Demonstrating the applicability and value of high level OECD policy goals through the delivery of operational services

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Abstract. “The OECD provides a forum in which governments work together to seek solutions to common problems, share experiences and identify best practices to promote better policies for better lives”. Thus the Organisation develops global standards to address current and emerging challenges in diverse domains. Related high-level policy goals compose the OECD’s vision of a stronger, cleaner, fairer world economy and society. In this context, the OECD’s facilities management division decided to “translate” high level policy advice into actionable principles when providing operational services in support of the daily work of the Organisation’s activities. The delivery of these services consider best practices and policy orientations developed by the Organisation in domains such as waste management, green growth or public procurement. They also relate to several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals that the OECD supports by bringing together its existing knowledge, tools and experience. Spearheaded by the OECD Executive Directorate, the division in charge of facilities management has made the promotion of good environmental and sustainable practices a priority for the past decade. Waste prevention, reduction and recycling are part of this engagement just as the certification of building infrastructure and related processes. The objective is to demonstrate the applicability and pertinence of policy recommendations in operational support activities.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate that high level policy goals – in the broadest sense possible – can be translated into concrete and actionable activities. The UN SDGs or policy recommendations that are developed in the context of the OECD committee work are good examples of this concept. Developing operational “greening” strategies contributes to achieving such high level goals while often improving operational performance and service quality. This paper also explains that “standard management frameworks” indeed help implement and monitor such initiatives. In the case of the OECD facilities management example, the work on sustainability dovetails with other initiatives, in particular the development of a digital strategy and the application of “value for money” recommendations. Together they can form the foundation for establishing priorities to foster responsible consumption and service delivery.
2. Approach/Methods

On issues such as the environment, the OECD, as an institution, is investing time and resources into “walking the talk”. Achieving green growth and moving towards a low carbon economy requires everyone in society to play their part. The OECD secretariat is no exception and must ensure that it operates in more environmentally responsible and sustainable ways.

On the topic of climate change, the OECD has a set of policy recommendations and was crucial for the draft of 2015 Paris Agreement and the definition of SDG 13, Climate Action. The report Aligning Policies for a Low-carbon Economy [1], for example, identifies the misalignments between climate change objectives and policy and regulatory frameworks across a range of policy domains and activities at the heart of climate policy. This work shows us the complexity of delivering [public] services while being consistent with wider environmental objectives. Therefore, for our work, it is important to define priorities and capacity to control or influence the operations.

A decade ago, the Organisation decided to apply the host country HQE™ standard to its owned and rented property to ensure proper monitoring, reporting, and continuous improvement. Besides allowing environmentally sound management of building infrastructure, its integration into the urban context, and the efficient use of energy, water and other materials, the application of such standards encourages occupant involvement. The OECD works in all these areas and it was possible to get inspiration from this research and the in-house experts. We focused on improving energy efficiency [2], installing multiple meters to improve monitoring, replacing lamps and windows to reduce consumption and including reduction targets in the maintenance contract to engage the suppliers. Regarding water, even if much of the OECD work [3] focus on governance issues, it also helped us embrace the need to reduce consumption. Today our gardens are partially watered with rainwater and meters are continuously installed to ensure water leaks are promptly detected. In 2018, UN and OECD work around plastic pollution [4] helped us push towards a total elimination of single-use plastic in our conference centers and catering services. Plastic cups were replaced by recyclable paper cups and plastic water bottles gave away to water fountains and glass bottles.

OECD’s work on green public procurement [5] and on Responsible Business Conduct [6] also helped us put in place sustainability-oriented procurement practices with an up-front evaluation of the impact of activities as part of the tendering process.

That is why the service in charge of facilities management and logistics has been undertaking a range of initiatives to apply good practices that relate to its own policy advice and that help it improve its environmental performance. These initiatives include for example:

- reducing energy and water consumption,
- improving waste collection and recycling,
- managing office buildings more energy efficiently
- and optimising the use of IT technologies to reduce travel.

An action plan was agreed to ensure that environmental matters are reflected, if not mainstreamed, in the daily operational work of the OECD. Each individual initiative must be considered as series of projects involving specific objectives and challenges which go beyond the scope of this short paper. They could be developed into case-studies to illustrate the complexity encountered when translating policy recommendations into operational implementation strategies and plans.
This is of key importance when tackling circularity aspects or, for example, when endeavoring to reduce waste generation. The HQE™ is amongst the most frequently applied building certification schemes in France. It is a voluntary approach aiming to limit the short and long-term environmental impact of a building’s operation and maintenance, while guaranteeing healthy and comfortable living and working conditions for the occupants.

Solid baseline data are essential to measure the effects of different initiatives over time. The definition of a set of key environmental performance indicators therefore represents another important element of the Organisation’s environmental Action Plan. For example, the Secretariat is carrying out a detailed inventory of its greenhouse gas emissions, covering building maintenance, operations and business travel. This and all other environmental information collected will then be handled and regularly updated in an Environmental Management System (EMS) and used for reporting. The EMS is part of our overall management system setting out processes and practices that enable an organisation to reduce its environmental impacts and to implement its environmental vision. The most commonly used framework for an EMS is the one developed by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) for the ISO 14001 standard. OECD’s EMS follows the ISO 14001:2015 standard. Using ISO 14001:2015 can provide assurance to company management, employees, as well as external stakeholders that environmental performance is measured and continuously improved.

Close involvement of staff and communication are essential to ensuring that greening initiatives have an impact on performance and awareness. A wide-ranging reflection group composed of staff members from across the Organisation was set up to not only to help inform staff of the various efforts we are making in this area, but also to engage staff into becoming part of the solution.

3. Results

The strategy to certify the sustainable management of real estate was achieved by 2018. In this process, the surrounding environmental conditions were analysed and significant goals were met. Notably, since 2010, GHG emissions per staff decreased by 16%, energy consumption per square meter by 28%, water consumption per staff by 34%, and paper consumption per staff by 70%

1. Other initiatives and investments allowed increasing the use of remote conferencing by 63% since 2014, ensuring that 53% of waste is recycled, and eliminating single-use plastic items from the Conference Centre and the catering services. Today all procurement activities relating to the provision of operational services include environmental criteria in their selection process.

Regarding staff engagement, the growing number of volunteers in the Greening Network indicates staff members are more sensitive to this topic. Nevertheless, a continuous and diversified communication strategy is necessary to reach existing staff and newcomers.

4. Conclusions

The efforts by the OECD Secretariat to “green” the Organisation mirror the work done by OECD Committees, such as the “Green Growth Strategy”, which supports that “green” and “growth” go together and the report on “Transition to a Low-carbon Economy” [7] which looks at why and how companies are lowering their carbon footprint.

1 Since 2011
The use of a structured management framework to apply environmental and sustainability guidelines and practices allows achieving measurable results. Merging this work with other initiatives, in particular the development of a digital strategy and the application of a “value for money” strategy/methodology, provides the foundation for the development of integrated strategies that foster responsible consumption and service delivery.

Certification methodologies for building infrastructure and related processes can be used to demonstrate the applicability and pertinence of good environmental and sustainability practices. Starting from sustainability-oriented procurement practices with an up-front evaluation of the impact of activities as part of the tendering process, the objective is to gradually introduce environmental objectives into ongoing operational support activities primarily on buildings, logistics and, more generally, services management.

This concrete experience demonstrates that the policy recommendations we work on for others is reflected in our own daily work, ensuring that the OECD “walks to talk” when it comes to Greening.

References
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