

The concept of the natural step essay



Can Natural Step promote sustainability in Organisations? There are three examples where companies have used The Natural Step and the outcomes prove whether it promotes sustainability.

The examples shown are Stena Metall AB, an industrial recycling, trading and shipping company. The second example is Scandic Hotels and example three is Interface, a manufacturer of commercial floor covering.

The Natural Step is a non- profit environmental education organisation with sight of the socially and ecologically sustainable society. Karl Henrik Robert, a cancer doctor in Sweden, discovered Natural Step in 1989. He noticed an increase in childhood leukaemia cases and seen and understood an association between human illnesses and toxins. The approach for The Natural Step is to develop their framework, and put it to use in companies and other organisations.

They intend to support it, plus Work towards becoming role models in the domain of sustainable development.

Internet.

The Natural Step promotes sustainability, and to define sustainability this is when materials are used in continuous cycles, reliable sources of energy is used continuously, and qualities of being human is sustainable. Examples would be as follows: creativity, co-ordination, appreciation, and spiritual and intellectual development. Internet

The Natural Step sets out a framework to guide companies and organisations in a direction towards sustainable development and defines the framework it lays out.

The purpose of the framework is to explain in the simplest terms so that companies can understand it and integrate in their everyday work. It includes four core processes:

i. Understanding the nature of business and society that is unsustainable and the interest of inspiring towards sustainability. ii.

Understanding the principles for sustainability, i. e., the four systems Conditions. iii. Strategic visioning through back-casting from a desired sustainable future.

Back- casting is determining steps required reaching the desired state. iv. Identify the desired vision for the company and putting forward strategic steps to move the company in. Book, The Natural Step for business, Brian Nattrass & Mary Altomare.

The Natural Step framework is used to integrate environmental considerations in to businesses every day work. It assists in creating goals to move companies towards a sustainable direction.

It is important that organisations and companies move in this direction, as the human population is around six billion. Humans carelessness has caused life-supporting systems such as croplands, wetlands, the ozone layer, forestry, fisheries and groundwater to decline, and companies that close their eyes to environmental reality are likely to hit the wall.

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In today's society, visible forms of molecular garbage, waste and visible waste is producing and accumulating in the air. What happens is societal demand increases, and room to meet those demands decreases, in other words there is no where to store the resources. More people are coming in to the world, resources are required to facilitate and there are increased pressures on the capacity of the ecosphere to absorb waste. If we do not create a sustainable society eventually, our businesses will hit the wall.

The only option is the restoration of cyclical processes, where wastes become new resources for society or nature. However, if humans realise that the ecosystem has limits, and they work towards the four systems conditions, this could be avoided and chances of a sustainable future might be possible.

In knowing what the framework contains, you also need to keep in mind the four systems conditions that guide companies and organisations in the direction of a sustainable future. Dr. Karl Henrik derived them.

The Natural Step concepts and methodology shows the discipline of sustainability in the basic laws of thermodynamics. The purpose of the four systems conditions is to find a framework for discussing sustainable human activities through non-overlapping first order principles. To come up with the principles, research was on human activities, and how they could destroy or deteriorate the ecological system that we depend on. In a sustainable society, this would not happen.

The four systems conditions do not tell the company what to do, it provides the first order principles that must be met for sustainability.

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The framework where this sustainability can take place are derived through the four system conditions which are as follows:

- i. Substances from the Earth's crust must not systematically increase in nature.
- ii. Substances produced by society must not systematically increase in nature.
- iii.

The physical basis for the productivity and the diversity of nature must not be systematically diminished, and iv. We must be fair and efficient when meeting human needs. The first order principles four system conditions give companies an idea on how to move towards sustainability.

Natural Step provides a route map for any organisation wishing to get to grips with sustainable development. A new area for Natural Step is their involvement with Air BP, Scandic Hotels, Nike Europe, Co-operative Bank, DuPont, Carillion, HP Bulmer, Interface, Microsystems, Tarmac, Wessex Water, Ikea and Yorkshire Water. There are several more companies working with The Natural Step.

Companies working with The Natural Step, seminars and workshops are held to educate staff within your organisation, about the meaning of sustainability and ways to achieve this. The Natural Step workshops prove effective at achieving a shared and new awareness of the principles, which are required in attempt at a sustainable future.

For most companies, life is not as simple as it used to be. Businesses get more pressure from government and consumers, because they want them to be more environmentally and socially responsible.

