

An Information Model for Software Quality Measurement with ISO Standards

Alain Abran

École de Technologie Supérieure
University of Québec, 1100 Notre-Dame
Ouest, Montréal, Québec H3W 1T8, Canada
aabran@ele.etsmtl.ca

Rafa Al Qutaish

École de Technologie Supérieure,
University of Québec, 1100 Notre-Dame
Ouest, Montréal, Québec H3W 1T8, Canada
rafa.al-qutaish.1@ens.etsmtl.ca

Jean-Marc Desharnais

École de Technologie Supérieure
University of Québec, 1100 Notre-Dame
Ouest, Montréal, Québec H3W 1T8, Canada
jean-marc.desharnais@etsmtl.ca

Naji Habra

University of Namur
Institut d'Informatique, Rue Grandgagnage,
21 5000 – Namur, Belgium
naji.habra@info.fundp.ac.be

Abstract. Within the ISO's mandate to upgrade its set of technical reports on the measurement of the quality of software products (ISO 9126), the ISO working group associated with it has come up with a proposed new structure, with some interesting contributions. This paper investigates the maturity of two new concepts proposed (measurement primitives and quality measures), highlights some of their weaknesses and proposes a way to address these using the measurement information model of ISO 15939 on software measurement process.

Keywords: ISO 9126, Software Product Quality, Software Measurement, ISO 15939

1. Introduction

In 1991, the ISO published its first international consensus on the terminology for the quality characteristics for software product evaluation (ISO 9126:1991) [2]. From 2001 to 2004, the ISO published an expanded version, containing both the ISO quality models and inventories of proposed measures for these models. The current version of the ISO 9126 series of standards now consists of four documents [4], [6]-[8]:

- Quality models - ISO 9126-1.
- External metrics¹ - ISO TR 9126-2.
- Internal metrics - ISO TR 9126-3.
- Quality in use metrics - ISO TR 9126-4.

The ISO has now recognized a need for further enhancement of ISO 9126, primarily as a result of advances in the fields of information technologies and changes in environment [1]. Therefore, the ISO is now working on the next generation of software product quality standards [12], which will be referred to as **Software Product Quality Requirements and Evaluation (SQuaRE - ISO 25000)**. This series of standards will replace the current ISO 9126 and ISO 14598 series of standards. The SQuaRE series will consist of five divisions, as in Figure 1 [9]:

- Quality management division (ISO 2500n).
- Quality model division (ISO 2501n).
- Quality measurement division (ISO 2502n).

¹ The term 'metrics' used in ISO/IEC 9126 is replaced by 'measures' in the new series of standards in accordance with ISO/IEC 15939.

- Quality requirements division (ISO 2503n).
- Quality evaluation division (ISO 2504n).

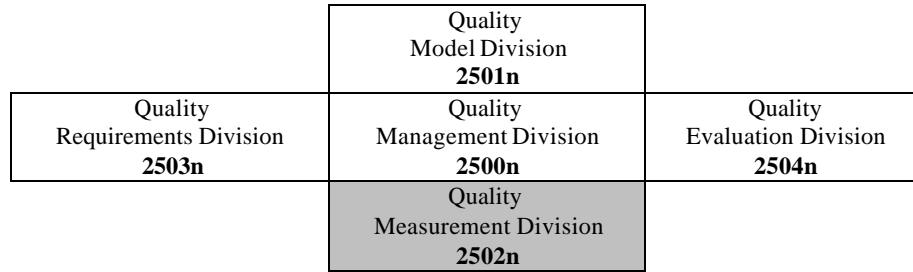


Figure 1 WG6’s proposed organization of the SQuaRE series of standards

One of the main objectives of (and differences between) the SQuaRE series of standards and the current ISO 9126 series of standards is the coordination and harmonization of its contents with ISO 15939 [9]. Figure 2 shows the proposed structure of the quality measurement division (ISO 2502n) series that is to replace the current four-part ISO 9126 series of standards [10]. This proposed quality measurement division (ISO 2502n) would consist of five standards [10]:

- Measurement reference model and guide (ISO 25020)
- Measurement primitives (ISO 25021)
- Measurement of internal quality (ISO 25022)
- Measurement of external quality (ISO 25023)
- Measurement of quality in use (ISO 25024)

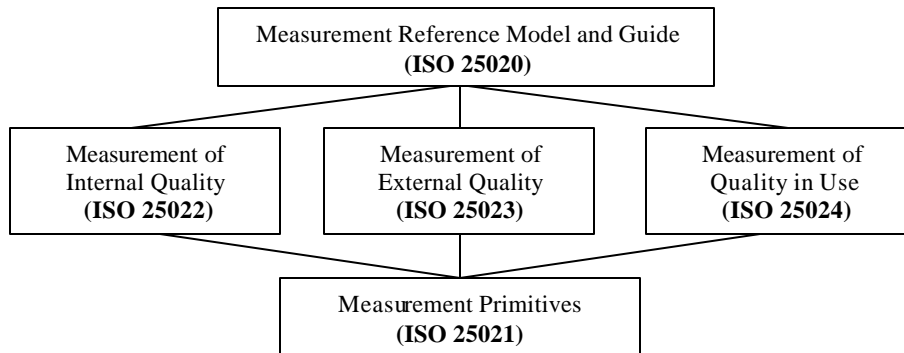


Figure 2 WG6 proposed structure of the Measurement division (ISO2502n series)

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the ISO Measurement Information Model adopted in ISO 15939. Section 3 analyzes the concept of ‘measurement primitives’ proposed by WG6, and section 4, the concept of ‘quality measures’, including our proposed solution for alignment with the measurement information model of ISO 15939. Finally, examples are presented in section 5, and conclusions in section 6.

