

/trends & hypes

Environmental management

>>just saying you are environmentally friendly doesn't work

The environment is at the centre of attention. Companies see business opportunities in this green trend. But serious environmental management is more than just adding a green sticker. It means taking a critical look at all activities and their effects.

The environment is hot, literally and metaphorically. Climate change as a result of human intervention appears to be fact. The words 'green', 'eco', 'sustainability' and 'environment' are all over the media and more and more companies are latching onto the fact. They all want to finish as high as possible in the rankings of green companies. But it is not always clear to what extent these fine words also translate into truly greener production and actions. Take the phenomenon of 'greenwashing', where things are presented more positively than they really are. Does a 140 cm TV deserve a green sticker just because it has an 'energy-efficient' LED backlight? Is electricity generated by burning waste green energy?

Structural

Doing business in a truly environmentally conscious way means more than having a green sticker. It requires structural attention for the environment in all branches of operational management. It means looking at what you can improve in your company, your product and your sector: from switching off the lights and copying

on two sides to a responsible choice of materials in product design. More and more companies are setting standards for their environmental policy, such as ISO14000. By also asking customers and suppliers to work in accordance with this standard, you are setting a good example.

Balance

In designing a system, certain environmental issues must be included as a matter of course. For example, what is the best battery for a given problem? Effectively, you are looking for a balance between lifespan, ease of maintenance, waste, energy consumption, cost, etc. Environmental management makes that way of working explicitly visible; you are also including the consequences and costs to the environment in your design choices. That calls for chain thinking; an awareness of all consequences, intended and unintended. For example, a decision at the design stage can lead to more waste for the producer. By involving the manufacturer in the design early on, the product can



be optimally adapted to the manufacturing processes.

Healthy profit

Environmental management is part of a larger whole; Corporate Social Responsibility. The aim is healthy profits which do not come at the expense of people and the environment. Green manufacturing does not have to be expensive, indeed it often yields extra money. A small investment can lead to big savings. This benefits the environment and the company. Moreover, environmental management contributes to innovation. You need to think creatively and provide new solutions. That is not an impediment but an opportunity to set yourself apart. To come up with a new product, or a new application for an existing product.

Electric car

A technical example of this is the electric car. Good measurement and control technology is essential to make optimum use of an electric car. That starts in the development phase. How do you use batteries in a smart way? You need the algorithms that will keep getting the best out of the battery in practice. That way you get more kilometres from one battery charge, with the bonus of energy savings and lower emissions of harmful substances. And because the use of the battery is optimised, it lasts longer.

Influencing driving behaviour

Human behaviour is not always good for the environment but technology can give us a helping hand. Measurement and control technology can positively influence the behaviour of drivers. The 'Belonitor' is a device which gives drivers feedback about their driving style and rewards them for good behaviour. It encourages a calm driving style, which reduces fuel consumption and CO2 emissions and is safer too. Car manufacturers could integrate something like it into their cars in the future.

In Rotterdam, the parking management system directs cars to the nearest free parking space. It has indeed cut the number of car kilometres driven in the city. Besides the obvious savings, that also means a more pleasant city with fewer cars driving around.

Fair rules

Some innovations seem so obvious that you wonder why nobody takes them up. For example, a heat exchanger to cool data centres and recover energy from the heat. Perhaps subsidies would help. Currently, the government mainly leaves innovation to the market, apart from a covenant here and there. Europe has issued a few important guidelines for electronic waste (WEEE) and banning dangerous substances (RoHS and REACH). And 'Netherlands BV' has its own roadmap for sustainable purchasing. But the government is still doing little to regulate or stimulate environmental management between companies. There could be a role for it here. We live in a competitive world and ultimately it is a problem of rules. Without fair rules, the manufacturer who goes cheap survives while another goes under. Because ultimately the merchant wins out over the preacher. No company is going to throw in the towel on grounds of principle. And you do not help society by just giving up either.

A good example

Whether in relationships between people or between companies, it is difficult to change others. A company only has a limited influence on its environment. It can only control how it responds to it. Thus a company can set a good example and expect others to follow it, for example by pointing out the consequences of a particular choice to a customer. But ultimately the customer will decide for himself and so it remains his responsibility.

Sense of reality

A responsible approach to the environment calls for a sense of reality. Take measures which are relevant. Taking steps that seem small can get you a long way when you add them all up. For example, a more efficient battery or better mobility management to reduce the number of unnecessary kilometres travelled. There is a clear trend towards using natural resources more consciously. If we all continue to take small steps, we will get a long way together.

