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Guidance for managing sustainable development

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Contents

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Foreword

Publishing information

This British Standard is published by BSI. It was prepared by Technical Committee SDS/1, *Sustainable development,* who will be responsible for future revisions made both as a result of developments in the field and experience in the use of the standard. A list of organizations represented on this committee can be obtained on request to its secretary.

This British Standard takes the form of guidance and recommendations. Therefore, it should not be quoted as if it were a specification to which compliance could be claimed.

Information about this document

There have been growing calls from organizations in the UK and elsewhere for clear, practical guidance to support the cost-efficient and effective integration of sustainable development principles into business as usual, both for commercial and non-commercial private and public organizations. BSI's decision to develop and launch BS 8900 marks both a recognition of, and response to, this demand.

It is a considerable challenge to embed a systematic approach to sustainable development into an organization's practices, given the breadth and complexity of the vision it represents, and the evolving understanding of what it really means and implies for planning and daily behaviour. Standardizing an approach is doubly challenging given the diversity of contexts and possible applications.

This standard starts by identifying the possible benefits and desirable outcomes of managing sustainable development. The approach throughout is to provide a framework for embedding sustainable development management in everyday decision-making and is necessarily challenging, provoking and continually evolving.

A key element in this standard is effective and continuing stakeholder engagement, essential in pin-pointing real issues and broadening buy-in. It is recognized that building confidence in processes and sustainable outcomes is an important part of this and that some organizations may wish to use some forms of verification, although this standard does not point users in any particular direction.

A development or maturity matrix is provided as a way of assessing progress, clarifying next steps and combining the principles underpinning sustainability with practical implementation.

The standard should not be viewed in isolation as there are many helpful and relevant texts, conventions, codes and case studies available; it acts as a guide to make sense of these many and varied sources and offers an approach to sustainable development that readily fits an organization's situation and circumstances.

Presentational conventions

The provisions in this standard are presented in roman (i.e. upright) type. Its recommendations are expressed in sentences in which the principal auxiliary verb is "should".

Commentary, explanation and general informative material is presented in smaller italic type, and does not constitute a normative element.

Contractual and legal considerations

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0 Introduction

0.1 General

Society's expectations of both public and private sector organizations continues to expand and deepen. The concept of sustainable development provides a framework for responding to a significant number of these expectations. For the purpose of this standard sustainable development is taken to mean:

> *an enduring, balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress.*

A successful approach to managing sustainable development also helps ensure that an organization makes high quality decisions that promote continuing and lasting success. The long-term success of any organization will increasingly depend on the integration of economic, environmental and social performance into all aspects of operation. A coherent and comprehensive approach is needed to weigh and address the opportunities, pressures and constraints of operating in the modern world.

The guidance in this British Standard is designed to help organizations develop an approach to sustainable development that will continue to evolve and adapt to meet new and continuing challenges and demands.

0.2 Outcomes

Organizations create value and are effective in diverse ways. A broad set of sustainable development drivers may impact performance across all organizations. The application of the guidance in this British Standard could be expected to continually improve performance along a path towards sustainable development. This is illustrated in Clause **5**. Progress can be achieved through:

*   strengthening relationships – by demonstrating to stakeholders that the organization is operating in an economically, environmentally and socially responsible way that will benefit them in the short and long term;

*   enhancing internal cohesion – by deepening the level of understanding of how the organization is performing among employees and using that information to improve the organization's operations and decision-making processes;

*   developing trust and confidence – through transparency and accountability;

*   stimulating learning and innovation – by consideration of emerging opportunities through engagement of stakeholders;

*   understanding and managing the risks and opportunities – by systematically identifying, prioritizing and addressing relevant issues,

thereby enabling the organization to progress along the sustainable development path illustrated in Clause **5**.

1 Scope

This British Standard provides guidance on managing sustainable development and a framework that assists organizations to enhance performance and effectiveness. It offers a coherent approach to managing economic, environmental and social aspects of an organization's activities.

