

Creating, fostering and communicating sustainability: the virtuous relationship between your projects' benefits and the Sustainable Development Goals¹

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Abstract

Creating, fostering and communicating sustainability: the virtuous relationship between your projects' benefits and the Sustainable Development Goals⁽¹⁾. In this article, the author explores five impactful steps to:

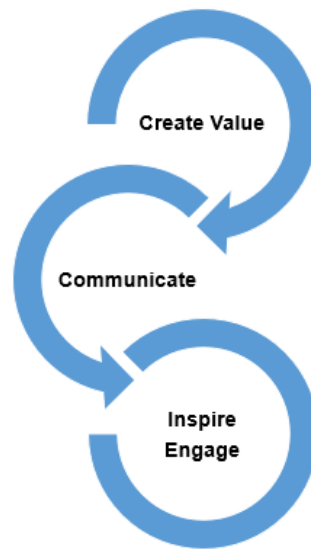
- a) visually connect the projects' benefits with the Sustainable Development Goals set by United Nations.
- b) communicate the positive value created and the contribution to improving the world we live in to internal and external stakeholders.

Introduction

Are you looking for a creative idea to give visibility to and engage your external and internal stakeholders on the way your projects' benefits improve the world we live in?

Visibility is usually very linked to communication and awareness; a visual way to communicate is to show to what extent your projects' benefits and deliverables contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by United Nations (UN).

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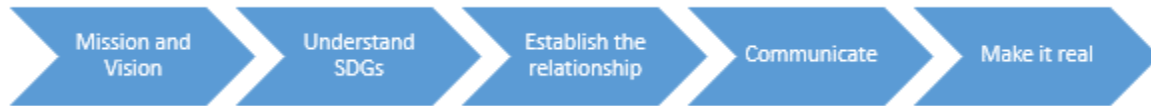
There are seventeen SDGs and each of them is connected with thousands of projects around the world: from the construction of wells in remote areas, infrastructure, digital transformation to develop smart cities, renewable energies that change the energy mix towards a greener sustainable one, quality education for all, etc.; these projects are part of the solution for a better world as they are the necessary link to transform the SDGs into concrete, measurable results that really add value to citizens, communities and the environment.

Public-private collaboration is a key element of the United Nations strategy; in this sense, in recent years, many companies have been explicitly linking and connecting the lines of their strategic plans and their projects' benefits with the SDGs in order to (among others):

- Give visibility to their stakeholders and society of their commitment to sustainability as socially responsible companies.
- Inspire their employees and attract new talent at the same time, showing the relationship between day-to-day activities and the SDGs; working in companies and projects that aim to improve the world as part of their activity is important for many people (including myself), gives meaning to their work and reinforces their involvement with the organization.
- Be included in indices of sustainable companies (such as Dow Jones Sustainability Index⁽²⁾, for example), increasing their visibility and opening up new financing (accessing international funds that only invest in companies classified as sustainable) and commercial possibilities (being able to participate in international tenders where sustainability is a core value in the specifications).

How can we successfully connect projects' benefits with the SDGs and communicate them effectively?

Let's follow these five steps:



1. Mission, Vision and Projects' benefits, the perfect start to transform ideas into real outcomes.

Seneca is credited to have said “There is no favorable wind for the sailor who doesn't know where to go” and I find it very true; having a clear purpose and a defined goal help to prioritize and establish management plans and projects focused on achieving the mission.

Every idea or strategy is implemented through a project and it is essential that the projects selected are consistent with the organization's mission and its associated management plans.

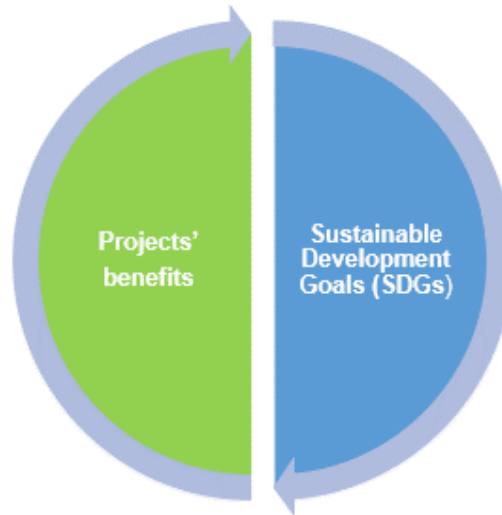
We must not forget that, whatever the type of project, they all have something in common: projects are the enablers to transform ideas into something real that can provide with positive value to citizens and their communities; and this is actually one of the reasons why I am passionate about them. ⁽³⁾

