

## **Certificates for professionals based on EOQ certification schemes – a valid proof of competence!**

### **EOQ certification related activities – some facts**

One of EOQ's goals is to achieve and maintain mutual recognition of personnel competence within Europe including the registration and unified certification of quality and management professionals.

EOQ develops, provides and maintains harmonized rules and procedures for the training, certification and registration of quality and management professionals since more than 30 years.

EOQ supports common activities of its member organizations, with respect to training, certification and registration of quality and management professionals and promotes the mutual recognition and acceptance of certificates within the framework of the certification schemes.

The EOQ Competence Center (CC) is the responsible unit dealing with these tasks. EOQ certification schemes are developed by specialists from leading quality organizations all over Europe, assuring a European harmonized professional approach.

EOQ is developer and owner of personnel certification schemes for many managerial professions, recognized by the European Quality Associations and for the scheme EOQ COS / CS 9000 by the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA).

This recognition of a conformity assessment scheme for persons in 2017 was the first in Europe since the beginning of accreditation on the basis of ISO 17024. International harmonization and acceptance of EOQ Quality Management and Auditor certification schemes is realized and unique in Europe.

Furthermore, EOQ schemes for quality auditors have been developed in cooperation with the International Personnel Certification Association (IPC) and comply with the rules of IPC Auditor Scheme. This scheme is accepted by the International Accreditation Forum IAF as the first scheme worldwide for personnel certification.

EOQ supports a broad framework of interested parties in form of liaison membership at EA, in ISO TC 176 and ISO CASCO and furthermore membership and mutual recognition of the schemes within IPC.

### **The EOQ approach of competence-based certification – an explanation**

Having competent personnel is a need and well established as a fundamental of sustainable organizational success.

How can organizations ensure the competence of their personnel in the different functions and units? The usual method is to initiate learning activities by different methods like self-learning, trainings, learning on the job, further education and so on. The result is usually knowledge about specified topics. In the relevant ISO standards these learning activities are defined as qualification.

Different to qualifications that persons/professionals achieve by learning activities, the “competence approach” focuses on the ability of persons to apply knowledge and skills.

Competence can be achieved by many activities beside learning, e.g. through achieved job experience, successful exercised jobs and tasks or training activities including the simulation of specified tasks. This competence approach is a fundamental in the ISO Standard 17024, dealing with requirements for the certification of persons.

How can the competence of persons be measured and attested / certified? A valid method is the competence-based certification of persons and the issuing of certificates.

How can one judge the value of a “certificate” and what kinds of certificates are available in the marketplace?

The term "certificate" is not protected - anyone can issue a certificate for any conceivable matter. It is therefore important to consider both the issuing organization or person and the basis on which a certificate is issued.

In the area of further education and personnel certification the following certificates can be distinguished in particular with reference to a person:

- Proofs of participation in educational events - often also called a certificate (of attendance)
- Certification of the qualification of persons on the basis of further education and passed examinations - also called qualification certificate
- Certification of the competence of persons on the basis of defined target competences with proof thereof by an independent competent body - also called certificate of competence.

The market is characterized by a high number of providers who issue a large number of certificates or other proofs of competence - often following corresponding further education measures.

To ensure comparability of the competence of certified persons, EOQ`s approach is based on clearly defined certification schemes related to the respective competence specification and procedures for certification bodies to achieve it. The high value of a competence certificate issued through a certification body of persons working on the basis of the International Standard ISO 17024 results from the conditions that a certification body has to fulfil – here some important requirements:

The basis for the assessment and the decision whether someone receives a certificate is the so-called “certification program”. This contains all necessary conditions and rules. It starts with the definition of the "job profile" - the tasks and activities to be performed in the exercise of the respective function (e.g. as an auditor or quality manager). From this program learning objectives and learning objective levels are derived, which describe the required competence (knowledge, skills and abilities). These learning objectives are an essential basis for the corresponding training courses. Finally, it is determined how the competence must be proven - e.g. through specific examinations, proof of skills or training, proof of practical experience in the field or successfully completed projects.

