

Behaviour Change in Sustainability

CE Sustainability Theme Group Meeting
Report by Martin Gibson

Constructing Excellence's [Sustainability Theme Group](#) helps attendees to embed best sustainability practice into all construction processes. The group expects members to learn something new, network and feel informed about key sustainability issues. Meetings usually have a theme and presentations; in October there were three presentations on the theme of behaviour change.

Change Management and leadership

The first speaker was Martin Hunt, Built Environment and Infrastructure Specialist from [Forum for the Future](#). His talk was on change management and leadership. This called on experience gained from Forum for the Future's Sustainable Business practice, which often works with very large multinational companies and encourages collaboration. In a theme that was repeated by other speakers, Martin explained that embedding sustainability describes how it is driven by people in their day-to-day roles.

Forum for the Future focuses on helping systematic change within very large organisations. It has developed a six step model to attain significant change. This starts with recognising the need for change and progresses through to setting rules for the changed situation. A company's position can be assessed and improvements tracked by considering how the business model ensures that the company will have commercial success in a sustainable society. The strategy, organisational qualities and performance that support this are also considered.

Forum has found that in order to really embed sustainability, there are qualities needed in four areas:

- People - need to know what is expected of them, be empowered to take risks and have the knowledge and capabilities to deliver
- Networks – people and functions should work together to deliver strategy and innovations are scaled up across the business
- Procedures – sustainability is integrated into everyday working practices and at key decision points, also that each individual's goals should clearly align with corporate goals
- Purpose - the organisation continually adapts to the changing external context and multiple views of the future are considered in order to help improve long-term resilience.

From working with companies such as O2 [on their Think Big Blueprint](#), Forum for the Future has been able to help catalyse change. Martin explained that often the top management understand sustainability and sometimes at the bottom understand sustainability but that the goals of senior and middle management are sometimes at odds with the greater vision – he termed this the management 'marzipan layer'.

In order to catalyse change some key lessons have been learnt:

- Work with personal motivations – these may include personal gain, competition or the greater good
- Provide choice – there may be different ways to achieve the outcome
- Make it real for the day job – it has to be relevant to individuals and the core purpose of the organisation.

A theme that was re-enforced by the other speakers was to use language that people recognise. Talking about innovation, new products and services, quality, productivity and efficiency is often far more meaningful than talking about sustainability.

Companies such as [Marks & Spencer](#) worked hard to ensure that their buying team understood sustainability and that it was embedded in people's performance objectives. This was backed up with

training and other initiatives, such as an innovation fund, to help capture good ideas from within the business.

Engagement during the early part of a change project is very important. Usually when Forum starts a project, it makes sure that everybody is brought on board so it's not just a top management look at the business model and organisational performance. People from across the business are asked to rate the organisation's position. Perhaps not surprisingly, this often gives huge differences of opinion from different sections of company and helps to learn where things need improvement.

Martin concluded with four points that are particularly important for behaviour change:

- Being adaptive and resilient
- Being entrepreneurial - challenging tradition
- Encouraging collaboration
- Being forward thinking and recognising trends and signals.

Behaviour change for sustainability

Caroline Watson talked about behaviour change for sustainability from the work of the environmental change charity [Global Action Plan](#) (GAP). Where Forum for the Future usually works at a very high level in companies, GAP undertakes more specific help on particular issues, often following on from the Forum. Gap works on the ground, harnessing the power of people to solve environmental challenges. It helps to ensure that awareness leads to action.

Everyone is using resources in getting to work and at work but this often not clear to them. However, when organisations take on an environmental behaviour change employees are generally very positive. There are benefits to employee well-being and productivity.

GAP has developed a model for intervention. It starts by understanding the culture of an organisation and its communication channels, motivation and abilities. It then looks at what action needs to be taken and works on a small number of specific actions. The actions are evaluated for their impact and effectiveness, with successes celebrated. As with good management systems, the evaluation leads to further actions and continuous improvement.

Caroline explained that GAP assesses people's ability and motivation to undertake specific actions: can people do what is being asked of them and do they want to do it?

Tapping into an organisation's culture is very important to reinforce and help change. Caroline gave the example of work at [Barts Health NHS Trust](#). Nurses, quite rightly, prioritise patient care. And issues like saving energy are secondary to this. To design a successful energy reduction programme, GAP looked at how to tie energy-saving into patient care. The team came up with a [TLC campaign](#): "Turn off, Lights out, Close doors". This helped nurses to link energy saving with patient care because it took actions that helped patients to sleep better, improving recovery rate. It led to comments such as "it feels calmer with the doors closed".

