

# Sustainable development goals at SAP

Daniel Schmid<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** This written survey of Daniel Schmid (SAP) is an article for the practitioners' forum at the uwf. It presents SAP's contribution to promote the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and discusses interdisciplinary requirements, limits, and challenges for industry as well as avenues for future research.

**Keywords** Digital transformation · Information technology · Interdisziplinarität · Sustainable Development Goals · Sustainability management

## Nachhaltige Entwicklungsziele bei SAP

**Zusammenfassung** Diese schriftliche Befragung von Daniel Schmid (SAP) ist ein Artikel für das uwf-Forum für Praktiker. Der Artikel stellt SAP's Beitrag bei der Umsetzung der nachhaltigen Entwicklungsziele der Vereinten Nationen vor und diskutiert Interdisziplinaritäts-Anforderungen, -Grenzen und -Herausforderungen für die Industrie sowie Potentiale für zukünftige Forschung.

**Schlüsselwörter** Digitale Transformation · Informationstechnologie · Interdisziplinarität · Nachhaltige Entwicklungsziele · Nachhaltigkeitsmanagement

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✉ Daniel Schmid  
daniel.schmid@sap.com

<sup>1</sup> SAP SE, Walldorf, Germany

## 1 Introduction

The present article is a written survey of Daniel Schmid, Chief Sustainability Officer at SAP and member of the steering committee of econsense, a forum for sustainable development of German business (econsense 2017). It is an article for the practitioners' forum at the uwf and presents SAP's contribution to promote the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations 2015) and discusses interdisciplinary requirements, limits, and challenges for industry as well as avenues for future research.

## 2 What is the value of the SDGs for SAP and its customers?

The SDGs provide a holistic framework for SAP's vision to help the world run better and improve people's lives. In service to this enduring purpose, we have committed our people and our products to address the world's biggest economic, environmental, and societal issues, that are systemized in the 17 goals in a vivid manner. We are helping countries, private and public sector organizations, and everyday citizens control risk, ensure regulatory compliance, operate with efficient resources, and innovate new business models in the digital economy.

Our solutions help eradicate slavery from supply chains and document every living creature on the planet to protect endangered species. Experts use our data visualizations and analytics to help end deforestation, promote environmental awareness, and improve the quality of life. Our software is helping to predict and prevent disasters, eliminate gender inequality, and educate people who might never have been inside a classroom.

### 3 Can you specify which SDGs are most important for SAP and its customers? Can you give some examples?

Information technology has the potential to support all 17 goals. To pick a few: As a global company and as an IT solution provider, goal 8, “Decent Work & Economic Growth” and goal 4, “Quality Education” are, of course, very important to us. Sustainable economic growth secures social stability around the globe. Furthermore, the digital economy is creating a greater demand for digital skills. This is why we largely invest in education, such as coding weeks or free openSAP online courses.

Our solutions also support to reach goal 11, “Sustainable cities and communities”: Technology will play a critical role in helping cities become more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive. Data collected from sensors embedded into city infrastructure, like the sewer systems in Buenos Aires, help ensure basic services are working but can also help save people from natural disasters and other emergencies. Innovation in Cape Town shows how data from sensors in water utilities, electrical smart meters, and RFID tags on garbage cans can help improve basic services.

Goal 12, “Responsible Consumption and Production”: IT and data can help make the sustainability performance of a product or service transparent. It can help educate consumers and corporate buyers about the social and environmental footprint and support them in making conscious buying decisions. As founding member of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data we actively participate and contribute our ICT and Big Data expertise in helping achieve Goal 17 “Partnerships for the Goals”.

### 4 How does SAP actively promote the realization of the SDGs?

SAP spares no effort to strengthen the partnerships urgently needed to achieve the UN Global Goals: In line with its tradition of civic engagement, SAP partners with governments, others in its industry, and the broader business community to advocate for public policies that support the SDGs. At the forefront of the transformation to the digital economy, SAP has the ambition to work hand-in-hand with global policymakers.

A goal of the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is to help expand the industrial and economic capacity in developing countries and improve the livelihood of billions in the process. As part of SAP’s cooperation with UNIDO and its membership in the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, we are using our analytics expertise and technology to help UNIDO engage in

guiding governments around the world through data-driven discussions.

As a founding member of IMPACT 2030, SAP is also collaborating across industries and agencies to align its employee volunteering efforts in support of the sustainable development agenda. The company started local versions of the SAP Social Sabbatical program to foster the collaborative volunteering model. The SAP Social Sabbatical for local engagement will bring together teams of employees from SAP as well as other private and nonprofit organizations to deliver pro bono support.

### 5 How are the SAP software and services supporting the customers to achieve the SDG?

The achievement of the majority of the SDGs depends on reliable, safe and efficient business operations. Therefore, our solution portfolio can help address the majority of the SDGs. A key element here is to create transparency about social, environmental and economic performance along value or process chains. This supports better and conscious decision making and then enables best and connected operations. Including predictive capabilities and machine learning will add a new and better concept of how businesses will be run in the future.

### 6 You are a member of the steering committee of econsense, the forum for sustainable development of German business. How important is it that all leading multinationals work together to reach the goals?

The UN SDGs can only be reached when society as a whole – governments, citizens, non-profits and of course companies – act in concert. I am firmly convinced that without the alliance of leading multinational companies, we will fail. econsense brings together more than 30 companies from different branches at one table and enables them to exchange ideas as well as best practices and to influence policy makers. We are stronger together and we need to speak with one voice.

### 7 What interdisciplinary requirements, limits, and challenges does SAP and its customers face to integrate the SDG into their sustainability management?

The current economic and societal framework is, in many cases, based on silo optimization of private but also public organizations, and in many cases within vertical industry

clusters. Yet, all new disruptive business models are based on horizontal innovation, bridging gaps between industry sectors. These are often enabled and accelerated by digital transformation. For example, a car maker becomes a battery producer and is partnering with car pool providers to make clean mobility attractive for end-users. Therefore, an open mind set and trust towards business partners will be crucial to overcome challenges and to make all involved parties benefit from a compelling joint business case. Again, transparency leveraging data is the fundamental and the initial prerequisite to build trust not only between private sector organizations, but also with the public sector and, more importantly, with the people.

## 8 How could future interdisciplinary research support industry in promoting the SDGs?

Interdisciplinary research needs to be moderated and requires a clear focus on compelling value propositions for all involved public and private parties. This value proposition should not only aim to extract short term economic performance, but consider mid and long-term social, environmental and economic impact creation in a holistic way. In this way, companies will be able to present their contribution to societies.

**Conflict of interest** As described in the introduction, D. Schmid is affiliated to SAP and econsense. Due to his expertise in the addressed matter, D. Schmid was invited by the Editors Prof. Dr. Edeltraud Günther and Prof. Dr. Uwe Schneidewind to respond to a collection of given questions.

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**Daniel Schmid** Chief Sustainability Officer