



Foundational Vocabulary for Whole Quality

Quality, Quality Objects, Standards, and Guides

Foundational Article 2 — Third Edition

Whole-Quality Institute

Whole Quality requires stable vocabulary before measurement, interpretation, or Quality Determination can proceed responsibly. Words such as quality, object, function, result, boundary, indicator, criterion, Evidence, and claim are often used differently across professions and application domains. Without controlled meanings, people may discuss the same subject while referring to different objects, scopes, expectations, or forms of Evidence. The authoritative definitions of Whole Quality Root Concepts are established in the Whole Quality Root Vocabulary Standard (WQI VOC1). This Foundational Article does not redefine those concepts. It explains, in accessible language, why a shared vocabulary is necessary and how the principal concepts relate within the Whole Quality methodology. Vocabulary does not create the reality of the Quality Object. It provides stable names for quality-relevant structures that already exist and allows them to be communicated, examined, evidenced, and interpreted consistently.

1. Why Vocabulary Comes First

Quality cannot be determined responsibly when the key terms are unstable. Before developing Core Standards, determining context-specific requirements through Context Guides, establishing Quality Outcome Criteria, examining Quality Indicators, or making Quality Claims, Whole Quality must establish a common language for describing what is being determined and how the determination is performed. This is especially important because Whole Quality applies across infrastructure, health, support services, management systems, environmental systems, processes, arrangements, and other Quality Objects. Each field retains its specialized terminology, but the common Whole Quality methodology requires stable Root Concepts that can connect those fields without erasing their differences. Controlled vocabulary therefore performs a methodological role. It helps preserve Traceability from the defined Quality Object and the basis of the determination through Findings, interpretation, Quality State, and an appropriately bounded Quality Claim.

2. Quality and the Quality Object

2.1 Quality as the Root Concept

Quality is always the Quality of something. It is not determined in the abstract and is not equivalent to effort, good intention, documentation, activity, inspection, conformity, certification, performance, or absence of observed failure alone. Those matters may contribute Evidence or support interpretation, but they do not independently establish the Quality State of the defined Quality Object.

2.2 The Quality Object

The Quality Object is the defined subject whose Quality is being determined. It may be an infrastructure system, a support-service arrangement, a Management System, a biological object, a human-health state,

a process, an activity, an Interface, or another appropriately defined subject. The defined Quality Object remains the primary reference point for the methodology. It provides the reference for establishing or interpreting its Intended Functions and Intended Results, Function Realization, Scale, Boundaries, Interfaces, Context, Quality Factors, Quality Indicators, Quality Outcome Criteria, Evidence needs, and the permissible scope of the resulting Quality State and Quality Claim. Without a clearly defined Quality Object, it becomes unclear what was examined, what was excluded, and what the resulting Quality Claim actually means.

3. Intended Function, Intended Results, and Function

Realization An Intended Function states what the defined Quality Object is required or intended to do. An Intended Result is a result required or intended to arise from realization of an Intended Function. The stabilized methodological relationships are: A Quality Object may have one or more Intended Functions. An Intended Function may be associated with one or more Intended Results. An Intended Result may also be associated with more than one Intended Function where justified. The Intended Function and Intended Results are related but not interchangeable: the Intended Function states what the Quality Object is required or intended to do, while the Intended Results identify results required or intended to arise from realization of that function. Function Realization describes the manner and degree to which the Quality Object realizes an Intended Function and its associated Intended Results. It may depend on relevant conditions, relationships, capabilities, protections, controls, adaptations, Boundaries, Interfaces, and external dependencies.

4. Quality Factors, Quality Indicators, and Quality Outcome

Criteria Quality Factors, Quality Indicators, and Quality Outcome Criteria perform distinct methodological roles.

4.1 Quality Factors

A Quality Factor is a principal dimension of Function Realization that must be understood to determine the Quality State of a defined Quality Object. Quality Factors are derived from the Quality Object, its Intended Functions and Intended Results, Function Realization, Boundaries, Interfaces, relevant conditions, and applicable requirements or knowledge; they are not selected merely because familiar categories or measurements are available.

