



Schmiedeknecht, Maud

## ISO 26000

# Reflecting the Process of a Multi-stakeholder Dialogue

### An empirical study

### KIeM

Konstanz Institute  
for Intercultural Management,  
Values and Communication

Hochschule Konstanz – HTWG  
Technik, Wirtschaft und Gestaltung  
University of Applied Sciences  
Brauneggerstr. 55  
D – 78462 Konstanz  
Germany

Phone +49 (0)7531-206 404  
Fax +49 (0)7531-206 187  
E-Mail: [kiem@htwg-konstanz.de](mailto:kiem@htwg-konstanz.de)

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## **ISO 26000**

### **Reflecting the Process of a Multi-stakeholder Dialogue**

An empirical study

Maud Schmiedeknecht

This working paper is part of a PhD research project dealing with the topics Social Responsibility, Stakeholder Theory and Network Governance, run by Maud Schmiedeknecht and supervised by Prof. Dr. habil. Josef Wieland, both from the Konstanz Institute for Intercultural Management, Values and Communication at the Konstanz University of Applied Sciences.

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## **I. Abstract**

Deliberative processes such as stakeholder dialogues and multi-stakeholder forums are an organizational form of the coordination and cooperation of individual and collective social actors. This paper discusses a process of developing a Social Responsibility Standard within a network made up of various stakeholders.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is known as the world's leading institution for the development of standards. Apart from setting standards in the fields of e.g. construction, agriculture and information technology, recently the Technical Management Board (TMB) of ISO proposed to further extend its activities by developing an international standard addressing the social responsibility of organizations. In 2004, a new Working Group was established as a multi-stakeholder group comprised of experts who were nominated by ISO members as well as interested international and regional organizations in order to provide for guidance in setting international standards on social responsibility.

In January and February 2008, the online survey was conducted subsequent to the fifth conference of the ISO Working Group in Vienna, Austria. The questionnaire is a follow-up study to a first survey undertaken at the third ISO Working Group meeting in Lisbon in May 2006.<sup>1</sup>

This particular empirical study has the objective to evaluate the individual participants' current perception and assessment of the network's efficiency, effectiveness and procedural legitimacy, a so-called "snap-shot" of the ISO process<sup>2</sup>. Overall, the empirical study shows that the perceptions and claims of the stakeholders differ strongly in regard to the individual aspects of the study. The criteria of effectiveness, efficiency and procedural legitimacy in isolation are insufficient to make a successful multi-stakeholder dialogue, a view shared by all participants. The study addresses difficulties concerning the imbalance of stakeholder groups due to different resources and bargaining positions. It also takes deficits of the process design such as the selection process of experts and observers into account. This multi-stakeholder forum is a learning process during which participants have to actively overcome language, political and intercultural barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> Results published in: Schmiedeknecht, M./ Wieland, J. (2007): ISO 26000 as a Network Discourse. An empirical study. In: Wieland, J. (ed.): Governanceethik und Diskursethik – ein zwangloser Diskurs, Marburg: Metropolis, pp. 137 - 171.

<sup>2</sup> In the following chapters the standard developing process for a Guidance Document on Social Responsibility will be named "ISO process".

## **II. Multi-stakeholder Dialog – Empirical Results of the Online Survey**

### ***1. The Standard Developing Process for a “Guidance Document on Social Responsibility”***

The following chapter describes an international multi-stakeholder dialogue with actors from politics, business and society who develop an ISO standard for social responsibility (SR).<sup>3</sup> Since September 2004, an expert working group of the ISO has been dealing with the topic SR of organizations. This international working group, currently consisting of approx. 500 participants from 78 member countries and 37 liaison organizations<sup>4</sup> led by the national standards institutes of Brazil (ABNT) and Sweden (SIS), is developing an international standard until the 2010, which is supposed to serve as a guideline concerning social responsibility. This standard ISO 26000 aims at implementing and accelerating the development, realization, and improvement of determining factors for social responsibility in organizations. ISO 26000 is intended for all kinds of organizations in any country of the world, including countries with emerging markets and developing countries. As the ISO standard will be designed as a guidance document, providing meaningful guidance to all kinds of organizations on SR issues, the standard will neither serve as third-party certification nor describes a management system.

Organizations from all sectors of society are participating in this ISO process: organizations for standardization, consumer organizations, governments, labour organizations, industry, non-governmental organizations, universities, etc. In order to ensure a balanced representation among these diverse stakeholders, the working group members are divided into six stakeholder categories: consumer, government, industry, labour, non-governmental organizations (NGO), service, support, research and others (SSRO).

The respective ISO national member bodies may nominate up to six experts and six observers of each stakeholder group to the working group. Those stakeholder representatives who hold an expert status have voting rights and hold a power of veto over resolutions and drafts issued by the working group by the consensus principle. Additionally, the countries are entitled to delegate observers who are not eligible to vote within the ISO process. International and regional organizations with an interest in the activity of the working group may apply to the

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<sup>3</sup> cf. Information about the ISO process: the official homepage (<http://www.iso.org/sr>) and the working area of the ISO working group (<http://www.iso.org/wgsr>).