2. ISO Measurement Information Model

Within ISO 15939 (2002), ISO produced an information model (Figure 3) to help in determining what has to be specified during measurement planning, performance and evaluation [5].

Figure 3 shows that a specific measurement method is used to collect a base measure for a specific attribute. Then, the values of two or more base measures can be used within a computational formula (by means of a measurement function) to produce and construct a specific derived measure. These derived measures are then used in the context of an analysis model to arrive at an indicator which is a value, and to interpret the indicator's value to explain the relationship between it and the information needed, in the language of the measurement user, to produce an Information Product for his Information Needs [5].

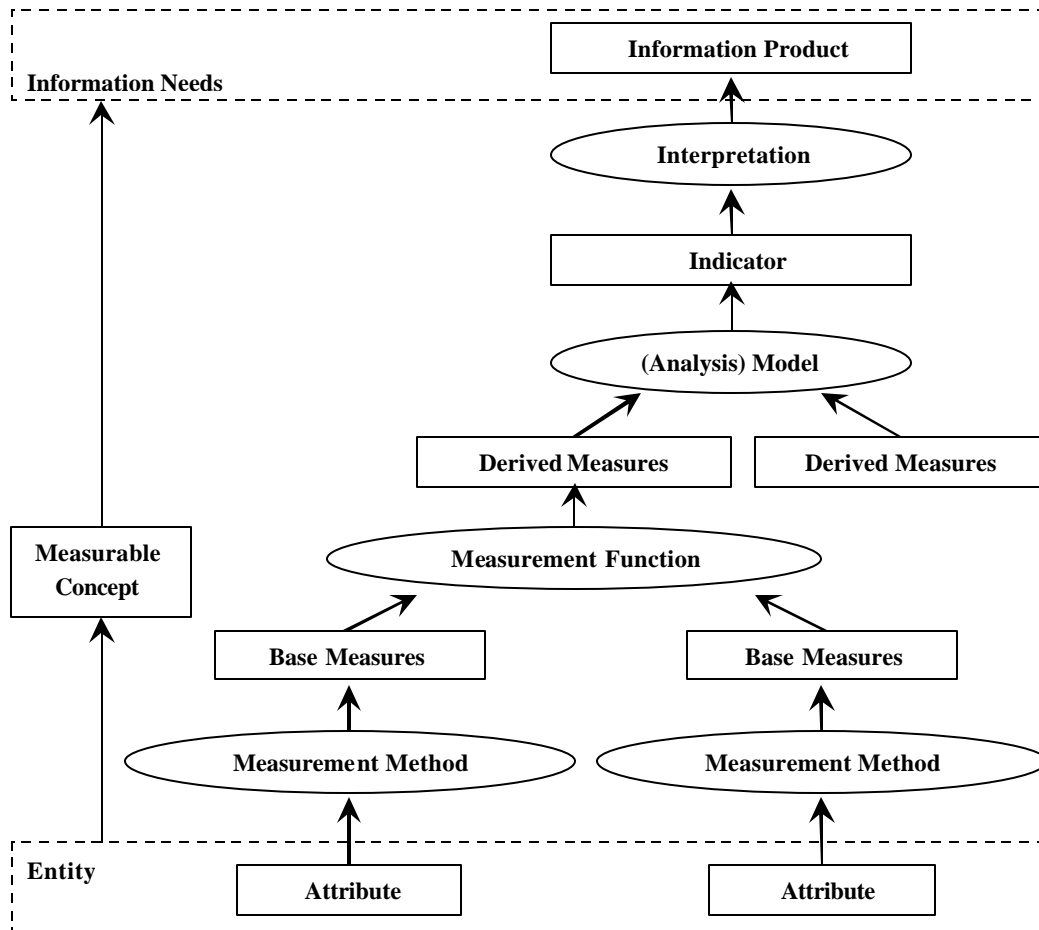


Figure 3 Measurement Information Model from ISO 15939 (2002) ²

There already exists a very mature measurement terminology, and it is well documented in the ISO International Vocabulary of Basic and General terms in Metrology (VIM) [3]. This terminology is widely accepted and used in most fields of science, and has been adopted in ISO 15939 as the agreed upon measurement terminology for software and system engineering related ISO standards.

² We added the arrows to the ISO/IEC 15939 Measurement Information Model to point up the dataflow relationships. Ovals represent activities and rectangles represent the input and output of an activity.

3. Measurement Primitives: Issues

3.1 WG6 work in progress

In 2004, ISO working group six (WG6) of software engineering subcommittee seven (SC7) proposed the introduction of two new concepts, namely ‘measurement primitives’ and ‘quality measures’. The introduction of these two new terms by WG6 raises the following concern: either the proper mapping to the set of classic metrology concepts has not yet been performed, or there are concepts missing from the metrology. The latter would be rather surprising. In this paper, we revisit the WG6 proposal in order to recommend the proper mapping of concepts to the related metrology terms and the ISO 15939 Measurement Information Model.

Figure 4 shows the WG6 proposed process for constructing the new ‘measurement primitives’ concept, which would either be a base or a derived measure [10].