This guidance is intended to be applied by organizations of any size, sector and type. In addition it is relevant to organizations' stakeholders.

NOTE   The application of this standard will vary with an organization's progress along the sustainable development path (illustrated in Clause **5**).

The guidance does not specify performance criteria or explain the specific elements of economic, environmental and social impacts.

2 Terms and definitions

All terms are explained within the text or carry their normal dictionary meaning.

3 Principles of sustainable development

An organization's management of sustainable development should be based on a set of principles and values (see **4.1**) with which decision-making and behaviour need to be consistent. Principles should be informed by an organization's values and should also relate to commonly held ethical norms that are increasingly reflected in UN and other international agreements covering topics such as human and labour rights, environment and governance.

The principles that an organization identifies for itself would normally include inclusivity, integrity, stewardship and transparency. Table 1 contains some useful questions for establishing these principles.

Table 1   **Sample principles**

Principles	Questions
Inclusivity	• How do you identify those who could affect or be affected (stakeholders, see **4.2.1**) by your decisions and actions?
	• How do stakeholders contribute their views, and on a continuing basis?
	• How do you help stakeholders understand the reasons for the organization's decisions and the implications of its actions?
	• How can you be sure that no groups or individuals are disadvantaged or are "kept in the dark"?
	• Are there interests beyond your immediate stakeholders which should be considered?
Integrity	• How do you try to deal with others with integrity?
	• How is diversity encouraged and developed?
	• How do you ensure bribery, abuse, oppression, and corruption are avoided?
	• How do you demonstrate that your decisions and actions are unbiased, and comply with relevant rights, legal obligations and regulations?
Stewardship	• How does this action affect quality of life?
	• Will organizational decisions lead to irreversible environmental (including biodiversity) or societal change or loss? If so, have alternatives been evaluated?
	• In any activity will the use of resources and its consequent impact be considered and monitored?
	• How are sustainable development management skills developed, shared, applied and recognized?
Transparency	• How do you make certain that relevant and reliable information is available in an accessible, low-cost and comparable way?
	• How are reasonable views or requests for further information considered and responded to?
	• How are significant interests, influences or beneficiaries recorded, communicated and managed?
	• How are decision makers identified and the reasons for decisions recorded and communicated, and to whom?

When identifying relevant principles, organizations should consider if further principles to those proposed in Table 1 are applicable.

4   Putting sustainable development into practice

4.1   The organization

The primary purpose of the organization and the key factors that will significantly contribute to its long-term success should be described in a statement that can be used in any communications referring to sustainable development. Preparation and maintenance of the statement should be the sole responsibility of the organization, drawn up within the appropriate rules of governance and approved by the organization's governing body. The statement forms the foundation for the organization's sustainable development activities and helps align primary purpose with related sustainable development activities, thereby increasing transparency of governance.

Management's commitment is integral to the success of any sustainable development programme. The leadership of the organization should define and communicate the strategic vision for sustainable development. In both these processes of definition and communication, the organization should engage with relevant internal and external stakeholders, understand their issues, identify the specific drivers and predicted benefits, and develop an appreciation of the dynamics of the various issues. The vision should express the organization's desired position on sustainable development; it should be challenging yet achievable and reviewed on an appropriate basis as issues change.

The leadership of the organization should promote those values that express the types of behaviour an organization has or wants to become known for. Such values could derive from the organization's policies on ethics, governance, workplace opportunities, conflicts of interest, safety, health and environment, political activities, etc. Commonly held and well-communicated values help to bring an organization together and align everyone in working towards a common aim.

The purpose, vision and values of the organization with respect to sustainable development should be reflected in its operations at all levels. It is important to develop a culture in which sustainable development issues are fully incorporated in the organization's activities. The organization should embed sustainable development into its existing planning and management processes (e.g. for risk assessment, planning, performance management, information systems, training and development and reporting), rather than establish separate processes.

