

Making sustainability operational

Sustainability is more than focus on climate and CO₂.

Raw material utilization, nutrition, education, logistics are some of the areas that the food industry has worked with for decades, and which also support sustainable development, globally as well as locally.



There are many ways to work with sustainability - but most importantly, the result must contribute to improving "people, planet, profit" to be sustainable in the true sense of the word.

Companies who already have processes and procedures within the framework of documented management systems already have focus on many sustainability aspects - directly as well as indirectly. Many synergies and methods can therefore be reused when implementing sustainability in your business without the need to reinvent the wheel.

The ISO standards are based on the horizontal structure examples of activities described in table below.

ISO reference		Activities and areas
4	<i>Context of the organisation</i>	<i>Defining stakeholders, supply chain and distribution set-up</i>
5	<i>Leadership</i>	<i>Responsibilities, policies, and communication</i>
6	<i>Planning</i>	<i>Risk and opportunities in product- or market development and CAPEX investments</i>
7	<i>Support</i>	<i>Procurement of goods and services, HR and PDR (Performance and Development Review)</i>
8	<i>Operation</i>	<i>Daily operation and optimisation, including GMP/GLP, LEAN and Safety walks</i>
9	<i>Performance monitoring</i>	<i>Trends and KPI follow up as well as management evaluation</i>
10	<i>Improvement</i>	<i>Reporting of initiatives and improvements based on the points above</i>

Below are examples of how sustainability can be assessed and described under each focus area.

- Context of the organisation** - Here we look at the company, its position in the value chain and interaction with the outside world. You often start out where impact and influence are within the control of the organisation. Are we aware of our own impact and influences - and how do they affect the overall value chain? What are the interactions to your supply chain, your market and in your local community?
- Leadership** - Management commitment is necessary for any change and a successful implementation thereof. Clear leadership and direction must come from owners as well as day-to-day management. Communication is one of the key words for a successful change and anchoring - internally as well as externally.
 If the overall goal is to become CO₂ neutral, it is important that the individual employee can see the connection from that goal and to e.g., procedures for daily cleaning and introduction of new employees. Fortunately, communication goes both ways - so it is important that suggestions from employees are also used and communicated.

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- Planning** - In the planning phase, the focus is on the company's risks and opportunities, such as new products, markets, legislation and technologies. When we talk about sustainability in relation to the planning phase, we must be aware that there can be significant regional differences often related to technological development and infrastructure. E.g., if a biodegradable plastic packaging cannot be collected or handled at its market destination, it can, in the worst case, contribute negatively to the CO₂ account compared to a conventional packaging. Focus on water reduction and recycling may be relevant if water is a limited resource, but in some situations the energy costs of treatment may outweigh the benefits of water conservation.
- Support** – In manufacturing businesses support activities can be activities such as procurement and HR. A new supplier must deliver in both the right quality and on time, but should also ensure that the product is produced in respect of the 10 principles of UN Global Compact.

Purchasing services such as transport and cleaning are also areas that you as a responsible company should look into in terms of compliance with current legislation, as we constantly experience providers that utilize and underpay foreign labour in particular. Staff development and competencies is another example - how can we attract and develop competencies to our organisation, how do we contribute so that in the future can get the necessary competencies and that we can attract them to our company / region?
- Operation** - Here the focus can be to manufacture products at the right quality and time, to avoid unnecessary environmental impacts and provide a safe place to work for all employees.

There may be a goal around first time right and thereby minimizing rework, focus on complaints, on collection of residual and by-products for recycling, well-being and safety in everyday life and thereby minimizing work accidents and stress. And of course, root cause assessments of non-conformances so that one can prevent recurrence of the incidents and accidents.

Examples of sustainability in practice is shown in the table below.

Operational focus		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
	Context of the organization																		
	Leadership, risk and opportunities, policy																		
Planning	Maintenance – buildings, utilities, equipment				+		+	+		+		+	+	+				+	
	Product development – reuse and disposal of packaging			+					+		+	+	+		+	+		+	
Support	Procurement - Supplier selection and evaluation	+							+		+	+		+	+	+	+	+	
	HR – Introduction and talent mgt.			+	+	+												+	+
	Planning – efficient usage of material and production		+										+						+
Operation	ISO14001 Environmental Management						+	+		+			+		+	+		+	
	ISO9001/22000 Quality/Food Safety Management		+	+						+			+						+
	ISO45001 Occupational Health and Safety			+					+										+
	ISO50001 Energy Management							+		+		+	+	+					+

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- **Performance evaluation** – to ensure efficiency in all aspects of operations and other activities KPI reporting and trending is crucial. Management evaluation of these is essential and can be done following either the agenda of an ISO standard or reviewing the legislative requirements of environmental emission permits, operating licences, food authorisations or occupational health and safety review.
- **Improvement** – The world keeps changing, we continually learn from our actions and are in dialogue with our stakeholders - this gives the organisation an opportunity to initiate improvements supporting the sustainability agenda whilst also improving the efficiency of its core activities.
For companies and organisations signing up under the UN Global Compact an annual Communication on Progress is a requirement. This requirement incorporates the essentials from all the above-mentioned focus area.

The conclusion is that we must use our management systems to improve our business together with our stakeholder – not to satisfy an auditor or get a certificate on the wall.

Therefore, when implementing sustainability in our business and strategy do not reinvent the wheel but look into your existing systems and processes and see how they can be strengthened supporting the sustainability agenda.



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