

Requalification: When suppliers, processes and products must be re-approved

Requalification refers to the renewed qualification of a supplier, manufacturing process or product that had previously been successfully approved but has lost its validity due to changes, failures or the passage of time. In industrial procurement, it is a central instrument for keeping risks in the supply chain visible and manageable. It closely links quality management, supplier management and operational purchasing.

Key facts

- Requalification is the renewed review and approval of already qualified suppliers, processes or products following material changes.
- Typical triggers are process changes, site relocations, quality problems, long delivery pauses or expired validity periods.
- The scope ranges from an extended documentation check to a complete new approval with first-article inspection and capacity audit.
- In practice, requalification cycles are often set at two to five years, depending on risk class and industry requirements.
- Without clearly defined requalification rules, there is a risk of undetected process changes, scrap, delivery shortfalls and liability risks.

Definition: requalification

Requalification is the repeated, systematic evaluation and approval of an object that has already undergone an initial qualification. It ensures that the conditions that applied at initial qualification continue to be met or have been restored. The term is used in the supply industry equally for suppliers, manufacturing processes and products.

Distinction from initial qualification

Initial qualification reviews for the first time whether a supplier or process meets the requirements. Requalification, by contrast, compares the actual state with the most recently approved reference state. This usually allows leaner review procedures, because documentation and history already exist. Nevertheless, in the event of serious deviations, the full scope of a new approval may become necessary.

Distinction from ongoing supplier evaluation

Continuous supplier evaluation relies on metrics such as delivery reliability, scrap and response times. Requalification goes beyond this because it specifically verifies the state of processes, machinery, certifications and approvals. It is a one-off, usually plannable intervention, not a continuous process. The two instruments complement each other and should be anchored in a joint supplier strategy.

Triggers: when requalification becomes necessary

Not every change in the supply chain forces a requalification. What matters is whether the change could potentially affect the quality, availability or compliance of the delivered performance. Buyers and quality managers define these triggers in binding form in the supplier agreement.

Changes at the supplier

Frequent triggers are site relocations, changes to tier-2 or tier-3 suppliers, conversion of production lines, or changes to materials and pre-products. A change of ownership or financial difficulties can also trigger a renewed evaluation, as they may indicate altered processes or capacities. Some companies therefore contractually require notification of material changes within a defined period, comparable to a defined notice period in framework agreements.

Changes on the customer side and in the product

From the customer's own perspective, too, requalification may become necessary: changed specifications, new conditions of use, higher volumes or a switch to just-in-time delivery raise the requirements placed on the supplier. A transition from single deliveries to sequenced supply typically requires new evidence of process capability and logistics performance.

Passage of time and pausing

Many quality management systems provide for fixed validity periods for supplier approvals, in practice often between two and five years. Even for programmes that are discontinued and later resumed, the approval often lapses: anyone who has not delivered parts or a remaining quantity over a longer period must demonstrate their process capability again before the series approval takes effect again.

Methods and approach to requalification

A structured approach keeps the effort limited and the evidence complete. A risk classification that controls the scope of requalification has proven its worth: critical parts with safety-relevant functions undergo the full scope, simple C-parts only an updated documentation check.

Self-disclosure, audit and document review

The starting point is usually an updated supplier self-disclosure on certifications, personnel, machinery and change history. This is followed by document reviews – for example of management certificates and substance compliance under REACH and RoHS – and, depending on the risk class, an on-site or remote audit. Capacities and capacity planning are also reconciled with the expected delivery schedule.

Sample inspection and process approval

Where processes or materials have changed, a renewed sample inspection is customary, often based on established procedures such as first-article inspection. The supplier documents that the changed process meets the specification. Only after the inspection has been successfully completed is the series approval granted or confirmed. In the interim, the part is often treated as blocked or only deliverable with the customer's approval stamp.

Anchoring in processes and systems

Requalifications only have an effect if they are tracked systematically and by deadline. Cut-off dates belong in the delivery schedule and capacity planning, responsibilities in category management

governance. Change notifications from the supplier should run through a defined change management process with clear deadlines and responsibilities.

Key KPIs for steering requalification

Metrics show whether approvals are up to date and whether requalifications are completed in good time. They should be reviewed regularly in the supplier review.

Approval and process metrics

Key figures are the proportion of valid supplier approvals, the punctuality of completed requalifications and the number of open change requests. The rate of on-time sample deliveries during requalification also provides insight into the supplier's process maturity.

