



# Overview of ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015

**National Accreditation Board for  
Certification Bodies (NABCB)**



# Introduction

## ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015:

- ❖ specifies requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems
- ❖ provides a foundation for facilitating the recognition of management system certification in **the interests of international trade.**
- ❖ applicable to the auditing and certification of any type of management system. **It is recognized that some of the requirements, in particular those related to auditor competence, can be supplemented with additional criteria in order to achieve the expectations of the interested parties.**

**Certification of a management system provides independent demonstration that the management system of the organization:**

- a) conforms to specified requirements;
- b) is capable of consistently achieving its stated policy and objectives;
- c) is effectively implemented.

**ISO/IEC 17021 consists of the following parts, under the general title Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems:**

**Part 1: Requirements**

**Part 2:** Competence requirements for auditing and certification of environmental management systems [Technical Specification]

**Part 3:** Competence requirements for auditing and certification of quality management systems [Technical Specification]

**Part 4:** Competence requirements for auditing and certification of event sustainability management systems [Technical Specification]

**Part 5:** Competence requirements for auditing and certification of asset management systems [Technical Specification]

**Part 6:** Competence requirements for auditing and certification of business continuity management systems [Technical Specification]

**Part 7:** Competence requirements for auditing and certification of road traffic safety management systems [Technical Specification]

# 1. Scope & 2. Normative References

## 1. Scope:

✓ISO/IEC 17021-1 contains principles and requirements for the competence, consistency and impartiality of bodies providing audit and certification of all types of management systems

✓ISO/IEC 17021-1 can be used as a criteria document for accreditation, peer assessment or other audit processes.

## 2. Normative References:

✓ ISO 9000, Quality management systems — Fundamentals and vocabulary ISO/IEC 17000, Conformity assessment — Vocabulary and general principle

*(For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments)*

# Clause 3 Terms and Definitions

## 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 9000, ISO/IEC 17000 apply:

### 3.1 certified client

Organization whose management system (MS) has been certified.

### 3.2 Impartiality Presence of objectivity

*Note 1 to entry: Objectivity means that conflicts of interest do not exist, or are resolved so as not to adversely influence subsequent activities of the CB.*

*Note 2 to entry: Other terms that are useful in conveying the element of impartiality include “independence”, “freedom from conflict of interests”, “freedom from bias”, “lack of prejudice”, “neutrality”, “fairness”, “open-mindedness”, “even-handedness”, “detachment”, “balance”.*

# Clause 3 Terms and Definitions

## 3.3 Management system consultancy

participation in establishing, implementing or maintaining a management system

**EXAMPLE 1** Preparing or producing manuals or procedures.

**EXAMPLE 2** Giving specific advice, instructions or solutions towards the development and implementation of a management system.

**Note 1 to entry:** Arranging training and participating as a trainer is not considered consultancy, provided that, where the course relates to management systems or auditing, it is confined to the provision of generic information; **i.e. the trainer should not provide client-specific solutions.**

**Note 2 to entry:** The provision of generic information, but not client specific solutions for **the improvement** of processes or systems, is not considered to be consultancy. Such information may include:

- explaining the meaning and intention of certification criteria;
- identifying improvement opportunities;
- explaining associated theories, methodologies, techniques or tools;
- sharing non-confidential information on related best practices;
- other management aspects that are not covered by the MS being audited.



**3.4 Certification audit** - audit carried out by an auditing organization independent of the client and the parties that rely on certification, for the purpose of certifying the client's management system.