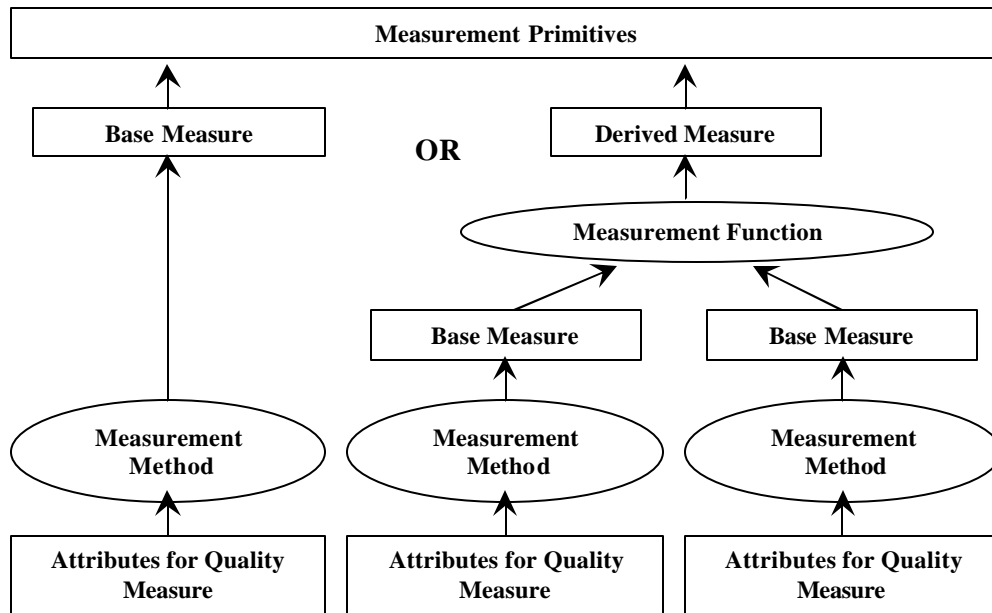


Figure 4 WG6 proposed process for constructing a Measurement Primitive

The current WG6 proposal recommends a set of measurement primitives to be used within the software product life cycle as an input for external, internal and quality in use measures - Table 1 - in ISO PDTR 25021 [11].

Table 1 WG6 recommended set of Measurement Primitives (MP)

MP Class Name	MP Name
External Metrics	Time
	Number of Functions
	Number of Faults
	Number of Data
	Number of Operations
	Number of Test Cases

In addition to the recommended set of measurement primitives, WG6 is also proposing a list of quality measures for internal, external and quality in use assessment, all of them to be

derived from measures selected from the set of measurement primitives; Table 2 shows the subset of these quality measures proposed in [11]. Figure 5 shows the WG6 proposal for the means for constructing the new quality measure concept: measurement primitives are to be used to construct quality measures by applying a measurement function on them based on (e.g. the dotted lines) the quality characteristics and subcharacteristics of a software product [10]. It is to be noted that the relationship represented by the dotted line in Figure 5 is not described and remains ambiguous³.

Table 2 WG6 recommended set of Quality Measures

Quality Group Name	Quality Measure Name
Internal Quality Measures	Functional Adequacy
	Precision
	Restartability
	Physical Accessibility
External Quality Measures	Computational Accuracy
	Access Controllability
	Operational Consistency
	Installation Flexibility
Quality in Use Measures	Task Completion
	Productive Proportion
	Discretionary Usage

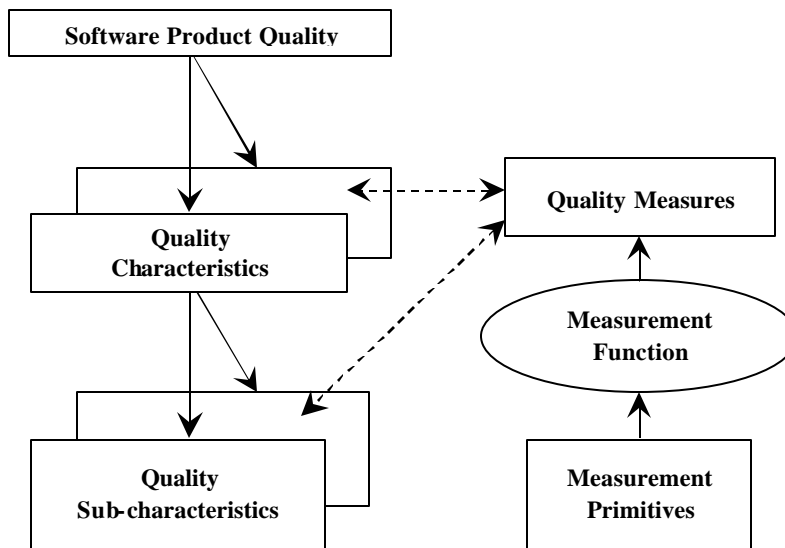


Figure 5 WG6 proposed construction of Quality Measures

3.2 Identification of issues

An analysis of WG6’s early 2005 draft document identifies a number of issues with the proposed concept of measurement primitives:

- The WG6 definition of measurement primitives does not provide criteria which allow verification that the proposed list (Table 1) is complete and correct.

³ Conventions are not defined for the symbols in Fig. 5. Content of the rectangles cannot be assumed to be at the same abstraction level and with similar interpretation.

- The WG6 proposed list of measurement primitives contains only base measures; it has therefore not been demonstrated yet that there is an instance of a measurement primitive being a derived measure.
- No rationale has been provided for not using accepted terminology of metrology, including base and derived measures.
- It is mentioned that the items in Table 1 have been identified and selected by means of a survey [11], but criteria for this survey are not documented and therefore it lacks transparency.
- Even though the WG6 proposal mentions that the definition of measurement primitives is based on ISO 15939 [11], it is not traceable back to that standard.
- The term ‘measurement function’ is used twice in the proposed hierarchy, that is, below the concept of ‘measurement primitives’ in Figure 4 as well as above it in Figure 5. However, it cannot be assumed that it means the same thing in both instances. On the contrary, such a double use of the terminology in a hierarchy of concepts leads both to ambiguity in expressing concepts, and to serious misunderstanding on the part of users of such documents.
- The items listed on the right-hand side of Table 2 are referred to as ‘quality measures’; however, they refer to the name of the attribute being measured at the level of the subcharacteristic (for internal and external quality of software products) or at the level of the quality characteristic for the quality in use of the software product. By contrast, the quality model described in ISO 9126 does not refer to the measurement of individual itemized attributes, but to the combination of the measures of these various attributes within the multi-level model of quality adopted in ISO 9126-1.
- In Table 2, there are a number of so-called quality measures not present in ISO 9126 documents.

