The significance of ISO 9001 and why ISO 9001:2026?

EXPLORING THE LEADING QMS STANDARD, ITS BENEFITS, EVOLUTION AND HOW WE CAN SUPPORT YOUR TRANSITION

White paper

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From defining "quality" to the 2026 edition

How does ISO define quality?

A definition of quality is part of the core vocabulary for quality management. It is found in ISO 9000:2015 and applies to all ISO quality management standards, including ISO 9001.

Quality is defined as the "degree to which a set of inherent characteristics (or distinguishing features) of an object fulfills requirements." An object here is defined as anything perceivable or conceivable, such as a product, service, process, person, organization, system or resource.

What is ISO 9001?

ISO 9001 is the world's leading quality management standard. It defines how any organization can establish, implement, maintain and continually improve a quality management system (QMS).

Implementing the standard helps you enhance your QMS and performance, meet customer and applicable laws and regulations, and demonstrate commitment to quality. ISO 9001 indicates that you have effective processes, trained staff and produce impeccable products or services.

Certification bodies, such as SGS, and other third parties also use it to assess ISO 9001 compliance.

1M+

Over a million ISO 9001 certificates have been issued.

Why is ISO 9001 important?

With more than one million certificates issued in almost 190 countries, ISO 9001 is the most widely adopted QMS standard globally.

It is part of the ISO 9000 family, which outlines seven quality management principles, including a strong customer focus and continual improvement. ISO 9001 is the only certifiable standard within the family, although certification is not mandatory.

What are the key principles?

ISO 9001 is based on the seven quality management principles:

1. Customer focus: understand and meet customer needs to enhance satisfaction
2. Leadership: top management must demonstrate leadership and commitment to the QMS
3. Engagement of people: involving all employees in the QMS is crucial for its success
4. Process approach: managing activities as processes helps achieve desired results more efficiently
5. Improvement: continual improvement should be a permanent objective of your organization
6. Evidence-based decision-making: decisions should be based on the analysis of data and information
7. Relationship management: you should manage relationships with interested parties to enhance performance

What topics are covered?

ISO 9001 covers a multitude of topics, including:

- Context of the organization: determine the external and internal factors that affect your QMS' ability to achieve its intended results
- Leadership: the importance of leadership in implementing and maintaining the QMS
- Planning: the QMS must include measures to achieve your quality objectives and continuously improve the system's effectiveness
- Support: address issues, such as resources, competence, awareness, communication and documented information
- Operation: the processes to meet and exceed customer requirements and satisfaction must be planned, in place and controlled
- Performance evaluation: you must monitor, measure, analyze and evaluate your QMS' performance and effectiveness
- Improvement: the significance of continuously increasing the QMS' effectiveness, based on performance evaluation and other data sources

What are the benefits?

The numerous benefits include:

- Enhanced product/service quality and customer confidence: robust quality control processes lead to enhanced customer trust and satisfaction, and regulatory compliance
- Effective complaint resolution: resolve customer complaints efficiently, contributing to timely and satisfactory problem-solving
- Process improvement: identify and eliminate inefficiencies, reduce waste, streamline operations and promote informed decision-making, creating cost savings and better outcomes
- Risk management: systematic processes help you spot and mitigate risks for stability
- Employee engagement: defined roles and responsibilities boost morale and engagement
- Ongoing optimization: regular audits and reviews enable you to continually refine your QMS, stay competitive and achieve long-term success
- Contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including:

Why is ISO 9001 certification important?

ISO 9001 certification is essential for demonstrating to stakeholders and customers your commitment and ability to consistently deliver high-quality products or services.

Checking that your QMS works is vital to ISO 9001. The standard recommends that an organization performs internal audits to check its QMS functionality. You can invite an independent certification body, such as SGS, to verify the QMS' compliance. Alternatively, you can ask your clients to audit the QMS.

What is the certification process?

The certification process includes:

1. Understanding the standard: you must study ISO 9001 and assess your readiness
2. Developing the QMS: create and document processes and procedures that align with ISO 9001 requirements
3. Conduct internal audits: regular audits help discover improvement areas
4. Certification audit: a third party, like SGS, conducts a two-stage audit to assess your ISO 9001 compliance

What are the origins of quality management and ISO 9001?

The initial awareness that a QMS could influence a product's quality was first presented in the 1970s. Several large entities, including Ford and the US Ministry of Defense (MoD), issued quality management standards that they maintained.