They must make decisions about their future development, in relation to social, economic and environmental impacts of every choice. All businesses must deal with the environment in a way that leads to a sustainable future in not doing so may lead to them not having a future.

We need to meet human needs without diminishing the Earth's capacity to provide for the needs of future generations. Few people will disagree that sustainability is a good idea, although most find it difficult as it has complex implications. The problems of social and the environment will not be solved unless we rethink how we interact with the environment, like the for example how the following companies have put these issues into effect.

Companies such as the three discussed further down have integrated the environment in to their business reality by using The Natural Step framework. The companies recognise that the economy and the environment are linked and nature's limits help profitability while improving their chances of growing in a competitive world. The costs of resources and environmental legislation such as the Resource Management Act, require environmentally sustainable business decisions.

In addition, to The Natural Step more and more companies are upgrading their environmental Management Systems to conform to International Standards. Such as the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) in Europe or the ISO 14001 Environmental system standard. The creation is by the International Standards organisation.

Business customers are increasingly requiring that suppliers become certified according to one of the internationally recognised standards. They

need a guide and that guide could be The Natural Step. Businesses are becoming ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certified. Book The Natural Step for business.

ISO 14001 standard is implemented to achieve excellence by reducing waste, while the ISO 9001 standard is implemented to reduce waste by achieving excellence.

ISO 14001 will change the way we do business. Its main clauses are as follows: General requirements, Environmental policy, and Planning, Implementation and operation, checking and corrective action and management review. The environmental policy gives direction to reduce environment degradation. Management review is similar to the ISO 9000 system.

Benefits arising from implementation are improvements in bottom line, increased profits, operations, marketing, regulatory, compliance and social, being capable to identify opportunities for improvement, waste reduction, waste reused, recycled or eliminated. The three examples discussed, where the companies are working with The Natural Step to move in the direction of a sustainable future are Stena Metall AB, Scandic Hotels, and Interface.

Stena Metall AB is an industrial recycling, trading and shipping company. They recycle scrap metal, i. e. scrapped cars, appliances, other steel and collects, process and sells waste paper, etc. Environmental issues are part of their day to day responsibilities. Recycling and environmental service Company in Stena Metall Group are becoming certified to ISO 14001.

In 1996/1997 they were ISO 14001 certified and registered according to EMAS (European Unions Ordinance on environmental processing and environmental audits). They were also certified to ISO 9002. Their goal is for all their companies to be ISO 14001 certified. Stena Gotthard Atervinning, are one of Stena Metall's Group, they are one of the first division to implement TNS.

Natural Step motivates the companies on environmental aspects.

Competition is increasing in marketing for recycling and environmental services as organisations and businesses are effected by environmental demands. When the company were looking into environmental training, they decided upon TNS as they found the four systems conditions to be an easy training model and they could easily link them to their daily behaviour. The TNS framework was used for their environmental training internally, and applied to their business operations.

When using the four systems conditions they found they had zero waste.

Waste Management today is a vital link to a sustainable society, for waste and recycling companies to be successful, they must be environmentally responsible and safe. In Stenna Metalls annual Reports, they devote two pages to their environmental approach. In addition, in 1996/1997 gross revenues amounted to SEK 292. 8m, which was a 40% increase compared with 1995/1996.

Another company Scandic Hotels AB had losses between 1990 and 1992, CEO, Roland Nilson was brought in to improve the company. He realised that

the way forward for the hotel would be to introduce new values towards caring for their guests, workers, shareholders, the community where it was situated, and the natural environment. He realised concern for the earth, and impact of business on natural world was important to many people. He needed to educate management and employees on environmental issues and bring environment issues into practice. He researched environmental values and came to the decision that TNS had credibility in both environmental and business circles.

The CEO met with Dr.

Karl Henrik Robert and was impressed with his approach. Dr Karl Henrik Robert give a presentation to introduce TNS and they proceeded with TNS as their environmental, educational program. After their training in TNS, employees made suggestions and some were implemented after meetings on topics.

TNS is part of the way Scandic Hotels do business now and in the future. When introducing TNS they produced an environmental guide that contained a description of the Environmental Dialogue process involving visions for 2000, environmental goals, policy and their recent activities.

It also covers principles behind TNS framework and including human activities into nature's cycle and the four systems conditions.

