

[Note to US NCITS: We are trying to obtain consensus to submit this as a joint contribution of Canada, Finland, Ireland, and the US, and Unicode.]

ISO/IEC JTC 1
Information Technology

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Replaces

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Joint National Body Contribution

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Joint Contribution by Canada, Finland, Ireland, US and the Unicode Consortium on Initiating Formal Processing of an Amendment to ISO/IEC 10646 (JTC 1 N5826)

Source:
National Bodies of Canada (?), Finland (?), Ireland (?), US (?), and the Unicode Consortium (?)

Status
For review and discussion at the JTC 1 Seoul Plenary Meeting in November
For information to JTC 1/SC 2
For review and discussion at the JTC 1/SC 2/WG 2 Meeting in September

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Reference:

JTC 1, N5826, JTC 1, “Notification of Endorsement of the Proposed Modifications to the ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 2 Programme of Work”, 1999-07-01

Request

We ask JTC 1 to reconsider its directive to JTC 1/SC 2 in document JTC 1 N5826. In this document, we provide additional comments for SC 2 and SC 2/WG 2 to consider in responding to document JTC 1 N5826. In general, we believe that the use of project subdivision (balloted by JTC 1/SC 2) has overwhelming advantages over requiring an NP (balloted by JTC 1) for the initiation of amendments to ISO/IEC 10646. However, we do see some circumstances where using an NP ballot would be a reasonable and useful alternative. In this document, we propose guidelines for deciding when a proposed amendment to ISO/IEC 10646 is sufficiently mature to initiate the formal standardization process via project subdivision versus an NP.

Background

In document JTC 1 N5826, “SC 2 is directed to modify the programme of work as indicated in JTC 1 N 5785, taking into account the Japanese National Body comments received.” It then lists two comments from the Japanese National Body. We are concerned in particular about the first comment:

JNB believes that the additional work for amendment or addendum to ISO/IEC 10646 should be started with the NP process rather than with the simple modification of the Programme of Work.

We see two issues with this document: First, what is the appropriate way to initiate amendments to ISO/IEC 10646? Second, what are appropriate guidelines for deciding the mechanism to formally initiate the effort?

Issue 1: Appropriate Mechanism to Initiate Amendments to ISO/IEC 10646

The first issue is: Where should approval be for initiating the process to amend ISO/IEC 10646 to encode another script (writing system) or particular set of characters—at the SC 2 level by modifying the program of work, or at the JTC 1 level by starting a new work item (NP)? We believe that approvals for amendments should remain at the SC 2 level by using the mechanism to modify the program of work and subdivide the project. However under some circumstances, it would be valuable to solicit JTC 1 members for guidance and support. For these exceptional circumstances, the NB process would be more appropriate.

Here is our rationale to support continuing to have SC 2 approve the formal initiation of most amendments to 10646:

1. We believe that using the modification of the program of work to subdivide a project supports the JTC 1 goal of “market relevance”.

ISO/IEC 10646 is a phenomenally successful international standard that has wide support in the IT industry. In ISO/IEC 10646, ISO has certainly reached its goal to develop

standards (a) that have market relevance and (b) that have major industry implementations. However in the IT industry, timeliness is an important part of “market relevance”. The IT vendors thrive on their ability to quickly deliver products to market. By adding the additional step of NP approval for *all* amendments to 10646, SC 2 would be doing a disservice to the industry by further delaying an already lengthy process for encoding new scripts and character sets in 10646.

In making the decision, consider for example, the request to add the Euro Currency Symbol to ISO/IEC 10646. This requirement had the highest priority in the European community and certainly met the JTC 1 criterion for market relevance. Moreover, the request came with a firm implementation deadline of 1 January, 1999. As it was, SC 2 submitted the FDAM for approval in document SC 2 N3188 dated 22 October, 1998, and ITTF did not announce approval until 12 May, 1999 in document SC 2 N3321. Even without the delay of an NP ballot, SC 2 was still unable to produce an approved amendment for this critical requirement until well after the deadline. Where would SC 2 have been in the process if it had been required to submit this amendment to the NP process?