4.2 Quality Indicators

A Quality Indicator is an aspect of a Quality Factor that identifies what should be examined to understand that Factor. It identifies what should be examined, not the expected judgment or result and not the examination method. The stabilized methodological relationships are: An Intended Function may be associated with one or more Intended Results.

4.3 Quality Outcome Criteria

A Quality Outcome Criterion establishes the expected state or result against which observations associated with a Quality Indicator are interpreted.

One criterion may be insufficient where the aspect represented by the Quality Indicator is multidimensional. The methodological relationship is: A Quality Factor may be examined through multiple Quality Indicators, and a Quality Indicator may be interpreted through one or more applicable Quality Outcome Criteria. Context, Lifecycle stage, Boundaries, Interfaces, Applicable Basis, and Reference Layer sources may affect the selection or applicability of Quality Outcome Criteria. They do not replace the stable methodological roles of the Quality Factor, Quality Indicator, or Quality Outcome Criterion.

5. Evidence, Quality Determination, and Quality Claims

5.1 Evidence

Evidence is information or observations used to support a Finding about the actual condition of a Quality Object. It may include observations, measurements, inspection results, records, professional evaluations, scientific information, lived experience, or other information appropriate to the defined Quality Object and Context. Evidence does not replace the methodology. Its usefulness depends on its relevance and dependability for the use made of it, and the available Evidence must provide enough appropriate support for the intended Finding and Quality Determination. Where relevant conditions or conclusions remain unknown or not established with sufficient confidence, that Uncertainty should remain visible.

5.2 Quality Determination

A Quality Determination is the structured application of Whole Quality to establish the Quality State of a defined Quality Object. It brings together the relevant methodological elements, including Intended Functions and Intended Results, Function Realization, Scale, Boundaries, Interfaces, Context, Methodological Resolution, Applicable Basis, Quality Factors, Quality Indicators, Quality Outcome Criteria, Reference Layer sources, Evidence, Findings, and interpretation. The established Quality State may be favorable, unfavorable, mixed, qualified, or unresolved. It should not be overstated beyond what the methodology and Evidence support.

5.3 Quality Claims

A Quality Claim communicates a statement about the Quality State supported by the Quality Determination. The claim should remain consistent with the defined Quality Object, Scale, scope, Evidence, Context, Methodological Resolution, and the limitations or Uncertainty that remain.

6. Vocabulary as Infrastructure for Quality Reasoning

A term is a label; the quality-relevant structure exists before it is named. Different fields may use different labels for similar dimensions, but vocabulary should make those relationships explicit rather than allowing terms to float without an identifiable object, boundary, function, criterion, or evidentiary basis. Controlled vocabulary supports several essential questions:

- What is the defined Quality Object?
- What Intended Function or Intended Functions and Intended Results are relevant?
- At what Scale, within which Boundaries and Interfaces, and in what Context is the Quality Object being considered?
- What Applicable Basis establishes or justifies what applies?
- Which Quality Factors must be understood, and which Quality Indicators identify what should be examined?
- Which Quality Outcome Criteria establish what is expected, and which Reference Layer sources support them?
- What Evidence supports the Findings, Quality State, and Quality Claim, and is that Evidence dependable and sufficient for the intended determination?

In this sense, vocabulary is part of the infrastructure of quality reasoning. It makes methodological relationships visible, repeatable, and transferable while preserving the specific nature of each application domain.

7. Standards, Core Standards, and Context Guides

7.1 Why Whole Quality Uses Standards

Whole Quality uses standards to stabilize vocabulary, conceptual relationships, and methodological requirements. A standard does not make every Quality Object, person, service, engineering solution, or Context identical. It stabilizes the logic through which quality is determined.

7.2 Core Standards

A Core Standard uses the Root Vocabulary and relevant Applied Vocabulary to establish a stable Quality architecture and requirements for a defined class of Quality Objects. It may establish Intended Functions, Quality Factors, Quality Indicators, Quality Outcome Criteria, Evidence requirements, Critical Conditions, Non-Compensability rules, Quality Determination requirements, and permissible Quality Claims. A Core Standard is not a universal checklist and should not force genuinely context-specific conditions into one form.

