

the last word

Empowering sustainable change - making it happen

You are unique, your organisation is unique. Any empowerment campaign is about your journey to generate positive and sustainable change for your organisation. If you want to empower your colleagues, the first person that must be empowered is yourself! Your colleagues will unconsciously look to you as a model and the unconscious is very powerful at feeling things the conscious brain doesn't see. Therefore if you start an empowerment campaign without ensuring you are in a good place, then your colleagues will sense the incongruence.

Leading sustainability is an amazing opportunity for self-expression; however it can feel burdensome at times with the expectations laid on your shoulders by stakeholders internal and external. You have limited time, resource, budget, authority and energy, and sometimes it feels like the demands on you are limitless. If you are feeling disheartened, then take some time out to re-connect with your purpose and passion, ask yourself questions such as: "what brought me to this place?"; "how could I look positively on this?"; "why do I want to empower change?"; "who can I turn to support me?".

When you feel empowered, consider how your unique abilities can generate empowerment. There are many skills and characteristics that will support your programme, such as facilitating, connecting, enabling, persuading, evaluating, catalysing and holistic thinking. You don't need to be strong in all of these, but you do need to be aware of the weaknesses and gain support from others who are strong in them.

You've now understood yourself, (re)connected with your passion and identified your strengths and weaknesses. Now the really fun



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part starts: you can start looking outwards to develop a robust approach, such as the 'Smart Change' process of "Ignite → Empower → Grow".

Ignite

This first phase is the most important, as it is when you get the opportunity to connect with the reality of your organisation and listen to the underlying narratives that flow through its culture. You will be preparing the campaign to hit the ground running when it is launched. To generate this springboard, there is one silver bullet at your disposal on which everything else hinges: the power of asking questions.

To prepare, you will already have been asking yourself powerful questions and in the Ignite phase, you will be asking some to your colleagues. This is effective because it is sending the message to both yourself and your colleagues that you don't have all the answers. Often, you only need to start asking good questions, and they will start to generate the solutions themselves. Also by tuning into your organisation you are feeling what they need. Whilst it is important to get statistics for this, you can only truly do this if you are talking to your colleagues.

As part of evaluating your situation, you will also have the opportunity to begin building a

coalition of stakeholders who will support you on the journey. It is important that you gain a diversity of opinion to avoid any form of group think. It goes without saying that if you ask good questions, you will also need to be a great listener, to truly and humbly accept what feedback and solutions your colleagues are offering you.

Now you can start to develop a narrative that will inform your empowerment strategy: it is critical that you have a story that flows effortlessly through, ensuring that it is aligned with your organisational culture and starts where the organisation is (not where you want it to be). Of course there will be measurement tools and you will use the available 'hard' data, but these are there to help you tell the story. The strategy can't appeal to everybody equally, there will be conflicting motivations, not just between departments and sites, but also between individuals. For example, people have a desire to take care of our planet and each other, but the current demands of the market encourage them to make more selfish decisions.

Empower

The 'Empower' phase is both the most exciting and emotionally challenging; you get to find out if the 'Ignite' phase work has created a

programme that will truly empower change or just engage them. Whilst engagement is important, people can be engaged, but not do much. You'll start off this phase by communicating the need and creating some level of urgency to act. Short term wins begin to appear, and you can use these to celebrate success and generate momentum.

However well you asked questions, listened to the feedback, created a robust coalition and crafted a carefully aligned strategy, you will still have setbacks which you can accept and learn from. Part of your personal journey is not to take this process too personally: feeling hurt due to unseen bumps in the road, or letting successes go to your head will disconnect you from the very people you are looking to empower.

Grow

This phase requires the most persistence, and is ultimately the most rewarding, as it is when you really see your empower change programme deliver full ownership. There will be constant communication where value is being demonstrated, gains are being consolidated and stakeholders are communicating their successes and challenges. Your role is to be that of a patient gardener, where you are tending your patch and cultivating sustainability. Until now you've been a key driver in the process, part of your personal journey is allowing yourself to step back, breathe, relax, take in what you've achieved, and enjoy what you've built.

Empowering change is the core of sustainability: it is taking your organisation from where it is now to a place where it is positively contributing to the flourishing society we live in. You have a fabulous opportunity to create a lasting legacy and grow personally. I wish you luck on the journey!



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