2. Be aware of the SDGs and their main lines of action.

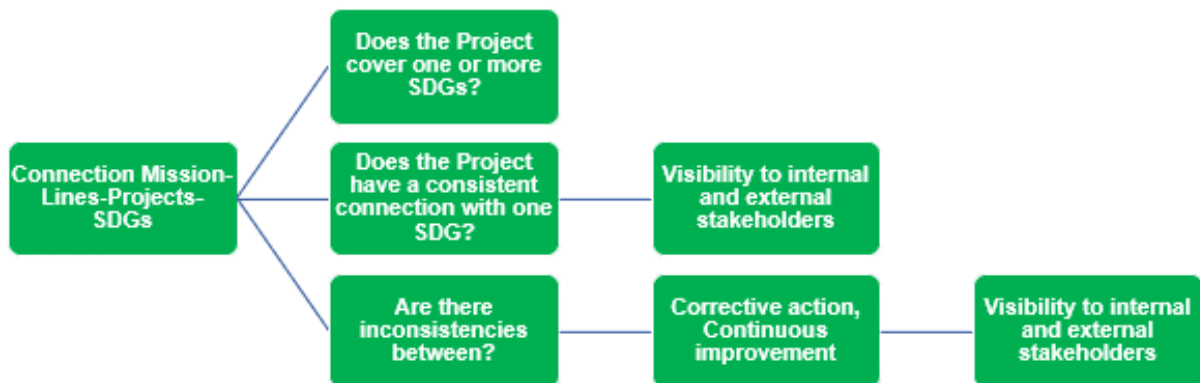
Knowing the SDGs and being aware of their lines of action will help you to identify the type of projects covered by each SDG, and therefore, to have the necessary information to analyze the way your mission and your portfolio of projects relate to them.

3. Establish the relationship between your projects' benefits and the SDGs.

Once you develop projects that are consistent with your company's mission and you are aware of the SDGs' lines of action, it is time to connect them: associate each project benefit with one or more SDGs:



This connection will bring valuable information and will allow you to establish a visual scorecard, as well as specific actions based on the results; let's see how:



1. You can get a visual understanding of the number and type of SDGs to which your projects are linked. The first step for a good planning and implementation is to be aware of the starting point.
2. If the connection between mission, project lines and SDGs is consistent, it is a good performance indicator and can also be used as a “go-ahead” to give visibility to both:
 - a. external stakeholders (customers, suppliers, public administrations, financial institutions and society in general).
 - b. internal stakeholders (employees, board of directors) of how each of the company's lines of activity, current and future projects are related to its mission and, all of this together, to the UN SDGs.

3. However, this exercise may lead you to discover potential gaps or inconsistencies between your mission, the benefits of selected projects and the SDGs you intend to address.

Imagine, for example, that one of the goals for the year is to improve energy efficiency (SDG-7) but you have not selected any specific project to address it; in this case, you will have detected a deviation and you will have to establish corrective actions within the continuous improvement cycle to either modify the goal for the year or maintain it by selecting a specific project focused on improving energy efficiency.

It is appropriate that mission, action lines, projects and SDGs are consistent to create positive value added and be efficient at the same time.

Once you have corrected the inconsistency, you are ready to move on to the next phase: communication and visibility.

4. Communicate and make your projects' benefits visible.

A proper effective communication will allow you to make visible the relationship between your projects' benefits and the SDG; it can be used, among other things, as a marketing tool for external stakeholders or society, as an input to incorporate lines of action in the strategic plan or to foster motivation and a sense of belonging among employees.



There are several examples of different ways to communicate the relationship:

- a. Placing the SDG logo on project communication templates.
- b. Making a referral to SDGs when talking about the benefits created by the project.
- c. Incorporate it in progress reports, not only including project kpis but also showing the progress of its contribution to SDGs.
- d. Include a chapter in the annual company report.

5. Make it real: Strong and efficient implementation is key to sustainability.

Deliver what you communicate and implement your project with efficient execution so that ideas are materialized within approved budgets and optimizing all available resources.

Being sustainable is not a short-term challenge; it is about maintaining a continuous and solid progress over time, giving confidence to the market and society that the projects' benefits will become a reality according to the approved framework.

Without efficient implementation, many projects, and thus many of the good ideas that might have been positive for the world, would remain locked, failing to deliver their full potential value to citizens and their communities.

Create value and communicate in parallel; inspire, engage and uplift the world with your project, who knows if that will be also the seed for new sustainable actions.

And remember, people are at the heart of projects. People who develop their full potential and creativity, who learn, overcome challenges and feel valued. If each person involved in the project improved, it could also serve as a catalyst to spread its effect to other people and thus, continue to improve the world we live in. As it is usually said, "improving the world, one person at a time".

References

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About the Author



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Human leadership, Global Sustainable Projects, Renewable energy, Story-teller, Keynote speaker, Lifetime learner, Risk management, Standardization

Manuel Ancizu is passionate about human leadership, sustainable projects and people's motivations. Enjoys working in international multicultural environments and wants to have a positive impact in society.

Manuel graduated in Economics from University of Navarra and obtained an MBA from IESE Business School (Spain); he has also studied in CEIBS (China) and University Anahuac del Sur (Mexico). He holds a number of professional certificates such as the PMP by Project Management Institute, Lead Auditor in ISO 9001:2015 by IRCA Association and has also received training in Management of Development Projects and Risk Management by Interamerican Development Bank (IDB).

Manuel has lived in Spain, France, UK and Mexico; he currently works in the wind energy sector leading the quality management of Offshore projects. Manuel has been involved in wind energy renewable projects developed in different parts of the globe with external customers, as well as in internal projects of cultural transformation, IT and global processes.

Thanks to his experience, he has delivered training sessions, lectures and keynotes to a different number of institutions.

Manuel is a qualified member of the Spanish Standardization Body (UNE) and has been involved in the development of Standards and Norms in Projects, Programs and Portfolios; he has also participated in the translation of different ISO 21500 to Spanish language.

Manuel loves smiling, storytelling, dreaming and making ideas come true in a sustainable manner.

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