tyre pressures regularly, not going over rough roads, avoiding hitting kerbs etc

A preventive action (PA) addresses the potential for a nonconformity to occur.

Example:

Putting petrol in the tank. If the tank is half full it is an indication that eventually you will run out of petrol but by watching the petrol gauge you can avoid this problem

CA requires you to understand the problem that has occurred and to use root cause analysis to uncover the real cause of the problem so that it can be addressed in a way that it is unlikely to reoccur.

ISO 9001:2008 section 8.5.2 says corrective action eliminates the cause of nonconformities to prevent recurrence,

PA requires you to conduct trend analysis to identify issues that may lead to non-conformances and address them before they become non-conformances

ISO 9001:2008 section 8.5.3 says preventive action determines and eliminates the causes of potential nonconformities ... to prevent occurrence.

Simply put:

Corrective Action is based on a non-conformance event that has happened in the past.
Preventive Action is based on preventing a non-conformance event in the future.

Both require a focus on continuous improvement and they are important and integral parts of any business that has a continuous improvement focus.

Both should use some type of system for logging and monitoring so that trends can be identified (PA) and the business can identify if their actions are having the desired effect in terms of preventing reoccurrence (CA)

Corrective Actions

In many businesses a problem is fixed and the assumption is that this is preventive action because steps have been taken to ensure the problem doesn't occur again. This is still corrective action because despite the fact that it looks to the future the focus is on preventing the problem from happening again

Preventive Actions

Preventive Action however is not focussed on what **has happened** but on **what might happen**. The focus is therefore on looking at trends and seeking to improve the way the business operates so that future problems can be minimised and business efficiencies can be maximised.

As the system improves it is likely that the number of Corrective Actions will reduce and the number of Preventive Actions will increase. This is a sign of a mature and effective system and is likely to be reflected in minutes of management review meetings where the greater focus is on identifying future improvements than on addressing corrective actions to address recurring problems.

Corrective Action Process

- Locate and document the root cause of the nonconformity.
- Scan the entire system to ensure no other similar nonconformity could occur.
- Analyse the effect that non-conformity may have had on a product or service produced before the nonconformity was discovered, and take action appropriate to the severity of the situation by either recalling the product, notifying the customer, downgrading or scrapping product.
- Establish thorough follow-up to ensure the correction is effective and recurrence has been prevented.

Preventive Action Process

- Take proactive steps to ensure a potential nonconformity does not occur.
- Employ process and system analysis to determine how to build in safeguards and process changes to prevent non-conformance.

The following are all Preventive Actions that most “certified” organisations would use although they may not be recognised as such

- A documented management system
- Documented procedures
- Policies
- Work Instructions
- Training
- Meetings
- Management Review
- Audits

All of the above provide guidance of how to do things correctly therefore they are all preventive actions. The audit process seeks to find potential problems before they emerge and when done correctly; the audit process should also seek to confirm that the process under audit is Effectively Implemented and Maintained.

Definitions from ISO 9000 – 2006 Quality Management Systems Fundamentals and Vocabulary

3.6.4

preventive action

action to eliminate the cause of a potential **nonconformity** (3.6.2) or other undesirable potential situation

NOTE 1 There can be more than one cause for a potential nonconformity.

NOTE 2 Preventive action is taken to prevent occurrence whereas **corrective action** (3.6.5) is taken to prevent recurrence.

3.6.5

corrective action

action to eliminate the cause of a detected **nonconformity** (3.6.2) or other undesirable situation

NOTE 1 There can be more than one cause for a nonconformity.

NOTE 2 Corrective action is taken to prevent recurrence whereas **preventive action** (3.6.4) is taken to prevent occurrence

NOTE 3 There is a distinction between **correction** (3.6.6) and corrective action.

3.6.6

correction

action to eliminate a detected **nonconformity** (3.6.2)

NOTE 1 A correction can be made in conjunction with a **corrective action** (3.6.5).

NOTE 2 A correction can be, for example, **rework** ((3.6.7) or **regrade** (3.6.8).