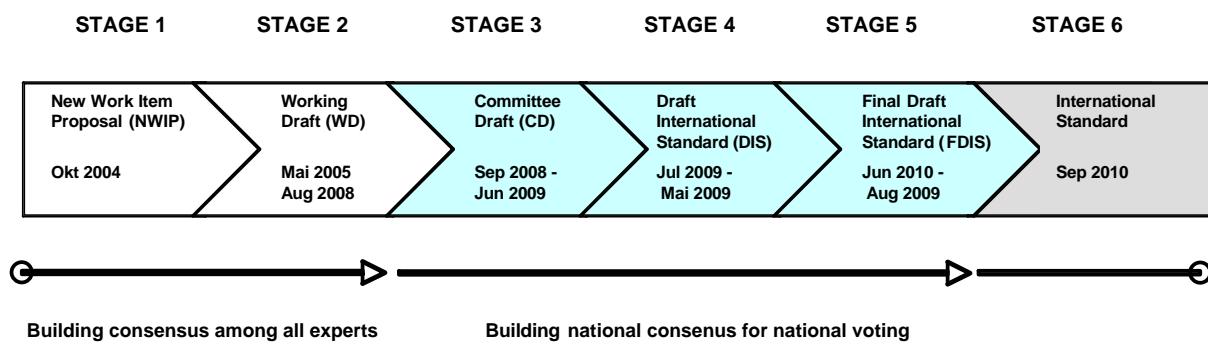
<sup>4</sup> cf. ISO/TMB/WG Social Responsibility - Report of the Secretariat to the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, Vienna, Austria, November 5-9, 2007 (ISO/TMB/WG SR N 129).

WG Secretariat for liaison membership (D-liaison organizations). The organizations with liaison status may nominate up to two experts and two observers.

### *Project Plan*

In the first two stages of the ISO process the ISO working group will develop a working draft (WD) that represents a consensus of the views of the participating experts. In the meantime, the ISO member bodies, which nominate experts and observers, should establish national mirror committees in order to formulate national positions on the drafts developed by the working group. At the end of the standardization process the member bodies will validate the consensus reached in the working group by voting on the Final Draft International Standard (FDIS) (cf. Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Project plan ISO 26000<sup>5</sup> (December 2007)*



### *Organizational structure*

Currently, the organizational structure consists of i) strategic task groups, ii) standard setting task groups and iii) other groups (cf. Figure 2).

Ad i) A specific task group (TG 1 – “Funding and stakeholder engagement”) has been created within the working group to ensure a broad stakeholder engagement by facilitating the participation of experts from stakeholder categories<sup>6</sup> with limited resources. A strategic communication Task Group (TG 2 – “Communication”) has been established in order to ensure transparency and openness and to facilitate the provision of working group information.

<sup>5</sup> Project plan (Date: 2007-12-11); cf. ISO/TMB/WG SR N44 rev 3.

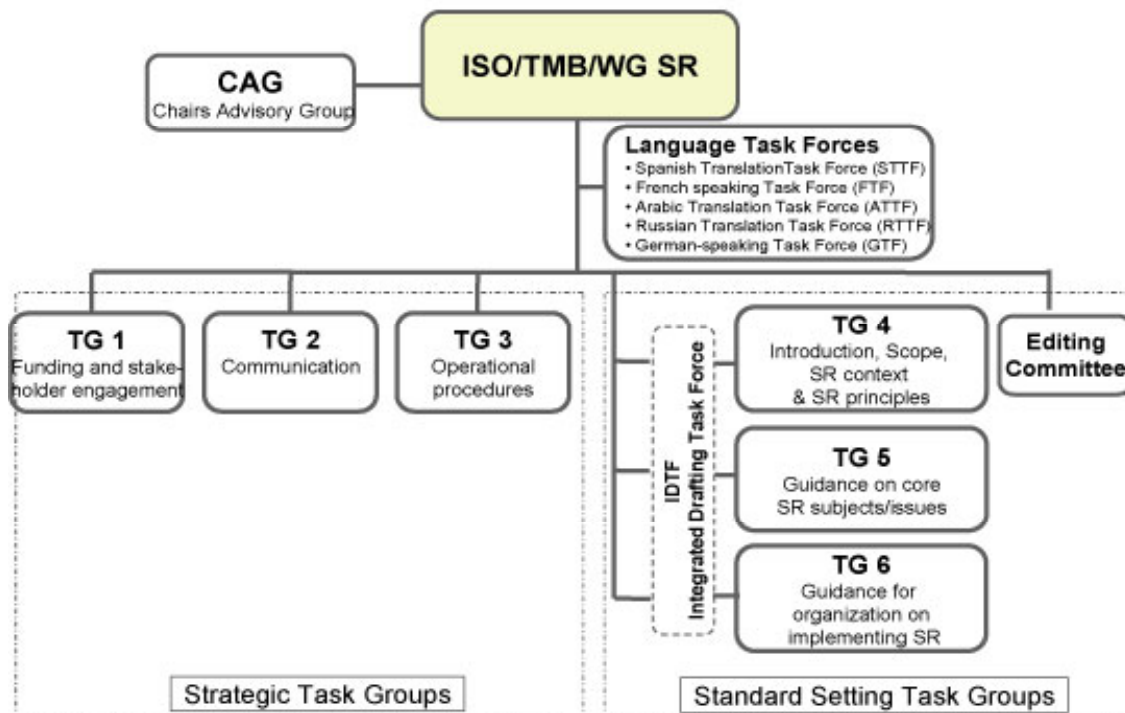
<sup>6</sup> such as developing countries, non-governmental organizations, consumers and others.

In addition, a specific Task Group (TG 3 – “Operational procedures”) has been set up to give internal guidance on special working procedures established by ISO/TMB for the working group<sup>7</sup>.

Ad ii) Apart from strategic task groups, standard setting task groups have been established: three task groups<sup>8</sup> to draft the text of ISO 26000, an integrated drafting task force (IDTF) to review and revise the full text and an editing committee.

