

Finding Common Ground: How collaboration can bring profound and positive change

Keynote Address

Thursday, October 21, 2010 – 1:15pm – 2:00 pm

Speaker

>> **Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt**, Founder, The Natural Step

Key Messages

>> To address our sustainability challenge, global society must have a shared “raison d’être”. We are in a funnel where the walls continue to constrain. A paradigm shift from reductionism to systems thinking and collaboration across sectors and expertise is crucial. Now is the time to take the lead—as an individual, organization, or community—and advance from “band-aid fixes” to innovative system solutions.

Worth Repeating

>> “In a sustainable society, we are not systematically increasing the concentration of materials from the Earth’s crust, synthetic man-made products and the degradation of nature and ecosystem services. And, in a sustainable society, we do not undermine people’s ability to meet their human needs,” - Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt

Summary

Dr. Robèrt noted that sustainability challenges are not a static problem—they are dynamic. The sustainability challenge is a funnel with ever closing walls and increasing constraints.

Collaboration is key to sustainable development. We have created this enemy that we must solve together and being part of the systemic problem will cost over the long term. A challenge we face in collaboration though is that each expert is digging deeper and deeper in respective drill holes without reaching out to other sectors and experts.

Successful collaboration requires clear objectives based on principles of success (neutral, non-controversial, necessary, general, concrete, non-overlapping boundaries of success). The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (TNS Principles) is systemic but open-ended. The Framework:

- Makes trade-offs manageable
- Frames system boundaries as purpose
- Makes resource potential calculable
- Allows alignment of tools
- Allows effective cooperation across value chains and among stakeholders

- Enables community building and collaboration across disciplines/sectors/culture
- Includes definitions for: system, success, strategy, actions, tools

The Natural Step strategic methodology involves an ABCD planning process where sustainability principles are understood (A), current reality is identified (B), a sustainability vision of the organization is created (C), and a strategic action plan is implemented and monitored (D). The metaphor of the funnel is used, integrating sustainability into corporate goals, vision, investments, etc.

Dr. Robèrt noted that when creating sustainability action plans, ask these strategic questions:

- Does the initiative comply with the four sustainability principles?
- Is it a flexible platform?
- Is there sufficient ROI?

In conclusion Dr. Robèrt noted that strategic sustainability:

- Is the greatest business opportunity ever
- Is profitable regardless if others 'get it' or not
- Requires ongoing investment in order to capture long-term value
- Must be driven by leaders and professionals in the service of sustainability
- Efforts across departments, disciplines, sectors and tools can be informed by the same principles
- Is key to enabling collaboration and community building