

Systemic indicators for corporate sustainable development

Aloisia Predota, Margit Kapfer

Denkstatt Umweltberatung und –management GmbH, Hütteldorferstraße 63-65, 1150 Wien, Austria

E-mail: aloisia.predota@denkstatt.co.at

Abstract:

The manual “Systemic indicators for sustainable development”, developed by the RNS (Institut für ressourcenschonende und nachhaltige Systeme, TU-Graz) and DENKSTATT in cooperation with 6 companies, and the Austrian Ministry for the Environment (BMLFUW) provides guidance in elaborating tailor-made indicators for sustainable development linking current interrelations with the environment, corporate strategy and changing framework conditions.

Keywords: indicators, sustainable development, management of sustainable development

I. INTRODUCTION

Management for sustainable development requires suitable indicators. Six leading Austrian companies cooperated in a research project conducted by the RNS (Institut für ressourcenschonende und nachhaltige Systeme, TU-Graz) and DENKSTATT. The resulting manual “Systemic indicators for sustainable development” supports organizations in elaborating custom-made indicators for sustainable development.

II. BACKGROUND

During the last years, the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines have become the main source of reference for sustainability indicators and sustainability reporting. The guidelines provide a list of economic, environmental and social indicators that are considered relevant by typical stakeholders and generally applicable for companies.

The manual developed by RNS and DENKSTATT provides step by step guidance how to elaborate a customized set of indicators. The indicators shall support strategic decision taking processes with relevant information for sustainable development.

III. SIX COMPANIES TESTED THE GUIDELINES

Six Austrian companies from various backgrounds - such as mining, paper, chemical industry, utilities or service providers - participated in the pilot project. The first set of tools and methods was tested with the participating companies. Their practical experience, suggestions for improvement and individual requirements were incorporated into the later versions of the manual.

Different starting positions and particular framework conditions of the participating companies – SMEs and multinational enterprises, producing and service industries – have put the manual, tools and methods to a hard test. Three companies started the process of developing sustainability indicators right from the beginning, whereas the others applied the guidelines in order to verify their existing sets of indicators.

IV. RESULTS

The key concept used for deducing indicators is the inter-relation between the organisation and its physical, social and economic environment. Organizations are not isolated, but interrelated with their environment.

The analysis starts with investigating current interrelations and identifying the most important ones in terms of corporate responsibility. Further analysis focuses on future interrelations as a result of corporate objectives and changes in the corporate environment. The systems affected by the implementation of strategic objectives are analysed with a systemic profile.

The major challenge in the analysis is to identify the critical interrelations from the broad range of current and future interrelations and to set priorities accordingly.

The second step gives guidance in deducing indicators for the selected interrelations and encourages ideas about cross-cutting indicators. Finally, the selection of indicators undergoes a check with regard to completeness and usability.

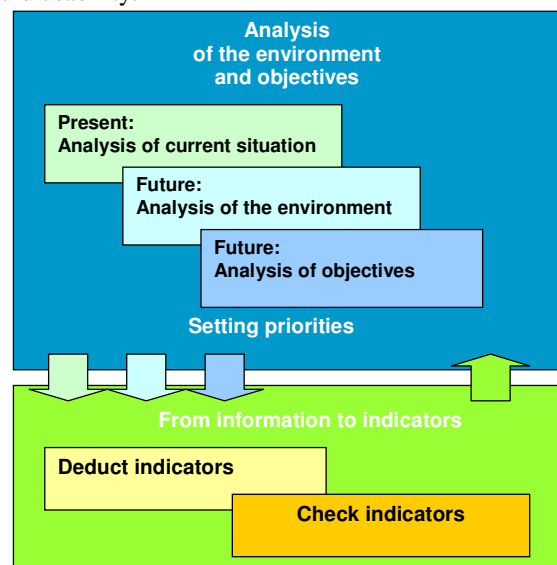


Figure 1: Steps towards a set of indicators for sustainable development

Indicators for sustainable development are not necessarily new indicators. It is the set of indicators rather than individual indicators that allow an assessment of progress towards sustainability.

V. CONCLUSION

The manual encourages a discursive process for the development of sustainability indicators. The participating companies highly valued the comprehensive approach and the change of perspectives initiated by the application of the manual.