Ad iii) The working group has established a Chair's Advisory Group (CAG) in order to identify issues and make recommendations - through the Chair - to the Working Group. So far, five different language task forces (LTF) have been initiated.

Figure 2: Organizational structure of the Working Group<sup>9</sup> (November 2007)



<sup>7</sup> The operation of the working group is guided by the ISO Directives. ISO/TMB works on special guidelines, which supplement the ISO Directives.

<sup>8</sup> TG 4 – „Introduction, Scope, SR context & SR principles“; TG 5 – „Guidance on core SR subjects/issues“; TG 6 – „Guidance for organization on implementing SR“.

<sup>9</sup> The organizational structure was revised at the Vienna meeting, November 2007.

## 2. Research Method and Approach

This chapter presents the results of the online survey. They reflect experiences of experts and observers taking part in the development of a guidance document on SR within the international process of standardization. Yet, the present survey only represents a “snap-shot” within the ISO process.

The online survey has been sent to the email addresses of all registered experts and observers based on the WG SR list (cf. Table 1):

*Table 1: Experts and observers of the ISO Working Group<sup>10</sup> (August 2007)*

	<b>Participants</b>
Experts	375
Observers	110
Total	485

In total, 437 participants - 335 experts<sup>11</sup> and 102 observers<sup>12</sup> - were asked to contribute to the research. This study is based on a sample of 106 responses<sup>13</sup>, which makes up a quota of 24%.

The objective of the survey becomes apparent from its concept: Its first part gathers information about the participants such as the stakeholder category or the participants’ status as either an expert or observer. The survey’s second part refers to the ISO process of developing a standard for social responsibility for organizations itself. This part aims at unveiling the individual participants’ perceptions and evaluations regarding the network’s effectiveness, legitimacy and efficiency and the dialogues taking place within this process. Thus, it does not analyze the networks’ actual effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy, but the involved stakeholders’ perception.

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<sup>10</sup> Numbers are based on the “WG SR List of experts and observers – update 2007-08-29”. In addition to the experts and observers, additionally 3 NSB Technical Officers ISO TMB/WG SR are listed.

<sup>11</sup> 335 of 375 experts were invited by email due to 30 Delivery Status Notification (Failure) [“Unable to deliver message to the following recipients, due to being unable to connect successfully to the destination mail server.”] and 10 missing email addresses in the WG SR List.

<sup>12</sup> 102 of 110 observers were invited by email due to 6 Delivery Status Notification (Failure) and 2 missing email addresses in the WG SR List.

<sup>13</sup> N=437; n=106.



The standardized online questionnaire in the conference language English is a follow-up study to a first survey conducted at the third ISO Working Group meeting in Lisbon in May 2006, as mentioned above.<sup>14</sup> Due to the sensitivity of the topic the data obtained was made anonymous.<sup>15</sup> In the subsequent examination report, the results of the study are being used selectively: Firstly, following the structure of the questionnaire, this paper will present the information on the survey participants (3.1). Secondly, it will examine the results of the participants' perception and evaluation of the process (3.2).

### 3. Interpretation of the Survey

#### 3.1 Information on the Participants of the Survey

This study is based on a sample of 106 participants. A classification by stakeholder categories shows the following results (cf. Table 2):

Table 2: Participants of the online survey - return by stakeholder category

Stakeholder Categories	Participants of the working group <sup>16</sup> (experts & observers)		Participants of the online survey (experts & observers)	
Consumer	52	11%	8	8%
Government	88	18%	17	16%
Industry	111	23%	31	29%
Labour	38	8%	6	6%
Non-governmental Organization (NGO)	81	17%	18	17%
Service, Support, Research and Others (SSRO)	98	20%	26	25%
Participants without Stakeholder category	17	3%	-	-
Total	485	100%	106	100%

Most of the survey's participants represent the stakeholder group *industry* (29%), followed by *service, support, research and others* (25%) and *non-governmental organizations* (17%). The other participants belong to the stakeholder categories *government* (16%), *consumer* (8%) and

<sup>14</sup> The online survey consists of 8 questions selected out of 18 questions of the Lisbon survey.

<sup>15</sup> They were evaluated by using the statistics software SPSS.

<sup>16</sup> Data based on the official „WG SR List of experts and observers (updated 2007-08-29)“.

*labour* (6%). Stakeholders representing SSRO and industry participated in the survey above average compared to the proportional distribution of stakeholder groups.

Table 3 shows that the questionnaire had the highest response rate among those participants who held an *expert* status (82%), whereas only 18% of those participating as *observers* took part in the survey.

Table 3: Participants of the survey – return by status

Status	Participants of the working group <sup>17</sup>		Participants of the online survey	
Expert	375	77%	87	82%
Observer	110	23%	19	18%
Total	485	100%	106	100%

Furthermore, 67 individuals stated that they represent a *developed country* (65%), 36 represent a *developing country* (35%). Three individuals chose not to answer this question. On average, the interrogated individuals took part in three of five ISO conferences<sup>18</sup>. This is important in order to assess the significance of this data. Important decisions concerning content and procedures of the ISO process result from resolutions, which the ISO working group drafts regularly at the ISO meetings.

### 3.2 The ISO Process – Assessment of a Multi-stakeholder Dialogue

The second part of the online survey focuses on the process of developing a standard on SR. This paper will analyze the results regarding the participants' current perception and assessment of the network's efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy.

