

Changing behaviours

A new guide looks at how to encourage employees to engage in sustainability initiatives, reports Doug Morrison.

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Senior directors of any organisation, public or private, nowadays freely acknowledge sustainability as much more important than a mere box ticking exercise to meet UK or EU regulations on cutting carbon emissions. For many, though, there are still big challenges in putting sound principles into practice, not least when it comes to encouraging the workforce, at all levels, to engage with an organisation's sustainability objectives.

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), "A lot of organisations have sustainability policies, but struggle to bring them to life." Meanwhile, the *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) estimates that 70% of all change initiatives fail, including human resources, health and safety and IT – in other words, initiatives to change established parts of the workplace.

As most organisations are still fairly near the start of their journey towards full sustainability, implementing change here is even more difficult. The Crowd business forum claims that "only one in 20 large organisations is taking advantage of sustainability".

The CIPD, HBR and The Crowd offer a triple edged reality check for anyone who cares about sustainability in the workplace. Their sober analysis is also deployed to set the scene in a new guide for business called *Empower change: Igniting your organisation to grow sustainability*.

The guide has been published by consultancy Carbon Smart and is intended for anyone charged with the task of promoting sustainability in an organisation and who wants to lead change by empowering employees.

Adam Woodhall, the guide's author and an associate director of Carbon Smart, suggests that it is only when employees "take ownership" of an organisation's sustainability agenda that it can meet its objectives. As he writes in the guide: "Empowering truly comes into its own when people take responsibility for delivery because it fits with their own desires and values; then sustainability starts to embed into your culture."

According to Woodhall, for many organisations there are several stages on the path to sustainability, invariably starting at a point where they are not even aware that they are unsustainable. "Then there is at some point a realisation they are unsustainable," he writes. "The work then really begins to raise awareness, communicate and engage; and eventually the organisation moves to being 'consciously

sustainable'. Assuming the organisation keeps working at its sustainability, in the long term sustainability is unconsciously embedded as part of the culture and is business as usual."

Just how long that journey takes depends on the organisation. As the guide points out, Marks & Spencer launched its "Plan A" sustainability programme eight years ago; and it helped to generate £140 million of savings in 2013/14 alone. Yet the retailer believes it is still only in the "consciously sustainable" phase of its programme. Another company featured in the guide, Interface, the carpet tile manufacturer, claims to have started practising sustainable business as many as 20 years ago; but it, too, believes that it will not achieve its aims for some years yet.

According to Woodhall, it is important for all organisations that they are financially, socially and environmentally sustainable, which he describes collectively as "profitable sustainability".

He continues: "The reason why you are wanting to empower employees is to change attitudes, behaviours and cultures in your organisation regarding sustainability. Any change is uncomfortable, and however logical sustainability might be, it is no different."

THREE STEPS TO CHANGING ATTITUDES

The guide sets out a three stage process for organisations to "ignite, empower and grow" their change programmes.

The manager in charge of sustainability must first evaluate the situation, by gathering not only hard data on energy, waste and resources but also soft data on employees' attitudes and behaviour. There must then be a "coalition" of interests among staff, which will take time to build. In that respect, "it is helpful to enrol at least one senior employee from your organisation".

The guide continues: "Ensuring alignment of your strategy to what motivates your colleagues is easily the single most important factor in empowerment." The motivation here could be market share growth, stability of finances or delivering excellent services. "With some of these, the alignment will be clear; for example, energy reduction will lower costs, so help stability of finances."

The guide says that the savings achieved by Lloyd's of London at its Lime Street headquarters bears out this approach to sustainability. An environmental working group meets three times a year, with Lloyd's director of operations as its senior "sponsor" but including representatives from across the business, who take responsibility for driving sustainable action within their areas. By 2014, energy consumption was 16% down on its baseline year of 2008, while the recycling rate is over 85% and there is zero waste to landfill.

CASE STUDY: RICHMOND TOWERS

PR firm Richmond Towers Communications uses an online scheme called JUMP to engage employees in sustainability issues and reward them for taking steps to improve their own wellbeing and that of the environment. JUMP is accessible at the office, at home or on a mobile device and can monitor recycling, energy saving, personal wellbeing, walking, cycling, responsible shopping, volunteering and new ideas. The company that runs JUMP provides a dedicated engagement manager for each organisation that uses the technology, as well as customer service and a performance management dashboard.

