

Improving the Efficiency of the Standards Development Process – Timeframes for the Development of International Standards

The ISO strategic plan for the period 2002-2004 provides a description of the goals that the Organization intends to achieve in this timeframe and of the main lines of action to be undertaken in order to reach these goals. Five major ISO Strategies have been agreed for the 2002-2004 period. These strategies are expressed as commitments:

- 1. Increasing ISO's market relevance** – by developing the ability to understand market needs and better serve them and by assuring the best possible participation of enterprises and other market forces in the ISO system.
- 2. Strengthening ISO's international influence and institutional recognition** – by continuing the efforts to consolidate the partnership with WTO and by establishing similar relationships with other institutions.
- 3. Promoting the ISO system and its standards** – by improving ISO's ability to convey the concept/message that standards have a strong impact on businesses by strengthening the ability to reach and to provide added value to the various parties involved or potentially interested in standardization, thus enhancing the overall ISO image.
- 4. Optimizing the use of resources** – by focusing on priorities and continuously improving the efficiency of the overall ISO processes; by devising new ways of working through the re-designing of processes, and by the full exploitation of the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).
- 5. Supporting national standards bodies in developing countries** – by coordinating resources and efforts aimed at upgrading standardization infrastructures and by facilitating the participation of developing countries in the standardization process by means of information technology.

ISO will increase its best efforts towards serving the needs of the market. In line with this major objective, a cost/benefit analysis is being made of the various services provided by the different groups making up the ISO system. This needs to be followed up by a medium to long term optimization programme with clear indications, targets and monitoring for the allocation of resources.

The technical programme management has to be strengthened.

To increase market relevance, it is essential that the technical programme management focuses on market needs. The key strategies required to achieve this are the following:

- improving systematic priority-setting;
- proactive application of project management concepts and techniques;
- periodic re-evaluation of the need to maintain standing committees;
- enhancing TC/SC leadership training and ensuring secretariat support obligations.

It is one of the key objectives that ISO shall have an organization capable of quickly adapting to change and to the needs of the world community, which it serves. ISO shall perform as well as, or even better than, any other international standardizing organization.

The objectives for the year 2003 include:

- Implementation of procedures, services, tools and supporting actions to ensure optimal use and maintenance of TC business plans.
- Refinement of the Standards Value Assessment Tool (SVAT).
- Consultation with TCs/SCs and stakeholders to favour the promotion of TC business plans and collection of input from market forces.

The ISO Technical Management Board (TMB) is strongly committed to support the implementation of the strategic agenda. At its last meeting in Stockholm, the TMB reviewed part 4 of its Business Plan (BP) which contained proposals for concrete actions related to the objectives identified in part 3.

There are some "bottlenecks" in the development process of International Standards that may result in considerable delays:

- poor performance of Secretariats (failure to chase Committees and especially Working Groups to meet deadlines),
- lack of communication between Chairpersons and Secretariats (insufficient liaison with Secretariats until just before a meeting, willingness to be led rather than to lead, etc.)
- the "waiting for the next meeting" syndrome

The above shortcomings can and should be addressed, not only by refinements of the process, but by a more proactive approach by the ISO Central Secretariat in training Secretariats and Chairs, and by ISO members in ensuring compliance with deadlines by those TCs/SCs over which they have a measure of influence.

Based on these findings, there is a need for:

- better project management, aimed at achievement of deadlines, by Secretariats
- more "hands on" management by Chairs, putting more pressure on Secretariats to perform
- professional support for WG conveners, i. e. support for drafting standards, using templates, and how to "get it right first time"
- prioritisation by NSBs of ISO work when a commitment has been made to hold a secretariat
- more focused training by ISO/CS and, where feasible, by NSBs to achieve these aims
- WGs to be required to work throughout the year rather than in a flurry of activity in the 2 months before each main TC/SC meeting (perhaps a change of direction should be discussed, whereby WGs meet more frequently and TCs/SCs less frequently)

One of the subjects that needs careful consideration is the „Development/improvement of a monitoring system for the standards development process“, which provides information in relation to standard development times as well as on the costs incurred.