<sup>17</sup> Data based on the official „WG SR List of experts and observers (updated 2007-08-29)“.

<sup>18</sup> To the present day five ISO meetings have been organized:

- 1.ISO meeting in Bahia, Brazil (Feb. 7-11, 2005),
- 2.ISO meeting in Bangkok, Thailand (Sep. 26-30, 2005),
- 3.ISO meeting in Lisbon, Portugal (May 15-19, 2006),
- 4.ISO meeting in Sydney, Australia (Jan. 29- Feb. 2, 2007),
- 5.ISO meeting in Vienna, Austria (Nov. 5-9, 2007).

Table 4 displays that the majority of respondents perceived the ISO process as generating legitimacy, with fairness, capacity-building, transparency and the dialogical nature of the process playing an equally strong role.

*Table 4: Assessment of the ISO process*

Statement: “In your opinion, this ISO process on SR is...”

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	n.a.	Total
... inclusive (open to all relevant stakeholders).	33	56	7	5	2	103
	32%	54%	7%	5%	2%	100%
...fair (assures stakeholders that the process does not prejudice outcomes).	12	63	19	6	2	102
	12%	62%	19%	6%	2%	100%
...capacity building (strengthening and developing skills and resources of involved people and organizations).	25	54	12	7	5	103
	24%	52%	12%	7%	5%	100%
...legitimate (procedures are democratic).	24	55	16	5	3	103
	23%	53%	16%	5%	3%	100%
...transparent (information is accessible and equally distributed).	33	47	16	5	1	102
	32%	46%	16%	5%	1%	100%
...a dialogue (decisions are the output of stakeholder discussions).	21	58	14	6	3	102
	21%	57%	14%	6%	3%	100%

In addition to ticking the relevant boxes, the participants had the opportunity to add comments in a separate field. The following passage provides a summary of the comments.

1) Most respondents perceived the ISO process as “*inclusive*” in the sense of being open to all relevant stakeholders (accumulated 86%; 32% strongly agree, 54% agree).

Comments regarding the inclusiveness of the ISO process partly confine this picture by mentioning i) *imbalance of stakeholder groups* and ii) deficits of the *process design* such as the selection process of experts and observers through the National Standard Bodies (NSBs).

Ad i) A number of participants described an imbalance of stakeholder groups:

- “Consensus works best when all stakeholders enter discussions with a balance of power. The ISO process is effective for defining technical standards among co-equal corporations, but even with financial support for some delegations from developing countries it fails to create such a balance of power.”
- “The process is inclusive but there are some stakeholder groups that are too much more important than others. Moreover, in some categories there are too many people that represent particular interest and not really a stakeholder category (for example too many consultants in SSRO category and too much association sustained by businesses in NGO categories).”
- “Some stakeholder groups are under-represented. There is good representation from developed and developing countries alike.”

Respondents stated that financial constraints are reasons for the under-representation of certain stakeholder groups:

- “Inclusively is fully safeguarded in the process design, but somewhat biased by the availability of financial support for certain stakeholder categories, in particular from developing countries [...].”

One participant of the survey emphasized that especially small and medium sized enterprises (SME) are under-represented in the ISO process:

- “Micro and small business have very different perspectives on SR than big companies. Despite these evidences, micro and small businesses are not considered a different category of stakeholder.”

Ad ii) Furthermore, respondents assessed the ISO 26000 process compared to other ISO processes as much more inclusive. However, they stated that the ISO procedures are not really ready for an inclusive process. Especially the argument was highlighted that the national mirror committees are responsible for organizing a balanced committee and sending representatives to the ISO working group meetings:

- “Compared to other ISO processes this SR is much more inclusive and fair, but it could be improved and ISO procedures are not really ready for an inclusive process.”
- “The general process is open, but the national process is the key point of entry, and those processes vary greatly from country to country.”

- “The real problem is that in a lot of countries (mainly developing ones) stakeholders such as trade unions, consumers and NGOs are not invited by the National Mirror Committee. The result is that trade unions and consumers are the stakeholder categories less represented in ISO 26000”.
- “Inclusively is fully safeguarded in the process design, but somewhat biased by [...] the fact the nomination of individual must be done via the national competent authorities.”

2) 74% experienced the process as “*fair*” insofar as it assures no prejudged outcome. Some critically noted that their assessment as an unfair process aimed at describing the dominance of certain opinion leaders:

- “The disagreement statements are related to the circumstance that only a few opinion setters are leading the process.”

3) 76% agreed to the statement that the ISO process is “*capacity building*”, that means strengthening and developing skills and resources of involved people and organizations.

- “Some stakeholders are much better prepared and familiar with the subject than others – therefore the process has a huge element of capacity building – the question is if the world community was ready for a SR standard when we started.”

4) Most respondents evaluated the ISO process on SR as “*legitimate*” (accumulated 76%).<sup>19</sup>  
A couple of experts differentiated their position as follows:

- “Even if defined as been democratic the process in reality has two faces: One official democratic one and one which is putting the opinion of some (native speakers) in the lead. I have also the feeling that a process can not be democratic if the opposite position of only a few can drive the decisions whereas the majority is more or less quiet in the decision taking process. It has to be clarified what quietness means: Does it mean agreement with the decision making proposed or does it mean agreement with the somewhat 10 to 20 persons who are having a sustained opposition?”
- “The process is legitimate but not conventionally democratic, decisions are made by absence of ‘sustained opposition’.”

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<sup>19</sup> One has to take into account, though, that in any case organizations and individuals attribute legitimacy to the ISO process already by actively attending its sessions.