In 1971, BSI published BS 9000, the first quality management standard, in the UK, specifically for the electronics industry. BSI also published BS 5179 and BS 5750, both established around the MoD's standards. For the first time, quality assurance was transferred from the customer to the supplier, instigating the practice of third-party assessors.

The world progressed toward international trade during the 1980s. Nations and industries needed to agree on quality assurance standards. The US again moved toward QMS and statistical control due to international trade.

ISO implemented the aforementioned UK standards into its international parameters and certification qualifications. ISO 9001 was first published in 1987, marking a significant development in QMS by providing a common framework for businesses worldwide.

ISO 9001 edition	Notable details
ISO 9001:1987	• The ISO 9000 series was published
ISO 9001:1994	• Revision • 20 clauses, 20 required procedures • Three auditable standards: ISO 9001, ISO 9002 and ISO 9003
ISO 9001:2000	• Major revision • Eight clauses, six required procedures • Process approach introduced • One auditable standard: ISO 9001
ISO 9001:2008	• Minor revision for word clarification
ISO 9001:2015	• Major revision • 10 clauses, no required procedures as such • Risk assessment added • Top management emphasized

Enter the age of ISO 9001:2026

Why is another revision needed?

The current version of ISO 9001 was finalized in 2015. Ensuring that all ISO standards remain relevant is essential. Following extensive international consultation, it was decided in August 2023 that revising the standard would add value.

This update aims to align ISO 9001 with the needs of standard users and the communities they serve, and driving forces include:

- Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation and the Internet of Things (IoT)
- Sustainability and social responsibility
- Greater stakeholder expectations
- The growing need for resilience, e.g. supply chain disruptions and pandemics

What is ISO 9001:2026?

ISO 9001:2026 is the next revision of ISO 9001. It will build upon the 2015 version, maintaining the Annex SL-based structure, while incorporating editorial improvements, subtle shifts in emphasis and modern business considerations, such as quality culture and ethical behavior.

When will ISO 9001:2026 be published?

The final revised edition is likely to be published in September 2026.

What are the anticipated changes?

The new version is expected to introduce refinements that strengthen the QMS framework and consider emerging themes. We anticipate limited new requirements, but several areas may be clarified or restructured for better readability and implementation.

DIGITALIZATION AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

- Integrating AI, automation, IoT and cloud tools
- Emphasis on data integrity, digital record accuracy and validating digital systems

SUSTAINABILITY AND ESG ALIGNMENT

- Embedding environmental and social responsibility into the QMS
- Considering life cycle awareness, carbon footprint reduction and ethical supply chains

ENHANCED RISK-BASED THINKING AND RESILIENCE

- A more structured approach – differentiating risks versus opportunities
- Embedding business continuity, change management and organizational resilience

LEADERSHIP, ETHICS AND QUALITY CULTURE

- Greater expectations around ethical leadership and fostering a quality-first culture

BROADER STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Recognizing diverse interested parties – communities, regulators and future stakeholders

BETTER INTEGRATION WITH OTHER STANDARDS

- Continued use of the Harmonized Structure (HS) for consistency across standards like ISO 14001 (environmental management systems) and ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety management systems)

ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE

- Focusing on managing, transferring and maintaining knowledge amid workforce changes

SERVICE INDUSTRY CLARIFICATIONS

- Addressing interpretational gaps for services – guidance is likely to be more definitive