3.3 Mapping terminology with VIM and ISO 15939

We illustrate now how the issue of ambiguity and redundancy in WG6’s proposed new term ‘measurement primitives’ can be avoided through the use of the corresponding metrology concepts and terms. The related concepts in metrology are the following [3], [5]:

- Base measure: the measure that is defined in terms of an attribute and the method for quantifying it.
- Derived measure: the measure that is defined as a function of two or more values of base measures.

In practice, the data collection associated with a property of an object (or concept), and quantification of it, happens at the base measure level, at which time a measurement unit is assigned based on the rules of the measurement method used for the quantification.

At the derived measure level, the base measures have been already collected and are being assembled according to the combination rules (e.g. a computational formula) defined within each derived measure. A derived measure is therefore the product of a set of measurement units properly combined (through a measurement function). This combination is then labeled to represent an attribute (of a characteristic or subcharacteristic of the quality) of a software product.

Table 3 shows examples of base measures used in the definitions of the measures documented in ISO 9126-2, -3 and -4 [6]-[8]. Table 3, shows the name of each base measure and the unit of measurement that is given to its value. These base measures can then be used to calculate

- Identifying, selecting and collecting a base measure (once), and then using this base measure to evaluate a number of derived measures.
- Knowledge of which base measures are required to evaluate specific software quality attributes (characteristics and subcharacteristics).

In summary, from our point of view, issuing a new term such as ‘measurement primitives’ is not necessary: the terminology and concepts in ISO VIM [3] and in ISO 15939 [5] are sufficient.

4. Mapping the Quality Model to the Measurement Information Model

4.1 Current WG6 work in progress and related issues

Figure 6 shows the WG6 proposed relationship between the SQuaRE Software Product Quality Measurement – Reference Model (SPQM-RM) and the ISO 15939 Measurement Information Model. This figure leads to the conclusion that every quality measure is necessarily a derived measure, that a measurement primitive can be a base or a derived measure. It can also be observed that there is no mapping to the analysis model, indicator or interpretation between the SQuaRE and ISO 15939 models. In Figure 5, there is some mapping between quality measures and quality characteristics and subcharacteristics, but this is at the level of the derived measures and through an unspecified relationship – the dashed arrow in Figure 5.

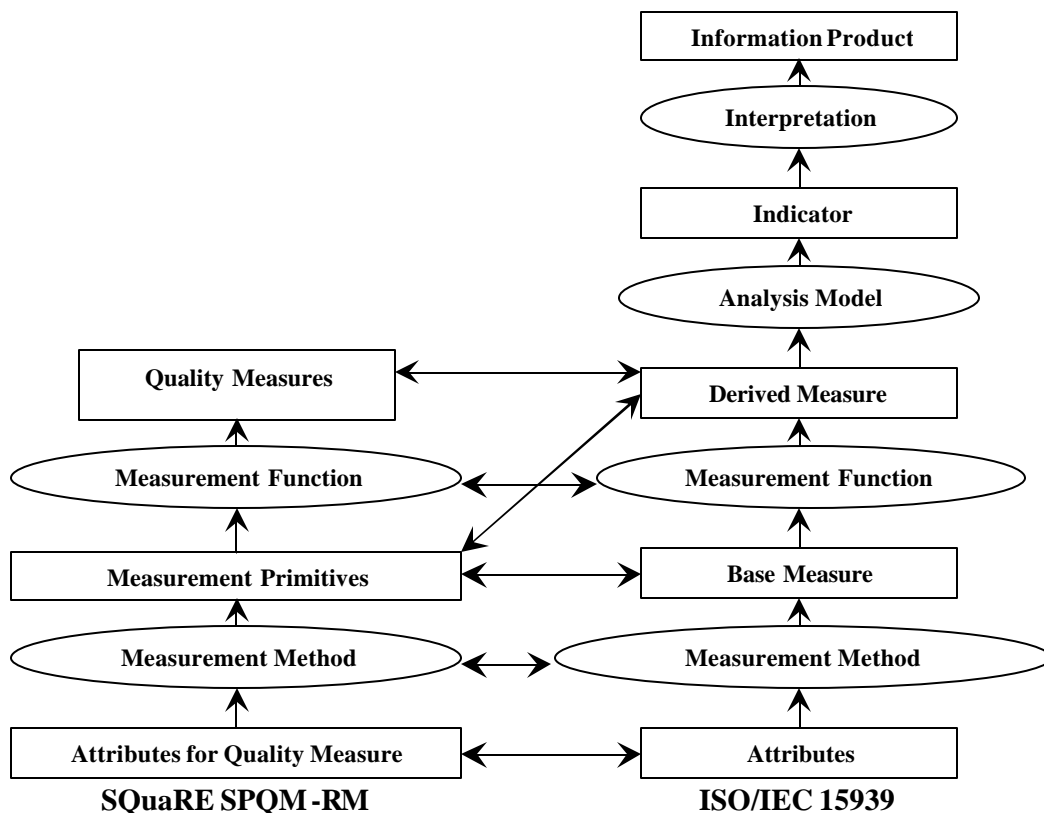


Figure 6 WG6 proposed relationships between the SQuaRE SPQM-RM and the ISO 15939 Measurement Information Model

4.2 Mapping with ISO 15939

In this section, we propose a mapping of both the measures and of the quality models in ISO 9126 to the measurement information model described in ISO 15939.

