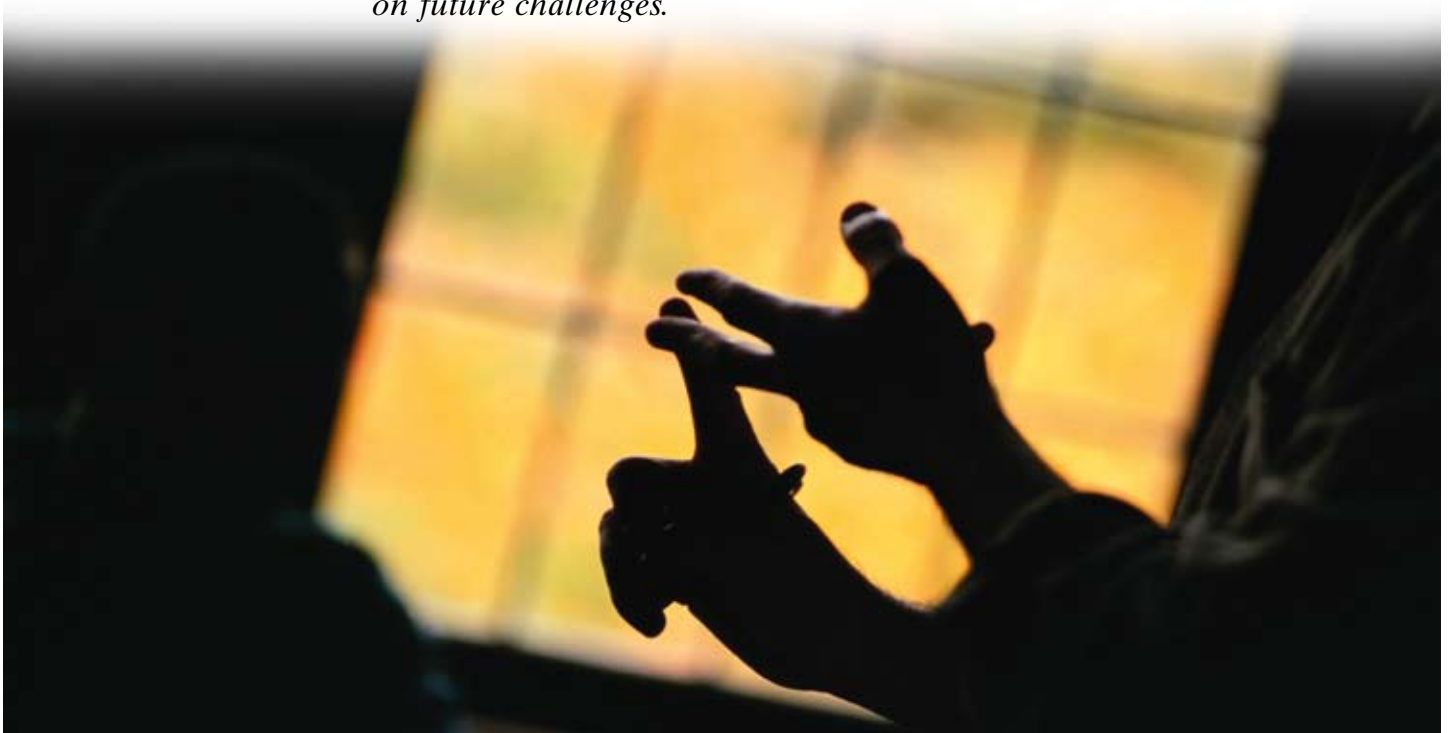




Next-generation ISO 14001

Three questions and 3C's

by Anne-Marie Warris *The new Chair of ISO technical committee ISO/TC 207, Environmental management, subcommittee SC 1, Environmental management systems, which is responsible for ISO 14001 and ISO 14004, shares her perspectives on future challenges.*



The main challenge that faces the management systems community is as Charles Handy, the philosopher and writer on organizational behaviour and management, says “not to let our past, however glorious, get in the way of the future”. Re-reading Handy’s book, *Beyond certainty – the changing world of organizations*, published in 1995, reminded me just how quickly things have and are changing.

