

ONE PLANET @ VITO

One Planet at the leading edge of transition



A transition action plan is characterised by a number of interrelated, yet distinct elements. We will briefly discuss the most important elements below, always in relation to One Planet as an internal sustainability programme. The different activities should be regarded as ingredients in a recipe, where the final taste is not guaranteed but is instead determined by all of the different parts of the process. A large amount of Tabasco sauce or fresh pepper is recommended, but not a must. After all, system innovation is a fairly spicy area...

1. Analysing systems

In order to be able to change a system, it is, of course, crucial that you familiarise yourself with it first: who or what are the relevant players and structures, streams and logics, barriers and rules? And how are the different players, interests, driving forces, etc. interlinked? What are the underlying links or underlying dynamics that determine how the system works? Relinquishing control and embracing complexity are crucial mental transitions for this activity.

View the pilot project 'Paperless VITO' for an example of this. This project examines the possibility of working with digital expense claims. This is not just for the purpose of making possible paper savings, but also because of the possibility of reducing the administrative burden and creating a higher level of convenience for the VITO employee. We are currently experiencing resistance on this issue from, for example, the European Commission, who are demanding ever increasing physical supporting documents, in part because they want to avoid expenses being claimed more than once. A 'ruling' was seemingly agreed with the tax authorities to be able to operate digital expense claims, where possible. And we therefore get a step-by-step picture of the system in terms

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of the need for paper copies of supporting documents, the importance behind these, the driving forces, the leading parties, others who are lagging behind, etc. From here, we can search for possible solutions. Apps that can be employed, negotiations that can be initiated, inspiring examples from elsewhere that already show how this can be achieved, etc. What is more, we must get a handle on the possible savings in terms of costs and environmental impacts that this would result in for VITO and the costs that the implementation of a solution would incur, as well as any possible side effects that could occur, etc. But it also involves the way in which the financial services are organised. Relevant knowledge and experience is also available in this area and can be used to gain a proper understanding of the challenges faced and reach solutions that are not only sustainable but can also be permanent.

An equal mix of quantitative and qualitative information is therefore always required in order to clearly chart a system and understand it and, as a result, reduce the risk of solutions being met with resistance or of problems being put on the back burner instead of being resolved.

2. Forming a vision

A process of change to a more sustainable society or system is primarily initiated on the basis of an appealing, concrete and daring vision that is based on strength and indisputable basic principles. A proactive and creative approach of this type changes 'must change' into 'want to change'. Leading the way off the beaten track.

Forming a good vision also requires creative go-getters, frontrunners... people who can draw up visions that are sufficiently concrete and, at the same time, leave sufficient room for a specific, personal finishing touch.

For VITO, this vision and ambition is, as already stated, very clear: we are aiming to be a climate-positive organisation by 2030. Our researchers work with sustainable technology on a daily basis. They are therefore highly motivated to apply this knowledge in their own organisation. And by applying themselves, the researchers, in turn, learn more about the applicability and relevance of their research. All One Planet initiatives are also always driven forward by employees themselves. Vision building therefore also goes hand in hand with co-ownership.

3. Mapping out paths

Various paths can be mapped out and followed based on the vision. Transitional thinking often uses 'backcasting' exercises, which define 'solution corridors', areas with interlinked solutions and players who make it possible to successfully accomplish this. Transition paths can be constructed, illustrated and, where necessary, passed on, using models and scenarios - something that is already common practice for external customers in different areas of VITO.

The One Planet core team compiled a programme of, on the one hand, a number of 'quick win' projects that we can already realise in 2017 based on input from employees, for example further increasing the sustainability of business trips or the option of leasing bicycles. On the other hand, it has defined a number of more strategic pilot projects, such as the evolution to climate-neutral mobility, circular procurement and a paperless organisation.

4. Experimenting

In transition experiments, attempts are being made to carry out a radical system change on a realistic scale, but within a protected and supported environment. An ideal experiment shows that radical changes are possible and also shows which obstacles or necessary supporting factors are the most important. Successful experiments can result in upscaling into so-called niches.

With One Planet, VITO provides a "learning by doing" environment, in which a challenge is faced and whereby the organisation can learn about the consequences, costs and benefits, feasibility, collaboration, management, and much more besides.

A project of this type already rapidly reveals how and which VITO expertise can be used, but the choices to be made are not always available. As a research institution, we will always underpin our choices with facts as clearly and elaborately as possible. However, we will always follow the principle 'do or do not, there is no try'. Issues will be explored and experiences captured and, where possible, these will be translated into lessons learned.

5. Monitoring

It is a good idea to keep your finger on the pulse throughout a transition process. Reliable measurement and monitoring instruments make it possible to carry out a good estimation of the direction and speed of actions taken. A good monitoring instrument is first and foremost a management tool: rather than taking an exact measurement, it encourages targeted and effective action where and when it is required.

In view of the importance of an instrument of this type, we at VITO have opted to exclusively allow a project group to work on developing a dashboard in which we can make our ambitions extremely concrete and benchmark the current state of affairs against our ambitions. This will allow us to make the right decisions.

6. Anchoring

An actual system change only takes place if the various aspects of a transition process become part and parcel of the 'mainstream' activities of the various players and structures of the relevant system; in this case our organisation.

Only if the learning effects from the various steps are recognised and used in a targeted manner can a system effectively get a step closer to achieving a sustainable status.