The TMB had expressed general agreement on the need to require committees to define realistic target dates for their work. The rules governing the definition of target dates and the options available to committees when target dates have been exceeded need to be further elaborated. Consideration should also be given to the possibility of combining the rules on target dates with the introduction of different development tracks based on maximum timeframes for their completion as well as maximum timeframes for intermediate stages inside each track.

The TMB decided to review the issue and established an ad hoc group for this purpose. The following resolution was adopted:

The Technical Management Board notes that the overall standards development times still exceed the expectations of the major market players, recognizing that project management techniques are not applied to a similar extent in standards development as in other business areas, decides to establish a task force with a view to determining possibilities to improve the efficiency of the standards development process and to review approaches adopted by other organizations, notes that the following members declared their willingness to participate in the task force:

- Mr. Ernst-Peter Ziethen (DIN, convenor)
- Mr. Gérard Mantel (AFNOR)
- Mr. Steven Cornish (ANSI)
- Mr. Stephen Russell (BSI)
- Mr. Fabio Tobon (ICONTEC)
- Mr. Herman Schipper (NEN)
- Mr. Eugene Julies (SABS)
- Mr. Colin Blair (SAI)

and expects an interim report of the task force at its first meeting in 2003.

(Technical Management Board resolution 48/2002)

Speeding up the standards development process is one of the most important goals. We have to find solutions to achieve this goal, i.e. to further improve the standardization performance and increase the efficiency of the ISO system as a whole. Consultations with TC/SC Chairs have shown that there is a high degree of awareness for tackling this issue. We have heard a lot of interesting ideas with regard to shortening the production time of standards. Some recommendations and a set of proposals came out of this exercise, which included:

1. Introduction of a tool to deal with New Work Items before their registration as an active work item
2. Introduction of a timeframe for delivering a document and taking care of the comments received
3. Using new deliverables when projects are not progressing.

These three actions are interrelated. It is quite obvious that the impacts on standards projects are of different kind (political, technical, logistical), and that many aspects have to be considered and resolved before a work item is officially registered, e.g.

- whether there is substantial technical need for the new work item (as in the case of interoperability of systems), or whether there is strong political demand (as in the case of protection of environment),
- whether the feasibility of the project has already been proven and the state of technology is stable, and whether suitable reference documents exist and the necessary expertise is available,
- whether adequate logistic resources (secretariat capacity, hosts for meetings) will be available, and in particular which procedures would have to be used and which deliverable would be suitable for the given purpose.

In the following, the aspects of a timeframe are considered for a project starting at HSC project stage 20.00, and finished at HSC project stage 60.60.

Existing target dates and policies in use

Within the existing rules and policies of ISO there are already several fixed time limits (e.g. for enquiry or formal vote) and recommended values. They build no coherent system, but have been decided under different conditions and for different purposes. Nevertheless, many of them are taken into account for the further proposals within this document.

The given data are based on the assumption that an official „preliminary stage“ is in place, being applied - without any time limit – for projects before the „active“ work item stage. Preliminary work items would have to pass an official approval process before becoming „active“.

As a general principle, secretariats should be encouraged to use the ISO software in running development projects as this would allow closer monitoring of what is actually going on by ISO/CS and TMB, and provide a greater openness and ease of access to those interested in the progress of the standard.

Use of different timeframes

Standardization needs of individual sectors may be different. Therefore, it is recommended to establish three different timeframes which will allow TCs/SCs to manage their technical work in line with specific sector needs and expectations.

In any case, whenever this is possible, preference should be given to the “recommended” timeframe (default timeframe).

However, there may be projects that will need less time or more time. Therefore, some flexibility is needed. As an example, the development of standards for terminology or innovative test methods may require some more time. For such projects an „enlarged“ timeframe may be agreed if appropriate justification is available.

In areas with short cycles of innovation, it may be preferable to apply the “accelerated” timeframe. In any case the total project time should not exceed a certain upper limit. In its resolution 3/2003, the TMB has decided to reduce to 5 years the permitted time period for a project to advance to publication stage.