*Note 1 to entry: In the definitions which follow, the term "audit" has been used for simplicity to refer to third-party certification audit.*

*Note 2 to entry: Certification audits include initial, surveillance, re-certification audits, and can also include special audits*

*Note 3 to entry: **Certification audits** are typically conducted by audit teams of those bodies providing certification of conformity to the requirements of MS standards.*

*Note 4 to entry: A **joint audit** is when two or more auditing organizations cooperate to audit a single client. **Clause 3.4***

*Note 5 to entry: A **combined audit** is when a client is being audited against the requirements of two or more management systems standards together.*

*Note 6 to entry: An **integrated audit** is when a client has*

*integrated the application of requirements of two or more management systems standards into a single management system and is being audited against more than one standard.*

**3.5 Client organization** - whose management system is being audited for certification purposes.

**3.6 Auditor** - person who conducts an audit.

**3.7 Competence** - ability to apply knowledge and skills to achieve intended results.

**3.8 Guide** - person appointed by the client to assist the audit team

**3.9 Observer** - person who accompanies the audit team but does not audit

**3.10 Technical area-**area characterized by commonalities of processes relevant to a specific type of management system and its intended results

**Note 1 to entry: Clause 7.1.2** The term “**technical area**” is applied differently depending on the management system standard being considered. For any management system, the term is related to products, processes and services in the context of the scope of the management system standard.

*The technical area can be defined by a specific certification scheme (e.g. ISO/TS 22003) or can be determined by the certification body. It is used to cover a number of other terms such as “scopes”, “categories”, “sectors”, etc., which are traditionally used in different management system.*

**3.11 Nonconformity (NC)** - non-fulfilment of a requirement

**3.12 Major nonconformity** - NC (3.11) that affects the capability of the management system to achieve the intended results

*Note 1 to entry: NCs could be classified as major in the following circumstances:*

- *if there is a significant doubt that effective process control is in place, or that products or services will meet specified requirements;*
- *a number of minor NCs associated with the same requirement or issue could demonstrate a systemic failure and thus constitute a major NC.*

**3.13 Minor nonconformity** - NC that does not affect the capability of the management system to achieve the intended results.



**3.14 Technical expert** - person who provides specific knowledge or expertise to the audit team.

*Note 1 to entry: Specific knowledge or expertise is that which relates to the organization, the process or activity to be audited.*

**3.15 Certification scheme** - conformity assessment system related to management systems to which the same specified requirements, specific rules and procedures apply.

**3.16 Audit time** - time needed to plan and accomplish a complete and effective audit of the client organization's management system.

❖ **3.17 duration of management system certification audits** - part of audit time (3.16) spent conducting audit activities from the opening meeting to the closing meeting, inclusive.

- Note 1 to entry: Audit activities normally include:*
- *conducting the opening meeting;*
  - *performing document review while conducting the audit;*
  - *communicating during the audit;*
  - *assigning roles and responsibilities of guides and observers;*
  - *collecting and verifying information;*
  - *generating audit findings;*
  - *preparing audit conclusions;*
  - *conducting the closing meeting*

# Clause 4 Principles

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**4.1 General**

**4.2 Impartiality**

**4.3 Competence**

**4.4 Responsibility**

**4.5 Openness**

**4.6 Confidentiality**

**4.7 Responsiveness to Complaints**

**4.8 Risk-Based Approach**

# Clause 4 Principles

## 4.1 General

- ✓ ISO/IEC 17021 does not give specific requirements for all situations that can occur.
- ✓ should be applied as guidance for the decisions that may need to be made for unanticipated situations. **Principles are not requirements.**
- ✓ Parties that have an interest in certification include, but are not limited to:
  - a) the clients of the CBs;
  - b) the customers of the organizations whose management systems are certified;
  - c) governmental authorities;
  - d) non-governmental organizations;
  - e) consumers and other members of the public
- ✓ The overall aim of certification is to give confidence to all parties that a management system fulfils specified requirements

### Principles (Clause 4.2 to 4.8) for inspiring confidence include:

- impartiality;
- competence;
- responsibility;
- openness;
- confidentiality;
- responsiveness to complaints;
- risk-based approach.

*NOTE This part of ISO/IEC 17021 sets out the principles of certification in Clause 4; the corresponding principles related to auditing can be found in **ISO 19011:2011**, Clause 4.*

## Risk-based approach

CBs need to take into account the risks associated with providing competent, consistent and impartial certification. Risks may include, but are not limited to, those associated with:

- ❖ the objectives of the audit;
- ❖ the sampling used in the audit process;
- ❖ real and perceived impartiality;
- ❖ Legal, regulatory and liability issues;
- ❖ The client organization being audited and its operating environment;
- ❖ Impact of the audit on the client and its activities;
- ❖ Health and safety of the audit teams;
- ❖ Perception of interested parties;
- ❖ Misleading statements by the certified client;
- ❖ Use of marks.

