

The expedition so far

A step on the way to innovation
for sustainable development



How did some hundred people come to be together at the Connection Day in the Van Abbemuseum in December 2009? Think of it as a moment in an expedition. The expedition's goal? To explore innovation for sustainable development.

Like any major modern expedition, this one has its explorers on the ground, its sponsors, its support team and people who get involved along the way. Together, they are engaged in reinventing innovation for a sustainable world.

Connection Day was the equivalent of establishing base camp at the edge of an unexplored jungle, beyond which lies the sustainable world. It was an achievement to get there, but we know the journey must continue.

Why we set out

Acting on our vision for a better world

This expedition is inspired by the belief that we can make the world a better place for everyone to live. We are exploring how to bring about a world where sustainable development enables a high quality life and a wise, respectful use of the planet's resources.

It's huge and complex challenge. Sustainable development calls for collaboration and co-creation. That is why this isn't a solo expedition. The idea that led to Connection Day originated in Philips, but from start we knew we needed to reach out to all kinds of people and talents to travel with us.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs. Brundtland Report, 1987

Who we are

The explorers span all kinds of people and backgrounds. They include business professionals, researchers, academics, representatives from NGOs, people from the world of art and culture, and engaged individuals.

Philips plays a role like that of an expedition "sponsor", supporting and providing resources to the expedition. On the ground, there's a core team of explorers that is driving the movement forwards through actions and events like Connection Day. There are also many others who act as a kind of "back-room" support, lending their energies and ideas to our activities.

And of course, the Van Abbemuseum has become a contrasting, creative partner. It not only provided the inspiring location for Connection Day, but also helped develop the whole conceptual framework for the day.

Where it all began: origins of the expedition

Every expedition begins with a big idea. For Philips Research, the idea took shape as the organization began to deepen its thinking on sustainability. Initially, its focus had been on "bottom of the pyramid" challenges. This is an important goal, yet the scope of sustainable development includes and expands on this.

Throughout its history, Philips has focused on improving the quality of people's lives through meaningful innovations. Today, quality of life of is inextricably linked to issues such as climate change, poverty, ageing populations and environmental damage that affects our planet's ability to support life. In other words – the very issues that are at the heart of sustainable development.

So exploring the implications of innovation for sustainable development makes perfect sense. Indeed, sustainable development is becoming a key driver for Philips's innovation for Health & well-being. This makes it all the more important to understand the territory and how to advance in new, uncharted areas of innovation and partnership.

Defining the scope – where are we heading?

Even an expedition to explore the unknown must have some sense of direction. So the first step was to establish some broad definitions of what innovation for sustainable development could mean.

From its initial focus on “bottom of the pyramid”, Philips Research expanded its thinking to the notion of the 3Ps – people, planet and profit. The 3Ps or “triple bottom line” reflect the belief that business and sustainable development are not inimical. Far from it; exploring sustainable development implies exploring new forms of innovation that enable economic prosperity as well as environmental, physical and spiritual well-being.

Assembling the team

Sustainable development touches on all aspects of people’s lives and our relationship with the planet. This is why tackling its complex, far-reaching issues requires new forms of co-operation beyond the walls of a single institution.

Hence, just like any modern-day, large-scale expedition, exploring innovation for sustainable development calls for teamwork. This teamwork includes “open innovation” and partnerships with commercial companies and academic institutions. But it must also go much further. Innovation for sustainable development means creating new connections among people who previously did not come into contact with each other.

First contacts

With its thinking on innovation for sustainable development beginning to take shape internally, Philips Research began reaching outside to diverse groups. It started engaging with partners and suppliers in new ways.

In 2007, Philips Research opened up its Corporate Research Exhibition for the first time, inviting some stakeholders from the world of sustainability, as well as some key customers and suppliers. During the event, Philips Research and Philips Corporate Sustainability Office jointly organized another first – the Sustainability Innovation Day. This brought Philips Research into contact with people and organizations it had never previously engaged with from Dutch governmental agencies and the European Commission to companies and NGOs working on sustainability issues.

At the same time, Philips Research launched an internal sustainability champions network, to enrich the connections among colleagues within Philips.

Enriching the mix of skills and experience

In 2008, Philips Research, Philips Lighting and Philips Corporate Sustainability Office co-hosted a second Sustainability Innovation Day on the theme of “energy”.

By this time, the process that led to Connection Day (and is continuing on) was crystallizing into an exploration of “need-driven, multi-stakeholder approaches” to innovation. And it was clear that the journey itself would be an experiment in creating a movement for a new kind of innovation.

With the symbol of stones to represent the desire for lasting results, the movement aimed to bring together a rich palette of talent and experience. These include researchers and colleagues from inside Philips, professionals from other businesses and industry sectors, academics, representatives from NGOs, people from the world of art and culture, and engaged individuals.

