

The Value of Staff involvement

The value of encouraging participation and cooperation by staff and management in using materials and resources wisely should not be underestimated. Many barriers to change in sustainability are people issues rather than technical ones. Ongoing motivation and education could be the key to the success of your business' environmental sustainability program.

Keeping staff involved in environmental sustainability activities and raising individual awareness of environmental issues can generate real benefits:

- It encourages participation and environmental responsibility – the more support, the more effective your sustainability program / initiatives will be
- It helps dispel misconception that environment sustainability measures result in loss of amenity
- It boosts staff morale and pride – as people are made to feel part of a solution.

At What Stage Do You Involve Staff

Each business will have a different approach to involving staff, dependant on a variety of factors including size of business, number of staff (it could just be you and a partner, or you could have 100 staff!). It is recommended that a truly sustainable process will involve staff from the very beginning of the planning process through to implementation of agreed actions.

Internal Communication and Cultural Change

Company Culture and the Change Process

Effective implementation of a sustainability program may mean changes to some company processes. It is also possible that the successful implementation of changes at a fundamental operational level can act as the catalyst for a broader cultural change within the organisation. Whether or not everybody expects or wants this to eventuate, it is helpful to be aware that it can happen anyway.

“Change Management” is a field of study in its own right. Researchers have analysed effective change management processes and broken them down into identifiable stages. The steps recommended in this material will lead you through the key areas for implementing a successful organisational transition. There are many publications available on this topic should you wish to explore the topic in greater depth.

Below is a sequence of stages in managing change processes. You can use it as a guide and checklist to ensure that you have not missed anything. Think creatively, however, because you are likely to find that any theoretical system of steps only loosely applies to your own situation. (Nothing in real life is ever that tidy!)

Change Process Guide:

1. **Creating a vision**
2. **Involving and Motivating**
3. **Forming an Implementation Team**
4. **Communicating the Vision**
5. **Empowering employees**
6. **Achieving short-term wins**
7. **Consolidating achievements and progressing**
8. **Securing changes in the culture**

The Importance of Involving Staff

Factsheet 1.4: The Importance of Involving Staff

The next couple of pages gives a brief overview of each step and looks at how you are likely to be addressing the issues in the context of your environmental sustainability plan. It also offers suggestions for anything else you might wish to incorporate.

1. Creating a vision

Visioning is an essential element of the change process upon which everything else is based. A "vision" is an image of the future that is to be achieved which also makes mention of why it is a desirable outcome. The factsheet on developing your Sustainability Policy will guide you through this process.

It might also be useful to extract from your Sustainability Policy something short and sweet to use as a "Vision Statement". It just needs to state, in brief and simple terms, where you are heading and why you are going there. By having this in mind (and at hand for giving to others when appropriate) you will be more readily able to communicate your vision to all those you will be dealing with – from senior managers to staff and operators.

2. Involving and motivating people to make changes

Motivation is a core issue underlying any initiative requiring people to alter their habits and make fundamental changes to their patterns of behaviour and attitudes. Educating employees on their importance and the impact they can have may be a great source of motivation. You may also choose to implement a reward system or staff recognition program to increase motivation.

3. Forming an Implementation Team

Due to the complexity of the task and its potential to initiate cultural change within your organisation, a strong implementation team is needed to plan, implement and sustain the changes. Neither one strong stand-alone key figure nor a weak committee will achieve success in implementing widespread change. It is essential to have a dedicated, carefully chosen and trustworthy team, which is in turn wholly supported by senior management.

4. Communicating the Vision

The key to communicating your change process is simplicity. Complicated, jargon-filled communication can confuse and isolate people leading to resistance to your proposed changes. The simpler and more concise the communication, the more people will understand and be excited to participate in the change. Refer to the factsheet on Communicating Your Success for more information.

5. Empowering Employees

Wide-reaching employee participation is integral to successful company cultural change. Involving all employees enhances the change vision and makes implementation easier and more effective.

If you are involving and motivating staff at every level – incorporating their suggestions for improvement, utilising them in roles of responsibility and communicating with them regularly, particularly whenever there's good news about results. You will also be rewarding them and issuing praise, collectively and individually, for good work. As a result, your employees will feel a sense of ownership of the program and pride in their association and achievements – all of which fosters a sense of empowerment.

6. Achieving short-term wins ("Quick & Easy Wins")

When first starting to implement changes within your organisation, it is helpful to identify and act on smaller, more immediate achievements. Achieving short-term wins boosts staff confidence in the change process (making their effort seem worthwhile), and gives the people responsible a chance to relax and enjoy their achievement for a little while.

Short-term wins also relate the achievements back to the original vision (testing the accuracy of both), helps persuade the cynics and resisters, and ensures support from management.

There are usually “Quick & Easy Wins” in any energy savings program obtained by tidying up housekeeping procedures. As soon as you have a result you can celebrate, make sure to publicise it widely and congratulate all concerned (including yourself) on having achieved the first step so painlessly.

“Register every success!”

7. Consolidating achievements and progressing

Whilst short-term wins should be celebrated, there is always the risk of being swept away in the achievement of a small feat, thereby losing the urgency of incorporating larger changes. It is important that focus remains fixed on the long-term change vision; otherwise the change process will regress.

A clear policy statement will help keep the longer-term goal in focus. A good communication system will make sure that you always remain approachable and open to suggestions for further improvements – you will need them!

8. Securing changes in the culture

An organisation’s culture is a very powerful factor in influencing human behaviour. Once it has been changed it is important to anchor it firmly into the company’s values and norms. In changing culture it is important to note that behaviours and attitudes must first be altered and proved successful before cultural change can be implemented.

You cannot go wrong by checking regularly that people still feel comfortable approaching you with feedback, problems or ideas. Also that you are remaining open-minded and personally open to change, and that you are maintaining a constant practice of recognition and rewards – one of the most effective new habits you can ever adopt for making sure your staff remains happy and ‘fluid’.

Keep the eco-efficiency message alive by reinforcing its broad environmental benefits and making people proud of their own efforts to being more sustainable.

What can you do to involve staff and other stakeholders in developing your Sustainability Policy and action plan?