5) A “*transparent*” process should guarantee that information is accessible and equally distributed and therefore can assure democratic control together with precise responsibilities. Overall, 78% of the participants agreed with the transparency of the ISO process. However, some participants differentiated the transparency of the ISO process by comments such as:

- “Transparency [does] not mean to put the document free in live link. There is more action necessary to [spread] information in all scale.”
- “The ISO process (NWIP, later involvement of national bodies) etc. is OK. The WG- and Task Group processes are not transparent [...].”

6) The process’s discursive quality is expressed by the free formation of opinion and decision-making. 78% of all respondents perceived the process as a “*dialogue*”.

Several comments point out language, political and intercultural barriers, which lay in the process design, and complicate an effective, legitimate and efficient dialogue.

- ”The imposition of the English language limits, and it excludes.”
- “ISO process is a very complex exercise, so there [are] some barriers very difficult to remove, not only the language, but also the political, intercultural barriers, and those associated with the very unequal level of development of the different countries and cultures involved in the process.”

Furthermore, an obstacle is seen in the fluctuation and the rising number of new experts and observers of the ISO process:

- “ISO is highly interactive and embracing. But because it is such a huge process, it is not clear whether stakeholders having less exposure to the issues can readily access or easily comprehend all the procedures upfront and thus be as involved as they may have liked had they be better informed of the complexities.”
- “There is difficulty moving forward due to new people joining the process, and going through the same comments over and over on the text.”
- “There is a challenge of securing continued responsibility to new experts, the same discussions starting all over again, and the need to have the guidance document finalised.”

The following question aims at assessing the participants' perception of the *stakeholders' influences on the ISO process*. Special emphasis was given to the aspect of equal influence (cf. Table 5). The respondents had the possibility to give reasons for their assessment<sup>20</sup>.

*Table 5: Influence of stakeholder groups on the ISO process*

Question: "Do you think that all stakeholder groups have the same influence on the ISO process on SR?"  
(Total: 103 answers; 100%)

<b>Yes</b> , all stakeholder groups have the same influence on this ISO process.	25	(24%)
<b>No</b> , stakeholder groups have a different influence on this ISO process.	78	(76%)

25% of the respondents had the impression that all stakeholder groups have the same influence on the ISO process. They argued that: i) *structures and rules*; ii) *leadership* and iii) *National Standard Bodies (NSBs)* support a balanced influence of stakeholders.

Ad i) One of the most frequently used arguments for equal influence of stakeholder groups is that everyone has the possibility to engage in the process due to the structures and rules of the ISO 26000 process. This position becomes apparent through a number of statements:

- "All decisions must be made by consensus, and therefore each stakeholder group can have equal input."
- "Everybody can express his feelings about the issues. In some cases it is more difficult, but everybody has the chance."
- "Each stakeholder group is treated as an equal regardless of size."
- "Discussions are transparent and visible, and all members have the opportunity of responding."
- "Every people have the same rules and opportunities."
- "There is no discrimination in the participation and everybody can express his opinion."
- "The process has allowed each stakeholder group equal representation in all the groups (task groups, editing, etc.). It has also encouraged stakeholder debates on most of the issues in advance of decision making."
- "The important thing is to have valid arguments to convince about the objective opportunity to take into account your opinion as the group opinion."

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<sup>20</sup> This question was an open question („Why?“).

- “Every stakeholder group has the same rights and the same amount of influence. We do not count the heads in one stakeholder group, but just listen to the voice of it.”

Ad ii) Furthermore, respondents stated that the Working Group leadership explicitly enforces stakeholder balance and equal engagement:

- „Leadership gives equal attention to all stakeholder groups.“
- “All activities of ISO/WG SR have proved this judgement.”
- “There is a conscious effort by leadership to involve all stakeholder segments in the decision-making.”

Ad iii) A few respondents explain that the national standard bodies with their specific SR mirror committee guarantee stakeholder balance:

- “In the national mirror committee all stakeholders are represented.”
- “National decisions are the result of consensus among all stakeholders.”

However, two-thirds of all respondents (76%) have the feeling that the stakeholder groups do not exert the same influence on the ISO process. When asked further questions about which stakeholder group influences the process most, the respondents’ answers result in the following picture: The stakeholder group industry is seen as the one which has the highest influence on the process followed by labour. Third and fourth are the NGO and SSRO. Participants perceive the influence of the stakeholder group government as least important (cf. Table 6).

*Table 6: High influence of stakeholder groups on ISO process*

Question: “If no: In your opinion, which stakeholder groups have a high influence on this ISO process?”  
(Total: 78 answers; 100%)

1. Industry	64	(82%)
2. Labour	28	(36%)
3. Non-governmental Organization (NGO)	25	(32%)
4. Service, support, research and others (SSRO)	17	(22%)
5. Consumer	14	(18%)
6. Government	12	(15%)



Reasons for the impression of uneven distribution of influence are as manifold as the statements show: Either i) *different resources*, ii) *homogeneity of the stakeholder groups* and/or iii) *different bargaining positions* regarding an agenda setting.

Ad i) Participants described that the reason for different influence of stakeholder groups lies in their access to resources. Financial resources vary for instance between stakeholder groups or countries<sup>21</sup>:

- “They do have enough financial resources in order to be present in all the meetings”.
- “Due to financial restraint stakeholders representing consumer, government, labour, NGOs could not take an active part in the process and just few of them could attend the meetings.”
- “Due to general cost for participation (payment, resources, time etc.) the richest stakeholders (industry) have the highest influence. This is a general problem in standardization at all levels.”
- “Industry, because it has more resources than other groups.”

