

Levels of Stakeholder Dialogue

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The contribution covers the following topic from the proposed lists:

Interfaces – instruments for the interaction of corporations and civil society (stakeholders)

The authors' experiences show that the success of dialogues initiated by corporations aiming to integrate stakeholders varies from case to case. From this case-based evidence a model for different levels of stakeholder dialogue is elaborated.

Recently, the German Council for Sustainable Development stated that the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility is not firmly established in corporations. An assessment of societal institutions' capacity for sustainability was undertaken by I.F.O.K. The picture that emerged in assessing corporations is highly differentiated: 'Influence' of corporations was rated very high, while 'integrity' and 'capacity for dialogue' was rated extremely low. Further studies show that the reasons for the low results in 'capacity for dialogue' are manifold: Current dialogues are often limited to a one-off event itself. Little input is given for topical preparation and documentation. Often, even obvious constituent parts like the minutes after a meeting are missing. Also, stakeholders are not always familiar with the corporations' specific needs and systems. At the same time, stakeholders are not accountable for many of their suggestions to corporations. Finally, incentives for the integration of stakeholders in decision making processes are only in few cases part of corporate governance structures.

Different strategies by corporations to integrate stakeholder dialogues are examined and a typology is developed. As a consequence an holistic approach is mapped out. The approach integrates cross-sectoral points of view and stresses the process and learning character. The requirements to use stakeholder dialogues as an instrument that stretches beyond public awareness building are elaborated. Reaching to touch the key-activities and values of the corporation, stakeholder dialogues are the foundation for organisational transformation. In this way, the instrument also implies a mechanism for effective self-control. Finally, benefits and limits of interaction with civil society are formulated.

Curriculum Vitae

Alexander Nick studied at the Technical University of Darmstadt and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Génie Industriel in Grenoble, graduating as an industrial engineer. His specialist areas encompass ethics and management. For six years Mr Nick worked with the international student organization AIESEC, as Chairman of the Board in Darmstadt and nationwide, as a member of the national trainer team.

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Since 2002, he has been a project manager at the Institute for Organisational Communication (IFOK). Mr Nick is responsible for projects generating and promoting Corporate Social Responsibility, sustainable communication and stakeholder dialogues. His clients come from a broad range of economic, political and civil society backgrounds.

Among other things, he is the co-author of "Sustainability and Society" for the German Council for Sustainable Development. Mr Nick is a member of the German "think tank 30" of the Club of Rome, as well as of the international social entrepreneurship network "Pioneers of Change".

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