

3 The role of sustainable development goals

3.1 Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly met in New York to adopt *The 2030 agenda for sustainable development* to make our world more human, sustainable, prosperous, and peaceful. Among others, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development was also involved in developing this agenda and agreed with the end product: *The 2030 agenda* [1].

The 2030 agenda is an ambitious plan of action. Its main objectives are to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want, and to heal and secure our planet. It is stated that bold and transformative steps are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. The member states of the United Nations promise that this ambition plan of action is a collective journey and that no member will be left behind.

The 2030 agenda specifies 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). Each SDG has specified subgoals. Every SDG contributes to realizing a more human, prosperous, and peaceful world.

The 2030 agenda states that global partnership is required to realize this agenda. It also invites private businesses to contribute to the realization of this agenda. It states in article 67:

Private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation. We acknowledge the diversity of the private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals. We call upon all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges. We will foster a dynamic and well-functioning business sector, while protecting labor rights and environmental and health standards in accordance with relevant international standards and agreements and other ongoing initiatives in this regard.

In general, the top management of international companies is familiar with the SDGs and want to contribute actively to the realization of its targets. The most important means by which the top management can contribute to the realization of SDGs are by the vision and strategy process, the business planning process, the purchase policy, the sustainable development policy, and allocation decisions. Process intensification (PI) can contribute strongly to the realization of SDGs. PI requires a renewal of the existing industrial innovation practices and the existing industrial infrastructures and networks. It is about a radical cultural change.

Usually, engineers who are active in PI have only a general knowledge of SDGs. Mostly they are familiar with some characteristic goals like the reduction of poverty and the development of a sustainable world. However, they are not familiar with the structure and the setup of the SDGs and do not have the knowledge to contribute to the realization of SDGs in process innovation.