

ISO/TC 207: the path forward market relevancy vs. fragmentation

When first approached to put my name forward as the new Chair of ISO/TC 207¹⁾, *Environmental management*, I asked myself the most fundamental of questions: did I see value in doing this as opposed to all the other demands being made on my time? Since I have several func-

tional hats, not the least of which is environment, health and safety for Alcan Inc., I knew that the answer to my question had to be clear and devoid of any personal desires to add this task to my own curriculum vitae.

In 1997, Alcan had already set ISO 14001 certification or equivalent as a goal for each and every operation (then about 130) which it manages worldwide with a completion date of end 2001. While the corporation's merger with algroup added quite a few facilities (bringing the total to some 300 units), we did not weaken in our resolve. In going through this process, our managers and employees recognized the



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His responsibilities include corporate communications, government relations, and environment, health and safety.

The new TC 207 chairman brings senior management experience with a major corporation – Alcan Inc. is a USD 13 billion organization and the parent company of an international group operating in the aluminum and packaging sectors.

Through its subsidiaries, joint ventures and related companies around the world, Alcan is a multicultural and multilingual organization employing 48 000 people.

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investment in time and money as secondary to the discipline and the resulting benefits that the process of certification brings in multiple areas – from environmental performance to increased productivity to enhanced plant motivation.

Spreading out from these internal benefits, we further realized that with increasing regulatory pressures, international and institutional measures across a number of sectors, public opinion and the standards being internalized and extended by major clients to preferred suppliers, the choices are being dictated by the marketplace. All this and I have not even raised climate change, the Kyoto Protocol and the inconclusive in all but direction international negotiations over a future carbon constrained world.

The conundrum – is ISO, the standards leader internationally, going forward as it was in the past? Does it have the right priorities? Or is its flame threatened by slow moving and increasingly process ridden exercises which could see the rise of competing and market responsive competitors?

After determining that we were too far in to simply retreat and introduce multiple standards for different purposes, I decided that the effort was well worth the investment – both my own and my company's. If the standard is not ISO, then whom?

Market relevancy

From environmental standards, monitoring, measurement and reporting of air emissions (including CO₂ gases), sustainability indicators to help business with what is commonly referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility and Triple Bottom Line Reporting, industry needs to be clear in its management systems on fundamentals. If ISO cannot do this in a fast changing world, it will not be market relevant for large global players and eventually for the

small and medium-sized enterprises of this world. I was comforted on my recent trip to Geneva to hear that market relevancy was ISO's top priority. Certainly, fragmentation is not a viable alternative.

My first experience chairing ISO TC 207 also convinced me that my new colleagues are very knowledgeable, sensitive to the changing environment around us and motivated to be relevant. This only served to confirm that my decision to get involved was the right one. I look forward to working together to chart the future path and choices for ISO/TC 207. ■

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