# Clause 5 General Requirements

## ❖ 5 General requirements

### 5.1 Legal and contractual matters

- 5.1.1 Legal responsibility
- 5.1.2 Certification agreement
- 5.1.3 Responsibility for certification decisions

### 5.2 Management of impartiality

### 5.3 Liability and financing



## 5.2 Management of Impartiality

### 5.2.1 Conformity assessment activities shall be undertaken impartially.

The CB shall be responsible for the impartiality of its conformity assessment activities and shall not allow commercial, financial or other pressures to compromise impartiality.

### . 5.2.2 CB shall have top management commitment to impartiality in management system certification activities.

- ❖ CB shall have a policy that it understands the importance of impartiality in carrying out its management system certification activities, manages conflict of interest and ensures the objectivity of its management system certification activities.

## 5.2 Continued.....

**5.2.3** CB shall have a process to identify, analyse, evaluate, treat, monitor, and document the risks related to conflict of interests arising from provision of certification including any conflicts arising from its relationships on an ongoing basis.

❖ Where there are any threats to impartiality, CB shall document & demonstrate how it eliminates or minimizes such threats & document any residual risk.

The demonstration shall cover all potential threats that are identified, whether they arise from within the CB or from the activities of other persons, bodies or organizations.

❖ When a relationship poses an unacceptable threat to impartiality (such as a wholly owned subsidiary of the certification body requesting certification from its parent), then certification shall not be provided.

❖ Top management shall review any residual risk to determine if it is within the level of acceptable risk.

## 5.2 Continued.....

❖ The risk assessment process shall include identification of and consultation with appropriate interested parties to advise on matters affecting impartiality including openness and public perception. The consultation with appropriate interested parties shall be balanced with no single interest predominating.

*NOTE 1 Sources of threats to impartiality of the certification body can be based on ownership, governance, management, personnel, shared resources, finances, contracts, training, marketing and payment of a sales commission or other inducement for the referral of new clients, etc.*

*NOTE 2 Interested parties can include personnel and clients of CB, customers of organizations whose management systems are certified, representatives of industry trade associations, representatives of governmental regulatory bodies or other governmental services, or representatives of non-governmental organizations, including consumer organizations.*

*NOTE 3 One way of fulfilling the consultation requirement of this clause is by the use of a committee of these interested parties.*

### 5.2.4 A CB shall not certify another CB for its quality management system.

5.2.5 CB and any part of the same legal entity and any entity under the organizational control of the certification body [see 9.5.1.2, bullet b)] shall not offer or provide management system consultancy. This also applies to that part of government identified as the CB.

*NOTE This does not preclude the possibility of exchange of information (e.g. explanation of findings or clarification of requirements) between the CB and its clients.*

5.2.6 The carrying out of internal audits by the CB and any part of same legal entity to its certified clients is a significant threat to impartiality.

❖ Therefore, CB and any part of the same legal entity and any entity under organizational control of the CB [see 9.5.1.2, bullet b)] shall not offer or provide internal audits to its certified clients.

❖ A recognized mitigation of this threat is that CB shall not certify a management system on which it provided internal audits for a minimum of two years following the completion of internal audits.

**NOTE See Note 1 to 5.2.3.**

## 5.2 Continued.....

**5.2.7** Where a client has received management systems consultancy from a body that has a relationship with a CB, it is a significant threat to impartiality.

A recognized mitigation of this threat is that CB shall not certify the MS for a minimum of two years following end of consultancy.

*NOTE See Note 1 to 5.2.3.*

**5.2.8** CB shall not outsource audits to a MS consultancy organization, as this poses an unacceptable threat to impartiality of CB (see 7.5).

✓ This does not apply to individuals contracted as auditors covered in 7.3.

## 5.2 Continued.....

**5.2.9** CB's activities shall not be marketed or offered as linked with the activities of an organization that provides MS consultancy.

