

## A Sustainability Management System that meets all Standards December 09, 2020 - Webinar Summary

### WHAT:

In the light of growing expectations from customers, regulators and investors, companies are trying to reduce their exposure to environmental and social risk and at the same time want to make use of business opportunities that arise from a stronger focus on the environment and sustainability.

Senior business experts were invited to discuss the most relevant elements for modern sustainability management, based on a study that the World Environment Center and the Institute of Sustainability conducted in 2019 with companies from Chile, Germany, Mexico, and the US, funded by the German Ministry for Environment.

The webinar shared practical learnings and insights from four companies. It served as the second event of the World Environment Center's (WEC) new initiative to support less exposed brands, often those in B-2-B customer relationships or in less regulated markets. WEC's Next-Tier-program is designed to gather managers of these companies to exchange their practices with each other and also connect them with WEC's group of leading global companies.

#### PARTICIPANTS:

14 sustainability managers from seven industries and nine countries participated in the event. They represented the following companies: BMCE Bank of Africa, DUnavNET, Equinox Gold, Essilor, FIS, Grupo AIE, Jacobs, Natra, Transformco, Viacable, Carl ZEISS.

#### SPEAKERS:

**akzente:** Thomas Loew

**BMCE Bank of Africa:** Dr. Amal Benaissa

**Equinox Gold:** Dr. Silvana Costa

**Grupo AIE:** Paola Correa Manterola

**Carl ZEISS:** Dr. Roya Akhavan

### KEY INSIGHTS AND MAJOR POINTS OF DISCUSSION:

1. **Three quarters of the participating companies** stated that they don't have a Sustainability Management System (SMS) in place, although many of them are in the process of implementing it. One quarter already has a SMS.
2. **Participating companies approach sustainability management from different angles.** Understanding that all of those are suitable helps individual companies to choose its best and most practical way. The following approaches have been discussed: **(a)** extending structures for Corporate Responsibility beyond good citizenship and compliance towards Sustainability as a Value Driver. All business divisions will then consider sustainability. **(b)** selecting a global focal point such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aligning processes and product development to support these goals, thereby creating drivers for a sustainability management system, and **(c)** experimenting with individual projects that serve to reduce waste, CO2-emissions or raise labor standards. With each additional project the coordination requirements rise, making a Sustainability Management System valuable.
3. **Changing traditional mindsets was commonly referred to as the greatest barrier** to implement sustainability management. However, once materiality assessments are made and once top management realizes the benefits of driving an own sustainability agenda rather than being pushed by stakeholders, new opportunities can thrive.
4. **Implementing a Sustainability Management System that meets all standards** of diverse stakeholders such as international customers, investors, and governments is a challenge as there is no generally accepted framework. At the same time the management system should be adapted to a company's size and its goal to help improve its processes. WEC and Institute for Sustainability (now akzente) produced a [scientific study](#) and [practical guide](#) that identified the 20 most important elements and provides practical recommendation. While all major frameworks were evaluated 80+ companies from Chile, Germany, Mexico provided input through surveys and discussions.
5. **The key elements for a successful Sustainability Management** are **(a)** Leadership and commitment from the top management with defined clear responsibilities both for the Executive Board and the senior management, **(b)** a Code of Conduct and Policy along with a Sustainability program and systems to ensure compliance & monitor sustainability indicators, and **(c)** integration of sustainability requirements into the business. For companies that are starting their sustainability journey a sustainability report is also very important as it helps to make data and processes transparent. Both certification and internal or external Sustainability Councils are considered least important among the 20 key elements identified.