



Center for Creative Leadership looks at CSR best practice

As evidence of the human impact on the world mounts, the question is no longer whether businesses have a responsibility beyond their own profitability. Today, progressive leaders embrace the concept of sustainability and its triple bottom line: 'profits, planet and people.'

In 2006, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Brussels launched its 'Leadership for Sustainability & Corporate Social

Responsibility' research project, studying more than a dozen organisations throughout Europe with proven track records of building sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) into their business practices. "We're building on previous research into the leadership traits and skills identified in individuals who have introduced sustainability into their organizations," says CCL's Laura Quinn, Ph.D., manager of the project.

Europe was selected as the target area for the study be-



LAURA QUINN

cause of its leadership role in the sustainability/CSR movement. "If you compare the contents of global reports on businesses' sustainability and CSR efforts, European organizations are often considered the best in class," says Quinn. "Their reports typically contain specifics, details on what they're doing, procedures they've put in place and mistakes they've made. It's also helpful if they follow the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative*."



RUDI PLETTINX

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One Belgium-based company that prepares its annual report in accordance with GRI guidelines is Umicore, the global materials technology group. "Umicore's CEO, Thomas Leysen, is well-known in Belgium for his commitment to furthering sustainability," says CCL Europe's Managing Director Rudi Plettinx. "So we were delighted when Umicore became a participant in this project."

The research is being conducted primarily through focus groups and individual interviews using a framework of findings from previous CCL research initiatives. Issues include the definition of CSR, developmental experiences, strategy and actual practices. Researchers are also probing how the concept of sustainability got started in Umicore.

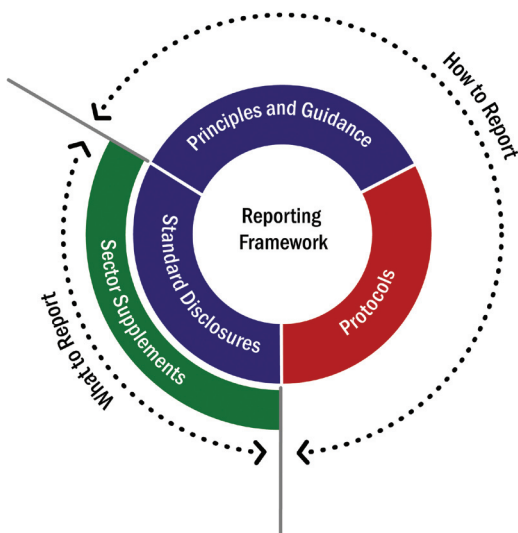
Looking at the research findings so far, Quinn observes that there seem to be two levels of CSR activity. "The first level is introducing sustainability to an organization and getting commitment to achieve it – 'talking the talk,'" she says. "The second

in Belgium

level is wading into complexity and going beyond organizational boundaries and the most immediate stakeholders. This is ‘walking the talk’ and means delivering results.”

CCL researchers acknowledge that organizations face several challenges as they pursue sustainability. “There is still pressure to do things with quarterly results in mind,” Laura Quinn says. “That approach does not allow for a long-term systems perspective, which is foundational to sustainability.” ■

**Organizations interested in participating in the study or in receiving study results may contact Dr. Laura Quinn at quinnl@leaders.ccl.org.*



The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is a large multi-stakeholder network of thousands of experts, in dozens of countries worldwide, who participate in working groups and governance bodies, use the GRI Guidelines to report, access information in GRI-based reports, or contribute to develop the network’s Sustainability Reporting Framework in other ways – both formally and informally.

Business, civil society, labor, investors, accountants and others collaborate through consensus-seeking approaches to create and continuously improve a ‘Sustainability Reporting Framework’, of which the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines are the cornerstone.

This framework provides guidance for organizations to use as the basis for disclosure about their sustainability performance, and also provides stakeholders with a universally applicable and comparable basis on which to understand disclosed information. It facilitates transparency and accountability by organizations – companies, public agencies, non-profits - of all sizes and sectors, across the world.