

MEET SERGIO MUJICA, THE ISO'S NEW SECRETARY-GENERAL

For Sergio Mujica, international standards play a vital role in the global economy and social development. Katrina Rozal asks him about the future of standards and how they are evolving with today's world

Sergio Mujica started his role as ISO's secretary-general in July. He is responsible for strengthening the network of ISO's 162 member countries and driving consensus, especially through the ISO General Assembly, its highest decision-making body, and the ISO Council, which acts as a steering group for decisions about governance. Mujica is also in charge of the implementation of ISO's strategy.

His career includes executive experience at international and national levels. Prior to Mujica's current position, and for the past

seven years, he was deputy secretary-general of the World Customs Organisation (WCO). Before joining the WCO, he spent 15 years working for the Chilean government in various capacities such as director-general of the Chilean National Customs Authority, director-general of fisheries, and senior positions within other ministries such as agriculture and economic affairs. Mujica has a law degree from the Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile and a Master's degree in International Law from the American University in Washington DC. >>



What does your new role as secretary-general involve?

As an international organisation, ISO has 162 members. One of my most important tasks is to involve all of them in the development of international standards and have them contribute to ISO. In addition, I am the CEO of the Central Secretariat in Geneva, where we have a 150 people from many countries around the world. I am in charge of the overall management and administration of the organisation.

What part of your work experience best prepares you for this role?

I'm from Chile and have spent most of my professional career working in highly regulated sectors where compliance with national and international standards is indispensable for the success and survival of businesses. I dealt with various industries including agriculture, forestry, fisheries and international trade.

On an international level, I spent seven years working in Brussels as the deputy-secretary general of the WCO. In that capacity, I had the opportunity to work closely with 180 members. I see this as good preparation for the role of secretary-general of ISO.

How do you build relationships within ISO?

We are a member-based organisation and therefore member-driven. Within our governance structure we have the ISO Council, whose members are elected by the ISO General Assembly, and which meets three times per year. We discuss the main priorities for the organisation and how to drive the implementation of our strategy.

I also have direct contact with many members. We try to have a very balanced approach by reaching out to members in developed and developing countries. That is what defines us as a truly global organisation. We also provide strong support to members and those in developing countries in

particular, through ISO's Action Plan for Developing Countries. We provide a suite of training packages that help members ensure they have the capacity to actively participate in the ISO system.

You deal with an extensive network of members and experts. How do you foster a sense of community?

Naturally, this isn't easy because ISO is composed of 162 members, each with very different needs and expectations. Balancing various priorities and coming up with a single strategy that resonates with all our members is an important part of developing a sense of community, as are events that bring our members together such as our General Assembly.

But for ISO the community doesn't just stop with our members. Our standards are developed by experts from all over the world, who give their time to share ideas and decide on the best way of doing something. These experts are nominated by our members and represent one of a number of stakeholder groups; for example industry, consumer groups or academia etc. Ensuring we engage these different groups, from all over the world, in the standards development process is critical to ensuring we publish truly globally relevant standards that reflect priorities and needs of the market.

How would you say the standards have evolved since ISO's formation 70 years ago?

If ISO does not evolve together with the world, we won't be relevant any more. I think during these past 70 years, ISO has been able to accompany the world with its innovations. We have moved from an initial approach of standardising materials, components and equipment, to more comprehensive methods such as management systems including quality.

We have also evolved to meet the needs of industries and society as

"The ultimate goal for us is to have our international standards used in all regions of the world regardless of their level of development"

a whole, which see the rise of very complex systems such as artificial intelligence, smart cities and the Internet of Things. Overall we manage a catalogue of more than 22,000 standards.

How would you describe ISO's strategy for 2016-2020?

I think we have come up with a very good strategy that is transversal in nature and reflects our priorities for the next few years. As I said before, priorities can be quite different from one region to another so it's important that all our members feel that our strategy represents their needs.

A key component of our strategic directions is to develop high quality standards. That means having a very good level of engagement with stakeholders and participation from experts around the world. We need to ensure that we work by consensus. We need to be very well connected to what is needed in today's market and to be responsive to those needs.

We need to engage with many other international organisations to make sure that we are relevant. For example, we have partnerships with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The third area is supporting our members by providing effective capacity building. This is where technology and communication come into play. We need to be transparent and open for the world to understand what we do. We must also connect our technical world with the political and economic priorities of our members, as well as political and business leaders.

