Applying International Risk Management Standards to Humanitarian Security

The Challenge

Why, when countless industries have arrived at a globally agreed approach for how to manage security risks, have we in the humanitarian sector cultivated not one, but several systems, in parallel?

*What would be the benefit – perceived and demonstrated – if we were to **import** the principles and processes of an ISO framework into our work? And if there is merit in this endeavour, how might we begin to operationalise such elements: as individuals, organisations and a community at large?*

In May 2011, the Security Management Initiative (SMI) published a landmark discussion paper entitled '*From Security Management to Risk Management*' laying out the basis to answer these questions. The authors argue convincingly that the international standard, *ISO 31000:2009 Risk Management – Principles and Guidelines*, does indeed provide a "better fit" than contemporary models utilised within the aid community, and that adapting *ISO 31000 standards* to suit our specific needs would enhance not only our duty of care to staff on mission but also contribute to the growing professionalisation of humanitarian assistance. The dual premise for applying *ISO 31000* is to harmonise our risk management language and improve sustainable access to the beneficiary populations we seek to serve.[1]

So the gauntlet has been thrown down to us all and, as the SMI has repeatedly voiced, "No individual aid agency has the means and methods to address these challenges on their own."[2] But as the first quarter of 2012 closes, those of us who understand the value of this standard might be justified in asking how, precisely, has the issue progressed over recent months?

The Purpose

The purpose of this independent bulletin is to provide a succinct overview of recent developments in the operationalisation of *ISO 31000* for aid workers and aid organisations. It is informed by professional observation and dialogue, with intent to capture evolutions from strategic down to tactical levels across a number of key sub-sectors, highlighting exciting new examples of success and generating further momentum amongst security professionals and generalists alike.

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[1] *From Security Management to risk Management: Critical Reflections on Aid Agency Security Management and the ISO Risk Management Guidelines*, (May 2011), Merkelbach, M., and Daudin, P.; For an earlier discussion of *ISO 31000's* prospective role in humanitarian security, also see the European Interagency Security Forum's *Risk Thresholds In Humanitarian Assistance,* (2010), Kingston, M., and Behn, O.

[2] www.securitymanagementinitiative.org; see also the Humanitarian Policy Group's *Risk In Humanitarian Action: Towards A Common Approach?*, (Jan 2011), Metcalfe, V., Martin, E., and Pantuliano, S.

Given sufficient interest, it is my intention to make this a regular bulletin – perhaps once per quarter – and offer it as a conduit for sharing new information, insights and test cases as they emerge. If I have overlooked an activity you are aware of, please do share it; this is intended to be a global forum and your experiences will be valuable to others. All updates will be included in any subsequent bulletins and, as the story unfolds, I hope together we can identify a clear pathway for influencing other stakeholders and accelerating change.

The United Nations

Since the release of the OCHA-led paper, "To Stay and Deliver,"[3] there has been an institutional growth in recognising several key concepts consistent with *ISO 31000,* such as the mainstreaming of *security* risk management within general risk management activities. The injection of security professionals from private sector backgrounds into some UN agencies has possibly assisted in knowledge transfer at the field level, and we are beginning to hear *ad hoc* reference to terms such as '*asset criticality', 'risk absorption'* and '*business continuity planning'*.

However, alignment between *ISO 31000* and the UN Security Management System (UNSMS) is generally thin - to the point of having separate basic definitions for the very term '*risk'*, as well as considerably different methodologies. One colleague stated, "There remains a critical mass within the UN family, both at security policy level and at duty stations, who are either unaware of the existence of an international risk management standard or do not believe it holds relevance for the UNSMS."[4] And with overwhelming internal investment spent on maintaining existing UN security architecture – or introducing relatively new elements, such as the Security Level System – many external observers find it difficult to foresee a narrowing of the gap in the near future.

Operational INGOs

To my knowledge, no INGO has yet formally adopted *ISO 31000* as a matter of institutional policy towards security issues. Those that have an integrated security management system in place are either guided by the Humanitarian Practice Network,[5] one of the regional interagency forums or have developed their own framework in isolation. That said, the relative flexibility and autonomy of INGOs does present opportunities, and there have been promising signs at the operational level over recent months.

