An Interview with John Sheridan, Chairman of ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 40, IT Service Management and IT Governance

John Sheridan discusses the important role standards play in IT service management and IT governance and the work underway in the subcommittee he chairs.

Q: In plain terms, what are IT service management and IT governance? What is the relationship between them?

I'm going to begin with IT governance, because I think it's the higher level question. IT governance can be described as the way in which the work in information technology (IT) is directed and controlled within an organization; it can be formally defined as the system by which the current and future use of IT is directed and controlled. IT governance looks at evaluating and directing the use of IT to support an organization, and then monitoring this use to achieve the plans of the organization. It also includes guidance on the strategies and policies to be used for IT within an organization. I think an important distinction should be made when looking at IT governance: that it is what the *board* of an organization might be doing, and not necessarily what is being done by the IT managers or IT specialists. IT governance looks to ensure that the decisions about IT within an organization are being made in the right way, and that those decisions are actually supporting the vision that the board has for the organization. I see it as the board of an organization being able to maintain control of the activities of the information technology part of the organization. IT governance provides the capabilities to guide the direction of IT within an organization in the same direction as the rest of the organization. In doing so, a lack of cohesiveness between IT and the goals of an organization is prevented. The ability to control and guide the direction that the IT of an organization is going is quite an important thing for companies and organizations, since IT is so pervasive amongst them.

IT governance and IT service management are two areas of equal importance, but address different levels of IT. I think IT service management is best seen as just being slightly different from IT governance. IT service management focuses on the standard for service management and addresses service providers rather than the governing body of an organization. It refers to the things that a service provider should do, in terms of providing IT to an organization, to ensure that the goals of the organization are being met. So, unlike IT governance, IT service management does not focus on the actions and decisions within the IT realm, or on those responsible for running an organization; instead, it focuses on the actions and decisions of those who are providing IT services to an organization, and what they can be doing to ensure that the IT being provided is in line with the goals of those customers. The main purpose of IT service management standards is to allow service providers to better understand what they should be doing in

order to plan, establish, implement, operate, monitor, review, maintain and improve their service management system. In this way, I think it's a much more "doing" area of IT than IT governance is: IT service management describes what a service provider must *do* in order to meet the requirements of a particular organization. Both IT governance and IT service management are areas that are very closely related to one another. The main focus of each is to make sure that the IT that an organization is using is actually supporting the organization's goals and efforts. It's this overall purpose for cohesiveness between an organization, its goals, and its IT, where IT service management and IT governance come together. While both address different areas of the IT of an organization, both are designed with a common purpose: the efficient and beneficial interrelationship between an organization and its IT. It was for this reason that IT service management and IT governance were put together in the new subcommittee.

Q: How can standards help address the needs in the areas of IT service management and IT governance?

We see the importance of standards throughout the IT realm. To me, there are two sorts of standards: there are standards that we expect compliance with, which are usually more qualitative standards, and there are standards that are educative, which are able to inform and guide an entity as to what it should be doing. The IT governance series of standards, ISO/IEC 38500: *Corporate governance of information technology* for example, are generally about educating the people who are running an organization on what they should be doing in terms of the governance of that organization. It helps them to understand what decisions they, as the governing body of the organization, should be making in order to ensure that IT is meeting the goals of the organization, and what decisions or things they should be leaving to the IT. Therefore, standards in IT governance and IT service management help to maintain this distinction: that at a business level IT is doing what it should be doing, and separately, that the people responsible for delivering IT are doing what they should be doing as well. I think that the IT service management standard, the ISO/IEC 20000 series, *Information technology – Service management,* also has some particular advantages; it doesn't just ensure that the people who are providing the services know what they're doing in terms of meeting the requirements of the organization they are supporting. It also ensures that the people who are ordering those services, who are responsible, for example, for contracting them or making sure they're in place, are also understanding of the direction the IT of an organization needs to take. The standard also creates a common language between those two groups of people, so that they can address the topic in the same way. Because the standard defines terms and conditions related to IT service management and the way that IT service management should be conducted most effectively, there is less possibility for confusion. By having those terms, definitions and standards commonly understood, there is a higher possibility of getting a good result with an IT system that is aligned with the organization's objectives. It is this communication between all the different areas within the IT of an organization, facilitated by standards in the IT service management and IT governance fields, which allows for smoother implementation and an overall better guided IT system.

Q: What is SC 40 doing in IT service management and IT governance?

