

Working on International Standards with Nigel Bevan: In Fond Remembrance

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Abstract

This article summarizes what it was like to work on standards with Nigel Bevan in two working groups of ISO/TC159. I hope it gives those who never had an opportunity to work with Nigel some idea of the contributions he made and some of the reasons he was such an important guiding force in the area of usability and, especially, user experience.

Keywords

Nigel Bevan, ISO Standards, ISO 9241-220, ISO 27501



Introduction

I knew of Nigel Bevan a number of years before I actually met and worked with him in the context of international standards. Many of my colleagues engaged in standards work knew him long before I did, and it seemed like everyone had a personal story (or several stories) to tell about the time they spent with him. I recall first meeting Nigel when I joined ISO/TC159/SC4/WG6 as a U.S. expert around 2013 for the purpose of contributing to ISO 9241-220 (Ergonomics of human-system interaction: Processes for enabling, executing and assessing human-centred design within organizations). This is the same working group that produced ISO 9241-11: 2018 (Ergonomics of human-system interaction: Usability: Definitions and concepts), which is arguably the most influential and well-known of the ISO ergonomics standards, and for which Nigel was the editor when that standard was revised. As I joined the working group near the end of the revision process for ISO 9241-11, I was less qualified to comment on that work than a number of other people in the working group, as well as many UXPA members who commented on the document during the revision process.

ISO 9241-11 and ISO 9241-220

With respect to ISO 9241-220, however, Nigel and I approached the work from very different perspectives. My own perspective evolved largely from working on human factors engineering projects for large-scale and/or safety-critical systems (air traffic control, medical devices). Often these systems had long life cycles in which human factors processes need to be applied to activities such as maintenance, repair, and disposal/retirement of systems, and post-implementation/marketing monitoring of safety-related accidents/incidents, in addition to all the other human factor issues. Nigel, on the other hand, brought to the table an immense amount of experience in the consumer product domain and a passion about the concept of "user experience," which is a concept that has not gained, relatively speaking, much traction in the safety-critical, highly regulated industries in which I had worked. ISO 9241-220, in order to be a "complete" standard, needed to address human factors/usability processes from both of these perspectives.

Thus, for both Nigel and me, contributing to ISO 9241-220 was an experience that broadened each of our perspectives, allowing both of us to appreciate what the other "brought to the table." While Nigel worked to ensure that usability and user experience were treated fully in ISO 9241-220, my own contribution related more to the human factors considerations involved in maintenance, repair, disposal, and retirement of systems.

While working to finalize ISO 9241-11 and complete the development of ISO 9241-220, I had several years in which to "experience" what it was like to work with Nigel Bevan. Standards work can be a tedious business in which arguments at meetings can get long and loud, and resolving issues can take an excruciating amount of time. In this regard, Nigel was absolutely tenacious, like a dog with a bone. However, whereas it is not uncommon for arguments to get heated, I never recall Nigel actually getting upset or angry; he just kept pushing his point. And sometimes, when he hadn't achieved exactly what he wanted in a resolving an issue, he would raise the issue again the next day to try to re-open the discussion. In my experience, he tended to be quite successful at this (or perhaps the group just tended to indulge him!). It could get a bit frustrating with respect to a document for which Nigel was also serving as editor because sometimes the solution of a resolved issue wasn't reflected in his amended text, if he hadn't personally concluded that the issue was, indeed, resolved. But it was a small price to pay, given the immense amount of work that Nigel did as the group's editor. "Tireless" is one apt descriptor of Nigel.

ISO 27501

As was the case with ISO 9241-220, Nigel once again proved that he was always ready for a new challenge when he joined ISO/TC159/SC1/WG5 as an expert from the United Kingdom. This working group, for which I served as the convener, was tasked with the development of ergonomic process standards, and its work, from the time of its formation in about 2013, had evolved quite a bit to embrace the impacts of ergonomics at the organizational level, as well as in the context of product and system design projects. As a result, the first standard produced by

this working group, ISO 27500: 2016 (The human-centred organization: Rationale and general principles), laid out seven fundamental principles of a human-centered organization and was targeted to organizational governing boards and executives. It contained no requirements or recommendations, unlike most standards, but only the seven principles, which were described in a very accessible way for the target audience. The working group's second project was ISO 27501 (The human-centred organization: Guidance for managers) and provides requirements and recommendations for organizational managers (of all types and at all levels) to apply in order to fulfil the seven principles of human-centered organizations outlined in ISO 27500:2016.

It was in the development of ISO 27501 that I had the opportunity to observe just how motivated Nigel was to produce the best standards possible. At one point in a meeting near the end of the development of the 31 requirements and recommendations that comprise the "core" of that standard, Nigel proposed what seemed to me a major rewording of many of the statements, perhaps too great a change for us to initiate in the short time we had before the document had to be submitted for voting. But Nigel was adamant that the wording changes were important and had to be made. Moreover, he felt sure he could make the changes before the next morning and that we would all agree to them (always a highly risky boast in standards work!). Nevertheless, he convinced me that he should be allowed to try.

Those not involved in standards development likely have little idea of what a tedious and exhausting process it can be. After a full-day meeting, most of us mortals are drained of creative capacity and need a nice dinner and good night's rest to be ready for another day of the same. But Nigel appeared to be almost indefatigable; sure enough, the next morning, he came to the meeting with all of the altered text, and it was unanimously approved by the experts in attendance; the final document will be the better for it.

Farewell and Bon Voyage

Although my experience with Nigel was limited to those two working groups discussed above, I came to perceive Nigel as a person who not only often challenged others, but constantly challenged himself. This was something he evidently did not only in standards work, but in his entire approach to life. The many stories I had heard about Nigel are consistent with this view, as is the way he died. He never shrank from a challenge, and he gave himself fully to the mastery of any challenge he chose to accept. I know he is sorely missed by his fellow experts in ISO/TC159/SC1/WG5 and SC4/WG6, and no doubt by his fellow UXPA members and colleagues in other standards groups in which he participated. I will always think of him fondly, and smile at the thought that Nigel is still out there, if in no other way than through the impact of his work, challenging all of us to meet the very high bar he set by example.

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About the Author



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Dr. Gardner-Bonneau is a Fellow of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society and has been involved in ergonomics/human factors standards for over 20 years. She has co-authored and co-edited two human factors books—*Human Factors and Voice Interactive Systems* (2008) and *Human Factors and Medical Device Design* (2011).