When I was doing my MBA, we looked at organizational structure. It focused on all the different types of structures, i.e. the way organizations operate and, back then, the most common one was bureaucracy. People’s views of what an organization¹⁾ is have changed since then.

The article (see pages 4 to 9) by Oswald Dodds, my predecessor as Chair of ISO/TC 207/SC 1

(see box, “Tribute to retiring SC 1 Chair”) recounts the evolution of the group responsible for ISO’s standards for environmental management systems and some of the challenges it has and continues to face.

Reading it made me think about the importance of not losing organizational experience, learning and memories when dealing with situations of rapid change. Without our



records, memories and experience, how do organizations grow and meet new challenges without repeating the same old mistakes and pitfalls – something we, the SC 1 community, are aware of as we move forward without “Ossie” at the helm.

What are the challenges?

As the new Chair of SC 1, I am asking myself a set of questions – ones that I feel we need to ask, understand and answer. From my perspective, we in the management system community are facing a number of challenges, the most critical of which are:

- What do we now mean by an organization? And does it fully cover what an organization is/could be?
- How do we ensure management systems meet stakeholders' needs?

- Being able to convincingly answer that most commonly asked question – “what is a management system and why is it relevant to my organization?”

Organizational challenges

I have already alluded to the change in perception of “what is an organization?” and if I look back to the publication of the first edition of ISO 14001 in 1996, this perception has changed substantially. The following is but a short list of some of the new phenomena related to this change:

- more portfolio organizations;
- much leaner organizations;
- more service-based organization operating in diverse manners;
- faster and more agile organizations;



1) Organization as defined in ISO 14001:2004 as “organization company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private, that has its own functions and administration”.

2) “A bigger world – a special report on globalisation”, *The Economist*, 20 September 2008.



Dr. Anne-Marie Warris, CEng, MBA, has been involved in the activities of ISO technical committee ISO/TC 207, Environmental management, since June 2000 as principal United Kingdom delegate to a number of groups, including work related to management systems, greenhouse gas accounting and carbon footprints.

Dr. Warris is the new Chair of ISO/TC 207's subcommittee SC 1, which is responsible for the environmental management system (EMS) standards ISO 14001 and ISO 14004 and which is also developing the new ISO 14005, giving guidelines for a phased implementation

of an EMS, and ISO 14006, giving guidelines on eco-design

She joined the LR Group in 1989 to help develop and subsequently manage their environmental consultancy business. In 1996, she moved to LRQA to become global product manager for environmental management systems, subsequently extended to cover climate change.

When this article was written, she was due to take up a new role in the LR Group focusing on external relations.

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- cross-functional groups and project groups;
- more virtual working;
- faster and mainly electronic communications;
- more outsourcing, including the growth of the “just in time” approach to manufacturing, super-market deliveries etc.;
- growth from national to global organizations;
- the change in global organizations with their headquarters in developed countries to ones based in emerging economies²⁾;
- the growth of small organizations.

SPECIAL REPORT

Now, couple this change in “what is an organization?” with the on-going complaint of “management systems are too bureaucratic, so they do not suit my organization”, and I believe this takes us to the next question:

So what about stakeholders - what are their needs?

Well, they are many and varied. However, do organizations spot them quickly enough? Can they identify those critical issues that may change or affect the business environment in which the organization and its supply chain operate?

And if organizations do pick up the critical issues relating stakeholders, do they have a management system in place that allows them to process this information and knowledge in a way that benefits them – and, ultimately, the stakeholders?

This is all about being sensitive to changing business environments and needs and being able to respond. Some recent examples include the switch to organic food and the demand for “climate change friendly” goods.

So, the critical question is, “Did the system get the right information and did the system take the appropriate action given the information?” If not, then stakeholder needs will not be met, nor is the system fit for the organization.

