

Risk Management and ISO 31000 in France

Interview conducted for riskmanagement.isotc262.org by
Dr. Frank Herdmann with

Steve O'Brien, Head of the French delegation to TC 262



Steve O'Brien is a senior lecturer and researcher at the graduate school of engineering ESAIP and was asked by ESAIP and the Haut Comité Français pour la Défense Civile to set up a graduate engineer diploma program in industrial risk. He is the Head of the French delegation to the TC 262 meeting in Amman in 2016.

isotc262.org: *Steve you are the head of the French delegation to the ISO/TC 262 meeting in October 2016 in Amman. Can you briefly introduce AFNOR, your national standardization organization, and yourself please?*

Steve: Thank you Frank. As expert in the French mirror committee I am supported by the organisation for standards in France AFNOR. AFNOR brings together over 20,000 professionals in regional, national and international networks to promote best practice through voluntary standardization in companies and organizations. It provides publishing, training, consulting, assessment and certification services. Managed by Olivier Peyrat, the AFNOR Group employs more than 1,200 people in 12 regional delegations in France and 39 establishments worldwide. On the international stage, the Group offers its certification and training services in more than 100 countries. Today, more than 70,000 customers place their trust in AFNOR.

As for myself after a period of many years working for international companies I was asked by the graduate school of engineering in France ESAIP and le Haut Comité Français pour la Défense Civile to set up a graduate engineer diploma programme in industrial risk. This was at a time when I was on a mission for the Ministry for Labour and Industry in France to run projects in innovation in SME's and I became fully aware of the risk such companies faced to survive and progress. In a way I have grown up with all the major changes in risk management over the last 20 years. As a senior lecturer and researcher at ESAIP I have the opportunity to work with one of the key players in risk management in France through its network of over a thousand qualified engineers

specialized in industrial risk and the supervision of hundreds of major projects in industrial risk each year.

isotc262.org: *What is the impact of risk management and in particular ISO 31000 in France?*

Steve: The recent nomination of Françoise Gaucher, Risk Manager for La Poste Group, as the new president of the French Mirror Committee is a prime example of the increasing influence of ISO 31000 in France. Françoise is leading a very ambitious project for global risk management for all La Poste Group and is basing the work on ISO 31000. AFNOR has just finished an extensive work programme with a group of professionals covering a vast range of expertise with the publication of a guide for global risk management in SMEs. Regular feedback from small companies to large groups and government departments show a trend that risk management, and in particular the process approach of ISO 31000 can open up new possibilities for improving performance. A recent example is a project led by the professional branch of metal workers in the west of France and groups of companies which is using the risk-based approach of ISO 9001:2015 to increase their overall performance.

isotc262.org: *Who are the key stakeholders of risk management in France?*

Steve: I see two groups of stakeholders or interested parties: those who develop and influence the evolution in risk management practice and those who apply such practice and test it in the field. For the first group certainly AFNOR plays a key role by federating a large range of expertise from industry, insurance, administration, public service, academics, etc. There are also the policy makers both in the public and private sectors who by setting new objectives and expectations are pushing organisations to include risk in their decisions and actions. In the second group we find consultants, risk managers, representatives of professional bodies, and organisations piloting projects in risk management. I have had the opportunity of meeting many of these stakeholders through the supervision of major projects which are pushing further and further into risk management practices.

isotc262.org: *What are the biggest obstacles for integrating risk management in all organizational activities for managers in France?*

Steve: In French we say "Il faut changer le logiciel" [one has to change the software] as business practice has been programmed to act quickly and keep moving forward, without always knowing where that will take them. The financial crisis has lifted our awareness but the practices don't change that easily. The BP Deepwater disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, VW with its pollution testing scandal, and many other less publicized examples show that act quickly and keep moving forward still dominates our way of

thinking and working. But ISO 31000 is more than a standard, it is a learning process and this process is on the move however it takes time.

isotc262.org: *ISO 31000 quickly became one of the bestselling and most well recognized standards in ISO. What do you think about the future of the standard and how will it change to adapt to new challenges?*

Steve: Change and patience are not always good flat mates. ISO 31000's greatest advantage is that it builds on what already exists in an organization to manage risk. The lever is in place, the question for each of us now, is how hard do we push on it?

isotc262.org: *What message do you want to give to the risk management community?*

Steve: I will let the hidden poet in me talk. ISO 31000 can make us young again for we rediscover in a new way the world in which we work and live by simply acknowledging that it is uncertain but it's in that uncertainty that many future possibilities can be found. The need to consider explicitly the different interested parties and in a more general way human and cultural factors bring us more into contact with a wealth of ideas and human resources. Risk management is not a recipe or a system it's a human experience which is a key to succeeding together.

isotc262.org: *What advice can you give to interested parties in France who want to offer their input to the work of ISO/TC 262 and who should they address?*

Steve: As I have just said there is a wealth of ideas and know-how in each of our countries which can be shared. This website provides one of the types of environments we need. An important issue we need to overcome is the barrier of language. We have the opportunity that English provides a link between many of us but it cannot be the only link. The Tower of Babel may not exist but then there is ISO!

isotc262.org: **Thank you very much!**