In the first year, the campaign helped Barts to save £100,000 in energy costs. The savings are being maintained because the behaviours that it has encouraged provide something that the nurses already wanted to do.

Another of the other lessons Caroline passed on included the importance of leading by example. For example, GAP worked with O₂ to help increase working from home. O₂ wanted to make working from home a social norm within the organisation. In order to help do this, the chief executive took a very high profile role in helping to show that he was working at home. A number of other employees were also asked to show the benefits to them and the company of working at home. Pictures and short message from all those involved were clearly displayed; it is often very encouraging when you see someone you know doing something.

The issue of communications is highly important. It was emphasised that just sending an e-mail is not communicating with most people. Many people are swamped by e-mail and simply won't read it all. Also, people on construction sites are likely to get their information in other ways - toolbox talks are a good way of getting information on site.

Like Martin, Caroline stressed the importance of the language used on construction sites. Health and safety is a heavily emphasised on constructions sites and tying other issues into this can greatly increase communication success. For example, drivers were more likely to switch off idling engines when it was pointed out that exhaust fumes would be unhealthy for their colleagues and passers-by.

Another important thing was to make it fun! This doesn't mean that issues are not serious but it helps people engage more and in different ways. Having a driving simulator competition that gave points to the most efficient drivers tapped into a competitive spirit that helped people to learn more about fuel-efficient driving.

As we all know, construction projects change frequently, with new people coming on-site with different trades. Caroline explained that it was very important to look for the people who are most constant on a project and get their buy-in to what you are trying to achieve. She gave the example of the gate man at a site mentioning the no idling policy to drivers and rewarding them with an air freshener for switching off engines. Similarly, site managers are fairly constant and so ensuring that they understood what was being tried and were on board with it was very important for success and longevity.

In summing up, Caroline re-enforced key messages such as the importance of senior management buy-in and looking at where staff will see and hear messages. She also pointed out the importance of putting the right objectives into people's job descriptions and then monitoring performance and reinforcing the messages.

Everybody plays a part

The final talk was from Sharon Davies, Principal Sustainable Development Communications Manager at [Willmott Dixon](#).

Over the past couple of years, the company has made huge strides against its sustainability targets – and these achievements would not have been possible without the engagement and support of the people who work for the company.

When Sharon joined the company two years ago, there were a number challenges when it came to implementing the company's new Sustainable Development Strategy:

- Geography – 3500 staff spread over 40 offices and 150 sites. Nearly half with limited or no access to computers.
- Attitudes – sustainability a luxury for the company and its clients in a climate of austerity. Sustainability seen as 'red tape'.
- Data – difficulties with data meant that the people did not trust performance information, so it wasn't being used in decision making.
- Message – the activities expected of individuals in delivering the strategy varied according to their job role. Their 'behaviour change' was more about ensuring that employees had the understanding of sustainability as a set of principles by which they made decisions in their work.

Re-Thinking, Willmott Dixon's sustainability team, spent many months improving the data, training individuals responsible for inputting it, and creating a system where it could be interrogated at a Group, local company, even down to project level. A new monthly report was created for their Holdings Board, which compared local companies' performance on carbon, waste and community. This transparency of

data created competition between local offices which in turn, drove improvements. Improving the data was a vital component in the company's strategy to improve its sustainability performance.

Sharon then put together some training mandatory for all staff, which helped people understand the principles of sustainable development and what these might mean to people in their day jobs.

The training took the form of an online module. This meant that everybody had to set aside 40 minutes to do it. 'Everybody Plays a Part' contained an innovative blend of film, interviews, graphics, quizzes and staff soundbites. It demonstrated leadership for sustainability from the very top, opening with an address from the Group's CEO.

'Everybody Plays a Part' was completed by 99% of the company's employees. Each of these made a behavioural-change commitment which was emailed to the individual and their line manager. All were encouraged to use these as performance objectives in their annual reviews. Fulfillment of these commitments will help Willmott Dixon reduce its environmental impact, increase community investment and delight its customers.

The average score for the final test, which checked people's understanding of the module's key messages, was 9.8/10. The Group has recently seen a 12% increase in the number of people who agreed with the statement 'I know how I can help my office/site/branch be more sustainable', in the annual staff survey.