

How Managing Directors Should Engage with ISO Systems

Presented by **Tony Cunningham**, Managing Director of **Wynleigh ICS**, to ARMA-EMEA members and guests. The session reframes ISO management systems as strategic leadership tools rather than compliance exercises.

1. The Core Argument

- **ISO systems are underutilised at executive level** — most organisations treat them as operational compliance mechanisms, delegating ownership away from leadership and limiting engagement to periodic review and approval
- **The gap is not in the standards** — ISO standards already provide the structure for strategic governance; the missing element is how leadership chooses to engage with that structure
- **The shift required is behavioural, not structural** — moving from passive certification maintenance to active use of ISO systems for risk visibility, performance management, and decision-making

2. Strategy-to-Execution Framework

- **Context (Clause 4)** defines the organisation's exposure — internal/external factors and stakeholder expectations that shape strategic reality
- **Risk-based planning (Clause 6)** identifies what could impact strategic objectives, embedding risk and opportunity directly into how the organisation plans
- **Process execution (Clause 8)** translates planning into controlled, consistent delivery
- **Performance evaluation (Clauses 8 & 9)** closes the loop with controls, internal audits, and management reviews that generate evidence-based insight
- **Consistency across elements is critical** — if context doesn't reflect strategy, or objectives aren't meaningful, the system fragments and loses its management value even if it still passes audits

3. Integrated Governance Across Standards

- **All ISO management system standards share a common structure (Annex SL),** each addressing a specific risk category:
 - **ISO 9001** — quality risk (product/service failure, commercial liability)
 - **ISO 14001** — environmental risk (legal compliance, environmental impact)
 - **ISO 45001** — people risk (health, safety, workplace exposure)
 - **ISO 27001** — information risk (data protection, cyber exposure)
- **Fragmented systems create duplication and inconsistent priorities** — integration aligns them around common context, strategic direction, and governance processes
- **Integration is not about combining documents** — it's about aligning how risk, strategy, and control are managed across the organisation's business processes

4. Real-World Impact

- **5% insurance premium reduction** achieved in a large mining operation after independent risk auditors assessed the maturity and effectiveness of the management system
- **External stakeholder confidence** — insurers, auditors, and regulators respond positively when risk is well understood and demonstrably controlled
- **Value extends well beyond certification** — influencing how the organisation is perceived, how risk is priced, and how value is protected

5. What Needs to Change

- **Executive ownership** — ISO systems must be owned at leadership level in terms of strategic accountability, not just administratively

- **Risk integration** — risk must be explicitly linked to strategic objectives, not treated as a standalone exercise
- **Decision-driven reviews** — management reviews must evolve from compliance meetings into structured decision forums
- **Insight-focused audits** — internal audits should move beyond conformity checks to deliver actionable insight on what's working and what needs to change
- **Performance intelligence** — data must inform decisions, not just populate reports

6. Key Takeaways

- **ISO systems are a structured management model**, not a documentation exercise — they connect strategy to execution when used as intended
- **The standards don't need redesigning** — the change required is in leadership engagement and behaviour
- **Integration across standards creates a unified risk governance framework** that reduces duplication and improves executive line of sight
- **Tangible commercial benefits follow** when systems are mature — stakeholder confidence, reduced insurance costs, and stronger governance
- **ARMA-EMEA and Wynleigh ICS/Risk Group** are positioned as ongoing resources for organisations looking to develop this capability further

7. Next Step

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