In addition, varying human resources were mentioned as reason for an unequal distribution of influence:

- “Depends on which stakeholder group that has ‘more’ voices.”
- “Resources to actively participate and staff time to critically pursue favourable language and procedures.”

Ad ii) Frequently, respondents stated in commentaries that certain stakeholder groups could develop a strong and concerted position due to their homogeneity:

- “unity”
- ”through being small and non-diverse and so having a single viewpoint”
- “clear objectives”.

Ad iii) The last factor that can be conceived as important concerning the levels of influence within the ISO process was the respondents’ perception of different bargaining positions of the stakeholder groups. Participants emphasized, for instance, that structures formally imply balanced representation and influence:

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<sup>21</sup> Category: “developed/developing country”.

- “Officially all groups have equal representation. But some are much better prepared and skilled than others for such a process - but the structure is OK”.
- “All stakeholders have formally the same influence; but there are differences.

Furthermore, industry was mentioned as obtaining a strong negotiating position, because it would be most strongly affected by the standard, which is indicated by commentaries such as these:

- “Industry deserves to, since they are the major organizations which will be using ISO 26000, at least for the first years of its inception.”
- “Industry by nature and by mere numbers and resources does have a high influence.”
- “[...] are very relevant for the real implementation of the standard.”

The high influence of the labour group was attributed to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ISO and ILO:

- “Labour might be few in numbers but have a MoU that gives them access, i.e. the same person can sit in all relevant units and thereby have great influence (this is not meant negatively).”
- “Through MoU”
- “Labour- due to the agreement (veto right) with ILO.”

In addition to the stakeholder group specific factors, participants also mentioned topics leading to different spheres of influence such as iv) *conference language*, v) *role of key players* and vi) *hidden agenda*:

Ad iv) As the conference language of the ISO process is English, language barriers have repeatedly been described as intensifying different negotiation positions:

- “English speaking influence, which is a high discrimination.”

Ad v) Some participants illustrated that the influence depends on the role and experience of key players:

- “There are key individuals who are very ‘good’ at the process and their power is independent of the stakeholder group to which they belong to a certain extent.”
- “Certain personalities used to using strong arm tactics.”

- “Process is predominantly influenced by some key players and not by democratic behaves.”

Ad vi) Few respondents suspect a hidden agenda behind the influence taking of stakeholder groups. They suspected people actively delaying the ISO process:

- “Influence is highly dependent on participating persons and their strategic behaviour (open or hidden).”
- ”Certain delegates do in fact have a hidden agenda in the ISO process, which materializes in the fact that they successfully lobby for decisions that delay the completion of ISO 26000.”
- “Because these groups are the ones that are delaying the process.”
- “Strength and ability to influence ‘behind the scene’.”

The following question gave the respondents the possibility to evaluate whether or not requirements for a successful dialogue such as accountability of participants or expert knowledge applies to the ISO 26000 process. Regarding the participants’ assessment and perception the following conclusions can be drawn (cf. Table 7):

*Table 7: Assessment of the stakeholder dialogue at the ISO process*

Question: “Do the following requirements for a successful stakeholder dialogue apply to this ISO process on SR?”

	strongly applies	applies	applies to some extent	does not apply	Total
Accountability of participants	23	35	31	6	95
	24%	37%	33%	6%	100%
Concept of consensus	30	46	19	1	96
	31%	48%	20%	1%	100%
Diversity of expertise, talents and interests	32	45	19	1	97
	33%	46%	20%	1%	100%
Effective communication between stakeholders (language, intercultural communication,..)	23	37	34	3	97
	24%	38%	35%	3%	100%
Efficiency of process and procedures	21	28	35	13	97
	22%	29%	36%	13%	100%
Equity in communication between stakeholders	21	28	36	11	96
	22%	29%	38%	11%	100%

Expert knowledge	28	46	21	2	97
	29%	47%	22%	2%	100%
Financial resources	12	22	43	17	94
	13%	23%	46%	18%	100%
Leadership	27	41	25	2	95
	28%	43%	26%	2%	100%
Legitimacy	27	44	23	-	94
	29%	47%	24%	-	100%
Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms	15	29	44	18	94
	16%	35%	30%	19%	100%

Most respondents acknowledged the “*concept of consensus*” and “*diversity of expertise, talents and interests*” as requirement for a successful stakeholder dialogue (strongly) applying to the ISO process (both accumulated 79%). They also agreed with respect to “*expert knowledge*” and “*legitimacy*” (both accumulated 76%). There was a more differentiated result concerning the requirements “*equity in communication between stakeholders*”, “*efficiency of process and procedures*” as well as “*monitoring and evaluation mechanisms*” (all accumulated 51%). Only one third of the respondents found the “*financial resources*” to be sufficient (36%).

Finally, the participants were asked whether or not their expectations had been met so far concerning the stakeholder dialogue of the ISO process.

*Table 8: Expectations of the stakeholder dialogue*

Question: “Has the stakeholder dialogue of this ISO process on SR met your expectations so far?”

completely	to a great extend	satisfactorily	to a small degree	not at all	Total
5	29	44	18	2	98
5%	30%	45%	18%	2%	100%

Table 8 shows that most of those taking part in the survey experienced the stakeholder dialogue so far as “*satisfactory*” (45%). 35% assessed the dialogue of the ISO process as above average, whereas 20% of the respondents expressed that their expectations had not

been met completely or at all. Reasons for this evaluation vary, as the responses to the question “why?” will show.