Gathering navigational aids

Worthwhile exploration may venture out into the unknown, but it has clear aims and delivers useful data. Thus, the expedition to explore innovation for sustainable development has been inspired by aspects of strategic thinking within Philips Research. And in turn, it has fed back into this thinking.

In particular as Philips has sharpened its strategic focus on health and well-being, several reports have looked at sustainable development and the business opportunities it presents in areas such as clean tech, environmental health, general health and well-being.

Metrics also drive action and steer effort and resources to where they will have most impact. Significantly, in 2007 Philips added a Green Innovation to target to its EcoVision IV programme, which sets quantified goals and drives reporting on “green” innovation.

Now, with the launch of EcoVision V in February 2010, Philips has created a set of three sustainability leadership key performance indicators which go beyond “green” to also cover care, energy efficiency and materials including targets for 2015

The expedition gets going

By 2009, the movement was ready to set off in earnest. Connections were in place, people had started connecting with each other and an initial path had been mapped out. There was a clear route ahead, based on a series of events and activities to take the thinking forward.

First stop – Disruption Day

With the movement underway, Disruption Day in March 2009 was the first moment for diverse explorers to pitch camp together and exchange ideas. Its goal was to “understand the innovation challenge towards sustainable health and well-being”.

Speakers from the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), the United Nations University (UNU-MERIT) in Maastricht, and the Innovation Leadership Forum shared their visions and joined in a multi-way discussion with explorers from Philips.

Starting the expedition log – bamboostones.net

With the movement starting to produce ideas and “chart the territory”, it was also time to open a “log book”. Thus, the bamboostones website came into being, supported by the IUCN, UNU-MERIT, the Innovation Leadership Forum and Philips Research.

Its name reflects the aim to create durable ideas for sustainable innovation (the stones) that grow rapidly (like bamboo).

This website provides a space for everyone involved in the expedition to share ideas and launch actions. It also welcomes contributions from anyone – inside or outside the process – who wants to contribute ideas and materials, or join up with others in activities related to sustainable development.

A first chart of the territory

In late 2008, Philips introduced a first compass or “chart” of the territory under exploration – the Innovation Framework for Sustainable Development.

The framework shows the territory from which we start – the land of incremental innovation. Incremental innovation can lead to efficiency increases within the existing socio-economic eco-system. It will buy us time, but it does not address the challenges of sustainable development.

On the other side are radically new ways to serve people’s needs. These are not easy to achieve. All of us are locked into existing frameworks – individual behaviours, cultural and social ways of thinking, legislation, and governance models – that tend to perpetuate the status quo.

The disruption zone: the jungle to cross

In between, there is the “disruption zone” – in effect, the jungle next to which Connection Day pitched camp. This is land that is difficult to cross. As we go, we will be confronted with fear and uncertainty, exactly because we are moving beyond known territory. In this zone, the risks are high and the rewards unknown.

Yet, we are starting to map out the terrain. For businesses that have already made some progress on their own journey to innovation for sustainable development, Philips Innovation Framework can help them develop “solution maps” that define roadmaps to more sustainable products and services.

Connection Day – arriving at base camp

Connection Day was the next significant point on the journey – the base camp where yet more explorers joined the party.

To get to this point, Philips needed another protagonist, a partner from another field who could share and spark ideas. The Van Abbemuseum proved to be an unlikely, but ideal, partner.

Artists, curators and designers joined the exploration. And people from the Van Abbemuseum played a key role in developing a conceptual framework in which artworks could impact strategic thinking.

So, on Connection Day, researchers, business people, people from the world of art, academics, representatives of NGOs, and engaged individuals connected in the environment of the Van Abbemuseum. It was a perfect, unexpected unusual setting, that helped people break out of their normal habits of thought.

Where do we go next? Navigating the disruption zone

Inevitably, crossing the disruption zone will take us into new territory. It will change how we think and how we see the world. This journey will also help us to understand how to be part of the solution beyond business as usual, as expressed in the Vision 2050 report, launched by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development in early 2010.

Within Philips, the concept of “synergetic prosperity” is helping take thinking and action further. Synergetic prosperity is about creating solutions that fulfill multiple human needs. This is not simply in material ways, but in terms of the “body & mind”, “earth & society” and a wider “prosperity”.

Synergetic prosperity brings together many notions. It encompasses individual-centered healthcare, balanced lifestyles that bring peace of mind, and using natural resources responsibly, so we ensure the long-term health of our planet.

Connecting to create a prosperous future

Importantly, Philips Research has extended synergetic prosperity to a way working set out in seven synergy principles. They encourage the exploration of sustainable development and social innovation. And they call for open innovation and cooperation that respects and builds on everyone’s creativity.

In other words, synergetic prosperity is a mindset that focuses on being successful together. We believe a prosperous future will be co-created by multiple stakeholders. It will emerge from eco-systems of players working together to build a world where prosperity means far more than economic growth alone.

Through its rich creativity and imagination, Connection Day was an important moment in that journey. We invite you to join. Share your thoughts and calls to action on www.bamboostones.net.