Turning employees into valuable sustainability assets and advocates

IMS Consulting (Europe) Ltd
Senior Executive Roundtable discussions
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Background

IMS Consulting facilitates a series of roundtable events sharing best practice and expert advice across our network of senior sustainability leaders. The topical briefings and lively debates cover issues such as the future of reporting, how to use engagement effectively, sustainability standards, frameworks and challenges.

Our latest session, held in London on 21 September 2016, focussed on **'Turning employees into valuable sustainability assets and advocates'** with representatives from both the public and private sector. **The aim of this paper is to report in depth on topics and issues discussed.**

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1. Why eLearning?

Getting to grips with sustainability eLearning and how to deliver excellent training
Presented by Graham Sprigg, Managing Director IMS Consulting

A **general trend** emerging from employee and materiality surveys is that employees are asking:

- for more training and support on sustainability

- to understand what it means to their role

- how they can help meet their business' targets.

Frequently organisations struggle to know how they can get their sustainability strategy firmly embedded with employees. **The Holy Grail is to have a workforce with a 'big S' frame of mind**, who always consider the sustainability opportunities and risks when undertaking their day-to-day tasks.

The reality is that without actively driving a significant step change in workforce behaviour and understanding, many sustainability directors find they struggle to meet ongoing strategy targets once the initial 'quick wins' have been won.

Training can be part of the solution and is moving up the agenda. ELearning is a natural choice for businesses that are large, complex and geographically diverse. Unfortunately there are plenty of dry, unfocused greenwash sustainability eLearning modules – those that fail to answer the questions employees need answers to: **WHAT** are the key issues, **WHY** should I care and **HOW** do I tackle them in my role and learn from others.

Why eLearning

There are several reasons why eLearning can help train and engage employees.

First of all, eLearning can hep support sustainability goals by:

- ✓ **Providing value for money**. When you produce learning content, you will spend a significant amount of time on it, whether it's built online or not. With eLearning, each time the course is accessed, your return on investment improves because you are dividing the fixed production costs by number of uses. You have also saved costs in terms of material, travel and you hopefully improved performance.

- ✓ **Maintaining productivity**. eLearning is not bound by geography or time, you can control the impact of training on production by encouraging people to access during down times.

- ✓ **Creating consistency**. You may have a great facilitator, but that's no guarantee that the courses are presented the same across session; eLearning allows you to create a standardised process and consistency in the delivery of training.

Secondly, eLearning can support the employee's development by:

- ✓ **Allowing real-time access.** Live learning events require participants to align their schedules to the training calendar. ELearning can be accessed anytime and anywhere, whether you have online access or not.

- ✓ **Giving freedom to fail**. The process of learning includes failing at some point during the process, but no one likes to fail in a classroom full of other people. ELearning encourages exploration and testing of ideas. By providing the participant with the encouraging and appropriate feedback you create a constructive and enjoyable learning environment. Worst case, you can always give the participant the opportunity to start again, something you can't always do in class.

- ✓ **Improving retention**. The combination of multimedia and instructional design can produce a very rich learning experience that provides repetition. The combination of text, images and sound give the participant multiple opportunities to absorb the various contents.

Thirdly and lastly, eLearning is eco-friendly:

- ✓ **ELearning is good for the environment**. According to several studies, producing and providing distance learning courses consumes an average of 90% less energy and produces 85% fewer CO_2 emissions per student than conventional face-to-face courses.

How to deliver excellent eLearning in sustainability

ELearning can be an effective training and engaging tool if delivered in the right way. Unfortunately, there are many ineffective elearning resources available, which is usually related to the quality of content and the way issues are communicated; such as failing to customise to different roles in the business, lack of in-depth understanding of the issues and a lack of interactivity making the delivery boring and tedious.

Below are eight **golden rules** for delivering excellent Sustainability eLearning:

1. **Clear objectives** for changes in employee thinking and behaviour, with approaches to measure if achieved.
2. **Training Need Analysis** helps to determine how the content and approach can be effectively tailored and delivered to the employee base.
3. **Bite-size modules** covering the WHAT, WHY and HOW are the most effective way at keeping the participant engaged..
4. **Learning management systems** (LMS) help administer, document, track, report and deliver elearning programmes. If your company doesn't have one – don't worry – there are online systems that you can use.
5. **Expert advice** is essential for the development of elearning modules; both sustainable business and eLearning expertise are essential to deliver effective content.
6. **Animation, interactivity and customisation** are essential to create an engaging and interesting delivery mechanism. Tailoring for different users and multimedia approaches are incredibly effective.
7. **Rigorous planning and testing** should be undertaken to connect smoothly with the business' existing training and IT infrastructure.
8. **Collaboration** with the business' HR and communication teams will ensure that training is well embedded, advertised and communicated.

