

Dō



Phil Cumming

# Management Systems for Sustainability

How to Connect Strategy and Action

DōShorts

# Management Systems for Sustainability

Phil Cumming

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First published in 2013 by Dō Sustainability  
87 Lonsdale Road, Oxford OX2 7ET, UK

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ISBN 978-1-909293-82-3 (eBook-ePub)

ISBN 978-1-909293-83-0 (eBook-PDF)

ISBN 978-1-909293-81-6 (Paperback)

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

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Page design and typesetting by Alison Rayner

Cover by Becky Chilcott

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# Abstract

**ALL BUSINESSES SMALL OR LARGE** will have some form of a management system even if they do not think of it in these terms. It is not necessarily something you see – it is part of the very fabric of a business and what makes it tick. Adopting a management systems approach to tap into and supplement these existing management and governance arrangements can play a crucial part in helping to implement more sustainable ways of working. It will help you in being more formalised and systematic in how and when you do things. It will help people understand what sustainability means and more importantly how it applies to their organisation or role. It will strengthen the link between strategy and action and provide the framework for various things to happen. This DōShort is intended to introduce you to management systems thinking and concepts and sets out clear and practical steps and guidance you can follow to put you in a good position to plan and deliver on your sustainability ambitions – without needing to follow a single management system standard!

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## About the Author



**PHIL CUMMING** is an accomplished corporate sustainability manager and consultant with over 15 years' multi-sector experience, which includes developing and managing the delivery of the award-winning sustainability strategy for the London 2012 Games from the ground up; from inception through to its dissolution culminating in the associated learning legacy programme (the first time that a major UK project has attempted to capture intellectual capital on this scale). Prior to London 2012, Phil spent nearly 10 years working in the environmental consultancy sector. After a brief spell at Schumacher College in 2001, he developed a keen interest in finding more sustainable business solutions. A Chartered Environmentalist, a Chartered Waste Manager and an IEMA Registered Environmental Auditor, as a consultant he provided the complete delivery of a range of projects within the sustainability field including due diligence, compliance appraisals, integrated management systems, auditing, waste and resource management and sustainability appraisals, across a diverse number of industrial sectors (such as government, defence, construction, chemical, ICT, food and beverage, transportation and manufacturing) for major private and public sector organisations in the UK and overseas. He was Head of the UK Delegation for the international committee responsible for developing ISO 20121 (the world's first international and certifiable sustainability management system standard) and a member of the GRI Working Group responsible

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for developing an Event Organisers Sector Supplement to the GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines. More recently he was Co-Convenor of the ISO Working Group responsible for drafting competence requirements for auditing and certification of event sustainability management. Since February 2013, Phil has been helping a number of organisations develop and deliver their sustainability policies and strategies whilst looking for his next challenge. He is currently a key member of Kingfisher plc's Net Positive team.

Phil is an outdoor enthusiast and as an experienced hill walker and kayaker tries to get out into the mountains or onto the sea with his (very patient) wife as much as possible.

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# Acknowledgments

**I WOULD LIKE TO THANK** everyone who has contributed to this DōShort in so many different ways. As with everything I've written previously, all has been done in what little spare time I have had – in particular the patience of my perhaps far too accepting wife, Jacqui, over the last few months is very much appreciated.

I have encountered many individuals working in the sustainability field who only think about management systems in the context of standards. For some time now I have thought that it would be great to write something on how a management systems approach can help with delivering a sustainability strategy – but from a non-standards view point. Whilst I am absolutely a supporter of standards, I believe they (and the language they use) often get in the way and confuse things. As 2013 has been a big year of change for me, I thought it was as good a time as any to put pen to paper! With this in mind I would firstly like to thank Manda Kiely (BSI), Rhiannon Lewis (Kingston University), Becky Toal (Crowberry Consulting), Julie Duffus (Rio 2016), Claire Buckley (Julie's Bicycle), and Chris Sheldon (Sustainable Events Group) who all commented on the concept for this Short and provided some really helpful encouragement and guidance on how to approach pulling it together.

I would also like to thank the following reviewers and contributors (in no particular order) for providing their much valued thoughts and contributions without which this Short's value would be greatly reduced: Manda Kiely and John Devaney (BSI), Andrew Kinsey (Mace Group),

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### Acknowledgments

Catherine Harland, Christina Allen and Becky Coffin (Kingfisher plc), Meegan Jones (GreenShoots Pacific), Beckie Herbert (bdh:sustain), Hayley Baines-Buffery (BioRegional Development Group), Amanda Curtis (Coca-Cola), Andrew Buchanan (Carillion), Eimear Keller (Edelman), Alan Williams and Peter Harris (UPS), Claire Buckley (Julie's Bicycle), Becky Toal (Crowberry Consulting) and Adrian Henriques. I have tried to take on board as many of their comments and contributions as possible. And of course a big thanks to Kingfisher plc and UPS generally for providing supplemental case study material.

I hope I have acknowledged everyone who needed thanking by name but if I've forgotten anyone it's not intentional. Finally, thanks for reading! I hope you find this Short beneficial. Whilst I believe there is no right or wrong answer to how sustainability management should be approached I hope it helps you adopt more sustainable ways of working.