The ultimate goal for us is to have our international standards used everywhere.

What is the most important challenge facing the standards world today?

One way I like to think about it, is that the standards world today faces

many of the same challenges that are impacting the global community at large. These include climate change, water scarcity, cybersecurity and immigration, just to name a few. We are not the only player of course, but our standards can support solutions for these global challenges. Therefore, it is extremely important for ISO to fully understand the changes that are happening around us everyday. We are an organisation that needs to understand the political, economic and social environment to be able to respond to members' needs.

At a more organisational level, one challenge for us at the moment is attracting young generations. Every organisation needs to be well connected with the new generation to make sure that we learn from them, better understand how they think and prepare them to take the lead in the future.

One more challenge I'd like to highlight is having a good level of cooperation with other international organisations and stakeholders. We cannot work in isolation, we need to coordinate our work with other organisations.

How are you working to address those challenges?

In the case of the work with young generations, we dedicated a session in our last general assembly to come up with concrete ways to engage with them. Something we plan to do next year is a global workshop to better shape our engagement strategy.

As for understanding the changes that are happening around the world, we have our standing committee on policy and strategy where we actually discussed in depth what our vision is about, what is happening in the world to reshape our strategic plan, and to make sure that we are responsive to those challenges.

Our strategy also addresses international cooperation, which is indispensable. When we included that item in our strategy we developed goals, actions and KPIs that are very concrete in order to support it. >>

ISO timeline

1947

ISO established with 67 technical committees.

1949

First offices open in Geneva. Five members of staff at the Central Secretariat.

1951

ISO publishes its first standard, ISO R 1:1951. It's now called ISO 1:2002 Geometrical Product Specifications – Standard reference temperature for geometrical product specification and verification.

1955

ISO has 35 members and 68 standards. Henry St. Leger is the secretary-general.

1960

ISO publishes ISO 31 on quantities and units. The system's goal is to reach global uniformity in units of measure. ISO 80000 now replaced this standard.

1961

ISO establishes DEVCO, a committee for developing countries, to include more developing countries in its standardisation work.

1968

Correspondent membership is introduced, allowing developing countries to stay up to date with standardisation without full costs of ISO membership.

1971

ISO creates technical committees in environment: air quality and water quality.

“Every organisation needs to be well connected with new generations to make sure that we learn from them”

What role do quality professionals (including quality managers and auditors) have in helping to meet those challenges?

Stakeholder engagement is one of the key elements of the way we work and how we develop standards. In that context, quality professionals are one of the stakeholders involved in the development of ISO quality management standards. That’s

really, really important because they provide the perspective of the end-user community. Their feedback and their knowledge are critical for us to develop good quality standards. The other dimension is the implementation of those standards because they can support companies or final users in the implementation of that standard.

How would you describe the relationship between international standards and quality management?

ISO 9000 establishes generic principles for quality management. That is very interesting because it provides principles that can be applied across various sectors. The most important quality of this set of standards is that they play a fundamental role in unifying the approach to quality management, and support the promotion of quality in work culture. What we have done is come up with a common language. A common understanding worldwide about what

quality means so we can support companies and stakeholders that want to implement quality systems in their own organisations.

How do you see the development and impact of the revised quality management standard ISO 9001:2015?

In over 30 years, ISO 9001 has become the most widely used ISO standard. It is famous and very useful because it is being used by many, many stakeholders and countries. It covers a number of quality management principles including a strong customer focus motivation, implication of management and the principle of continual improvement. Continual improvement is at the heart of improving customer satisfaction and effectiveness of the business. This is the flagship for ISO because there are more than a million companies and organisations in over 170 countries that have certified compliance with ISO 9001.

The early feedback we have received from the latest version, ISO 9001:2015, suggests that it is a good improvement because it provides commonality and integration with other ISO management system standards. In practice, this new version provides an identical structure and common terms for all ISO management standards. So it facilitates the integration of those previous standards into a single system in a single organisation.

What role do standards play in technological changes on the horizon such as artificial intelligence and block chain?

ISO can support the development of artificial intelligence and block chain but we’re not the only player. We have created dedicated technical committees and sub-technical committees with IEC and have received good support from ITU, both in block chain and artificial intelligence. Interoperability and agreed ways of working is crucial for those technologies to go to the next phase.