Rob Metcalfe, Richmond Towers' managing director, explained the firm's approach to sustainability at the launch event for the *Empower change* guide, held in April in London. He said that JUMP has helped to give some structure to the firm's sustainability objectives, encouraging employees to participate. It has also helped the firm make the shortlist for the 2015 Employee Benefit Awards, alongside major corporations such as McDonald's, Lidl and Marston's.

What does empowering change mean to Richmond Towers?

Rob Metcalfe: "Our client base has traditionally been in food and drink. We gradually got more and more involved in sustainability, because a lot of our food clients want to pursue a sustainability agenda. From that, people started thinking: 'We like this area. Let's do more work in this field.' We're now at the point where we have a separate unit called the EcoPRAgency, which is working with all sorts of sustainability technologies.

"So there is that force within the business that's telling themselves and the rest of the business that we should be reflecting what we're doing for our clients and that as a business we need to be more sustainable."

How does JUMP support your strategic objectives?

RM: "It's a very practical programme and very easy for people to engage with. Part of the attraction from our point of view was to make engagement with sustainability as unthreatening as possible, because everyone has different levels of imagination and willingness to participate. The nice thing about JUMP is that there are various modules that people can engage in. Walking to work, cycling to work, volunteering ... all of these areas are very easy for people to participate in.

"Some people walk to work anyway but just the existence of a scheme with little incentives and small rewards built into it has really embedded these behaviours on a much more regular and sustainable basis. We're seeing really good uptake across the whole workforce and people doing small but significant things on a regular basis – 75% have signed up to JUMP and, of them, 88% are walking to work."

Why does Richmond Towers attribute its recognition in the 2015 Employee Benefit Awards to implementing JUMP?

RM: "We find ourselves as a small company alongside McDonald's and Lidl, which have very significant sustainability employee engagement programmes running out there. Ours is small but it's working for us. We have that nice level of engagement and it is delivering visible change, both in behaviour and outcomes.

"We survey our client base about what they do or don't find attractive about our business and 84% of them say that one of the reasons they work with us is because of this type of engagement, because of the JUMP scheme. It has a very clear and powerful commercial benefit, as well. It's small in the scheme of things but it's quite powerful and we find it's a very effective way of driving change through the business."

Lloyd's, which is a Carbon Smart client, is now expanding its corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme beyond the HQ. Writing in the guide, Lloyd's senior CSR manager, Vicky Mirfin, says: "We have chosen to increase awareness and engage stakeholders on a personal level. We want to help them take personal action, whether that is at their desk, on their travels or at home."

Mirfin refers to "a flourishing network of champions" that will feature in a global campaign. They will work together and influence others on topics such as energy, waste, greener travel and procurement.

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP

The guide also highlights the merits of digital technology in empowering employees, not least at Dentsu Aegis Network, a leading media communications agency with 24,000 employees worldwide. Dentsu Aegis has trialled a host of digital technologies to foster more sustainable behaviour both inside and outside the office. One of its most successful initiatives has been the "Stravel app", which promotes greener commuting and business travel. Users can track their miles travelled via this app and so monitor travel impact.

Employees have been encouraged to compete against colleagues from different offices and countries and, in return, the firm converts the miles into small rewards, such as coffee or a charitable donation. So far, 10% of staff have downloaded the app and have committed to running, cycling and walking to and from work. This has helped Dentsu Aegis to hit its carbon emissions targets ahead of schedule, as well as enhancing the health and wellbeing of its workforce.

Another PR firm, the London based Richmond Towers Communications, has adopted a different technology but, nonetheless, a similar approach to empowering its staff (see box). "We reward walking and cycling to work, for example," explains managing director, Rob Metcalfe, "as well as things like recycling and energy saving initiatives in the office. The points that people earn can be donated to charities which are relevant to our business, or spent online and in-store. It's an excellent additional motivator for people who are thinking about their own and the planet's wellbeing."

The guide points out that there are many ways of empowering employees to work towards a common goal in which sustainability becomes the norm, and "there are no silver bullets". As Woodhall concludes, "Empowered change is a process, not an event." **FM**

INFORMATION

For more information about *Empower change: Igniting your organisation to grow sustainability*, visit: www.carbonsmart.co.uk/empower-change-guide/.