4.2 Identification of issues

4.2.1 General

The organization should identify and manage its sustainable development issues. The main mechanism should be through stakeholder engagement. A stakeholder is any individual or group which affects, or is affected by, the organization. All organizations undertake some form of stakeholder engagement, even if at a basic level, e.g. member, customer and employee dialogue, in order to improve effectiveness, manage risk, identify and realize new opportunities.

NOTE   Some stakeholders may not be able to represent themselves but their interests should be considered.

Ongoing, systematic stakeholder engagement is intrinsic to sustainable development and means for example:

- stakeholders having opportunities to express views about relevant issues and about their relationship with the organization;
- organizations accounting for their decisions and whether the stakeholder contributions were incorporated;
- commitment from all involved to learn and develop within the process.

Some stakeholders may have legal or moral entitlement to consultation.

The precise form of stakeholder identification and engagement depends on the size and complexity of the organization, and its context at a particular time.

4.2.2 Stakeholder identification

The organization should define and identify stakeholders and their representative organizations. This process should firstly identify the different stakeholders and secondly clarify their interest and relationship with the organization.

Stakeholder identification should take the following into account.

- Some stakeholders are essential to an organization for it to perform its activities, e.g. specific employees, customers/clients and suppliers of goods or services. Other stakeholders have a relationship with the organization that is more strategic in its nature, e.g. special interest groups and government agencies.

- Stakeholders are specific to the scale, nature, spatial and temporal aspects of activities. For example, the stakeholders in the organization as a whole are likely to be different but not mutually exclusive from those in a specific activity such as establishing a new plant or project within a specific geographical region.

- Those individuals who are identifying the stakeholders in the activity will differ in their view on who to include as a stakeholder. This is dependent upon aspects such as their role within the organization, their education and experience.

- The precision with which stakeholder identification is carried out will have a considerable effect upon the ability of an organization to engage and develop relationships. For example, the neighbouring properties to the plant may be identifed as being important. However, knowing who those individuals are within that group is more likely to lead to a quality relationship being developed and maintained.

- Some stakeholders may identify themselves. The organization should consider the above points in terms of the legitimacy of their claim and be transparent in that process to ensure accountability for its decisions.

4.2.3 Stakeholder engagement

The organization should engage with its stakeholders and their representatives to understand the economic, environmental and social impact of its activities, products and services and the risks involved.

When engaging with stakeholders, the organization should take the following into account.

- The method of engagement should be commensurate with the importance of the stakeholder and the issues identified to the organization.

- The aim at all times should be to develop trust between the organization and its stakeholders. Trust is developed through a combination of performance and transparency and is, therefore, a test of the integrity of the organization.

- The organization needs to take full accountability for the decisions that it makes.

- Meaningful engagement with stakeholders is not simply an isolated activity; it is a decision-making method that may involve a degree of cultural and procedural change within an organization.

- Stakeholder engagement is a continuous process. There should be a constant cycle of dialogue and feedback between the organization and its stakeholders. The organization should be in a position in which it is abreast of its risks.

- Stakeholders should be in a position, through feedback, to understand how the organization has responded to their views. Communicating sustainable development performance allows an organization to demonstrate its progress towards meeting objectives. Although common, reports on progress towards sustainable development should not be seen as the only method of communication. They should be an update on, and not the sole outcome of, the progress towards sustainable development within the organization.

4.2.4 Additional considerations

The organization should also consider significant issues that may derive from other factors arising where there may not be a stakeholder voice. Examples of these factors include technological development, major natural disasters, war and epidemics.

4.3 Capability of the organization

4.3.1 General

For the principles of sustainable development (see Table 1) to be converted into practice the organization requires appropriate resources and a range of competencies.

4.3.2 Resource allocation

The organization should allocate appropriate resources to achieve its sustainable development objectives (see **4.4.4**), as follows.

- Identify the required types and levels of resources, informed by the risk and opportunity assessment, objective setting and governance structure. Types of resources required may be financial, human or manufactured (such as information systems, metering tools or customer surveys).