As a first step, we refer to the bottom section of Figure 7 by the term ‘Data Collection’ (e.g. the measurement methods and the base measures), the middle section by the term ‘Data Preparation’ using agreed upon mathematical formula and related labels (e.g. measurement functions and derived measures) and the top section by the term the ‘Data Analysis’ (e.g. analysis model, indicator and interpretation).

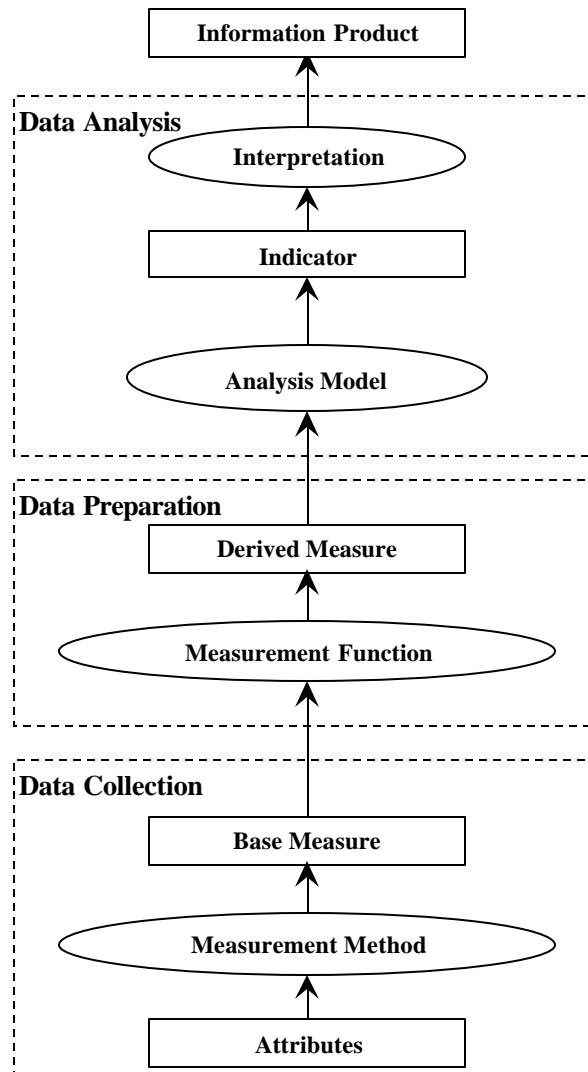


Figure 7 ISO 15939 (2002) Measurement Information Model – three different sections

Both data collection and data preparation having already been discussed in section 3, we now focus on the ‘Data Analysis’ section.

It is in the 'Analysis Model' part of the ISO 15939 measurement information model that the ISO 9126 models of software product quality are to be put to use. Figures 8, 9 and 10 present these generic models of ISO 9126 [4].

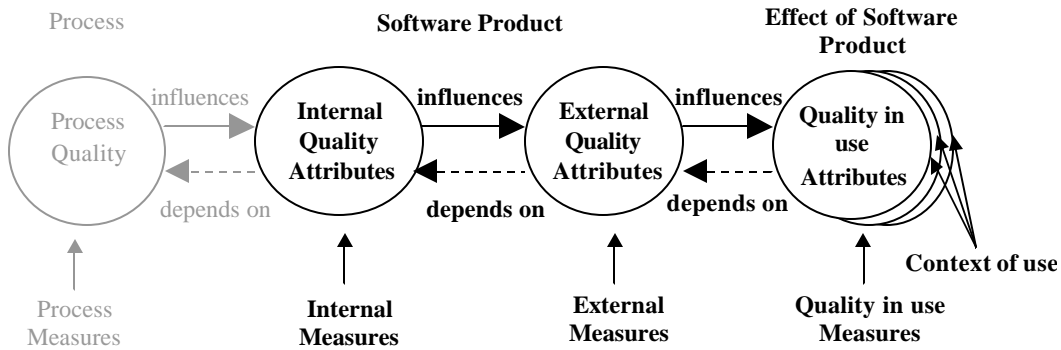


Figure 8 Quality in the lifecycle – ISO 9126-1 [4]

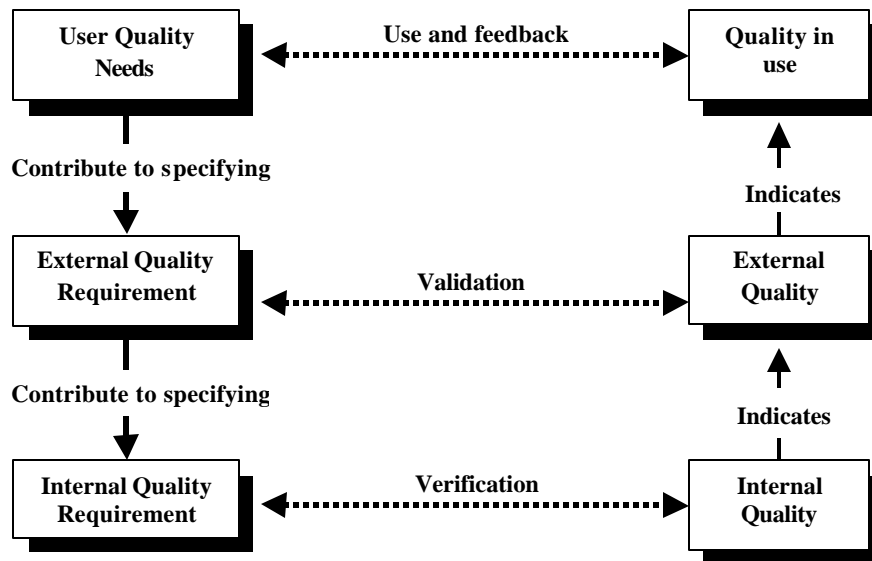


Figure 9 Quality in the software lifecycle – ISO 9126-1 [4]