On the basis of these specifications, the certification procedures are carried out - this includes the application of a candidate for certification, the submission and examination of the evidence and the performance and evaluation of the examination up to the issuing of the certificate as soon as all conditions are fulfilled.

For the customer or interested party in a certification, the relevant conditions (e.g. the specific EOQ certification scheme requirements) are laid down and can be read in the certification and examination regulations as well as the respective implementation regulation.

The certification body claims that all interested parties are treated equally and fairly and that all certification-relevant activities are carried out impartially, neutrally and objectively by competent personnel.

Certification bodies fulfilling ISO 17024 requirements and working on contractual basis with EOQ owned certification schemes have the right to issue certificates in the respective competence field based on a unified approach:

EOQ Competence Specifications (CoS) and Certification Schemes (CS) have for each profession clearly defined profiles/job descriptions, knowledge and skills requirements as well as requirements for the certification and re-certification processes of the personnel certification.

Together with additional EOQ documents certification bodies running the EOQ scheme ensure a harmonized approach for certifying persons Europe wide.

The EOQ European harmonized approach includes but is not limited to the following issues:

Harmonized knowledge pre-condition requirements: Pre-conditions related to the content and duration of vocational trainings to be proved by EOQ based certification candidates, including recognition rules and procedures for the recognition of training organizations and provided trainings are defined on the same European harmonized approach and applied by involved personnel certification bodies.

Harmonized practical experience requirements: EOQ based certificates are issued on the basis of identical fulfillment of practical experience requirements.

Assurance of ongoing competence development: The validity of EOQ based competence certificates is limited. For the prolongation of the certificates' validity the certificates' holders have to prove practical experience in the certified professions and further professional development.

High level competence of examiners: Examiners acting on behalf of the personnel certification bodies have to fulfill the same high level EOQ competence requirements and approval procedures.

Fair, valid and reliable assessments: Fairness, validity and reliability of the assessments are monitored by national accreditation bodies and/or EOQ, through periodic audits.

### **Added value for organizations using certified personnel**

During the last decades requirements related to the necessary competence of personnel have increased, especially for specialists and managerial functions with reference to ISO Management System Standards like ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001. Sustainable success of organizations relates strong with the competence of their personnel.

But how to ensure the needed competence in the specific tasks and functions?

Regarding Quality and Management related tasks, derived from requirements of the respective standards and market needs the EOQ certification scheme approach is one sufficient mean to fulfil the needs for (Quality) Management and Audit professionals. Valid proofs of competence ensure that the persons are able to do the defined job and strengthens the competitiveness of the organization.

Last but not least motivated and highly competent personnel have a positive influence on the quality culture within the organization.

## Resume

Competent personnel is a fundamental need for successful organizations. EOQ supports organizations and professionals with the international harmonized and recognized “competence-based certification approach” by defining relevant job profiles and developing related concepts how to proof the necessary competence. This supports organizations in finding stuff that is able to improve the organization and execute relevant management and related tasks in a sufficient way.

EOQ develops and updates Europe wide harmonized and recognized certification schemes for Quality and Management related personnel since decades. These may build the basis and framework for personnel certification bodies and training organizations. Certified persons show their competence through a “competence-based certificate” of an accredited and EOQ recognized certification body for persons. Additionally, EOQ based certified persons can be verified in the EOQ registry that is publicly available on the EOQ website.

These and related activities support now and in future the vision and mission of EOQ to promote Quality through competent professionals.

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## About the author:



Thomas Votsmeier is Director Standardization at the German Association for Quality (DGQ). As longstanding Head of EOQ`s Technical Working Group he leads the development of EOQ Certification Schemes and represents EOQ at European Cooperation for Accreditation EA. He was member of the ISO CASCO working group during the revision of ISO 17024 and is also active as board member and in working groups of the International Personnel Certification Association IPC. Furthermore he supports ISO standards development in Projects of TC 176, TC 207 and ISO CASCO as representative of DIN and / or EOQ.