EXPANDED ANNEX A GUIDANCE

- Annex A may become a practical guidance section, aiding implementation, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Clause	Likely update	Your action
3 – terms and definitions	• Specific QMS-related terms may be added, reducing reliance on ISO 9000 • Annex A is likely to expand significantly to provide clause-by-clause guidance and clearer interpretation	• Review and align internal definitions with the terminology introduced
4 – context of the organization	• Minor updates to enhance clarity • Climate change considerations remain from previous amendments	• Confirm that your current management system and business context analysis include environmental influences, where relevant
5 – leadership and commitment	• Clearer focus on quality culture, ethical behavior and continual improvement, supported by the process approach and risk- and opportunity-based thinking • Quality policy must now more explicitly reflect the organization's strategy and external context	• Evaluate current quality-culture practices and update leadership messaging
6 – planning	• Risks and opportunities may be restructured into separate clearer subclauses • Additional clarity anticipated in guidance notes (Annex A) • Further emphasis on planning changes to include communication of changes, monitoring and evaluation of changes, and how changes will be reviewed	• Revisit how risks and opportunities are distinguished and addressed, as well as planning changes
7 – support	• Text restructuring is likely, with few substantive requirement changes • New awareness requirements may include understanding quality culture and ethical behavior	• Prepare to refresh awareness training if needed
8 – operation	• Minimal changes anticipated (although terminology and clause layout may be updated)	• Ensure traceability for updated clause references in future documentation
9 – performance evaluation	• Mostly consistent with the 2015 version • Expectations for detection of quality trends and performance outcomes remain relevant	• Confirm audit objectives and review criteria to reflect new clause framing
10 – improvement	• Additional guidance on continual improvement incorporated, especially as linked to Clause 5 leadership expectations	• Consider documenting how leadership influences improvement cycles

Why is ISO 9001:2026 important?

Even with moderate changes, the revision process is an opportunity to:

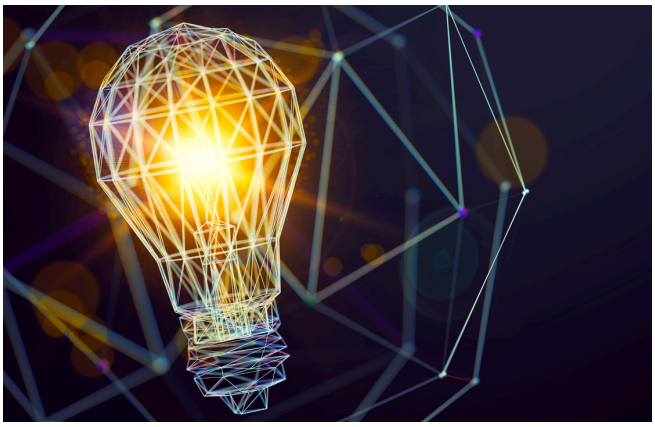
- Realign your QMS with strategic goals
- Refresh stakeholder engagement
- Integrate modern values like ethical practices and quality culture
- Ensure continued certification and audit readiness

What will ISO 9001:2026 mean to ISO 9001:2015-certified companies?

The revised standard presents an excellent opportunity for you to review and update your QMS, ensuring that it effectively addresses any changes and aligns with your needs, as well as those of your customers and other stakeholders.

When published, ample information will be available about the updates and their possible impact on organizations. We will keep you updated.

ISO 9001:2015-certified organizations will have a transition period, usually three years, to migrate their QMS to ISO 9001:2026.



What is the expected transition timeline?

Phase	Milestone
Current standard	ISO 9001:2015
Draft International Standard (DIS)	Published August 2025
Final Draft International Standard (FDIS)	Published May 2026
New standard published	September 2026
Transition deadline	Expected three-year period (to late 2029)

Start your ISO 9001:2026 transition planning early to avoid disruption and maintain certification.

What is a decent transition checklist?

To ensure you are on track for ISO 9001:2026:

- Stay up to date with ISO committee developments
- Conduct a readiness review against current ISO 9001:2015 practices
- Start internal conversations around quality culture and ethics
- Train senior leaders on the proposed new expectations
- Work with us to monitor when the new standard is published

How can SGS help?

Whether you are maintaining existing certification or implementing a management system for the first time, we can inform you of the latest developments, expected transition timelines and key considerations for transition planning.

We are trusted by organizations worldwide to deliver accredited services that support quality, sustainability and regulatory compliance. Our experts are directly involved in ISO technical committees, ensuring we stay ahead of changes and provide reliable, up-to-date guidance.

We can offer a complete range of services, including readiness assessments, training, gap analysis and certification once the standard is published. Our global network, technical expertise and active role in standard development make us a trusted partner for your ISO 9001:2026 journey. With the right support, you can navigate change efficiently, maintain compliance and unlock new opportunities for continual improvement and business resilience.

Transition with a trusted partner

As a global certification body with deep QMS expertise, we provide comprehensive services, including:

- Gap assessments
- Readiness audits
- Transition training
- Full transition and certification services once the standard is officially released
- Integrated management systems (IMS) support for ISO 14001, ISO 45001 and more

The quality partner for your quality management needs

Contact our experts now to start or enhance your ISO 9001:2026 journey.

For more information:
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When you need to be sure

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