First of all, many respondents highlighted that in this multi-stakeholder dialogue consisting of various stakeholders from all over the world (interim) results could be achieved:

- “To bring so many people from different backgrounds and outlooks together and to achieve the consensus that has been achieved up to now is a remarkable achievement.”
- “Perfect way for broad consultation.”
- “I would not be able to mention any national or international process of that relevance and/or quantitative dimension as regards contributors/interested parties that is designed and run that well up to the expectation that relate to the organization and performance of stakeholder dialogues.”
- “I think the dialogues are improving sharply specially after the Sydney meeting.”
- “Given the conditions I find that the process overall has been successful.”
- “Because it is an extremely difficult process and its mere existence is already in such a success and a permanent learning process.”
- “Even [if it] is not a perfect process, [it] is still a very enriching one. And it [is] the only process I know, with such a big representativeness of different stakeholder groups.”
- “I think the processes are transparent and every effort is made to accommodate the various stakeholder views.”
- “Everybody can tell his opinion, even in the short time.”
- “Good representation of various stakeholder and good dialogue within task groups.”

The participants described difficulties in the discussions resulting from this international multi-stakeholder process:

- “It is difficult to expect much substantive dialogue within such a large quality and variety of participants in the process.”
- “In any international process with this much at stake, stakeholder dialogue will be difficult. Interests will diverge. It is a large negotiation that sometime takes the form of co-operative dialogue. The Leadership could have tried to strongly influence and promote, or even demand!, a more cooperative position from stakeholder groups.”
- “Stakeholder groups still fight for their view-points and demonstrate too little readiness to negotiate compromises.[...]”

- “[...] there was too little such stakeholder dialogue all the time [...].”
- “It depends in which fora this dialogue takes place. Within the standard setting task groups and within the former drafting teams we did have very valuable discussions and consensual outcomes throughout different stakeholder representatives from time to time. Where it is a real dialogue, partners are open for rational argument and willing to leave moment. However, when participants are representing merely certain political positions and interests without an official ‘mandate’ from their organizations to compromise and meet somewhere in the middle, neither the ISO principles of consensus building nor the principles and rules of a genuine dialogue apply anymore.”
- “Some stakeholders are not fully involved in the process, and do not actively participate (e.g. labours and consumers).”

Several respondents described a strong focus on the structure of the ISO standard setting process – and the resulting problems:

- “Balanced dialogue requires allocation of expert staff time to become familiar with the alternative language suggestions and offer innovative and thoughtful improvements. The structure of ISO standard setting procedures limits that level of engagement in groups that are as diverse as the SR committee.”
- “The organizational model is favourable to the stakeholder dialogue but in practice oriented to stakeholder confrontation.”
- “Owing to fairly weak leadership and being constrained by standard ISO rules leaves the process open to abuse by those who have the time to make it work for them. [...]”
- “The process has focused more on the form of balanced participation of stakeholders than on content of participation.”
- “This entire process is built on a flawed foundation. In other words, it will be difficult to make a silk purse from this sow’s ear.”

According to the previous commentaries, some respondents criticized statements concerning the accountability and selection process of experts and observers through the NSBs:

- “I think that the most important requirement is the accountability of participants. This is not fulfilled at all by a large majority of the WG members who belong to consultancies and similar organizations with strong economic interest related to the publication of a standard on SR.”

- “Because this is not a true multi-stakeholder process – it is a modified ISO process that gives ISO National Standards Bodies complete control over who is sent as an ‘expert’. If it were a true multi-stakeholder process, each stakeholder group would be self-selected and self-organized. As it is, some experts represent their stakeholder group while many do not. Representation is the key attribute that is missing from this process - anyone can be identified as from a particular stakeholder group - but the real question is whether that person represents that group.”

Participants commented on the tempo of the standardization process. The ranges of opinions varied from too slow (e.g. the drafting process) to too fast (e.g. to comment the drafting papers, to exchange ideas with stakeholders, etc.):

- “I think the process could be faster.”
- “The time is too long.”
- “The methodology of consensus with the participation of different stakeholders can slow down the process of drafting the document.”
- “[...] the process has evolved and I feel it has improved significantly. But there have been times, during the process, when frustration was great. This was due to short deadlines for comments on drafts [...].”
- “Lack of adequate oversight by ISO to ensure their own standards development processes are properly followed has meant more time has been spent overcoming procedural difficulties than discussing substantive issues. There has been insufficient time or opportunity for smaller groups of stakeholder representatives to understand where people are coming from with their various viewpoints. [...].”

### 3.3 Conclusion

The goal of the ISO Working Group on Social Responsibility, consisting of various organizations from all over the world, is to reach consensus about a global guidance standard for social responsibility. The success of the realization of the ISO 26000 depends on various elements.

It is a function<sup>22</sup> of

- the convictions and competencies of the individuals participating in this process,
- of the diversity of the informal institutions (e.g. different cultural meanings of the terms “social” and “responsible” among those involved),
- the formal institutions (e.g. national laws, already existing multinational standards)
- the involved organizational structures of both the individual stakeholders (i.e. the companies, parties, political institutions, interest groups they represent) and
- the coordination and cooperation structure of the working group itself.

The results of the online survey demonstrate that the perceptions and claims of the stakeholders differ strongly with regard to the individual aspects of the study. To sum up, the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency and procedural legitimacy in isolation do not suffice to create a successful multi-stakeholder dialogue, which is also perceived as such by all participants. There has to be a process of an accepted order between these elements, generated by an adequate governance structure.

