

## TNS breakfast meeting with the founder of The Natural Step



On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2010 dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt – founder of The Natural Step – came to the Netherlands for a lecture for sustainability managers and advisors at Radboud University Nijmegen. At this occasion, Peter van Luttervelt (board member of SVN) and Judy van der Lijke (owner of The Sustainability Company) took the initiative to organize a breakfast session with Karl-Henrik as the main speaker. They invited representatives of different type of companies: manufacturing, consulting and innovative organizations among others.

The Natural Step organization was founded 20 years ago as a non-governmental organization with the ambition to ‘accelerate change in sustainability’. In fact they strive for a sustainable world. The TNS organization has offices in 11 countries all over the world.

The founder of the Natural Step, dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, uses his own experience as cancer specialist, to explain what success means in a sustainable world; you need to speak the same language. When working on a definition for sustainable success in a complex system (our planet) he noticed that a robust definition of sustainability was missing. Therefore he developed the FSSD, Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development. *This is the only sustainable framework that is based on science.* It is very powerful because it takes a systems perspective on sustainability. In essential it offers a compass in asking the right questions when defining a sustainable strategy.

The setting of this meeting was a personal and vivid debate in which Karl-Henrik told us about the origination of the framework and its power for strategic sustainable planning within organizations. It helps to find the common language when defining success for sustainability. Many participants stated afterwards that they had perceived the morning as valuable and very inspiring for their own efforts in the area of corporate sustainability.

The Natural Step is presented as an open source. Everybody who wants to work with the framework is free to do so. In the Netherlands there are currently some people trained to become a certified TNS consultant and trainer. If you want to know more about the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development or the development around TNS in the Netherlands, you can contact Judy van der Lijke via [judy.vanderlijke@thesustainabilitycompany.nl](mailto:judy.vanderlijke@thesustainabilitycompany.nl).

### Five main elements form the framework: background of FSDD

- **The Funnel:** the top line is presenting ‘Declining resources and capacity of the earth to provide mankind ecosystem services like clean air, clean water and clean food’. The under line is presenting ‘Increasing human population and consumption’.
- **System thinking:** System thinking means that you look at the situation from a systems perspective and realize that manipulation in one part of the system will cause repercussions in other parts of the system. Everything is connected to each other.
- **Four system conditions** (which can also be called the four sustainability principles)
- **Backcasting:** Having the vision in mind you ‘backcast’ to the present situation. The backcasting method gives both guidance towards a long term vision and facilitates step by step innovations in all parts of a company.
- **Five level model:** The 5-level model will help you in the planning process. Level 1: What is the system we are talking about? Level 2: What is success within the system? Level 3: How will we plan for success? Level 4: What actions will best support our strategy? Level 5: What tools are needed to evaluate our strategies and actions and build capacity?

