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BUSINESSEUROPE's views on the development of an ISO standard for research and innovation processes

KEY MESSAGES

- 1** Proposals for developing a standard for R&D&I processes at ISO level are not considered necessary or helpful by European business. More research about the current level of standardization of R&D&I processes may help understand benefits and costs attached.
- 2** Existing ISO standards, like ISO 9001, already provide a viable framework which can be applied for the improvement of R&D&I processes.
- 3** Most businesses would be confronted with more bureaucracy, higher costs, less flexibility and no clear benefit deriving from the standardization of R&D&I processes

Introduction

Over the past months, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has received submissions to develop a standard for research and innovation processes. Some national standardization bodies have advanced proposals aimed at defining requirements for a management system in the field of research, development and innovation (R&D&I) to provide to users the tools to establish, implement, maintain and improve their R&D&I processes.

The ISO Technical Management Board, comprising 14 member governments, is expected to hold a vote in March 2013 to decide whether work should be initiated in this area.

BUSINESSEUROPE recognizes the general positive objective of generating more and better R&D&I activities pursued by the supporters of such initiative; however, it has strong reservations about the necessity and expected overall impact of a standard for R&D&I processes.



Major drawbacks of developing a standard for R&D&I processes

As guidelines and standards for R&D&I multiply at local and national level, developing an ISO standard may bring some simplification for business. Also, less experienced stakeholders and more generally SMEs may benefit from the standard to develop their activities especially in the areas of open innovation.

Nevertheless, BUSINESSEUROPE believes that these potential positive effects do not justify action at ISO level as they would be accompanied by much more important drawbacks.

- The standard could achieve a *de facto* mandatory status if public authorities considered it as a criterion for granting subsidies or for public procurement. This trend could be strengthened by the development of certifications for the standard and result in a burdensome administrative requirement.
- In case of problems due to innovations brought to the market, the suggestion of negligence could be linked to non-appliance of the standard; this would make its application necessary – even when not useful - for the management of liability risks.
- The standard would allow less flexibility to companies choosing the best way of working for any given situation and lead to bureaucracy in the innovation process. It could also represent a barrier to social innovation, which often takes place as innovation at the workplace.
- ISO 9001 already provides guidance on how to secure quality and continuous improvement for an organization, including in relation to research development and innovation activities.

Overall, most businesses would be confronted with more bureaucracy, higher costs, less flexibility and no clear benefit from the standardization of R&D&I processes. Developing such a standard could lead to a more complex and burdensome environment for companies investing in R&D&I and reduce their innovation performance since innovation is also about creativity and cannot always be caught in a standard process. A less attractive framework for publicly funded programmes may disincentive companies' participation and reduce cooperation with research centres and universities.

For these reasons, European business strongly advises against the undertaking of this type of standardization work at ISO level.

Instead of developing a standard, ISO could undertake a study on the existing level of standardization/codification of R&D&I processes in different regions and to identify related benefits and burdens. ISO could also develop guidelines to achieve quality in the organization of R&D&I activities on the basis of the existing ISO 9000.