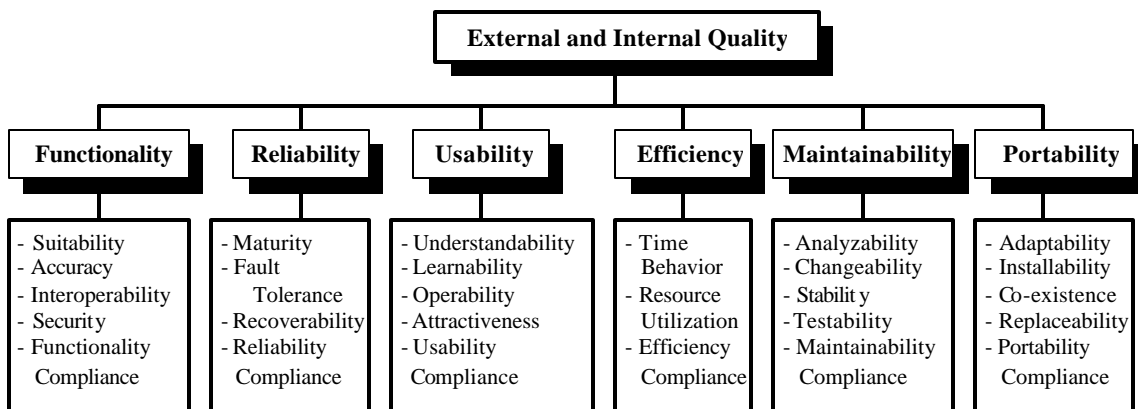


Figure 10 Quality model for External and Internal Quality (characteristics and sub-characteristics) – ISO 9126-1 [4]

These generic ISO models are to be instantiated in any particular context of measuring the quality of a specific software product. This is usually performed in a four-step process:

1. Identification of quality related requirements, that is, the selection of the parts of the ISO quality models that are relevant to a particular context of quality evaluation.
2. Identification of the context of interpretation, that is:
 - the selection of reference values, such values being either generic or specific threshold values, or
 - the determination of targets specified for a particular context.
3. Use of the derived measures from the data preparation phase to fill out the instantiated quality model determined in 1.
4. Comparison of the results of step 3 with either the set of reference values or targets determined in step 2.

This is summarized in Figure 11.

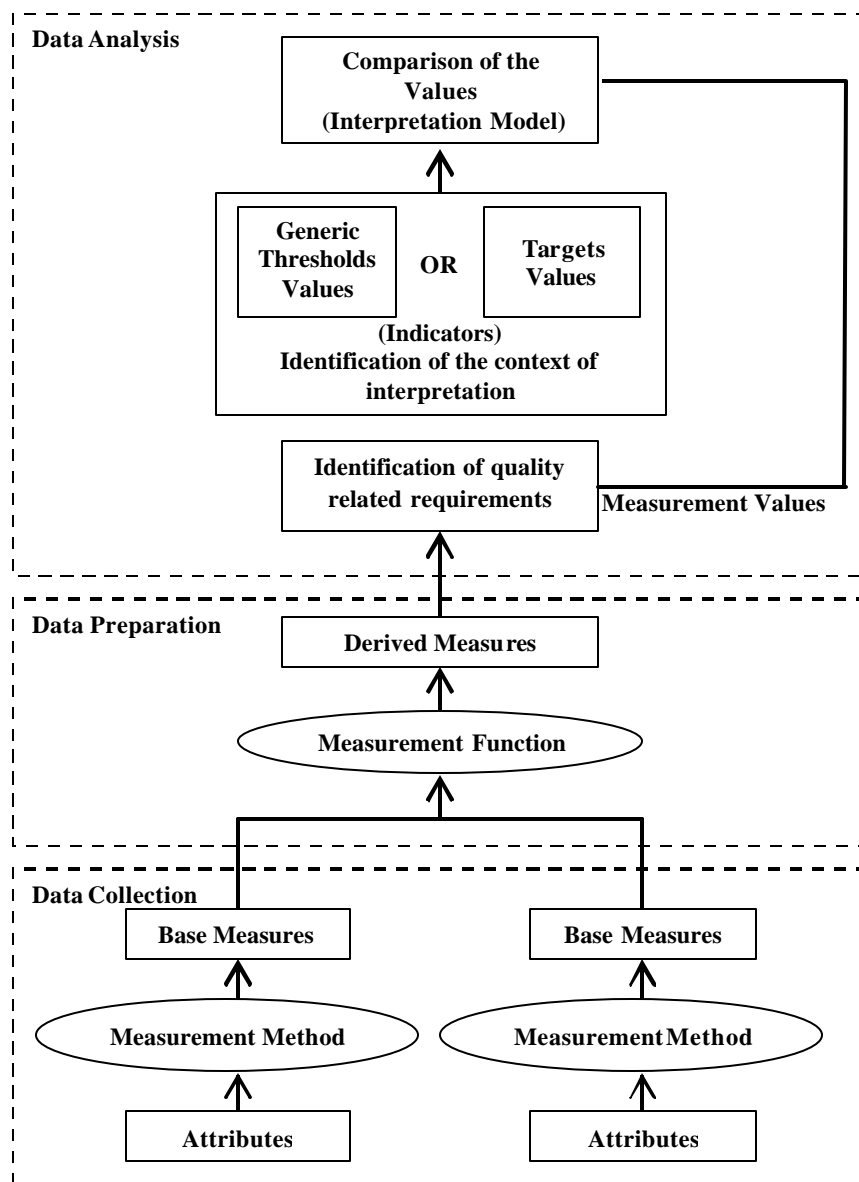


Figure 11 Mapping to the Measurement Information Model

5. Examples

Some examples are presented next illustrating the process described in Figure 11. These include some of the ISO 9126 base measures and how they are combined to construct a derived measure using a computational formula:

Example 1:

Data Collection:

Base Measure 1 (B1): Number of inaccurate computations encountered by users.

