

## **Why ISO 20400 is a guidance standard**

We have all been there haven't we?

"OMG the auditor is coming next week!" All hands to the pumps! Hide all the bad stuff, polish up all the good stuff, rehearse what we are going to say, send anybody away who may say something embarrassing, put our best foot forward to get the certificate on the wall for the next 2 years. Although audits are not entirely without value, they can tend to descend into a contest between how good you are at hiding the bad stuff and how good the auditor is at finding it. Is this really productive use of your time and your businesses money? I think possibly not.

During my four years leading the UK delegation on the ISO 20400 committee I was always comfortable with the idea of this being a guidance standard, not a requirements standard. It follows in the footsteps of its predecessor BS 8903 and the global standard for corporate responsibility ISO 26000. Of course, you can have an independent evaluation against the standard, you can also complete a simple self-assessment at [www.iso20400.org](http://www.iso20400.org) to point you in the right direction.

In my experience; independent evaluations against the standard result in a refreshingly honest and constructive process. As there is no pass/fail and no certificate on the wall there is no need to hide the bad stuff. You can spread out your evidence, warts and all and get an expert opinion on what to do next and a comprehensive evidence-based report to share internally, or externally if you wish.

Some of the first companies to submit themselves to an independent review of the newly published standard in 2017 have since re-evaluated after a comprehensive action plan. They weren't after a badge or certificate when looking at how they could improve their approach to sustainable procurement; they wanted an insightful overview of where they stood and how they could improve.

Supply chains carry risks as well as opportunities. When it comes to sustainability, the management of those risks, and unlocking the wider potential of their supply chains, is critical to an effective approach to managing sustainable procurement.

I am frequently asked when the standard will "grow up" to be a "proper" standard. I, for one have no plans to grow up personally and I hope the standard doesn't either.

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