BUSINESS ASSURANCE

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PERFORMANCE?

A short guide on sustainability and how it relates to your management system.
We have written this to help guide you through some sustainability basics. Everyone is talking about it, but what is it, really, and what does it mean for your organization?

This guide does not aim to give all the answers, but like with any response you have to start somewhere. A serious response to the demand for a more sustainable world cannot be designed and executed without the participation and contribution from businesses and other organizations. So you are a key player, and we hope that this guide will help you understand better some key principles of sustainability and how your management system can be a good starting point for your sustainability journey.
Whether we work with quality, health and safety, or environmental management systems, in some way we are all contributing to the sustainability of our communities and the future success of our organizations.

However, the degree to which your company or organization will be able to generate value from this will depend on the ability to understand how its future can be affected by external factors.

Organizations that today are capable of looking at risk beyond traditional metrics, boundaries and timeframes are those most likely to demonstrate Sustainable Business Performance tomorrow.

Your job may involve incidents or accidents; hazards and near-misses; aspects and impacts, but business outcomes will still depend on how well your management system interacts with the rest of your organization’s functions.

It is increasingly accepted that, just as corporate functions must interact successfully, a successful organization must understand the external and internal issues that can both prevent and enable its success.

Often these factors are about how the organization’s activities, and possibly its products or services, can either have an impact on or can benefit society and the environment.

This is not just our understanding of how effective management systems contribute to corporate sustainability. It is also the International Standards Organization’s position.
When looking at the High Level Structure for management systems, new ISO standards such as ISO 9001:2015 will include reference to sustainability concepts such as interested parties (stakeholders) and how they are relevant to the organization and its context.

The first step to understanding your organization and its context is to identify its stakeholders. These will be groups or people that represent or speak for external and internal issues.

Most of us can easily identify stakeholders on the inside of our organization that we rely on to achieve our objectives and goals. These internal stakeholders - like systems, processes, structure, targets and strategy - help to shape the context of your organization.

External stakeholders, being outside the company, may be different and have views and expectations that will need managing differently. They should also be considered in your context definition.

Just as with risk (where we consider an outcome against the probability of it occurring – effect of uncertainty) in sustainability we can measure the degree of stakeholders’ concerns over an issue against the organization’s ability to reach its sustainability objectives and targets.

Looking for a number of issues (new areas of risk) that are relevant to stakeholders allows a company to prioritize them. This is called materiality.
Learning what is material (most important to you), and how it affects the outcome of your objectives and targets, are steps towards achieving Sustainable Business Performance.

The next steps are about how to respond to these wider risks. With boundaries of control and impact now considered from afar, there will be challenges ahead on how to manage them.

But where there are risks there may also be opportunities. The evidence that sustainability drives value is overwhelming.

With your knowledge of the context of your organization and critical stakeholders, you can use the certification process to get information that can improve your management systems’ ability to help you achieve your sustainable business targets.

DNV GL auditors make this possible by using our Next Generation Risk Based Certification. They are trained to incorporate critical issues from the context of your organization that relate to your management system, i.e. your management system could be used to help manage and mitigate this critical risk and turn it into an opportunity.

By helping you translate them into focus areas for the audit, while checking compliance against the standard during the audit they also check how well your management system supports your business objectives and targets.

A well-functioning, certified management system is a great starting point for you to start your sustainability journey.
About DNV GL

Tomorrow’s successful companies will create value by meeting the world’s economic, social and environmental needs.

As a world-leading certification body, DNV GL helps businesses assure the performance of their organizations, products, people, facilities and supply chains through certification, verification, assessment, and training services. Partnering with our customers, we build sustainable business performance and create stakeholder trust.

Driven by the purpose of safeguarding life, property and the environment, our origins stretch back to 1864. Operating in more than 100 countries, our 16,000 professionals are dedicated to helping our customers make the world safer, smarter and greener.