- Use the organization's planning and budgeting processes to make these resources available.

- Establish responsibilities and authority so that the required responses to activities can be undertaken effectively.

4.3.3 Competence building

A competence may be seen as a fusion of knowledge, skills and attitude. Applying a sustainable development strategy may require acquisition of new knowledge and, to be effective, developing the skills to apply that knowledge practically.

The organization should identify the learning and development needs of managers and employees, particularly those with special responsibility for improving sustainable development performance, in order to equip them with the tools and capabilities they need to implement organizational objectives. Some considerations might be formal training, job shadowing or job exchanging internally or externally, attending conferences, or working in a specific project team.

The organization should invest time and money to provide appropriate resources for building appropriate levels of competence. This investment can reap rewards, both in terms of managing sustainable development and employee motivation. The cost/benefit analysis may be linked to the organization's case for sustainable development.

The organization should review its existing learning and development programmes to ensure that:

- recruitment and induction programmes clearly outline the organization's vision and objectives for sustainable development;

- sustainable development issues and their management are woven into all relevant professional and functional training;

- learning and development resources provide opportunities to adapt and develop the organization's culture and behaviour, where necessary; and

- competencies required to manage sustainable development form part of the performance appraisal system.

4.4 Management

4.4.1 General

Within organizations, sustainable development issues can be managed using a range of techniques. The approach chosen will vary according to the needs of the organization and its level of sustainable development maturity.

Some organizations already use recognized management systems, for example in the areas of accountancy, environmental management and employment. It is possible to include elements of sustainable development in these management systems. Alternatively, other approaches can be taken by selecting appropriate performance-based elements. This guidance document does not prescribe any particular approach, however the following elements can form an approach to the management of sustainable development.

4.4.2 Assessing risks and opportunities

For all organizations the issues associated with sustainable development present both opportunities for innovation and development as well as potential risks. In order to maximize opportunities and minimize risks an assessment should be undertaken which:

- identifies potential issues and impacts, both positive and negative, direct and indirect, and analyses key risks and opportunities (in terms of impact and likelihood) to establish their significance;

- prioritizes actions and allocates resources to maximize opportunities and minimize risks, to achieve the organization's sustainable development objectives.

The results of the risk assessment should be shared with relevant stakeholders and used to establish sustainable development objectives that are informed by the organization's vision and its sustainable development principles.

4.4.3 Identifying performance indicators

To achieve sustainable development objectives and measure progress in a way which enhances transparency, the organization should:

- identify those indicators that are key to meeting these objectives;

- establish the chosen indicators across relevant parts and functions of the organization;

- define effective methods of assessing performance using these indicators.

NOTE   *Reference should be made to indicators that may have already been defined by the organization itself for other purposes, or by standards or other influential organizations.*

4.4.4 Achieving progress

Organizations should establish processes to review progress against sustainable development objectives regularly. Existing management system processes may be appropriate but whichever approach is chosen, the organization should:

- assign specific responsibilities to record, manage and track actual performance against the chosen objectives and indicators;

- ensure the process is comprehensive by embedding and integrating sustainable development objectives in all areas of the organization through inclusion in job responsibilities and personal objectives;

- measure performance equitably and ensure it is subject to the same performance management criteria as any other organizational objectives.

4.5 Review

4.5.1 General

The organization should integrate sustainable development into its performance review and reporting processes as follows:

- identify opportunities for improvement from reviews and audits;

- develop appropriate recommendations to address any shortcomings; and

- ensure these are communicated to and agreed with senior management, employees and other stakeholders, and integrated into future management plans.

4.5.2 Review of strategy

The organization should keep its strategy for sustainable development under continual review and update it at appropriate intervals,[1] or following a significant organizational change. This review of strategy should assess the organization's vision for sustainable development (see **4.1**), assessing progress and prospective changes in each area and defining new strategies when required. The strategic review should include:

* relevant stakeholders' issues, and the key impacts the organization has on them;

* checking that purpose, vision and values are relevant to the organization or require revising;

* ensuring that the organizational culture is consistent and developing in line with its sustainable development vision;

* checking that roles, responsibilities and governance structure remain appropriate and effective; and

* the advancing sustainable development maturity of the organization (see Clause **5**).