Because SC 40 was just formed in November of last year, the subcommittee is still in its beginning stages. Although since the subcommittee's formation we have already begun to pick up the work in the three working groups, we're still very much in our formative stages. To date, we've had one international teleconference where we have confirmed our three working groups, as well as discussed what we would name them and how to structure them. We have just recently put some of our work out for ballots, which have to be conducted in order to formalize this work. Our first plenary, which will be held in Sydney, Australia, will help to establish not only the working group level things, but also the vision that we all share for SC 40. At the plenary, we will be able to decide together what kinds of standards within the IT service management and IT governance field SC 40 should be focusing on, as well as the overall direction

that the subcommittee should be going. Because so much of the standardization process relies on a clear vision for what standards are needed for the field, agreeing on the direction that SC 40 is heading will help drive the standards development process forward. Setting up the structure of the subcommittee and working together to create a vision for SC 40 are extremely important to the success of future standards in IT service management and IT governance. My role as chairman is not at all dictatorial; rather, it is to bring everything together: to bring the views of the experts and national bodies in the area of IT service management and IT governance together to ensure that they are forming a coherent direction. Through this collaborative effort, we will then take the work forward under the guidance of JTC 1 and the various national bodies.

The standardization work of other working groups within JTC 1 also plays an important role in the future and current standardization activity of SC 40. Before the new subcommittee's establishment, there were a number of working groups that worked within the areas of IT governance and IT service management, including JTC 1/WG 8 *Governance of IT* and JTC1/SC 7/WG 25 *IT Service Management* and JTC1/SC 7/WG 27 *IT Enabled Services/BPO (ITES/BPO)*. Because IT governance and IT service management are such important upcoming fields, SC 40 was established at the last JTC 1 plenary in order to consolidate the work being done by those three separate working groups. Therefore, the work from the two working groups of SC 7 and that of WG 8 will be completely organized into the work of SC 40. Our position at the moment is that the three initially planned working groups for SC 40 will reflect the previous working groups, WG 8, and WG 25 and 27 from SC 7. I am very keen to get as great a degree of continuity as we can with the work that's going on in those working groups, already. It's good work, and an important goal of our new subcommittee is to make sure we don't lose any of its focus and any of its pace as we move forward.

Q: Are there other organizations or committees also working in this area? What are their relationships to SC 40?

Since we're at the early stages as a subcommittee, there are still a lot of possibilities for new collaborations. Currently, we have a very close working relationship with SC 7 *Software and systems engineering*, and I'm very happy that we've received a lot of guidance and help from the chair of SC 7, François Coallier, who's been vital in helping us get SC 40 set up properly. There is, of course, a range of other people working across the JTC 1 arena that have also played an integral part. We've been working with certain national bodies, particularly those that have already been very active in the previous working groups. There are also a number of external organizations like ISACA, the itSMFI, and related organizations that have very important roles in the areas of IT service management and IT governance – I am very excited to work with them on future projects. The genesis of SC 40 has taken some considerable time, and there have been a number of national bodies that have contributed very greatly to getting it started. I really appreciate the effort they've put into getting this off the ground, and I want to make sure we maintain those connections. As we formalize and improve our work over time, I anticipate that we will continue to make connections with other people and organizations in the international standards-setting community that are interested in the areas of IT service management and IT governance. I am sure that as we move forward, SC 40, and the standards produced therein, will benefit greatly from collaborations with these groups.

In terms of competition among other standards setting organizations or organizations that have a say in the development of IT service management and IT governance standards, I'm not particularly worried. What we tend to see in the standards setting community is a very great willingness to work together to achieve good results; there are certain processes that promote this kind of cooperation, such as the PAS process, but a good deal of the cooperation occurs due to the willingness of those interested in the standardization of a certain area. I think it's up to us, the standards setting community, to make sure our efforts are complimentary to each other – this will ensure that the standards being produced are not

incompatible or incohesive. Cooperation, both through the processes that exist within the standards community and through the good will of the people, will allow for the production of better quality standards. For this reason, I believe that this process of cooperation and collaboration exists for us to design our work in a way that benefits all parties involved. Therefore, through this process, we are able to support each other in the development of these standards. In the upcoming months, I am very confident that we can get that process of collaboration working properly.

Q: Can you tell us about your experience in IT, and why you've chosen to be involved in this work?

I built my first computer when I was 12, unsuccessfully I might say, and that was almost 45 years ago, so a very long time. I've always been interested in IT. Throughout my working life in government, I looked at what ways we could get IT solutions for things, what we could do to introduce new technologies, and that sort of work. When I was working as the defense architect in our department of defense here in Australia, I became interested in the work of Standards Australia in the IT area. I was one of the coauthors of the Australian standard, AS 8015: *Australian Standard for Corporate Governance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT),* which was fast-tracked to become ISO/IEC 38500. That gave me a very useful understanding of the process of generating standards and how that works. In my current job as the same government chief technology officer, I again became involved with Standards Australia, particularly in the ongoing work in the IT standards area and by chairing the strategic advisory committee that we have for JTC 1 in Australia. While having been involved in this governance work over time, I was able to, at the last couple of JTC 1 plenaries, participate in that multinational effort to get SC 40 established as a subcommittee. I'm continually interested in making sure that IT delivers its promise through good governance and good management across organizations.