What advice would you give to auditors and quality professionals that can prepare them for the future of standards implementation?

Firstly, I would like to thank quality professionals for participating in the ISO system. They are important stakeholders in the development and implementation of standards.

What is really important for them is to have the latest industry knowledge and to actively participate. ISO CASCO, our conformity assessment committee, has developed specific standards for the competence of auditors that reflect the new concepts of ISO 9001. So training in this is really important. After that, it’s about applying general principles of good quality management. So a great involvement from the top managers of the organisation, then being able to identify the problems to address them and also identify the opportunities to take full advantage, avoiding or

mitigating the areas of risk. Those would be my advice for the quality professional.

What might the changes to the geopolitical climate mean for standards in 2020, such as Brexit?

I am not going to go into too much detail here, but what I can say is that it would be impossible for us to be effective or even exist without international cooperation. It’s about doing things together. It’s about combining our national talents to have a better performance. My key message here is that cooperation is indispensable for the global community to be effective and to better respond to worldwide challenges.

Why is it important for the Chartered Quality Institute and its members to ensure the quality profession has its say on Draft International Standards through channels such as TC 176?

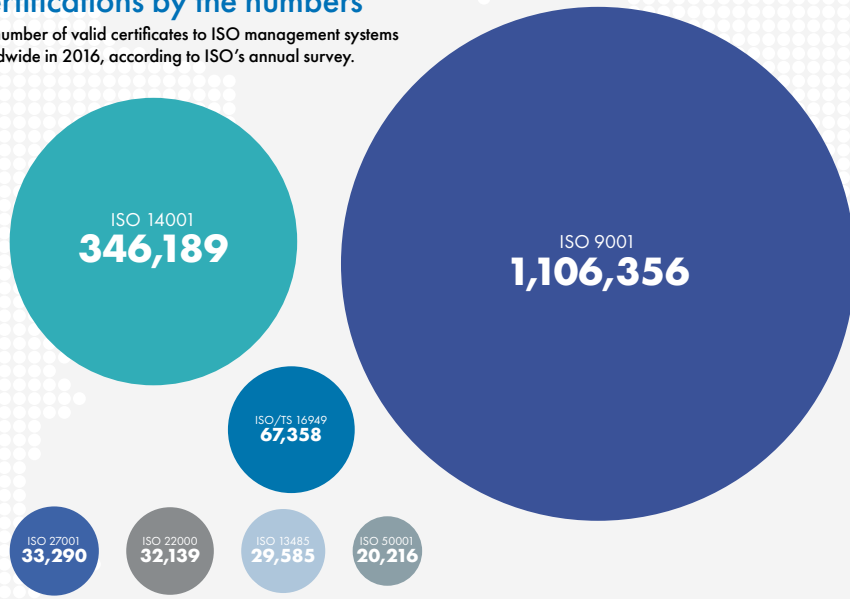
ISO standards are developed by consensus in a multi-stakeholder environment. Stakeholders are actually invited to the process of developing standards so they can share their views, priorities and feedback. It’s not only about having international standards. It’s also about the process we follow. We want to do it with full transparency. We want to make sure there’s a good level of stakeholder engagement; that the best experts around the world are participating in the process of developing those standards. [And] the standards we produce actually reflect the views and priorities of all final users of all market needs.

What’s the most rewarding part of your role?

We have the opportunity to make a contribution. We are part of the international trading system, which is an engine for economic and social development. That’s the huge responsibility we have in our hands. We better do a good job to support international trade because it affects real lives. ■

Certifications by the numbers

The number of valid certificates to ISO management systems worldwide in 2016, according to ISO’s annual survey.



1987

ISO publishes first quality management standard. ISO 9000 family of standards are some of the bestselling.

1995

ISO launches first website.

1996

ISO launches ISO 14001, environmental management system standard.

2005

ISO and International Electrotechnical Commission launch ISO 27001 information security standard. ISO 27001:2005 has become one of ISO’s most popular standards.

2010

ISO 26000, the first international standard providing guidelines for social responsibility.

2011

ISO 50001 energy management standard launched to help organisations maximise energy efficiency, reduce costs and improve energy performance.

2016

ISO 37001 publishes first international anti-bribery management system standard to help organisations fight bribery risk throughout their global value chains.

2017

ISO marks 70 years.