

The Revision of ISO/IEC 17021—from ISO/IEC 17021:2011 to ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015

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I am writing this article at the request of the Independent Association of Accredited Registrars (IAAR) in the US to inform its members of the important changes to ISO/IEC 17021.

I am the vice president of the management systems accreditation programs at ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB), as well as the chair of IAF and co-convener for ISO/CASCO WG21.

History

As a brief history, ISO/CASCO WG21 was formed in 2000 to develop what became ISO/IEC 17021. Among the goals of WG21 was for this new document to replace ISO/IEC Guide 62 for QMS CBs and ISO/IEC Guide 66 for EMS CBs, and to be applicable to all types of management systems. The standard was published six years later as ISO/IEC 17021:2006. All management system certification bodies (CBs) accredited by IAF MLA signatories were required to conform to this standard 2 years after publication. However, in response to concerns by several stakeholder groups, WG21 initiated a revision focused on competence. This was accomplished with the publication of ISO/IEC 17021:2011. Again, all CBs accredited by IAF MLA signatories were required to conform to the revised standard 2 years after publication. Since then, a host of new standards, considered parts of ISO/IEC 17021, have now been published which add to the generic competence requirements in ISO/IEC 17021:2011 for specific types of management systems, as follows:

- ISO/IEC TS 17021-2 for environmental management systems
- ISO/IEC TS 17021-3 for quality management systems
- ISO/IEC TS 17021-4 for event sustainability management systems
- ISO/IEC TS 17021-5 for asset management systems
- ISO/IEC TS 17021-6 for business continuity management systems
- ISO/IEC TS 17021-7 for road traffic safety management systems.

There are also some additional standards that include additional competence requirements:

- ISO TS 22003 for food safety management systems
- ISO/IEC 27006 for information security management systems
- ISO 28003 for supply chain management systems
- ISO 50003 for energy management systems.

The review and revision of ISO/IEC 17021:2011 was initiated in 2012. Inputs for the revision included:

- Out-of-scope comments on revision of 2006
- CASCO interpretation requests
- IAF application documents
- APG and AAPG papers
- Outcome of WG33—ISO/IEC TS 17022
- Outcome of WG37—ISO/IEC TS 17023
- CASCO PAS documents 17001-17005
- Other CASCO documents—17020, 17024, 17065

What are the changes?

To those familiar with ISO/IEC 17021:2011, the most obvious change will be to Section 9 which has been restructured. It now reads more in order of how certification services are delivered by a CB.

The following are what I consider to be three most important changes. This is my personal opinion.

1. Improving effectiveness of operational and organizational control by CBs of remote offices regardless of their organizational structure
2. Allowing a statement, but no mark, on product packaging (not on product) and accompanying literature that a company has a certified management system
 - a. cannot imply the product is certified by this means
 - b. to include the name of the CB
3. Defining audit time and audit duration, and then focusing requirements for justification on audit duration, which is the time from the opening to the closing meeting. (Our goal is to have ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 consistent and harmonious with ISO/IEC 17023 and IAF MD5.)

Other changes are as follows:

- Adding one new principle for a risk-based approach
- Adopt the approach in ISO/IEC 17065 and not require, but still allow, a committee for safeguarding impartiality
- Adopt the approach in ISO/IEC 17024 regarding public information with, or without, request
- Defining/classifying nonconformities as major and minor
- No longer requiring a public directory of certifications
- Allowing a CB to certify another CB to a management system standard, except for a QMS
- If a CB is unable to verify effective correction and corrective action 6 months after an initial audit, another Stage 2 shall be conducted
- Six months allowed for recertification following expiration of certification; otherwise, a Stage 2 shall be conducted. When there is a gap in certification (up to six months), making sure the certification documents clearly identify the gap.
- When recertification is completed prior to expiration, the expiration date can be based on the existing certification (so certification may be longer than 3 years)
- If the recertification audit is not completed, or any major nonconformity not verified by the expiration date, then recertification cannot be recommended and the validity of the certification cannot be extended
- New requirement for consideration of shifts in the audit program
- New requirement when certifying to multiple management systems standards
- New requirement on transfers requiring the accepting CB to obtain sufficient information for making a certification decision
- New requirement for the audit report requiring a statement of the conformity and effectiveness of the MS
- Normative Annex A revised to include expanded statements explaining competence requirements, similar to the approach in ISO/IEC TS 17021-2 or -3. Doing this allowed us to eliminate the X and X+ in the table.

WG 21 also expanded the requirements for the audit report taking into consideration the requirements of ISO/IEC TS 17022:2012 *Conformity assessment—Requirements and recommendations for content of a third-party audit report on management systems*, and on this basis is recommending that ISO/IEC 17022 be withdrawn.

For those that like to numerically characterize changes, Rob Dye who is an ANAB accreditation assessor and instructor, made the following summary analysis of changes:

- 7 New definitions

- 1 Modified definition
- 1 Removed Definition
- 1 New principal
- 4 Modified principals
- 54 New requirements*
- 85 Modified requirements*
- 27 Removed requirements*

*This is clauses, sub-clauses and notes

So what?

So what does this mean to a CB currently accredited to ISO/IEC 17021:2011? In my opinion it will be easy for any current CB to conform to the changes. Very few CBs will need to make any significant changes to their processes. But I also think nearly all of the changes are improvements and will add to the credibility and integrity of certification.

The last face to face meeting of WG21 was in January 2015. At this meeting, there was also consensus among WG21 members to support the IAF Resolution that the transition period be 2 years from publication. It is anticipated now that an FDIS (Final Draft International Standard) will be balloted in March and April and that ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 will be published in May or June of 2015.

Once issued, the FDIS will be available for purchase through ASQ, ANSI or ISO.