All in all, the ISO 26000 multi-stakeholder process is a challenge in every respect: In addition to the broad stakeholder involvement problems such as funding arrangements, a strict time frame and multilingualism arise. As one expert formulated convincingly: “[...] we need to develop a ‘global civil society’ mindset that rewards understanding and some compromise, with the goal of consensus but also of creating a useful document with some teeth in it. It’s a long road.” The ISO process is an opportunity to demonstrate the world that consensus within a heterogeneous group regarding SR is possible.

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<sup>22</sup> cf. Wieland, J. (2007): Idealistische, ideale und reale Diskurse. Governanceformen des Diskurses. In: Wieland, J. (ed.): Governanceethik und Diskursethik – ein zwangloser Diskurs, Marburg: Metropolis, pp. 13 - 57.



### III. Appendix

#### 1. Online Survey

## Online survey on Social Responsibility ISO Process

Email:

Dear experts and observers of ISO/TMB/WG SR,

I kindly ask your contribution to a short online survey on the ISO process on social responsibility as part of my PhD research project conducted under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Josef Wieland, University of Applied Sciences Konstanz (Germany).

The research project looks into the process of network building and multi-stakeholder dialogues. As you are an expert or observer participating in this ISO process, your contribution is very valuable.

The participation in the survey, which consists of 8 questions, will take about 10 minutes. You can answer the questionnaire under the following link until February 22nd, 2008:

*LINK*

You will have the possibility to view the results by following a link provided after completing the survey. The final result will be forwarded to the Chair and Secretariat of ISO /TMB/WG SR, which kindly supports this study.

The questionnaire is a follow-up study to a first survey conducted at the Lisbon meeting in May 2006. The results have been published (KIeM Working Paper Series No.24, 2006) and can be accessed at:

[http://www.kiem.htwg-konstanz.de/publikationen\\_e/kiem\\_pbl\\_set\\_e.html](http://www.kiem.htwg-konstanz.de/publikationen_e/kiem_pbl_set_e.html)

Thank you very much for your cooperation and support!

Maud Schmiedeknecht

Data protection: Please be assured that the data and information you provide will be treated strictly confidential. Anonymity will be guaranteed, no personal data or information that might identify you as a respondent will be passed on to a third party.

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Maud Schmiedeknecht  
Konstanz Institute for Intercultural Management, Values and Communication  
University of Applied Sciences Konstanz  
Brauneggerstr. 55  
78462 Konstanz Germany

phone: +49 7531 206 637  
fax: +49 7531 206 87 637  
email: [schmiedeknecht@htwg-konstanz.de](mailto:schmiedeknecht@htwg-konstanz.de)  
URL: <http://www.kiem.htwg-konstanz.de>

### Section 1: General Statistics

#### 01. Which stakeholder group do you represent?

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consumer   | <input type="checkbox"/> Labour                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-governmental Organization (NGO)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industry   | <input type="checkbox"/> Service, support, research and others (SSRO) |

#### 02. Are you an "expert" or an "observer" (according to the ISO definition)?

- |                                 |                                   |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expert | <input type="checkbox"/> Observer |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

**03. Are you representing a “developed country” or “developing country” (according to the ISO definition)?**

Developed country

Developing country

**04. Which of the following meetings of ISO/TMB/WG on Social Responsibility (SR) have you attended?**

(Please tick all appropriate boxes)

Bahia, Brazil  
(Feb. 2005)

Bangkok, Thailand  
(Sep. 2005)

Lisbon, Portugal  
(May 2006)

Sydney, Australia  
(Feb. 2007)

Vienna, Austria  
(Nov. 2007)

## Section 2: ISO Process - Developing a Guidance Document on SR

**05. In your opinion, this ISO process on SR is...**

How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

(Please tick the appropriate box in each line)

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	not applicable
...inclusive (open to all relevant stakeholders).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...fair (assures stakeholders that the process does not prejudge outcomes).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...capacity building (strengthening and developing skills and resources of involved people and organizations).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...legitimate (procedures are democratic).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...transparent (information is accessible and equally distributed).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...a dialogue (decisions are the output of stakeholder discussions).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other:

**06. Do you think that all stakeholder groups have the same influence on this ISO process on SR?**

**Yes**, all stakeholder groups have the same influence on this ISO process.

**No**, stakeholder groups have a different influence on this ISO process.

➔ If no: In your opinion, which stakeholder groups have a high influence on this ISO process?

(Please tick all appropriate boxes)

Consumer

Labour

Government

Non-governmental Organization (NGO)

Industry

Service, support, research and others (SSRO)

Reason(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**07. Do the following requirements for a successful stakeholder dialogue apply to this ISO process on SR?**

(Please tick the appropriate box in each line)

	strongly applies	applies	applies to some extent	does not apply
Accountability of participants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Concept of consensus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diversity of expertise, talents and interests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effective communication between stakeholders (language, intercultural communication,..)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Efficiency of process and procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Equity in communication between stakeholders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expert knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legitimacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**08. Has the stakeholder dialogue of this ISO process on SR met your expectation so far?**

completely

to a great extent

satisfactorily

to a small degree

not at all

→ Why?

Thank you very much for your cooperation and support!

I am indebted to the Chair and Secretariat of the ISO/TMB/WG SR for allowing the survey to be performed. In order to view the current results of the survey please copy the following link into your browser (link active until February 22nd, 2008):

LINK

If you have any questions or interest in the final result, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Maud Schmiedeknecht