4.5.3 Operational review

Sustainable development should be included in an organization's operational review and should form an integral part of the regular planning or budgeting cycle.

The organization should assess the following and where appropriate make changes:

* how well its performance is meeting relevant stakeholders' expectations;

* what are its key impacts, risks and opportunities, compared with before;

* how appropriate are its objectives and targets, policies, key performance indicators and how well it is meeting these;

* whether information gathering and use is effective and efficient and whether competencies are developing in line with needs;

* whether it has allocated the appropriate resources, training and communication to achieve its objectives;

* whether monitoring is an integral part of its internal and external performance reporting.

> NOTE   *The frequency of reporting will depend not only on regulatory requirements, but also on the significance of each indicator. Hence some reporting may be on a daily basis, whilst others may be on a monthly, quarterly, half-yearly or annual basis. Has the organization:*
>
> * *collected and evaluated evidence and information?*
>
> * *communicated and reported performance?*

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[1] Many organizations find an annual review to be appropriate.

4.5.4 Follow-up

The organization should ensure that processes and resources are in place, and that there is a will and commitment to deal with the findings of these reviews and to implement the changes required for continual improvement. The organization should agree timescales for corrective actions and follow these up.

4.6 Building confidence

Application of the principles outlined in Clause **3** could itself be seen as a significant step to building the confidence of stakeholders in an organization's management of sustainable development. Increasing levels of stakeholder confidence can also help enhance credibility and transparency of an organization's performance.

Although this standard is for guidance and does not contain performance criteria, an organization may choose or be obliged to use the principles described above to develop such criteria for itself. Furthermore, although this standard does not contain specific proposals for external verification or formal system audits, an organization may wish to undertake or provide for verification of the data and information that it communicates to stakeholders.

NOTE   *The depth and scope of verification depends on a number of factors including stakeholder expectation and the organization's progress along the sustainable development path (see Clause **5**).*

In seeking to build confidence in the management of sustainable development, two key questions should be considered. Table 2 contains some useful pointers to answer these questions.

Table 2   **Pointers for building confidence**

Questions	Pointers
Where is confidence building needed?	• Identify where there is a need to build trust and credibility
	• Determine what are the nature and levels of stakeholder expectations
	• Identify where transparency is particularly important
	• Establish what specific opportunities exist
How will confidence be provided?	• Define the scope of the sustainable development activities
	• Determine the nature of possible confidence building activities
	• Establish how confidence building could be integrated into existing processes
	• Determine what should be done internally and externally to build confidence
	• Establish how the outcome of the feedback obtained should be managed

5 Sustainable development maturity matrix

Each organization should, from time to time, determine its position along the sustainable development path. A useful tool for this purpose is the maturity matrix, which is readily constructed and maintained by the organization itself.

Typically, the matrix may comprise four or five stages along its horizontal axis and up to a dozen elements along its vertical axis. The elements chosen should be appropriate to the organization and its affairs. The stages should stretch as far forward along the path as can be realistically envisaged.

In development of the matrix, it is useful to involve a number of persons with differing roles and responsibilities, seeking consensus on the most appropriate and meaningful elements and stages. In filling the cells of the matrix, the temptation to set soft and easy targets should be resisted; the entry in each cell should, as far as possible, be of unambiguous, objective and clearly measurable achievements.

An organization should appraise its current position in respect of each element, noting any which need particular attention to restore balanced progression towards maturity. Specific objectives should be identified and action plans devised to secure both balance and broad general advance.

A periodic review should be conducted of the organization's position and of the continued relevance of the elements selected. Adjustments to the matrix may be required to reflect changing circumstances, stakeholder priorities, regulations, etc.

