Book The Green Workplace

Sustainable Strategies That Benefit Employees, the Environment and the Bottom Line

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Recommendation

The business case for sustainability is now fairly well-established: Doing good is good business. Building sustainability into your firm requires change, which human nature resists. Leigh Stringer describes how companies can solve pressing environmental problems while increasing profits and providing a happier workplace. *BooksInShort* recommends this book as a solid starting point from which to address sustainability changes. Stringer covers a full range of promising solutions and provides a "green" take on change management, but other books in the field may offer more depth on implementation. "Design thinking" is all about solving multiple problems at once, and Stringer persuasively argues that this approach can meet the demands of the emerging idea-driven marketplace.

Take-Aways

- Regulatory agencies, shareholders and employees increasingly demand that businesses adopt a proactive approach to sustainability.
- The "triple bottom line" assesses success in terms of people, planet and profits.
- "Design thinking" seeks to solve multiple problems at one time.
- Sustainability is an ongoing project. Create an executive organizational structure to manage your sustainability initiatives and provide oversight.
- Figure out how to measure energy usage, waste management and productivity goals.
- The most difficult hurdle for sustainability projects to overcome is behavior modification. Engage shareholders early and keep them continuously informed.
- Look to green-savvy employees to help with grass-roots support for sustainability.
- Build sustainability into your brand and be consistent in your approach.
- Modern technology enables work to take place anytime, anywhere. Use technology to save money, time and trees.
- "Smart buildings" adjust their energy outputs based on demand. Open-office scenarios require less physical space per employee and are often more productive.

Summary

What You Can Already Do for Sustainability

Sustainability is an issue for every business. Human demand for the Earth's resources has grown exponentially. Just 3% of the water on the planet is fresh, and most of that is not available for drinking. Leading experts fear that by 2020, 1.5 billion people will lack access to potable water. In most developed countries, energy use per capita continues to rise.

"The goal of the green workplace of the future should be to facilitate creative ideas, accommodate intense think time, and allow for a rich and rewarding

work and personal life."

Government regulations increasingly mandate greater energy efficiency. Stockholders demand sustainability-centric policies. As the population ages, talented young workers will become increasingly scarce and more sought after. Companies should note that these workers care about their employers' responses to environmental issues. As people become more conscious of the consequences of an acquisitive lifestyle in terms of ecological, health and family concerns, they begin to imagine, develop and embrace new, more flexible ways of conducting business. To solve an evolving multitude of environmental crises, businesses must adapt.

"Each green message the organization sends should be tied into larger, enterprise-wide goals."

Most companies undertake sustainability projects because they save money. Improving indoor air quality reduces costs incurred by employee absences and illnesses. Going green mitigates future risk and anticipates increasing regulatory oversight and supply chain disruptions. In your company, be mindful of how products are recycled. Reuse rather than buy new. Good ventilation and the use of nontoxic cleaning chemicals improve indoor air quality. Design your facilities to take advantage of natural light. If you're not ready or able to install an alternative energy source, consider buying renewable energy from your power company.

"Find partners that are ahead of you on the sustainability curve and those that will provide you with research, regulatory information, trends, feedback on your organization or all of the above."

Change initiated at the grass-roots level is more powerful and personal than change pushed by top-down mandates. Reducing, reusing and recycling happen best when employees are invested in the program. The most efficient ideas emerge when employees are personally engaged. In fact, participating in the implementation of sustainability programs can harness the passion of already interested employees. For example, one employee at Google's Mountain View, California, facilities noticed the immense cost and waste of purchasing water bottles for the staff and gathered 2,000 signatures in a week to petition for a change. Google stopped purchasing bottled water in all its North American offices.

"[The] attributes of design thinking – synthesis, visualizing possibilities, making hypotheses, looking for complex issues to solve, balancing requirements versus possibilities and being open to scrutiny – are all particularly timely and relevant for creating value in a concept-based economy."