2. We believe that most approvals should done at the SC 2 level.

Once JTC 1 has approved an NP for a standard and subsequently approved the standard itself, we believe that it is both unnecessary and counterproductive for JTC 1 to micro-manage the detail of initiating amendments to a standard, unless the amendments are outside of the original scope of the standard. The scope for ISO/IEC 10646 is to be the Universal Coded Character Set that encodes the world’s characters in as consistent and technically usable a manner as possible. These characters include both living and dead scripts, and symbols.

Moreover, using the NP process to decide which additional scripts and characters to encode in 10646 represents increased work for JTC 1. Although SC 2/WG 2 has documented the scripts that need to be added to ISO/IEC 10646, ISO/IEC 10646 standardization is more open-ended than many other international standards because of the large number of scripts involved. Since JTC 1 approved ISO/IEC 10646-1 in 1993, SC 2/WG 2 has undertaken 31 amendments and 3 corrigenda. Does JTC 1 really want to process an NP ballot for every additional amendment and corrigendum proposed to 10646? We think not. We believe that attending to such details for every proposed amendment to add new characters to 10646 would be a waste of valuable JTC 1 time. In addition, we think that SC 2 would be shirking its responsibility if it were to require that all 10646 amendments be submitted as NPs to JTC 1. In most instances, the decision should be done at the SC 2 level by those National Bodies more knowledgeable in the work of SC 2. Finally, does JTC 1 want to start balloting NPs for every amendment to every JTC 1 standard? We believe that having SC 2 submit all amendments to ISO/IEC 10646 for an NP ballot would be establishing a precedent that could lead to NP ballots for amending every JTC 1 standard.

Issue 2: Suggested Guidelines to Initiate Processing of Amendments to ISO/IEC 10646

The second issue is: What are the guidelines for deciding whether a proposed amendment should be initiated by project subdivision or by NP ballot? The essential concern appears to be that SC 2 needs to have quality proposals that have the support of the interested communities, which may include national bodies, liaison organizations, scholarly groups, and organizations

representing the user community. However, as SC 2 needs to encode more and more obscure scripts into ISO/IEC 10646, it may be unable to identify the communities of interest. Under these circumstances, an NP ballot could be used to solicit help to identify the communities with an interest, obtain feedback, and build a proposal that has the support of the communities.

To help assure the quality of and backing for ISO/IEC 10646 amendment proposals to encode new scripts and character sets, we propose the following criteria:

Corrigendum

SC 2 should approve the initiation of any Corrigendum to ISO/IEC 10646 via project subdivision.

Amendments

SC 2 should initiate the formal process to amend the ISO/IEC 10646 standard via the project subdivision process if a proposal for new characters or a new script meets the SC 2/WG 2 criteria (The current document is SC 2/WG 2 N2002, “Principles and Procedures for Allocation of New Characters and Scripts and handling of Defect Reports on Character Names (Replaces N 1502)”, dated 1999-03-11) plus the following criteria:

1. The proposal identifies a representative set of interested and authoritative organizations and/or individual experts that have been contacted in the preparation of the proposal.
2. The proposed script or set of characters and character ordering has consensus support among the appropriate user communities, national bodies, liaison organizations, and/or academic communities with interest and expertise on the character set. In particular, the community of users needs (a) to support the proposal (consensus) and (b) to intend to use the characters coded in the ISO/IEC 10646 amendment when ISO approves it (market relevance).

If a proposal for an amendment to ISO/IEC 10646 fails to meet the above criteria for project subdivision approval by SC 2, then SC 2 may submit an NP request to JTC 1 with the intent of identifying interested and authoritative organizations that would help develop and reach consensus on a proposal to amend ISO/IEC 10646 to encode new characters.

Requested Action

In conclusion, we ask JTC 1 to include these comments for JTC 1/SC 2 to consider in deciding when it is appropriate to require an NP for amendments to ISO/IEC 10646. We believe that project subdivision is the appropriate mechanism to initiate most amendments for adding new scripts and character sets to ISO/IEC 10646. However, for those exceptional circumstances where SC 2 is concerned that a proposal for a new script or set of characters may have insufficient involvement and support by the user community, we believe that it would be more appropriate to initiate an NP to solicit JTC 1 support and identify the communities with an interest in a proposal.

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