Base Measure 2 (B2): Operation time.

Data Preparation:

Derived Measure: $B1 / B2$

Name of Derived Measure: Computational accuracy.

Data Analysis

Quality group name: External quality measures.

Characteristic: Functionality.

Subcharacteristic: Accuracy.

Comparison of values obtained with the indicators (generic thresholds and/or targets).

Example 2:

Data Collection:

Base Measure 1 (B1): Number of detected failures.

Base Measure 2 (B2): Number of performed test cases.

Data preparation:

Derived Measure: $B1 / B2$

Name of Derived Measure: Failure density against test cases.

Data Analysis:

Quality group name: External quality measures.

Characteristic: Reliability.

Subcharacteristic: Maturity.

Comparison of values obtained with the indicators (generic thresholds and/or targets).

Example 3:

Data Collection:

Base Measure 1 (B1): Number of memory related errors.

Base Measure 2 (B2): Number of lines of code directly related to system calls.

Data Preparation:

Derived Measure: $B1 / B2$

Name of Derived Measure: Memory utilization message density.

Data Analysis:

Quality group name: Internal quality measures.

Characteristic: Efficiency.

Subcharacteristic: Resource utilization.

Comparison of values obtained with the indicators (generic thresholds and/or targets).

Example 4:

Data Collection:

Base Measure 1 (B1): Task time.

Base Measure 2 (B2): Help time.

Base Measure 3 (B3): Error time.

Base Measure 4 (B4): Search time.

Data Preparation:

Derived Measure: $(B1-B2-B3-B4) / B1$

Name of Derived Measure: Productive proportion.

Data Analysis:

Quality group name: Quality in use measures.

Characteristic: Productivity.

Comparison of values obtained with the indicators (generic thresholds and/or targets).

Example 5:

Data Collection:

Base Measure 1 (B1): Number of errors made by user.

Base Measure 2 (B2): Number of tasks.

Data Preparation:

Derived Measure: $B1 / B2$

Name of Derived Measure: Error frequency.

Data Analysis:

Quality group name: Quality in use measures.

Characteristic: Effectiveness.

Comparison of values obtained with the indicators (generic thresholds and/or targets).

Example 6:

Data Collection:

Base Measure 1 (B1): Task effectiveness.

Base Measure 2 (B2): Task time.

Data Preparation:

Derived Measure: $B1 / B2$

Name of Derived Measure: Task efficiency.

Data Analysis:

Quality group name: Quality in use measures.

Characteristic: Effectiveness.

Comparison of values obtained with the indicators (generic thresholds and/or targets).

6. Conclusions

Within the ISO's mandate to upgrade its set of technical reports on the measurement of the quality of software products (ISO 9126), ISO WG6 has come up with a proposed new structure for upgrading the current series of ISO 9126 documents for the measurement of the quality of software products. In this paper, issues have been raised concerning two new concepts proposed by WG6: measurement primitives and quality measures. These concerns can be summarized as follows:

- Measurement primitives: non alignment with the classic terminology on measurement is puzzling;
- Quality measures: inconsistency in the terminology used, and ambiguity about which level of the ISO 9126 multi-level standard is being applied.

We have analyzed some of their weaknesses and proposed ways to address them by using the ISO 15939 measurement information model on software measurement process. In summary, using predefined terms such as 'base measure' and 'derived measure', as well as the proper mapping to the Measurement Information Model in well-developed standards like ISO 15939,

and the international vocabulary of basic and general terms in metrology (VIM) is more useful than producing weakly defined terms.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the authors.

References

1. Azuma, M., 2001, "SQuaRE: The next Generation of ISO/IEC 9126 and 14598 International Standards Series on Software Product Quality," in *Proceedings of the European Software Control and Metrics Conference (ESCOM)*, 2-4 April 2001, London, UK, pp. 337-346.
2. ISO, 1991, *ISO/IEC IS 9126, Software Product Evaluation – Quality Characteristics and Guidelines for Their Use*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
3. ISO, 1993, *International Vocabulary of Basic and General Terms in Metrology (VIM)*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
4. ISO, 2001, *ISO/IEC 9126-1, Software Engineering – Product Quality – Part 1: Quality model*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
5. ISO, 2002, *ISO/IEC IS 15939, Software Engineering – Software Measurement Process*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
6. ISO, 2003, *ISO/IEC TR 9126-2, Software Engineering– Product Quality - Part 2: External Metrics*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
7. ISO, 2003, *ISO/IEC TR 9126-3, Software Engineering– Product Quality - Part 3: Internal Metrics*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
8. ISO, 2004, *ISO/IEC TR 9126-4, Software Engineering – Product Quality – Part 4: Quality in Use Metrics*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
9. ISO, 2004, *ISO/IEC FCD 25000, Software Engineering – Software Product Quality Requirements and Evaluation (SQuaRE) - Guide to SQuaRE*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
10. ISO, 2004, *ISO/IEC FCD 25020, Software and System Engineering - Software Product Quality Requirements and Evaluation (SQuaRE) – Measurement Reference Model and Guide*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization, January 24, 2005.
11. ISO, 2004, *ISO/IEC PDTR 25021, Software and System Engineering - Software Product Quality Requirements and Evaluation (SQuaRE) – Measurement Primitives*, Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
12. Suryn, W.; Abran A.; and April A., 2003, "ISO/IEC SQuaRE: The Second Generation of Standards for Software Product Quality," *7th IASTED International Conference on Software Engineering and Applications*, California, USA.

