ISO 9001

Confirm or Revise?

An update on the potential revision and future of ISO 9001 by L.L. "Buddy" Cressionnie

It may seem like technical committee (TC) 176 subcommittee (SC) 2, which develops the ISO 9001 standard,[1] can't make up its mind whether to confirm or revise the standard, leaving many stakeholders unclear about the standard's future. These stakeholders include a wide range of users, such as ISO 9001-certified organizations, auditors, ISO 9001-based sector certified organizations (automotive and telecommunications), accreditation and certification bodies, and consultants.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) requires its TCs to review all its released standards every five years to determine a standard's continued viability. ISO TC 176 SC 2 decided to launch a systematic review and establish task group (TG) 5 to run concurrently regarding the potential revision and future of ISO 9001.

This column summarizes the activities to date and upcoming plans so stakeholders can understand the process and decisions moving forward.

Systematic review

An ISO member body votes on a standard via its voting country representative. The United States, for example, is represented by the American National Standards Institute, which casts one vote. ISO TC 176 conducted a systematic review with the member bodies to determine the future of ISO 9001:2015. The systematic review closed on Dec. 2, 2020, with the following results:
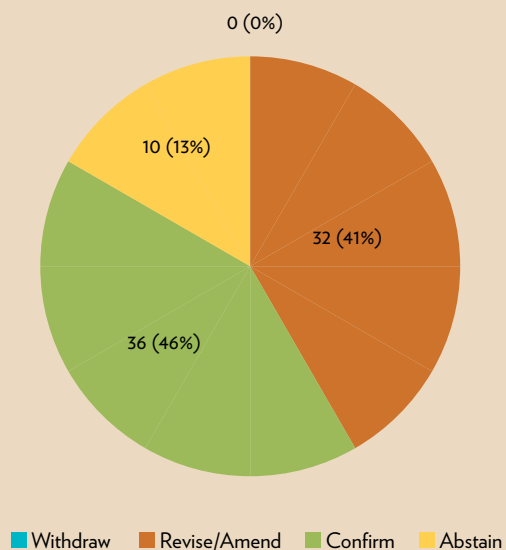
- Withdraw = 0. A withdrawal vote would result in the cancellation of ISO 9001.
- Revise/amend = 32. A revise/amend vote would result in the start of the ISO 9001 revision effort.
- Confirm = 36. A confirm vote indicates the member body believes that no changes are required.

- Abstain = 10. An abstain vote indicates the member body did not obtain consensus or maybe did not have the expertise or strong position for voting.

The vote was close between revise/amend and confirm (see Figure 1). One member body said its decision was based on receiving additional information from the 2020 ISO user

FIGURE 1

TC 176 member body systematic review results

Withdraw   Revise/Amend   Confirm   Abstain

0 (0%)
32 (41%)
36 (46%)
10 (13%)

survey and future concept discussion. The COVID-19 pandemic and timing of beginning work on a proposed ISO 9001 revision had a significant impact on the voting, resulting in the confirm vote. Another factor was the long transition time allocated to the last revision (three years) for certified organizations to upgrade.

TG 5

TG 5 was launched in November 2019 based on the need to prepare for a potential ISO 9001 revision. TG 5 collected input regarding a potential revision and conducted a worldwide user survey to better understand current and future user needs for ISO 9001.

The ISO user survey was conducted from July 29, 2020, through Dec. 31, 2020, and included 19 questions to gather ISO 9001 customer satisfaction and improvement information, and gauge desire for a revision versus confirmation. The survey also included several open-ended fields that allowed users to provide feedback.

The survey was available in 14 languages and included 8,397 responses from 149 countries. The results provided excellent information regarding ISO 9001 and revealed that a slight majority of participants wanted to confirm the standard versus revise it (see Figure 2, p. 52). A confirmation vote means no change to the existing ISO 9001:2015 at this time.[2]

Strategic planning and operations TG (SPOTG)

The SPOTG is an advisory group to TC 176 SC 2 leadership. The SPOTG met on March 26, 2021, to examine the systematic review results, user survey and other inputs to recommend whether to revise or confirm ISO 9001.