Target timeframes only make sense if it is sufficiently clear what will happen if the target dates are not met. Therefore, the TCs/SCs are expected to take action as soon as a target date has expired. If this does not happen within a reasonable period (usually within 6 months), the projects will be automatically cancelled.

A systematic description of the suggested timeframe model and the actions to be taken is given in Annex 1.

Expected advantages of the proposed procedure

The responsibility for the project management is allocated to the TC/SC. Interventions from ISO/CS or TMB will only happen if the agreed timeframes are not respected. This means that the TC/SC will have reliable data for its planning and that its self-responsibility will be strengthened. The TC/SC will be obliged to monitor the progress of work and to take due note of its delayed work items in a systematic way. TMB and ISO/CS will intervene by exception only. The TC/SC will act as master of the situation.

The TC/SC gets advice how to proceed in the different situations. The TC/SC secretary will be in a better position to assist his TC/SC to handle late items.

Stakeholders and the public will be better informed about the progress reached.

Annex 1 – Timeframes for technical work

Standardization projects have to be managed like projects in industry.

Before starting the work, the market need has to be analysed carefully. There should also be a clear understanding on the expected date of availability of the standard. Furthermore, the TC/SC has to ensure that conditions for conducting this project within the target timeframe are fulfilled. There shall be a clear commitment from industry and other interested parties that they are willing to provide the necessary resources and expertise within the agreed timeframe.

As a matter of principle, the TCs/SCs are responsible for managing the technical work. They have to monitor the progress of work. When establishing their work programmes, they should consider very carefully whether the conditions for meeting the target timeframes are fulfilled.

Criteria for selecting the timeframe

- When selecting one of the timeframes, the TCs/SCs have to take into account the expectations of industry and other stakeholders.
- There should be a clear understanding at what point in time the International Standard will be needed by the market.
- There should be a clear commitment from stakeholders that they are prepared to allocate the resources for meeting the selected timeframe.

The TC/SC has to decide at the beginning of the work which of these timeframes applies.

- **Recommended timeframe (see Table 1): 36 months** – This is the preferred timeframe for developing International Standards.
- **Accelerated timeframe (see Table 2): 24 months** – This timeframe may be agreed if there is an urgent market need or if a suitable document is available that can be submitted directly to enquiry.
- **Enlarged timeframe (see Table 3): 48 months** – In exceptional cases, an enlarged timeframe may be agreed if appropriate justification is given (e. g. in the case of terminology or innovative test methods).

Timeframes for the development of International Standards

Target dates (accumulated) for reaching each milestone

Table 1 - Recommended timeframe (Default timeframe)

Project stage	Milestones Action / Deliverable	Sub-stage	Project time (accumulated) in months
Preparatory stage	Registration of approved new work item (AWI)	20.00	0
Committee stage	Registration of committee draft (CD)	30.00	12
Enquiry stage	Registration of draft International Standard (DIS)	40.00	18
	Voting summary dispatched	40.60	24
Approval stage *)	Registration of final draft International Standard (FDIS)	50.00	30
	FDIS ballot initiated	50.20	32
	FDIS voting summary dispatched	50.60	35
Publication stage	Publication of International Standard	60.60	36

*) The approval stage may be omitted if no negative votes have been received on the draft International Standard (DIS). In this case the publication stage should be reached after 32 months.

Table 2 – Accelerated timeframe

Project stage	Milestones Action / Deliverable	Sub-stage	Project time (accumulated) in months
Preparatory stage	Registration of approved new work item (AWI)	20.00	0
Committee stage	Registration of committee draft (CD)	30.00	-
Enquiry stage	Registration of draft International Standard (DIS)	40.00	6
	Voting summary dispatched	40.60	12
Approval stage *)	Registration of final draft International Standard (FDIS)	50.00	18
	FDIS ballot initiated	50.20	20
	FDIS voting summary dispatched	50.60	23
Publication stage	Publication of International Standard	60.60	24

*) The approval stage may be omitted if no negative votes have been received on the draft International Standard (DIS). In this case the publication stage should be reached after 20 months.

