



## The System Integrator's Role in Sustainability - Part II

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As I wrote in my previous article, "The System Integrator's Role in Sustainability" (Automation World - October 2022), System Integrators have two types of responsibility in driving sustainability:

- direct responsibility in running our businesses in complete alignment with some of the SDGs
- responsibility in implementing projects that can help to achieve the goals.

Here I will analyze the first and what we can do to run our companies in alignment with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development.

It has, of course, to be a personal ethical commitment of any entrepreneur to guarantee fair conditions for all employees. Our industry is well-positioned to do that, and all our companies have strong policies to ensure their rights. Nevertheless, today the concept of sustainability goes beyond single initiatives, the respect of rights or

labor conditions. It has a more complex and pervasive meaning that makes fulfilling the expectations challenging, especially for younger generations.

In the case of the SI industry, the goal is not to guarantee essential health, equality, economic conditions, or well-being. It's to create an environment where each person can "feel well", motivated, and proud. There's no rule or universal best practice to do that because personal interpretation changes person by person and time by time. But what happens is that the combination of the various conditions determines the perception of a sustainable work environment.

For this reason, we should consider some of the UN initiatives from a slightly different perspective.

**Good Health and Well-Being:** it's more related to a healthy work environment and a sustainable work-life balance. Well-Being comes as a first need of many young engineers during the interviews. If you dig deeper, it's a mix of various components, like the possibility of hybrid working to reduce the time to commute, make more time available for family life, or reduce the stress of the standard office routine. But at the same time, part of Well-Being is a company social environment that nurtures relationships with colleagues and grows professional skills.

**Gender Equality:** there's no doubt that historically and statistically, the industrial system integration business has a prevalent male presence. This makes the organization of our industry still mostly male-centric. There are many opportunities for improvement in guaranteeing equal gender opportunities. Bringing and balancing different perspectives at all levels of the organization helps remove some gender bias in business and tech approaches. It doesn't only reflect in a more inclusive working environment where different sensitivities are all represented, but it helps to create unbiased technological solutions. Many technology innovations suffered from gender bias (e.g., early speech recognition software struggled to recognize women's voices, and airbags failed to protect women as they were designed by and tested on men). Today, many solutions we build are still created by men for men, even if not voluntarily. So having equal gender representation helps even to improve project and business outcomes.

**Decent work and economic growth:** again, this has a slightly different meaning in our industry with respect to a basic need. All our employees have "decent" work conditions and economical treatment. But what is

perceived as extremely important to make it sustainable is the growth perspective. Nobody wants a steady work environment with no personal or financial growth perspective, especially for the young generations, and this is perceived simply as not sustainable. For this reason, having clear growth plans, nurturing professional and personal skills, and matching them with a corresponding salary growth is crucial to making the work environment sustainable.

As we can see, sustainability has a different interpretation depending on the level of the environment you apply it. We, as system integrators, do not probably need to fulfill the basic requirements that the same UN initiatives address in different industries. Despite that, the same initiatives still deeply impact the business environment. Working in a sustainable environment is the aspiration of many engineers, especially the young ones. It's our responsibility to create that environment, keeping in mind the UN initiatives and adapting them to our businesses.