

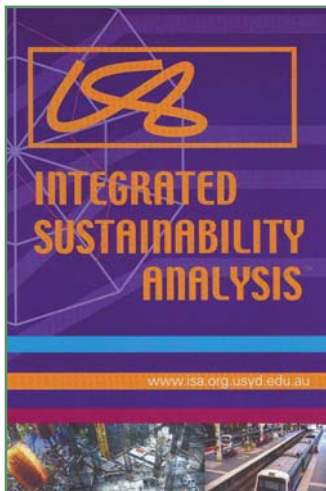
DEVELOPMENT AND PILOT OF SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING FOR ORGANISATIONS

overview of the project

Integrated Sustainability Analysis (ISA) is a multi-disciplinary research team at the University of Sydney that focuses on the investigation of broad environmental and sustainability issues. This project developed a system for organisations to carry out comprehensive Triple Bottom Line (TBL) analysis. TBL is a move away from a tradition of reporting based only on economic indicators to a more wide-ranging analysis of the economic, social and environmental aspects of business. ISA took a reporting method that they had previously developed and evolved it into an accessible tool to enable organisations to conduct their own TBL analyses. Through a research program involving many partners, they produced a package comprising an accounting framework and software tool, and an online training program and support material.

how the project was carried out

Because of the enormous scale of the task, the ISA team decided to gain the input of a number of partners, including local government and non-government organisations. The project harnessed the potential of people working together by using an action research approach, in which a team collaborates to create change by cycles of action and reflection. They ran three workshops to introduce the concept of ISA, gain feedback and ideas about the issues of importance in sustainability reporting, and eventually to explore and comment on the software and training packages.



Brochure promoting ISA

A software developer was employed who was happy to work within the action research framework and who was able to meet the mathematically challenging nature of the brief. The package was built and modified with continual input and feedback from the project partners. Two online courses were developed: one for free availability on the ISA website and another more comprehensive certified course to be delivered through an educational institution.

outcomes now and in the future

The ISA group produced a software package that is flexible and easy to use, can be updated and configured to other economies and is compatible with all accounting systems. The system utilises the ISA method of analysis, which accounts for everything affecting an organisation along the complete chain of supply. For example, energy use in a bakery can be

tracked from transport of flour to the bakery, back to energy for the mining to produce steel for the transport truck. Online training and support is provided free on the ISA web site. It includes a range of learning tools such as case studies, and a training program designed on sound e-learning principles. Negotiations are taking place for delivery of the certified course, and Charles Sturt University has expressed interest in incorporating the package into their Masters in Sustainability Management degree.

The group has laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive use of the tool to standardise TBL reporting world wide in the future. Plans are also underway to develop more specialised versions of the software to suit the needs of particular activities, for example education or farming.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The ISA group has built the resources to enable organisations to carry out their own TBL analyses, with results that are repeatable and reliable. The project has filled a need for companies to be able to report on all aspects of their performance in a holistic framework. The enthusiasm with which the project partners participated in the action research, generously giving their time and feedback, clearly demonstrates that the business community is ready for this development.

Some participants, although benefiting greatly from involvement, experienced challenges in engaging their organisations in the project. It was sometimes difficult to convince them of the need for sustainability reporting. Future packages of this program may incorporate a communications strategy to help encourage internal stakeholders to adopt the process.