Table 3 – Enlarged timeframe

Project stage	Milestones Action / Deliverable	Sub-stage	Project time (accumulated) in months
Preparatory stage	Registration of approved new work item (AWI)	20.00	0
Committee stage	Registration of committee draft (CD)	30.00	18
Enquiry stage	Registration of draft International Standard (DIS)	40.00	30
	Voting summary dispatched	40.60	36
Approval stage *)	Registration of final draft International Standard (FDIS)	50.00	43
	FDIS ballot initiated	50.20	45
	FDIS voting summary dispatched	50.60	47
Publication stage	Publication of International Standard	60.60	48

*) The approval stage may be omitted if no negative votes have been received on the draft International Standard (DIS). In this case the publication stage should be reached after **45 months**.

Actions to be taken by the TC/SC if target dates are not met

Note – If delays are caused by the performance of chairpersons, convenors, project leaders or secretaries (e. g. insufficient resources), the TMB may consider to re-allocate TC Secretariats and TC Chairs, the TC may consider to re-allocate the other functions (i.e. SC secretariats and Chairs, WG convenorships and project leaderships)."

Target date for DIS is not met

If the target date for DIS (stage 40.00) cannot be reached, the TC/SC shall take and implement one of the following decisions.

- a) If the technical content is acceptable and mature, the draft is submitted as a DIS for Enquiry.
- b) If the technical content is acceptable but unlikely sufficient mature for a future International Standard (IS) , the draft is submitted for vote as a Technical Specification (ISO/TS).
- c) If the technical content is not regarded acceptable for a future IS or TS, but nevertheless of interest to the public, the draft is adopted as a Technical Report (ISO/TR).
- d) If no consensus on the submission of a draft for an IS, ISO/TS or ISO/TR can be reached within the TC/SC, but there is evidence that further work on the subject is regarded essential by stakeholders, the TC/SC may submit a report to the TMB for consideration and for granting an exception in well justified cases.
- e) If the TC/SC is unable to find a possible solution, and wants to stop the work on the WI, the WI has to be deleted from the work programme using the appropriate procedure.

Target date for FDIS is not met

If the target date for FDIS (stage 50.00) cannot be reached, the TC/SC shall take and implement one of the following decisions.

- a) If the technical content is acceptable and mature, the TC/SC should submit a FDIS for Formal Vote.
- b) If the technical content is acceptable but not sufficient mature for an IS, the TC/SC should submit a Draft for vote as an ISO Technical Specification (ISO/TS).
- c) If the technical content is not acceptable for an IS or TS, but nevertheless of interest to the public, the TC/SC should adopt a ISO Technical Report (ISO/TR).
- d) If no consensus about the submission of a draft for an IS, ISO/TS or ISO/TR can be reached within the TC/SC, but there is evidence that further work on the subject is regarded essential by stakeholders, the present "state of the debate" should be submitted preferably to the public, but at least to the TMB. This can be done:
 - d1) by submission of a second DIS to an abbreviated enquiry, informing the public about the results reached in the meantime, asking for verification of market relevance, and stating, where appropriate, diverging solutions, classes of products, possible alternatives etc.
 - d2) by submission of a report to the TMB, demonstrating the market relevance of the work, providing information on the reasons for not being able to present within the agreed time frame an FDIS or a draft for one of the other deliverables mentioned before, and giving a new date for accomplishment.
- e) If the TC/SC is unable to find a possible solution, and wants to stop the work on the WI, it should delete the WI from its work programme using the appropriate procedure.

Actions to be taken by ISO/CS and TMB

A project is cancelled automatically:

- if the target date for DIS (stage 40.00) is not met and if the TC/SC has not taken and implemented a decision within 6 months after the target date has expired,
- if the target date for FDIS (stage 50.00) is not met and if the TC/SC has not taken and implemented a decision within 6 months after the target date has expired,
- if the maximum timeframe (5 years) is not met and if the TC/SC does not provide appropriate justification which would allow TMB to grant an exception,
- if there is no visible progress within 2 years (i. e. no change of stage code) and if the TC/SC does not provide appropriate justification which would allow TMB to grant an exception.

Note – A cancelled project may be continued if a new enquiry among the ISO members has shown that there is still a market need to develop an International Standard.

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