The SPOTG received and examined:
- ◗ The results of the systematic review
  (36 votes to confirm, 32 to revise and two abstentions).
- ◗ The results of the ISO 9001 user survey
  (showing a similar slim majority to confirm ISO 9001).
- ◗ A report on the future concepts.
- ◗ A report on the findings of the brand integrity TG.
- ◗ A report on the potential impacts of revising the ISO 9001 Annex SL high-level structure.
- ◗ A report on the working group 24
  (which developed ISO 9001:2015) project review report.
- ◗ Verbal reports from country and liaison members.[3]

After reviewing all the available inputs, TC 176 SC 2 leadership decided there was not a compelling reason to overturn the results of the majority of member bodies voting to confirm the standard. There was extensive discussion that the standard should be revised to improve clarity, remain relevant and provide value to users.
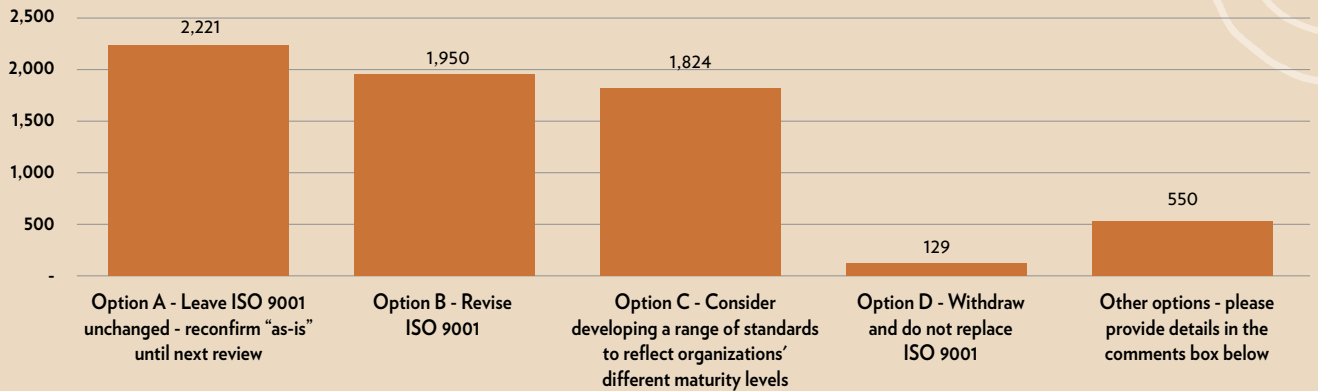
The member bodies' decision was the first time ISO 9001 was confirmed and not revised or amended at a systematic review since its release in 1987. Considering the speed of market changes, there is significant concern that ISO 9001 could lose its relevance if 15 years pass between revisions.

The SPOTG and TC 176 SC 2 leadership decided to recommend continuing TG 5 activities for the ISO 9001 preliminary stage, which gives TG 5 three years to determine whether new justification exists to launch a new systemic review.

These recommendations were balloted to member bodies with approval to confirm ISO 9001 and start the preliminary

International Organization for Standardization user survey

stage of evaluation (see Online Table 1, which can be found on this column's webpage at qualityprogress.com).

TG 5 preliminary planning

TG 5, which currently consists of 76 members representing 27 countries and seven liaison organizations, usually meets monthly. There is no timeline for when TG 5 will present a final report to SPOTG, but an update is scheduled for spring 2022. Volunteers have been assigned to evaluate various sources of data to determine whether new justification exists for an ISO 9001 revision. These sources include:

◗ The 2020 ISO 9001 user survey.
◗ Systematic review comments.
◗ ISO 9001:2008 project review report, including deferred improvements.
◗ Revision of the Annex SL high-level structure.
◗ Auditing practices group.
◗ ISO 9001 interpretations.
◗ Other sector writings for generic requirements that may apply to ISO 9001.
◗ Emerging trends and future concepts.
◗ Brand integrity.
◗ ISO 9004:2018 ad hoc group study.
◗ Other ISO TC committee revision activity and integration.
◗ Sector-specific versions of local government (ISO 18091) and electoral bodies (ISO 54001).

◗ International workshop agreement 12/new work item proposal ISO 9001 for policing bodies.
◗ Any other sources of information from interested parties.

These sources of data will be evaluated to determine whether there's justification for another ballot to start an early revision of ISO 9001. These data also will be used as input sources to the future revision of ISO 9001.

Where do we stand?

ISO 9001 has been confirmed and no revision is planned at this time. ISO's processes regarding maintaining standards are being followed. TG 5's work regarding potential revision efforts and activities continues and will be used as input to a revision at some point. When that will be is unknown.

The entire ISO scheme might seem bureaucratic at times, and few would argue this point. But considering the impact on millions of organizations around the world, it is important to think through all actions clearly. To this end, TC 176 SC 2 wants to ensure ISO 9001 meets the needs of all stakeholders and maintains relevance as the world's most widely used international standard. **QP**

REFERENCES AND NOTE
1. "ISO/TC 176/SC 2," https://committee.iso.org/home/tc176sc2.
2. The complete ISO 9001 user survey report can be found at the TC 176 SC 2 website at https://committee.iso.org/home/tc176sc2/.
3. ISO/TC 176/SC 2/N 1555, ballot on the ISO 9001 systematic review recommendations, March 30, 2021.

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