In meetings they looked at ways in which they could make environmental improvements in Scandic Hotels, they also drew up a program to suggest ways they can reduce their impact on environment through their

environmental networker. They came up with, ideas to be carried out and implemented ideas that need further investigation, and ideas that need investment. The program has been produced, and given to employees and guests in the hotel.

More than 1500 measures through environmental dialogue have been implemented.

Scandic hotels have reduced their environmental impact by introducing a 97 percent recyclable room, where 1000 rooms produce 60 tons less plastic waste (a reduction of 70 percent), 10 tons less metal waste (50 percent reduction). Scandic saved 40 tons of soap in one year by changing to liquid soap dispensers, reduced fuel and water consumption by using more efficient washing machines and increased its market share due to positive public response to its activities. In addition, they have introduced in typical areas 25 percent light sockets filled with low energy bulbs. They have made bicycles available for guests and workers to lessen the impact on environment. Any Eco-efficiency and cost saving initiatives are resulted in higher profits for the company.

This was popular with customers, but not only, that it also contributes to a healthier environment.

In relation to 1996, annual cost for energy and water has been reduced by almost 12million SEK (US \$1. 4m) Ecological Sustainability is not a cost to the company, it helps profit margins considerably and a competitive advantage. In 1996/1998, their goal was to reduce energy and water consumption by 20% and unsorted waste by 20%. Their average in this period of energy

consumption was reduced by 12 percent per night and water consumption by 12 percent per guest per night, and waste was reduced by 28 percent.

Environmental sustainability is a competitive issue, by introducing TNS into their strategy and practices. They continue to win customer and market share from their competitors. The Natural Step is Scandic Hotel's best team building program they have ever discovered. Internet, and brochure on Natural Step.

Interface is a manufacturer of commercial floor covering, there is four manufacturing sites in the UK. They are committed to becoming sustainable and work with The Natural Step in the USA as well as in the UK, Australia, and throughout Europe.

Interface put together a learning and development programme for the company, to encourage people to take responsibilities, make suggestions and take risks with new ways of doing things. The objective of this project was to give training to staff, including those on the shop floor, to learn what sustainability means for Interface and also to contribute to the company becoming sustainable and eventually, restorative.

Interface worked with TNS to create a two day training course, a group were trained and then they went on to facilitate the course to their colleagues, and over 2, 500 people have taken a Natural Step within Interface.

Employees are ready to contribute to exciting new ideas, including onsite renewable energy generation, accounting for sustainability, and the search for new, less toxic chemicals to use in production. Reductions in waste to landfill have been achieved, an increase of use of post-consumer recycled

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materials, existing facilities have been redeveloped, reusing much of the material from the old buildings.

In addition, the latest technology has been used for energy saving.

Ray Anderson calculated that the company is responsible for 1.2 billion pounds of petroleum extracted from the crust of the earth each year. One third is used for the materials in carpet, and two thirds is the energy it takes to make carpet. Over 250 million pounds of carpet is produced each year from the United States.

With an average life of 15 years, most of this material goes to landfills. Their vision is to eventually make all carpet from recycled materials and to use renewable energy resources. If this strategy succeeds, the indicator will approach zero. Since their journey toward sustainability they have watched their sales rise.

Interface has also developed one of the world's first sustainable reports, which says one of their goals is to become the world's first sustainable enterprise.

Interface in recent years with a turnover increasing from \$802m in 1995 to \$1.135 billion in 1997.

Ray Anderson, chairman and founder of the company says that after attending training in TNS he understands the urgency of redesigning their products. Also he had realised how wonderful the world was but only now realises what a mess we have made of it. TNS has made him aware of waste

streaming not just at home but also at work, his dream is to be committed to leading the way to sustainability.

Brochure on Natural step

The Natural step organisations have been launched in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. Japan and South Africa are now in the process of establishing Natural Step organisations. The Natural Step framework is considered by Ikea, Scandic Hotels, Interface and Collins Pine to provide the best available organising structure for understanding sustainability. The Natural Step is relatively young and their impacts and results have not been evaluated or widely communicated.

Book The Natural Step, by Brian Nattrass & Mary Altomare.

A large part of destruction is mainly due to business activities or through products and services that they provide. Though in my opinion it no longer matters who is to blame, all that matters is, that responsibility is taken towards the direction of sustainability for our society. The Natural step provides the vision that guides a company toward sustainability.

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