AklysTransform

There Are No Externalities at the Top

What ISO 55001 asks of leaders, and why it matters for sustainability



***Esmé Fantozzi**, August, 2026*

NO EXTERNALITIES FOR LEADERS

When you have spent years in operational leadership, you know the pull to focus only on the here and now. Accountabilities are clear, results are immediate, and everything outside that frame can feel like an externality: someone else's problem, an unwelcome distraction.

That discipline works when your role is tightly defined. It is what single-point accountability is designed to deliver.

It is far less useful when you are responsible for the organisation's future.

For asset leaders and executive teams there are no externalities. You are accountable for performance today and for the organisation's capacity to perform tomorrow. What looks peripheral now can become decisive later: climate exposure on a forty-year asset; a community that stops cooperating; a regulation that arrives mid-lifecycle. None of these sits outside the frame anymore.

The ISO 55000 family of standards that sets out vocabulary, overview and core principles of asset management, and the requirements for an asset management system is one of the most practical frameworks available for leaders whose performance depends on physical or infrastructure assets, and who refuse to treat the long term as optional. Most people file it under asset management and maintenance. Almost nobody files it under sustainability.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Most operations leaders do not connect ISO 55001 with sustainability. That is a missed opportunity.

The standard does not treat environmental impact, climate resilience, social responsibility or long-term value as separate agendas or afterthoughts. It requires them to be assessed and managed as risks and opportunities, and as such, as integral components of business decision-making.

By embedding risk and opportunity management inside a lifecycle perspective, ISO 55001 forces leaders to make holistic choices: choices that strengthen both operational performance and broader environmental and social outcomes.

ISO 55001 also extends the time horizon of leadership decision-making. By requiring a focus on long-term value, it compels leaders to look beyond their own tenure, annual budgets and immediate performance targets. This creates a decision-making horizon better aligned with sustainability, adaptability and resilience: outcomes that typically require sustained investment and only realise their full value over the longer term.

This is precisely why the standard places such high demands on leadership.

THE LEADERSHIP TEST

Asset management is the coordinated set of activities that generate value from assets across their full lifecycle. Done well, it anticipates failures, removes operational waste, and secures the long-term reliability of critical infrastructure.

Decisions taken today about assets shape an organisation’s capacity to perform and adapt tomorrow. Recognising this strategic weight, and converting it into lasting advantage and resilience, is a core responsibility of leadership.

In the energy and utility sector this responsibility is particularly acute. Grid operators face concurrent pressures: energy-system transformation, the rise of electric mobility, increasing extreme weather, and the need for far greater system flexibility.

According to the IEA’s Electricity 2026 report, power systems must deliver significantly more flexibility through 2030 to accommodate higher shares of variable renewables, rising demand from electrification, and growing intermittency. European TSOs and DSOs also confront the rapid growth of distributed energy resources and bidirectional power flows.

ISO 55001 places senior management at the centre of the response. Leaders must take direct accountability for strategic direction, resource allocation, cultural alignment and performance outcomes. This means moving beyond endorsement to active stewardship: defining the value expected from assets, formalising it in an Asset Management Policy and

Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP), and ensuring consistent application of decision criteria.

FROM REACTIVE TO DELIBERATE

Many organisations already apply elements of ISO 55001. Few, however, do so with the depth needed to deliver measurable, sustained gains.

Asset management too often remains reactive: short-term cost considerations routinely outweigh the higher value that assets can create across their full lifecycle.

The ISO 55001 standard addresses this gap. It sets clear requirements for strategic planning, risk management, performance evaluation, and continuous improvement. Critically, it defines *what* must be achieved rather than *how*, allowing each organisation to adapt the approach to its own context, asset portfolio, and regulatory environment.

One of the most demanding requirements is the insistence on long-term orientation. Every decision, from design and procurement through maintenance, renewal and decommissioning, must be evaluated through the lens of lifecycle value. Delivering outcomes that endure is both the central ambition of ISO 55001 and its greatest leadership test.

THE REAL OPPORTUNITY

Aligning asset management practices to the ISO 55001 standard is not a compliance exercise. It is a leadership one, one that makes it harder to treat sustainability, resilience and long-term value as externalities.

When applied with genuine commitment, it becomes one of the strongest practical tools available for embedding those considerations deeply into the everyday decisions that shape an organisation’s future.

Sustained leadership focus is required. The rewards, in operational performance, adaptation, system resilience and long-term value creation, are both substantial and increasingly urgent.

WHERE TO TAKE IT FROM HERE

If the ideas in this piece resonate and you are exploring how to deepen the strategic and leadership dimensions of asset management in your organisation, I would be glad to continue the conversation.

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Esmé Fantozzi is the founder of AklysTransform, a consultancy that turns energy transition and sustainability strategies into real-world results across operations and capital allocation.

With more than 25 years of global leadership in major energy companies and joint ventures across Europe, the United States, the Middle East, and Asia, she has driven operational and asset management excellence, digital transformation, and strategies that deliver sustainable, long-term results in the field. She now advises a global clientele on operational excellence and sustainability.

The holder of a Master of Engineering in Supply Chain and Logistics from MIT and a Laurea in Physics from the University of Padua, Esmé also serves as an independent board director in a biotech company. She helps clients achieve superior performance by integrating energy transition opportunities with operational efficiency and digital innovation.

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