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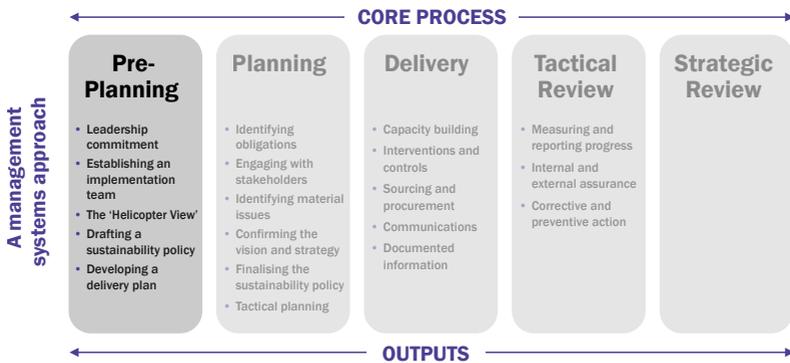
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## CHAPTER 2

# The 'Brilliant Basics'

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### Orientation: Where you are in the process



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**OFTEN OVERLOOKED**, there are a number of steps which if implemented well can provide your management system with solid foundations for delivering your sustainability vision and strategy. These steps are known as the 'Brilliant Basics'.

## Leadership commitment

It may sound obvious but a solid and genuine commitment from the top is a crucial step towards integrating sustainability into the organisation. This can make or break its potential to become core business.

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You should make sure that you have secured the necessary commitment from your top management. You should not assume that this is the case before plunging straight into the planning and delivery phase. Just because you have some sustainability initiatives already in place or possibly even developed a sustainability vision and strategy, does not mean that your organisation's leadership has entirely bought in. Investing time here will save time later on.

When seeking commitment from the top you need to consider how your business is structured. For example, how does a group holding company interact with its operating companies? Is it a command and control approach or is it relatively decentralised? Any commitment needs to be strong enough and at a high enough level to resolve any issues that may arise down the line in the planning and delivery phases. Ideally there should also be a nominated sponsor or champion at board or senior management level – in a smaller organisation this may well be the Managing Director.

This DōShort makes the assumption that your top management is already sold (to an extent anyway) on the business case for sustainability and has some idea of what it wants to achieve that is articulated in the form of a vision and/or a strategy. If this is not the case then an earlier DōShort, *Strategic Sustainability – Why it Matters to Your Business and How to Make It Happen*,<sup>12</sup> outlines why businesses should take action on sustainability. Having said this, at this stage it may only be necessary to prepare an outline business case, vision and strategy. As you progress your understanding you will be able to develop more detailed ones.

## Establishing an implementation team

It is not all about top management – involving individuals at all levels of the organisation helps to identify opportunities to drive the management system forward. Leadership can present itself at all levels of your organisation to help build a business-wide approach to sustainability. For example, there could be a key member of staff who may not be all that senior but has been in the organisation for years, is well respected and someone that others listen to – their buy-in is therefore crucial. Spending time understanding and talking to key players in different areas of the business, including who the 'movers and shakers' are and how they work, will pay dividends down the line. 'Bolt-on' initiatives tend to come and go and only those that truly align to core business values and objectives and the culture of the organisation have the ability to last.

For everyone to be bought into sustainability, and for it to become an inherent part of his or her job, is the 'Holy Grail'. Even the best performing companies are unlikely to have reached this level of maturity. The reality is that you will need to establish a 'crack' or core team to drive the process forward and help keep your goals firmly in sight. You could create a separate sustainability department, establish it as a team within a larger department, or simply have an enthusiastic individual supported by representatives from other parts of the business. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to this and will completely depend on how your organisation is set up and organised. Equally this need not necessarily be a large team. A recent survey carried out by ENDS found that almost three-quarters of companies responding had fewer than five full-time equivalent staff in their sustainability teams.<sup>13</sup> Whichever model is chosen for your core team, make sure it has the necessary mandate

or 'licence to operate' from top management to avoid it being seen as a side project. You will need good and regular access to your board or senior management sponsor.

At this early stage, begin to outline the roles and responsibilities of those involved in implementing elements of the system, particularly those in top management and the core team. It is also a good idea to consider the resources required to take things forward. For example, what tasks can be done in-house versus those that may require a degree of external resource?

### **The 'Helicopter View'**

Before plunging straight into the detailed design and planning stage it is advisable to take a step back and look at the business from a holistic view and determine its current sustainability performance – essentially this is a high level 'stock-take'.

Try to involve as many people as possible at this stage. Don't fall into the trap of starting with a solution and looking for ways to make it fit. Your mission should be to identify ways to tap into existing company culture, utilise existing processes and structures and amend policies to make sustainability an everyday part of doing business. Undertaking a thorough review of your existing management practices and sustainability performance will help you move towards this.