The position depicted by the matrix (e.g. by shading already accomplished cells) may serve as an input to the organization's reports to stakeholders.

An indication of how a matrix might be structured for a business organization is given in Figure 1. The elements and stages shown are intended for guidance and illustration only and are not exhaustive or fixed. Finer detail should be entered where this assists understanding and communication.

Other types of organization might require a different set of elements, although the stages may be similar. Organizations of the same type may choose differing elements and stages, although comparisons will be facilitated where there has been uniformity of choice.

The sustainable development maturity matrix links the principles (in Clause **3**) with the practice (in Clause **4**) and back to the drivers and desired outcomes set out in the introduction (in **0.2**).

Principles and practice		Characteristics of developing organizations			
		Minimum involvement →		Maturity →	Full engagement
Inclusivity	Stakeholder engagement and issues identification	Restricted to few	Defensive. Some dialogue with immediate stakeholders, especially shareholders	Systematic stakeholder identification. Issues emerge and are clarified. PR and competitive advantages recognized and opportunistically utilized	Strong and continuing engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Issues clear and regularly reviewed. Feedback networks established. Focus on strengthening relationships. Promotion and support of wider sustainable development
Integrity	Key drivers	Quarterly returns-driven. Profit paramount	Reactive-driven by regulatory, NGO, shareholder and/or investor pressures. Cost/return decisions	Sustainable development part of reputation/risk management. Based on longer term development	Short, long term and broader view fully integrated. Proactive planning and seeking out opportunities. Championing of sustainable development
	Leadership, vision and governance	Directive and narrowly focused	Adherence to (one or more) public codes	Leadership commitment consistent. Publish SD and SR statement, policy and objectives. Non Executives influential	Sustained leadership internally and externally. Purpose, vision and values integrated. Key role of reviews based on audit and analysis of performance
	Managing risk	Fire-fighting	Compliance by the book. Compliance effort where likelihood of enforcement. Seek "safe-harbours"	Main risks identified and managed. Performance indicators, but sustainable development separate	Sustainable development policies fully integrated. Spirit not letter. Prevention rather than cure
Stewardship	Sustainable development culture	Minimalist: doing as little as can "get away with"	Tick-box approach, seeing PR only; if little cost/impact. Meeting regulatory baseline requirements only	Seeing link between sustainable development and business advantage but PR/marketing focus. Developing education programme	Culture of sustainable development embedded at all levels. Values-led and ethical approach. Sustainable development part of all relevant planning and decision making. Wide understanding and buy-in. Sharing know-how outside organization
	Building capability	Closed shop. Minimum standards or below	Statutory rights only	Building rights, responsibility frameworks and competencies. Stimulating innovation, learning and people-empowering	Continual reappraisal and learning. Recognizes and rewards sustainable actions. Encourages and values diversity. Internal cohesion and common direction
	Key management issues, e.g. supply chain	Lowest price suppliers. Latest possible payment	Supplier rating scheme based on technical compliance, cost and delivery time	Broadened criteria of selection, to include SD, SR and environmental factors	Community of interest fully recognized. Assistance given to lower tiers where necessary
	Environmental assessment	Minimal awareness. Defensive posture	Standards not embraced. Ad hoc solutions	Education and training. Apply environmental policies and external standards	Environmental impact/risk assessments/audit comprehensive, integrated in decision making and valued. Prevention rather than cure
Transparancy	Review	Not valued	Minimal systems in place. Conventional reporting	Analysis of needs. Integrated system design and planned dissemination	Periodic review and adjustment. All necessary recipients served
	Reporting and building confidence	Little or none unless pressed	Minimal or as required	Selective to determined ends	Legitimate stakeholders (internal and external) receiving regular and appropriate reporting. Building understanding in the stakeholder community, seeking to explain decisions and implications, and wider long-term education beyond. Building trust and confidence

Figure 1 — Example of a sustainable development maturity matrix

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