- ❖ The CB shall take action to correct inappropriate links or statements by any consultancy organization stating or implying that certification would be simpler, easier, faster or less expensive if the CB were used.
- ❖ A CB shall not state or imply that certification would be simpler, easier, faster or less expensive if a specified consultancy organization were used.

**5.2.10** In order to ensure that there is no conflict of interests, personnel who have provided MS consultancy, including those acting in a managerial capacity, shall not be used by the CB to take part in an audit or other certification activities if they have been involved in MS consultancy towards the client.

- ❖ A recognized mitigation of this threat is that personnel shall not be used for a minimum of two years following the end of the consultancy.

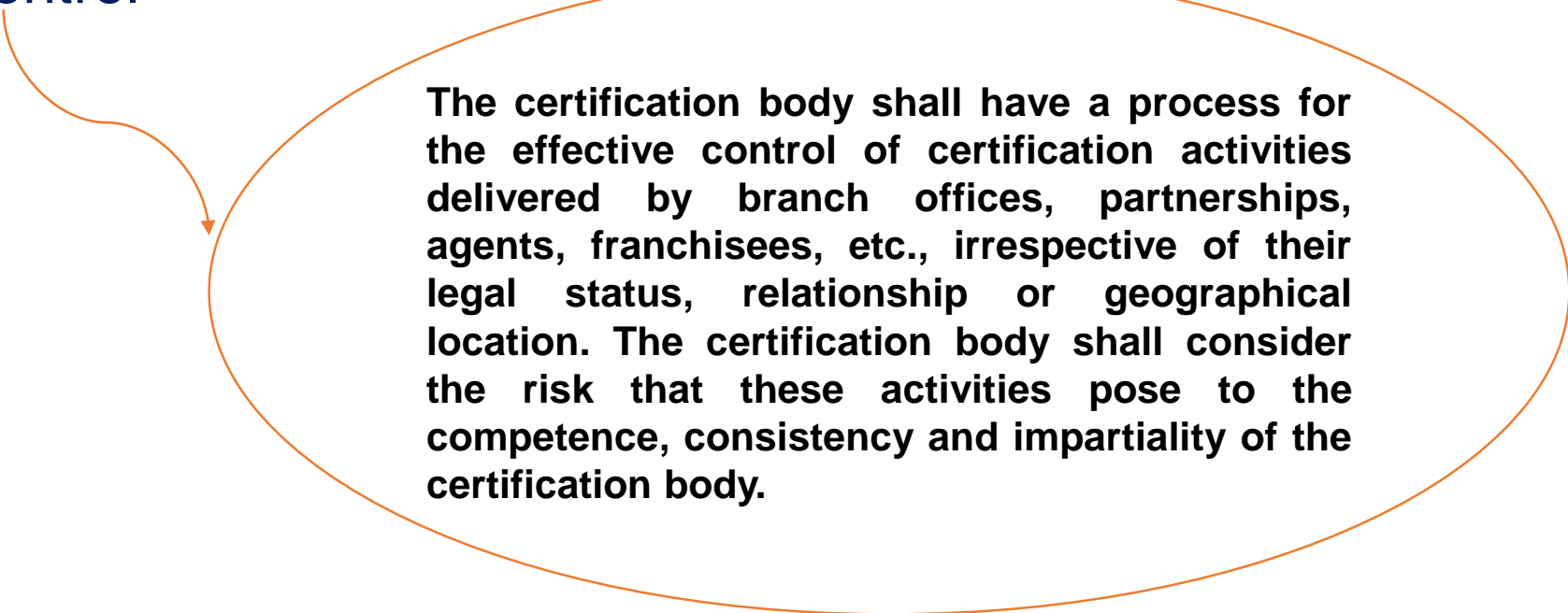


- 5.2.11** CB shall take action to respond to any threats to its impartiality arising from the actions of other persons, bodies or organizations.
- 5.2.12** All CB personnel, internal or external, or committees, who could influence the certification activities, shall act impartially and shall not allow commercial, financial or other pressures to compromise impartiality.
- 5.2.13** CBs shall require personnel, internal & external, to reveal any situation known to them that can present them or CB with a conflict of interests.
- ❖ CBs shall record and use this information as input to identifying threats to impartiality raised by activities of such personnel or by organizations that employ them, and shall not use such personnel, unless they can demonstrate that there is no conflict of interest.