Measuring success in terms of the "triple bottom line" – people, planet and profits – helps create a green-sensitive organizational culture. To define your environmental initiative within the "Balanced Scorecard" framework, measure four broad areas of progress: financial, "human capital," "stakeholders" and "business process."

Build In Sustainability from the Beginning

Greening your workplace involves all the traditional concerns: communication, technological education and human resources. Ask these pivotal questions: Which environmental issues have the greatest impact on your business? How does addressing core environmental issues relate to your business agenda? How will this increase value for your organization, and how will you communicate about it to stakeholders? How will you develop the culture to support your initiatives?

"Build ownership into the solution. The more involved employees are in setting up [sustainability] choices, the more likely they will be to adopt them."

Because green initiatives can be complex and can affect an entire organization, instituting full-time executive oversight of your sustainability projects ensures accountability, uniformity and follow-through. Companywide coordination helps avoid redundancy and embeds going green in every business process.

"Once a strategy has been set...update employees on progress."

Bloomberg launched its B-Green program to improve the sustainability of companywide processes and to educate employees. A lean executive team reports to the head of Global Sustainability Initiatives, who reports to Bloomberg Chairman Peter Grauer. This team works across company departments and locations. As its members implement money-saving policies that reduce Bloomberg's overall environmental impact, they also seek green business opportunities.

"Workplaces that promote human alertness and engagement evoke qualities of nature through the use of light, air, materials, color, spatial definition, movement patterns, openings and enclosures, and connections to the outdoors."

Smaller companies can form strategic partnerships with consultants, governments and vendors to accomplish these objectives. A fully integrated approach is crucial. Whole Foods, a U.S. chain of health food supermarkets, emphasizes locally grown produce, a policy that empowers each store's procurement process. The company established a loan program for small-scale farmers. *Fortune* magazine consistently names Whole Foods as one of the most desirable places to work.

Five-Part Plan for Green Initiatives

Follow a five-part plan to launch your green initiatives. Always remain aware that sustainability is an ongoing project. First, lay the foundation for your sustainability changes by designating a leadership team to guide the process and pull together all your stakeholders to articulate a vision and goals. Figure out how to measure progress. Define your start and end points. Bloomberg's B-Green program tracks business-process carbon emissions, keeps abreast of current sustainability trends and educates end users.

"Insist that your suppliers disclose their carbon footprint, provide verifiable or third-party eco labels on their products...and clearly explain how their product is produced."

Second, analyze how environmental issues affect your business. Infrastructure design, technology, and plant and manufacturing processes – including waste recycling – all offer opportunities for triple bottom line payoffs. No program will be successful without employee buy-in and support, so engage your workforce early.

"Inform users in a transparent way about the right decision to make, to put them in control of their decision and to let them know their actions count toward a larger social good."

Third, prioritize. Measure potential projects against your sustainability vision and organizational goals. The easiest initiative does not always yield noteworthy change, so be sure to balance environmental impact against costs. Fourth, design your implementation "road map" in detail. Consider executing a pilot project before making companywide changes. Fifth, be prepared to support implementation with education and to measure success concretely. Tweak your processes to improve results.

How to Change Behavior to Support Sustainability

To support your organization's sustainability goals, you must change your employees' behavior. Create a well-coordinated strategy that facilitates the deployment of policy, aligns all employees with companywide goals, directly involves all stakeholders, and clearly communicates what the company expects, when it expects it and why it's important. "Greeniacs" will likely embrace ecopositive change; "green couch potatoes" and "skeptics" might be motivated only by an easy behavioral change that directly benefits them. They will follow the example of green-savvy employees.

> "Sprint eliminated the use of 4.6 million foam cups annually, resulting in an annual savings of $135,000."

You can help everyone in your company appreciate a good business case for change. The triple bottom line framework can help: How will policy change benefit your employees, improve profits and positively affect the environment? Communicating the success other companies have had with similar programs helps employees understand that they are part of a bigger picture. Directly engage employees. They will buy into solutions they helped create. Identify resistance, who it's coming from and why. Consider creating "task forces" for greater implementation. Early success with easy-to-implement, quick projects helps build momentum for larger efforts. Support that momentum with training and rewards programs. Continuously communicate progress made.

