

KSO 1.6: ISO'S GLOBAL RELEVANCE POLICY

KEY MESSAGES FOR COMMITTEE LEADERS AND PARTICIPANTS

- **ISO's Global Relevance Policy is vital to ISO's international credibility.**

The WTO/TBT Committee has detailed the following criteria for a globally relevant standard should:

- Effectively respond to regulatory and market needs (in the global marketplace);
- Respond to scientific and technical developments in various countries;
- Not distort the market;
- Have no adverse effects on fair competition;
- Not stifle innovation and technological development;
- Not give preference to characteristics or requirements of specific countries or regions when different needs or interests exist in other countries or regions;
- Be performance based as opposed to design prescriptive.

The development and adoption of an ISO International Standard that fails to meet these requirements is open to being challenged as creating a barrier to free trade. As a result, the ISO Technical Management Board developed ISO's Global Relevance policy and related implementation guidance to assist committees in their work.

- **First and foremost, recognize the ultimate goal of producing a globally relevant International Standard.**

Any International Standard shall to the extent possible represent a unique international solution. In cases where unique international solutions are not possible for specific provisions of an International Standard at the current time due to legitimate market and essential differences, International Standards may present options, in a limited number, to accommodate these differences where justified.

- **Understand the distinctions between market differences and essential differences.**

Market differences result from those factors affecting international consensus that are regarded as potentially changeable (such as legislation, economies, social conditions, trade patterns, market needs, scientific theories, design philosophies, etc.). Essential differences result from those factors that are not expected to change over time, such as imbedded technological infrastructures, climatic, geographical or anthropometric considerations. Options in ISO International Standards may accommodate either market or essential differences.

- **Seek to achieve global relevance in the same way you achieve consensus.**

The ISO Global Relevance policy compels each committee to more carefully consider the value of the standards that it provides, and while voting, members of committees have to consider that value from the perspective of all concerned parties. "One standard, one test, accepted worldwide" is a laudable goal, but it is only achievable if another element exists as a precursor: one global market. Evolving dynamics mean that a single global market does not yet exist in all cases. All committee leaders and participants must keep at the forefront of their considerations the commitment to global relevance in the course of taking consensus decisions within the committee.

- **Demonstrate the commitment and feasibility of preparing a globally relevant International Standard at the outset of the project.**

Providing one solution that accommodates one market (but not others) as the International Standard will not force markets to evolve and coalesce. This may cause markets and industries to look elsewhere for standards that better accommodate their needs. ISO will lose its relevance for those markets and industries. Therefore, ISO committees should determine at the outset of a project whether:

- a globally relevant International Standard presenting one unique international solution in all of its provisions is feasible;
- an International Standard is feasible that presents options in specific provisions to accommodate existing and legitimate market or essential differences where justified;
- an interim ISO deliverable (ISO/TS or ISO/TR) is feasible when there is no immediate likelihood of reaching agreement on an International Standard, but an International Standard is considered feasible at a future time; or
- the preparation of a globally relevant International Standard is not feasible and work should not be undertaken in such circumstances.

Committees are encouraged to form TC-level new work item review groups to explore proposals for new ISO standards at a very preliminary stage to investigate, understand and document the global relevance feasibility of new work item proposals before they are advanced for voting. Further guidance on TC new work item review groups is provided in a separate ISO/TMB guidance document.

- **Committees can only ensure global relevance if they are aware of all the factors that may affect a particular standard's global relevance.**

The participation of all relevant ISO member bodies is seen as a major factor in supporting global relevance. However, developing countries especially have difficulty acquiring the capability, expertise and resources to participate, even when an ISO committee's work is important to their national commercial interests.

Be active in recruiting participation from unrepresented parts of the world where the committee's work has a significant national commercial impact. Find opportunities for twinning and partnering between developed and developing countries to support effective participation. All ISO members, even those that are not participating members of the committee, may submit positions during DIS and FDIS voting as well as during systematic review to bolster the global relevance of the ISO standards.

Furthermore, it can be expected that the participating committee leaders, delegates and experts should be aware of the specific market needs of non-participating countries. Certainly, manufacturers of products are very aware of their market needs, in all markets where they sell their products. Therefore, representatives of these manufacturers that do participate as leaders, delegates and experts have a particular responsibility and perhaps even a duty to bring this knowledge into the committee's deliberations.

- **Limit options and treat them all equally.**

As the ultimate goal is to produce as much as possible a unique international solution, or to evolve to one over time, the number of options in a standard should be as few as possible and constitute only a minority of the requirements in an ISO International Standard. The intent is to capture and accommodate market dynamics and essential differences, not regional or national differences, as a market may cross borders and encompass a region or a number of countries. The options to address different market dynamics may take the form of:

- parallel normative clauses in the main body text;

- parallel clauses in normative annexes; or
- parallel sub-parts of International Standards (with each sub-part representing a specific market).

Whichever form the options take, the committee will ensure that all options are treated equally.

- **To understand the real global relevance of International Standards on an ongoing basis, we must understand where and how they are used.**

According to the PDCA method, it would be valuable for ISO's stakeholders that the ISO system make optimal use of the systematic review process to document the real worldwide acceptance and use of International Standards. Through improvements to the systematic review process and promotion of effective implementation of it:

- TC/SCs shall take the information resulting from the 3 year systematic review as input for the next revision of the standard; and
- If an ISO standard is accepted as useable (that is, there is no impediment to its use at the national level), each member body should make its best efforts to withdraw and/or modify conflicting national standards.

Furthermore, a world mapping of where each International Standard has been accepted would be useful information to industry, and this could be easily provided by ISO on its web site.

Further information and guidance is provided in the ISO/TMB Global Relevance Policy Implementation Guidance document.