# Clause 6 Structural Requirements

## ❖ Structural requirements

- 6.1 Organizational structure & top management
- 6.2 Operational control

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The certification body shall have a process for the effective control of certification activities delivered by branch offices, partnerships, agents, franchisees, etc., irrespective of their legal status, relationship or geographical location. The certification body shall consider the risk that these activities pose to the competence, consistency and impartiality of the certification body.

# Clause 7 Resources

## 7.1 Competence of Personnel

7.1.1 General Considerations

7.1.2 Determination of Competence Criteria →

7.1.3 Evaluation process

7.1.4 Other Considerations

## 7.2 Personnel Involved in the Certification process

## 7.3 Use of Individual External auditors and external Technical Experts

## 7.4 Personnel Records

## 7.5 Outsourcing →

Where additional specific competence criteria have been established for a specific standard or certification scheme (e.g. ISO/IEC TS 17021-2, ISO/IEC TS 17021-3 or ISO/TS 22003), these shall be applied.

Decisions for granting, refusing, maintaining of certification, expanding or reducing the scope of certification, renewing, suspending or restoring, or withdrawing of certification shall not be outsourced

# Annex A (Normative)

## Required knowledge and skills

**A.1 General - Table A.1 specifies the knowledge and skills that a certification body shall define for specific certification functions. “X” indicates that the certification body shall define the criteria and depth of knowledge and skills.**

**The knowledge and skill requirements specified in Table A.1 are explained in more detail in the text following the table and are referenced by the number in parenthesis.**

# Table A.1(Normative)- Table of knowledge and skills

knowledge and skills	Certification functions	Conducting the application review to determine AT competence & selection & determine audit time	Reviewing audit reports and making certification decisions	Auditing and Leading the audit teams
Knowledge of business management practices				X (see A.2.1)
Knowledge of audit principles, practices and techniques			X (see A.3.1)	X (see A.2.2)
Knowledge of specific management system standards/normative documents		X (see A.4.1)	X (see A.3.2)	X (see A.2.3)
Knowledge of certification body's processes		X (see A.4.2)	X see A.3.3)	X( see A.2.4)
Knowledge of client business sector		X (see A.4.3)	X (see A.3.4)	X (see A.2.5)
Knowledge of client products, processes and organization		X (see A.4.4)		X (see A.2.6)
Language skills appropriate to all levels within the client organization				X (see A.2.7)

# Normative Annex A

knowledge and skills	Certification functions	Conducting the application review to determine AT competence & selection & determine audit time	Reviewing audit reports and making certification decisions	Auditing and Leading the audit teams
	Note-taking and report-writing skills			X (see A.2.8)
	Presentation skills			X (see A.2.9)
	Interviewing skills			X (see A.2.10)
	Audit-management skills			X ((see A.2.11)

NOTE Risk and complexity are other considerations when deciding the level of expertise needed for any of these functions.



# Annex B (Informative) Possible Evaluation methods

**This annex provides examples of evaluation methods as an aid to certification bodies.**

- ❖ Methods for evaluating individuals' competence can be grouped into five major categories:
  - ✓ review of records,
  - ✓ feedback,
  - ✓ Interviews,
  - ✓ Observations,
  - ✓ examinations

These can be further subdivided. The following is a brief description of each method and its usefulness and limitations for evaluating knowledge and skills. It is unlikely that any one method on its own will confirm competence.