Think about how your business works and how it interacts with your stakeholders and value chain including areas that are within and outside your direct control or influence. In many respects, as a long-term goal sustainability is about companies accepting their share of responsibility

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for issues outside their direct control and influence and working with others on common goals. Review your existing or emerging sustainability vision and strategy to identify what commitments you have made or are looking to make. If you are aware of any legal or other requirements of relevance to sustainability make sure these are captured. You may even be aware of your stakeholder views in respect to sustainability matters – capture these as well.

Try and identify programmes or initiatives that are already in place – include all informal or 'ad-hoc' things that are done and those that were introduced but have not hung around. Identify those that are fully aligned with your business strategy and those that are perhaps less so. Many organisations are surprised at how much is already in place although it may not always be seen as contributing to the 'sustainability agenda' (business improvement or efficiency initiatives, for instance). This may also provide you with a great opportunity to educate those internal stakeholders who may not yet fully understand what sustainability is or be completely bought in to what you are attempting to do. It is often helpful to simplify sustainability messages and talk in a language people can relate to and understand.

Identifying the activities that you can and can't control and influence may well require collaboration with other parties. These may not always be very apparent so consider leveraging knowledge and expertise from key staff through one-to-one engagement and workshops. This exercise will help you in setting the boundaries (or scope) of your eventual management system and identifying the major business practice 'interventions' that need to be made.

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The key questions to ask during this stage include:

- What are the key business processes and management practices that exist and who owns them?
- What are your organisational values and guiding principles (see below)?
- What are your existing decision-making processes?
- What are the success or failure factors for past initiatives that have been introduced?
- What governance structures and associated processes are in place such as how risks, issues and opportunities are identified and managed?
- How does your performance compare with what your peers are doing? (It is also useful to look at what is going on outside of your sector.)

### Organisational values and guiding principles

Most businesses will have a clear purpose, which is understood and shared by their employees, customers and other stakeholders. This purpose should ideally be expressed in the organisation's vision and values and sit at the very heart of the organisation.

A key consideration for your vision and strategy is to adopt a set of guiding principles. These may be informed by your organisation's values if you have them or you could identify your organisation's values from any guiding principles you adopt.

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In any event, sustainable development guiding principles help to apply your sustainability strategy in practice by providing reference points for the way in which your organisation should operate and how your employees should be expected to behave.<sup>14</sup>

Commonly held guiding principles of relevance to sustainable development include: inclusivity, integrity, accountability, stewardship, and transparency – there may well be others that you identify though. The following table provides some useful questions to help you reflect on the extent to which your organisation is aligned with these guiding principles:

<b>Guiding principles</b>	<b>Example questions</b>
Inclusivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do you identify those who could affect or be affected by your decisions and actions?</li><li>• How do stakeholders contribute their views, and is this on a continuing basis?</li><li>• How do you help stakeholders understand the reasons for the organisation's decisions and implications of its actions?</li><li>• How can you be sure no groups or individuals are disadvantaged or are 'kept in the dark'?</li><li>• How is diversity encouraged and developed?</li></ul>

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Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In what ways do you deal with others with integrity?</li><li>• How do you ensure bribery, abuse, oppression and corruption are avoided?</li><li>• How do you demonstrate that your decisions and actions are unbiased?</li><li>• How do you take into account ethical considerations in your decision-making process?</li></ul>
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In what ways do you hold yourself account for your actions?</li><li>• How and to what extent do you account to your stakeholders?</li><li>• How do you demonstrate that your decisions and actions comply with relevant rights, legal obligations and regulations?</li></ul>
Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do your actions affect quality of life?</li><li>• Will decisions lead to irreversible environmental or societal change or loss? If so, have alternatives been evaluated? To what extent do you adopt the precautionary principle in decision-making?</li><li>• In any activity, will the use of resources and its consequent impact be considered and monitored?</li><li>• How are sustainable development management skills developed, shared, applied and recognised?</li></ul>

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 can new technologies be used effectively to increase transparency?
- How are decision-makers identified and the reasons for decisions recorded and communicated and to whom?

**SOURCE:** Modified from BS 8900-1:2013.

You should develop a simple way of capturing the outputs of this initial 'Helicopter View' exercise and the key opportunities and gaps that have been identified.

Undertaking a thorough 'stock-take' will provide a solid foundation for your management system and should save you time later on. This stock-take is also something that is advisable to do on a periodic basis and will help you in your strategic review (more on that later).

## Drafting a sustainability policy

At this point it is suggested that a sustainability policy is drafted to help

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provide focus for developing your management system. It does not necessarily have to be seen by anyone outside your business – although it might be sensible to share it with some of your key stakeholders.

During the previous step you should have identified what policies already exist (e.g. environment, health and safety, diversity, etc.) and what commitments you have made or are looking to make. The Sustainability Policy is an overarching policy but does not necessarily replace other existing policies. You should ensure that there are no potential conflicts and consider whether current commitments in other policies still hold true.

During the previous exercise you should have begun to think about, or reaffirm, what the sustainability commitments mean to your organisation. This is because they will be a focus for your management system going forward and will need to be upheld through clear actions. When you eventually come to finalise your policy it will need to be endorsed by your top management (see next chapter).

# Notes

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