This only furthers my view that we have to be able to answer the above commonly

Tribute to retiring SC 1 Chair

Anne-Marie Warris, the new Chair of ISO/TC 207/SC 1, the group responsible for ISO 14001 and ISO 14004, the management system standards in the ISO 14000 family, paid the following tribute to her predecessor, **Oswald A. Dodds**:

“Ossie’s contributions to the developments and success of ISO/TC 207/SC 1 were substantial. His calm leadership ensured solutions were found and issues managed in a pragmatic manner.

“There were many learning lessons in watching the manner in which items were managed to ensure a smooth transition and how major “rocks in the rapids” were negotiated without embarrassing anyone, or making them want to withdraw from the process.

“This included building bridges with other management system committees, while supporting and defending ISO 14001.”

asked question and it may also explain why the whole issue of management systems is such a struggle for many.

But why are management systems seen as such a struggle?

There are numerous answers, and I am sure we all have our own. But my simplistic and somewhat confrontational answers are:

- it is because it is a term or concept that basically is not understood;
- it is also perceived as coming with a lot of negative baggage, such as “it’s bureaucratic, of no use and does not deliver what either the user community wants, or the community the users serve want, let alone what external stakeholders need”.

Does the following scenario sound familiar? *You are at a party or talking to a new friend and the conversation turns to work. “So, what do you do?” In reply, you start explaining what a management system is and, eventually, depending on the politeness of the person you are speaking to, the conversation changes topic. Management systems are almost guaranteed to switch them off the conversation – it all sounds just too boring.*

But how exactly did you explain what a management system is?

I believe our starting point to answering that commonly asked question, “What is a management system and why is it relevant to my organization?” is for us to be clearer in describing what a management system is.

And I do not mean in terms of a sophisticated ISO definition, but in terms of what it means to organizations and their stakeholders, whether they be internal or external. Certainly, from my experience, organizations and stakeholders talk a different language from the one that we in the management system community use: one that does not translate into the “jungle” of terms and concepts. We have to make our language match that of the organization and the challenges it faces in being able to meet stakeholder needs.

So how do we make management systems work and respond to stakeholder needs?

What do organizations actually want and need?

I think organizations need a system which is flexible, multi-functioning and supported by an issues-based “tool kit”. Clearly, any system needs to fit the needs of the organization, as well as be integrated with the manner in which the business is managed – otherwise, it will simply be a “bolt-on”, without generating significant added value. The characteristics of such a system are as follows:

- *flexible* – the ability to adapt to the type of organization; whether it is a small or medium-sized enterprise, or multi-national, in services or manufacturing, governmental or a charity;
- *multi-functioning* – capable of tackling the variety of challenges being faced



by the organization to ensure it stays “in control” in today’s fast changing business environment;

- *issue-based tool-kits* – having access to a number of compatible standards, tools, processes, etc. for managing and responding to stakeholder critical issues (which will be different from organization to organization).

Whatever the system of the future looks like, it will have to:

- be clear about what it is and its benefits;
- be designed to support organizations in the widest sense of what an organization is;
- have the capacity to link, with little or no fuss, to other relevant systems both within and outside of the organization;
- use plain and simple language i.e. words that are in everybody’s daily conversations.

We in the management system community are facing a number of challenges

My belief is that in order for us to achieve this “utopia”, ISO/TC 207/SC 1 needs the following “3C’s”:

- 1) *courage* – and we have that in plenty – to challenge perceived wisdom and historical habits;

- 2) *capability* – again in abundance in SC 1 – to find the pragmatic and flexible solutions needed to help organizations manage their critical issues;

- 3) *commitment* – to allocate sufficient time for SC 1 and ISO to develop management systems. This is where I have concerns. The current SC 1 experts are hugely committed, working many hours beyond what is expected. However, when the amount of hours required by the organizations employing the experts increases, where does that leave the time available their ISO work and developing the management system standards that will help organizations of the future?

The management system of the future will have to be clear about what it is and its benefits

If ISO/TC 207/SC 1 has the 3C’s and answers the three questions I have posed in this article, I personally believe that management systems have a bright future. I know it is going to be a challenge, but it is one that I look forward to. In particular, I look forward to working with colleagues from around the world in ensuring that the International Standards we develop meet organizational and stakeholder needs as well as protect our planet. •