7.3 Context Guides

A Context Guide applies a Core Standard to determine requirements for a bounded application Context. It retains the stable Quality Factors and Quality Indicators established by the Core Standard and determines the context-specific requirements needed for their application. In particular, it establishes the applicable Quality Outcome Criteria for each Quality Indicator and identifies the Reference Layer sources that establish or justify those criteria. It may also determine context-specific Boundaries, Interfaces, Lifecycle or operating conditions, Evidence needs, Critical Conditions, and other provisions necessary for Quality Determination.

7.4 Current Whole Quality Architecture

The Whole Quality Institute provides the umbrella methodology and Root Vocabulary. The Infrastructure Quality Initiative applies that methodology to infrastructure Quality Objects. The American Support Standards Initiative applies it to support-service Quality Objects. Other Whole Quality platforms may apply the same Root Concepts through domain-specific Applied Vocabularies, Core Standards, and Context Guides. Universality belongs to the methodology. Specificity belongs to the defined Quality Object and Context.

8. Applicable Basis and Reference Layer

Whole Quality does not reproduce every specialized law, regulation, engineering code, clinical guideline, scientific method, professional requirement, contract, specification, or organizational procedure. Applicable Basis and Reference Layer perform different methodological roles. Applicable Basis establishes or justifies what applies to the Quality Object and the intended Quality Determination. The Reference Layer identifies the sources used to establish or justify applicable Quality Outcome Criteria. The same external source may contribute to both roles, depending on how it is used. Applicable Basis may include requirements, scientific or technical knowledge, contracts, specifications, design bases, and other justified bases. Reference Layer sources may include laws, regulations, standards, contracts, specifications, design bases, scientific literature, professional guidance, validated data, and other justified sources. Neither role replaces the defined Quality Object, professional reasoning, Evidence about actual condition, or the Whole Quality methodology. The distinction can be summarized simply: Applicable Basis establishes what applies. Reference Layer supports what is expected. Evidence supports what is actually found.

9. Methodological Sources and Related Work

Whole Quality vocabulary development is consistent with established terminology science in treating controlled concepts, definitions, and designations as necessary for clear communication across fields. ISO 704:2022 establishes principles and methods for terminology work and describes relationships among objects, concepts, definitions, and designations. ISO 1087:2019 establishes basic terms and definitions for terminology work and terminology science [1,2].

These standards provide useful external context for disciplined terminology work. They do not define the Whole Quality methodology or the WQI Root Concepts. WQI_VOC1 remains the authoritative source for those definitions. The WQI contribution is the particular cross-domain methodological architecture through which Root Vocabulary, Applied Vocabularies, Core Standards, and Context Guides are related to Quality Determination, including the use of Context Guides to determine bounded context-specific requirements and applicable Quality Outcome Criteria from the stable Core architecture.

References

[1] International Organization for Standardization (ISO). ISO 704:2022, Terminology work — Principles and methods. Geneva:

ISO, 2022.

[2] International Organization for Standardization (ISO). ISO 1087:2019, Terminology work and terminology science — Vocabulary.

Geneva: ISO, 2019.

Conclusion

Whole Quality requires stable vocabulary because responsible Quality Determination depends on stable meanings and traceable relationships. The defined Quality Object remains the primary reference point. It may have one or more Intended Functions and associated Intended Results. Function Realization is understood through Quality Factors and examined through Quality Indicators. Quality Outcome Criteria establish what is expected. Evidence supports Findings about what is actually found. Those Findings are interpreted to establish the Quality State and support an appropriately bounded Quality Claim. The principal methodological relationships are: A Quality Object may have one or more Intended Functions. An Intended Function may be associated with one or more Intended Results. A Quality Factor may be examined through multiple Quality Indicators, and a Quality Indicator may be interpreted through one or more applicable Quality Outcome Criteria. Controlled vocabulary does not create the quality-relevant structure of reality. It provides stable language through which that structure can be understood, applied across domains, evidenced, interpreted, and communicated responsibly.

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