One such example involves Japanese Emergency NGO (JEN) programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I was recently asked to facilitate a group of JEN program managers, drawn from international and national staff, through the process outlined

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[3] *To Stay and Deliver: Good Practice for Humanitarian in Complex Security Environments*, (2011), Egeland, J., Harmer, A., and Stoddard, A.
[4] Anon.
[5] E.g. Good Practice Review No 8: Operational Security Management in Violent Environments, (Dec 2010), van Brabandt, K., Harmer, A., Stoddard, A., Haver, K., Fenton, W., and Foley, M.

in *ISO 31000*, focussing on the security aspects of risk management. JEN now uses the ISO definition for risk "*the effect of uncertainty on objectives*" as its fundamental starting point for operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as applying a number of tools such as *internal versus external context analysis* and various complimentary methods (beyond the risk matrix alone) lifted from *ISO 31010 Risk Assessment Techniques*. A combination of treatment options that not only consider *risk avoidance, reduction, and transference,* but also includes *risk retention* so as to exploit positive opportunities is a fundamental cornerstone in the way risk is managed. Whilst the impact of this process continues to be monitored, the example of JEN Afghanistan / Pakistan establishes a clear progression from traditional INGO models. A follow-up event is scheduled for later in 2012 and, with JEN permission, I'll be circulating results.

Humanitarian Training Organisations

There is no doubt that cross-sectoral humanitarian training organisations have a role to play in shaping *ISO 31000* outcomes. Branching out from their traditional knowledge and skill areas (in client demand) trainers are faced with the opportunity to raise awareness of risk management standards and creatively tailor tools to meet the needs of a specific audience. Such creative bespoke training becomes critical as ISO operationalisation moves into the implementation phase within aid organisations.

In 2011, RedR Australia formally incorporated *ISO 31000* into its core course curriculum and delivered numerous bespoke modules using the *ISO 31000* process as a framework for discussion.[6] However, as a Standby Partner to the UN and a neutral player amongst INGOs, RedR Australia is not in a position to dispense entirely with all competing systems.

The Humanitarian Distance Learning Centre (HDLC) provides on-line courses in security and risk management that are advertised as ISO compliant.[7] It is as yet not clear to me how extensively other global aid training organisations push I*SO 31000* within their courses, although reports suggest most providers tend to offer a balanced outlook, depending on client wishes. Any updates on specific training products are welcomed.

Private Sector Involvement

It is widely acknowledged that numerous global commercial industries (e.g. maritime, aviation, oil and gas) are amongst the most advanced in terms of compliance with *ISO 31000*. Although organisations in these fields have dramatically different principles, structures, values and mandates, they often operate in the same complex environments, facing the same landscape of threats, as humanitarian organisations. There is much that we can learn, and professionals in the private

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[6] See the RedR Australia 2011 Curriculum Review and 2011 Course Calendar.
[7] www.hdlc.com.au

sector often tend to network heavily on security risk management themes; for example, there are several 'Linked In' groups specifically designed to share experiences in the implementation of *ISO 31000*.

In general, private sector organisations involved on the fringes of aid and development appear to be more variable. Colleagues employed as risk or security managers in this sub-sector often comment how ISO frameworks are "present on paper, but are often not communicated throughout the organisation – and are certainly not always used to guide management decision in the field."[8] Any updates on specific, positive examples are welcomed.

Government Sector Involvement

As the debate on demonstrable legal <u>duty of care</u> rages on, [9] government donors may begin to play a leadership role – if not, an enforcing one – in the standardisation of risk management approaches.

The Australian Government's aid agency (AusAID) is a noted example of an ISO compliant donor.[10] Indeed, an affiliated AusAID scheme or organisation may provide some of the most fertile soil for future ISO test-cases [11], due to the region's longstanding association with *AS/NZ Standard 4360:2004 Risk Management* (the predecessor and first draft to ISO 31000) and the highly recommendable *AS/NZ Standards Handbook 167:2006 Security Risk Management*. [12] Although little known throughout the external aid community, this latter resource slices through many of the long-debated issues in humanitarian security and provides detailed guidance on how to tailor each stage of the risk management framework (and process) to security-based activities in organisations of all sizes, types and contexts.

About the Author

Rich Parker is an independent consultant security advisor and trainer to the global humanitarian community. He has worked for and alongside multiple UN agencies, INGOs, government agencies and private organisations, in addition to his previous career as an officer in the British Army. Rich holds a Diploma in Security Risk Management through the Australian Security Academy, Licentiate Status with the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and a Degree in Psychology from Exeter University. For more information on any of the information or resources contained in this bulletin, please contact Rich via Linked In.

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[8] Anon.

[9] See the SMI Policy Paper: *Can You Get Sued? Legal Liability of Humanitarian Aid Workers Towards Their Staff?* (Nov 2011), Kemp, E., and Merkelbach, M.

[10] See *AusAID Risk Management Policy and Guidelines* (2006).

[11] E.g. The rapidly emerging *Australian Medical Assistance Team (AusMAT)* model which, amongst other operations, deployed a field hospital to the Pakistan floods in 2010.

[12] Both documents jointly published by Standards Australia / Standards New Zealand.