> "Green facilities not only reduce operating costs, they also increase revenue for building owners."

Help recruit and retain ecoconscious employees by letting them know how your company weaves environmental considerations into its business operations and goals. Demonstrate by your actions that you are as committed as you say you are. Integrate your green credentials into your brand, your website and your annual report. Meshing green solutions throughout your enterprise demonstrates that you "walk the talk." Green jobs can be local jobs that concentrate on improving the triple bottom line. Let prospective employees know if you offer perks, such as a gym on the premises or healthy food alternatives in the cafeteria, or if you support a green event or nonprofit effort. Be thorough in your approach. For instance, find ways to minimize paper use when orienting or training new or potential employees.

Use Technology to Support Sustainability

Modern technology has the ability to help people work smarter, from enabling teleconferencing, to encouraging group innovation through online collaboration, to designing "smart buildings" that maximize energy efficiency. Take advantage of technology to minimize environmental harm: Travel less, use less paper and save time by holding virtual meetings. Leverage your technology – print on both sides of the paper, in black and white; send and receive faxes via computer. Web-enabled or teleconferenced meetings or training sessions translate into real savings. Sprint calculates the value in productivity of each employee saving five minutes per day to be $40 million. The company sets the value of each of its employees printing 10 fewer pages per week at $750,000, sparing 3,600 trees.

> "With clever use of infrastructure, natural resources, good change management and training, it may be possible in the future to use significantly less real estate to conduct business."

Social media, virtual 3-D, game playing and wiki building all engage users directly in product testing, policy feedback and authentic collaboration. Technology offers particularly good ways to change people's behavior. Offering regular feedback about energy savings positively reinforces that new behavior.

> "Green is a journey, not a place."

See if you can use smart-building technology, such as PeopleCube software that adjusts lighting and internal temperatures based on how your company schedules the use of space, saving energy and money in the process. "Smart grids" distribute energy over large areas in a way that greatly improves efficiency by adjusting to demand and supply.

The more waste you eliminate from your business processes, the more money, time and energy you save. Companies always monitor their financial income and expenses, but they rarely analyze their energy usage and materials waste flow. Adobe Systems took the extra step of installing meters that measure energy usage continuously within its building. Managers noticed an energy spike when several building systems started simultaneously. They simply staggered these times and saved considerably on the company's power bill, which was based on peak usage.

Requiring sustainability practices from your vendors is a simple first step to greening all your own processes. Recycling your waste stream embraces sustainability from the consumer end. For instance, Apple has a program to take back all its electronic products at their end-of-life.

Design for Sustainability

Good design can't solve every problem, but it certainly contributes. Designers often take inspiration from nature. The architects who designed the Eastgate Building in Harare, Zimbabwe, were inspired by observing how termites regulate the airflow within their mounds to maintain a constant temperature.

Individuals' productivity increases when their workspaces provide a connection to nature and support their personal choices for comfort and sensory variety. Good interior air quality provides a healthy boost. The nature of business has changed from a top-down style to a collaborative, project-oriented team approach, so open areas designed to foster group engagement have replaced closed-door offices. This approach is more in sync with the expectations of knowledge workers. Making this transition from individualized workspaces to areas that support the more collaborative nature of modern business can save your company money while reducing environmental demands and increasing productivity.

Evaluate which employees' jobs permit them to work off-site. To accommodate less-supervised working arrangements, develop clear, measurable objectives. Be sure to involve mid-level managers to ensure their support. Other issues include providing information technology support for off-site workers and finding or developing local

suppliers so you create sustainable supply lines. Of course, virtual communication cannot always substitute for one-on-one meetings, which are vital to building relationships. Thinking green about both physical space design and work policies will yield a more profitable workplace and a happier, healthier workforce.

About the Author

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