Cost and delivery metrics

In addition, delivery reliability, scrap rates and complaint rates indicate whether a supplier needs requalification. For economic assessment, a total cost calculation is suitable, which captures not only the unit price but also inspection costs, blocked stock and failure risks. This makes it possible to demonstrate whether the requalification effort pays off through avoided failures.

Risks and controls

Untreated requalification cases lead to noticeable disruptions in day-to-day operations. Typical consequences are blocked stock, delays against the delivery schedule, repeated sample cycles and, in the extreme case, production stoppages in just-in-time-oriented manufacturing.

Typical weak points

Clear trigger criteria or deadlines are often missing, so that requalifications only come to attention when problems arise. The supplier's silent process change without notification is also a known risk. Anyone who focuses exclusively on unit prices and does not mark requalified providers as 'approved' in tender management risks unintentionally switching to unverified sources.

Control instruments

Effective controls are contractual change notification periods, defined safety buffers for requalification cycles ahead of critical start dates, and an approval status that is visible in the procurement system. In addition, elements such as safety stock should temporarily cushion the supply contract during ongoing requalifications. Legal consequences – such as warranty or product liability for unapproved changes – must always be examined on a case-by-case basis.

Current developments

Requalification is changing as a result of digitalisation and increased demand for evidence. Paper-based audits are being replaced by systems that centrally manage approval statuses, certificates and change histories and automatically remind users of due dates.

Digitalisation and data basis

Supplier portals and procurement platforms make it possible to keep approval statuses and certificates continuously up to date. A high classification rate for material master data helps to identify parts

requiring requalification automatically. Analyses based on a spend cube show for which suppliers and material groups the effort is economically justified.

Compliance and sustainability

Growing requirements for substance compliance, traceability and sustainability evidence increase the documentation effort. Regular requalifications offer a suitable opportunity to re-verify REACH and RoHS evidence as well as social and environmental standards. Requalification is also gaining importance as supply chains are diversified and new or reactivated sources are opened up.

Typical metrics

Proportion of valid supplier approvals: > 95%

Proportion of active suppliers with a non-expired approval; practical guideline value

On-time completion rate for requalifications: > 90%

Proportion of requalifications completed on time before expiry

Complaint rate for requalified parts: < 1%

Guideline value observed in series deliveries after re-approval

Open change notifications: 0 critical > 90 days

Age of open change requests without completed requalification

Practical example

A medium-sized mechanical engineering company has been sourcing a machined cast component from a European supplier for years. The supplier relocates production to another site and replaces the foundry partner – without the original series approval being reviewed again. Shortly after the changeover, shrinkage defects accumulate; the affected batch is blocked, and assembly faces a delay of several weeks.

- Introduction of contractual change notification periods with fixed response times
- Risk-based requalification catalogue: audit, sample inspection and updated process documentation before re-approval
- Establishing a safety buffer of six weeks ahead of critical delivery dates
- Automatic due-date reminders for validity periods in the procurement system

Conclusion

Requalification is not a bureaucratic end in itself but an insurance policy against the silent ageing of supplier approvals. Those who clearly regulate triggers, responsibilities and deadlines prevent undetected process changes and costly failures. The effort can be steered in a targeted manner via risk classes and significantly reduced through digital tools. What matters is anchoring it in the delivery schedule, capacity planning and supplier strategy. This keeps the supply chain controllable even in the face of change.

Frequently asked questions

What does requalification mean in procurement?

Requalification refers to the renewed review and approval of an already qualified supplier, process or

product. It applies when material conditions have changed or a validity period has expired. The aim is to demonstrate that the original approval requirements continue to be met.

When must a supplier be requalified?

Typical triggers are site relocations, process or material changes, new tier-2 suppliers, quality problems and expired approval periods. Long delivery pauses or changed customer requirements can also make requalification necessary. The triggers should be defined contractually and in quality management.

How long is a supplier approval valid?

In practice, validity periods of typically two to five years are agreed, depending on risk class and industry rules. Critical or safety-relevant parts are given shorter cycles. Once expired, requalification is required before further deliveries remain released.

What is the difference between qualification and requalification?

Qualification reviews for the first time whether a supplier or process is suitable. Requalification compares the current state with the most recently approved reference state. It is therefore usually leaner, but in the event of serious deviations it may reach the full scope of a new approval.

What costs does requalification incur?

Costs arise for audits, sample inspections, documentation and internal coordination – in practice often a multiple of the pure inspection effort when blocked stock and delay risks are included. A total cost calculation helps to weigh effort against risk mitigation. A risk classification limits the scope of inspection to what is necessary.