

**“Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung” -
special on “Innovation and Chemical Industry“
byline article by Martin Babilas, CEO ALTANA
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Sustainability as a Driver of Innovation

A current study shows that companies that commit themselves sustainably to economic, social, and environmental aspects have above-average innovative capabilities. Great opportunities arise for chemical companies, in particular.

By Martin Babilas

Sustainability is a decisive driver of innovations. This is the result of a study titled “Industry Innovation Index 2016” conducted by the Forsa Institute. A total of 500 managers and young professionals from industrial companies were surveyed. According to the study, companies that consistently promote sustainability have high or very high innovative ability. The managers surveyed also see this connection: 57 percent believe that sustainability plays a key role for a company’s innovative prowess.

Developing sustainable products is a major challenge

But many industrial companies do not fully tap their potential for sustainable action. While 62 percent of the companies focus strongly on sustainable business success, less than half of them show special commitment regarding the ecological and social dimension. There is a great need to act when it comes to the development of products that contribute to environmental and climate protection. Only 17 percent of the companies make this a focal point.

This offers the chemical industry and the specialty chemicals industry, in particular, a great opportunity. Companies can develop products and solutions that make a contribution to environmental and climate protection along the entire value chain, starting with the use of renewable raw materials and extending to the CO₂ balance and recycling. Companies not only need a sustainable, foresighted perspective, but also an innovative capability that combines new solutions for resource and climate protection with economic benefits.

An essential factor for the ability to push ahead sustainability is sensitizing employees to this issue. The aim should be to establish a corporate culture that fosters in every single employee an awareness for sustainable thinking and action in an economic, ecological, and social respect. Of all the important measures that contribute to the sustainability of a company, however, a culture of sustainability is the least common. Yet the study shows that sustainable success, environmental and resource protection, as well as social commitment are so important to career entrants today that these factors are paramount when they decide for or against an employer. So the young specialists already have an awareness of sustainability. Companies could use this potential to strengthen their own innovative ability.

The key is consistent promotion of talented staff members. For only those who have the opportunity to unfold their competencies and personality can support the development of future-oriented ideas and solutions in a motivated and sustainable way. This was confirmed by the findings of the study. For the

ALTANA AG

Abelstraße 43
46483 Wesel
Germany
Tel +49 281 670-8
Fax +49 281 670-10999
info@altana.com

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professional newcomers, a cooperative working climate with sufficient scope for action is the top criterion for their choice of employer. Chemical companies that view human resource development as an essential component of innovation and sustainability can master the challenges of the future.

Martin Babilas is the Chairman of the Management Board of ALTANA AG. The specialty chemicals company had the Forsa Institute carry out the study for the third time in a row.

ALTANA Industry Innovation Index 2016