Appendices

Appendix A: The List of ISO/IEC 9126 Base Measures

External Base Measures		
	Measure Name	Unit of Measurement
1	Number of Functions	Function (number of)
2	Operation Time	Minute
3	Number of Inaccurate Computations Encountered by Users	Case (number of)
4	Total Number of Data Formats	Format (number of)
5	Number of Illegal Operations	Operation (number of)
6	Number of Items Requiring Compliance	Item (number of)
7	Number of Interfaces Requiring Compliance	Interface (number of)
8	Number of Faults	Fault (number of)
9	Number of Failures	Failure (number of)
10	Product Size	Byte
11	Number of Test Cases	Case (number of)
12	Number of Breakdowns	Breakdown (number of)
13	Time to Repair	Minute
14	Down Time	Minute
15	Number of Restarts	Restart (number of)
16	Number of Restoration Required	Restoration (number of)
17	Number of Tutorials	Tutorial (number of)
18	Number of I/O Data Items	Item (number of)
19	Ease of Function Learning	Minute
20	Number of Tasks	Task (number of)
21	Help Frequency	Access (number of)
22	Error Correction	Minute
23	Number of Screens or Forms	Screens (number of)
24	Number of User Errors or Changes	Error (number of)
25	Number of Attempts to Customize	Attempt (number of)
26	Total Number of Usability Compliance Items Specified	Item (number of)
27	Response Time	Second or Millisecond
28	Number of Evaluations	Evaluation (number of)
29	Turnaround Time	Second or Millisecond
30	Task Time	Minute
31	Number of I/O Related Errors	Error (number of)
32	User Waiting Time of I/O Device Utilization	Second or Millisecond
33	Number of Memory Related Errors	Error (number of)
34	Number of Transmission Related Errors	Error (number of)
35	Transmission Capacity	Byte
36	Number of Revised Versions	Version (number of)
37	Number of Resolved Failures	Failure (number of)
38	Porting User Friendliness	Minute

Internal Base Measures		
	Measure Name	Unit of Measurement
1	Number of Functions	Function (number of)
2	Number of Data Items	Item (number of)
3	Number of Data Formats	Formats (number of)
4	Number of Interface Protocols	Protocol (number of)
5	Number of Access Types	Access -Type (number of)
6	Number of Access Controllability Requirements	Requirement (number of)
7	Number of Instances of Data Corruption	Instance (number of)
8	Number of Compliance Items	Item (number of)
9	Number of Interface Requiring Compliance	Interface (number of)
10	Number of Faults	Fault (number of)
11	Number of Test Cases	Test-Case (number of)
12	Number of Restoration	Requirement (number of)
13	Number of Input Items Which Could Check for Valid Data	Item (number of)
14	Number of Operations	Operation (number of)
15	Number of Messages Implemented	Message (number of)
16	Number of Interface Elements	Element (number of)
17	Response Time	Second or Millisecond
18	Turnaround Time	Second or Millisecond
19	I/O Utilization (Number of Buffers)	Buffer (number of)
20	Memory Utilization	Byte
21	Number of Lines of Code Directly Related to System Calls	Line (number of)
22	Number of I/O Related Errors	Error (number of)
23	Number of Memory Related Errors	Error (number of)
24	Number of Items Required to be Logged	Item (number of)
25	Number of Modifications Made	Modification (number of)
26	Number of Variables	Variable (number of)
27	Number of Diagnostic Functions Required	Function (number of)
28	Number of Entities	Entity (number of)
29	Number of Built-in Test Function Required	Function (number of)
30	Number of Test Dependencies on Other System	Dependency (number of)
31	Number of Diagnostic Checkpoints	Checkpoint (number of)
32	Number of Data Structures	Data-Structure (number of)
33	Total Number of Setup Operations	Operation (number of)
34	Number of Installation Steps	Step (number of)

Quality in use Base Measures		
	Measure Name	Unit of Measurement
1	Task Effectiveness	(a given weight)
2	Total Number of Tasks	Task (number of)
3	Task Time	Minute
4	Cost of the Task	Dollar
5	Help Time	Second
6	Error Time	Second
7	Search Time	Second
8	Number of Users	User (number of)
9	Total Number of People Potentially Affected by the System	Person (number of)
10	Total Number of Usage Situations	Situation (number of)

Legend of the Quality in Use characteristics

Q1	Effectiveness
Q2	Productivity
Q3	Safety
Q4	Satisfaction

Legend of the External and Internal sub-characteristics

F1	Suitability	E1	Time Behavior
F2	Accuracy	E2	Resource Utilization
F3	Inter operability	E3	Efficiency Compliance
F4	Security	M1	Analyzability
F5	Functionality Compliance	M2	Changeability
R1	Maturity (Hardware/Software/Data)	M3	Stability
R2	Fault Tolerance	M4	Testability
R3	Recoverability (Data/Process/Technology)	M5	Maintainability Compliance
R4	Reliability Compliance	P1	Adaptability
U1	Understandability	P2	Instability
U2	Learnability	P3	Co-existence
U3	Operability	P4	Replaceability
U4	Attractiveness	P5	Portability Compliance
U5	Usability Compliance		