# Clause 8 Information Requirements

## 8.1 Public Information

## 8.2 Certification Documents

## 8.3 Reference to certification & use of marks

## 8.4 Confidentiality

## 8.5 Information exchange between a certification body & its clients:

8.5.1 Information on the certification activity & requirements

8.5.2 Notice of changes by certification body

8.5.3 Notice of changes by certified client *(through legally enforceable arrangements for any changes in certified client system without delay.....)*

# Clause 9 Process Requirements

## 9.1 Pre-certification activity

9.1.1 Application

9.1.2 Application Review

9.1.3 Audit programme

9.1.4 Determining audit time

9.1.5 Multi site sampling

9.1.6 Multiple Management system standards

## 9.2 Planning audits

9.2.1 Determining audit objective, scope & criteria

9.2.2 Audit team selection & assignments

9.2.3 Audit plan

## 9.3 Initial Certification

**(Stage 1 & Stage 2 audits)**

9.3.1 Initial Certification audit

### **9.4 Conducting audits**

- 9.4.1 General
- 9.4.2 Conducting opening meeting
- 9.4.3 Communication during the audit
- 9.4.4 Obtaining & verifying information
- 9.4.5 Identifying and recording findings
- 9.4.6 Preparing audit conclusions
- 9.4.7 Conducting closing meeting
- 9.4.8 Audit report
- 9.4.9 Cause analysis of nonconformities
- 9.4.10 Effectiveness of corrections and corrective actions

### **9.5 Certification Decision**

- 9.5.1 General
- 9.5.2 Actions prior to making a decision
- 9.5.3 Information for granting initial certification
- 9.5.4 Information for granting recertification

### **9.6 Maintaining Certification**

9.6.1 General

9.6.2 Surveillance activities

9.6.3 Recertification

9.6.4 Special audits

9.6.5 Suspending, withdrawing or  
reducing the scope of accreditation

9.7 Appeals

9.8 Complaints

9.9 Client records

# Clause 10 Management system requirements

## 10.1 Options

The certification body shall establish, document, implement and maintain a management system that is capable of supporting and demonstrating the consistent achievement of the requirements of this part of ISO/IEC 17021. In addition to meeting the requirements of Clauses 5 to 9, the certification body shall implement a management system in accordance with either:

- a) general management system requirements (see 10.2); or
- b) management system requirements in accordance with ISO 9001

## 10.2 Option A: General management system requirements

### 10.2.1 General

### 10.2.2 Management system manual

### 10.2.3 Control of documents

### 10.2.4 Control of records



### 10.2.5 Management review

#### 10.2.5.1 General

#### 10.2.5.2 Review Inputs

- a. results of internal and external audits;
- b. feedback from clients and interested parties;
- c. safeguarding impartiality;
- d. the status of corrective actions;
- e. the status of actions to address risks;
- f. follow-up actions from previous management reviews;
- g. the fulfilment of objectives;
- h. changes that could affect the management system;
- i. appeals and complaints.

#### 10.2.5.3 Review outputs

The outputs from the management review shall include decisions and actions related to

- a) improvement of the effectiveness of the management system and its processes;
- b) improvement of the certification services related to the fulfilment of this part of ISO/IEC 17021;
- c) resource needs;
- d) revisions of the organization's policy and objectives

### 10.2.6 Internal audits

### 10.3 Option B: Management system (MS) requirements as per ISO 9001

**10.3.1 General** – CB shall establish & maintain a management system, in accordance with the requirements of ISO 9001, that is capable of supporting and demonstrating the consistent achievement of the requirements of this part of ISO/IEC 17021, amplified by 10.3.2 to 10.3.4.

**10.3.2 Scope** - For application of the requirements of ISO 9001, the scope of the MS shall include the design and development requirements for its certification services.

❖ **10.3.3 Customer focus** - For application of requirements of ISO 9001, when developing its MS, CB shall consider the credibility of certification and shall address the needs of all parties (as set out in 4.1.2) that rely upon its audit and certification services, not just clients.

❖ **10.3.4 Management review** - For application of the requirements of ISO 9001, the CB shall include as input for management review, information on relevant appeals & complaints from users of certification activities and a review of impartiality.

# Thank You!!

## National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB) Quality Council of India

Institution of Engineers Building, 2nd Floor, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi - 110002, India.

Tel: +91 - 11 - 2337 9921, 2337 8056, 2337 8217, 2337 8057 | Email: nabcb@qcin.org | web.: www.nabcb.qci.org.in