ELearning and employees with learning difficulties

So how can eLearning support people with learning disabilities?

ELearning is delivered using text, images and sound; increasing the likelihood of delivering content in a way that meets a range of skills and abilities. Elearning uses animation and interactive elements to actively engage the participant in the learning process, it can also be easily repeated if not grasped the first time.

ELearning – how to motivate your employees

How can you motivate your employees to even start looking at an eLearning module?

When first approaching elearning, the following questions arise:

- How do you motivate employees to train themselves?
- How can you measure the effectiveness of eLearning?

There are a range of approaches that can help motivate staff, including effective internal communication campaigns that could motivate by introducing a competitive element between different parts of the business – e.g. the first division to all complete the module wins a free lunch.

Measuring the effectiveness is where your clear objectives and Learning Management System come into play (see eight golden rules above). The LMS will allow you to monitor the number of people that have completed the modules and capture any data that will allow you determine if you have achieved your objectives.

Large organisations often struggle with the vast number of different training programmes delivered through a range of channels; it can be confusing for employees and make it difficult to determine which course is right for them. In such cases, a company wide learning strategy that encompasses all learning requirements – including sustainability – could be the best way of introducing clarity and coherence.

IMS eLearning demo

IMS Consulting is specialised in delivering excellent Sustainability eLearning. The links below show give a few examples of our work:

http://materiality.imsplc.com/Elearning/elearningdemo1/story.html

http://materiality.imsplc.com/Elearning/elearningdemo2/story.html

2. How to build teams who become Sustainability Advocates

Presented by Noel Morrin, Executive Vice President Sustainability at Stora Enso

Based in Finland, Stora Enso is one of the largest forest products companies in the world. Noel Morrin joined Stora Enso in April 2015 in a newly created executive role established to drive sustainability strategy to a new level as the company moves from traditional forest products to higher added value products in packaging and biomaterials.

Noel was previously Senior Vice President Sustainability and Green Support at Skanska AB in Sweden, one of the largest construction & development companies in the world.

Noel shared his lessons for engaging people on sustainability:

Keep it simple

No matter what you think your sustainability strategy should look like, the most important aspect to consider is to **keep it simple**! It seems straightforward but unfortunately it is not as easy as it sounds. We tend to complicate our strategies and jargon and the more in depth the strategy becomes, the more complicated our communication becomes. We forget that if we want to engage and communicate effectively, keeping it simple is the only way to make our message clear to everyone we want to get engaged.

Example: the Green Postcard

A case in point is the mapping of your sustainability strategy on to a postcard. This may sound like an unusual alternative to the normal brochure companies usually resort to; trying to squeeze a whole strategy onto the size of a postcard would mean simplifying and reducing. But this is exactly what we need to do to get people engaged. The postcard idea worked very well for the company that embraced the idea. They found it simple, clear and understandable. This was the beginning of Skanska's communication of their journey into Deep Green – a strategy that is now understood, admired and referred to throughout the construction industry.

Creating the need for sustainability training

Sometimes you may find that you need to educate people within your division, for example introducing and demonstrating how to achieve targets. Sometimes people do not want to learn, they may just not be interested and motivation can be key.

Noel explained a challenge he had been given to educate senior leaders on sustainability. Everyone thought it was someone else's priority, but not their own. He thought about several approaches to teaching and learning but concluded that, unless people had an imperative to learn, the information wouldn't stick. So, instead of "pushing" information out to senior managers, he devised a way of

them consciously having to "pull". Noel set his managers the task of speaking at conferences, delivering their company's aims, objectives, views and approach to sustainability. It became part of their performance review. Pretty soon, the managers were learning about sustainability and delivering presentations with confidence. Not only did the senior managers become engaged and passionate about sustainability, their message was broadcast to hundreds of influencers via the conference circuit.

By creating a need, people quickly find the motivation to train themselves and learn.

Engaging NGOs

Noel provided an example of how engagement with NGOs can be improved significantly. This method works for NGOs who aren't completely bought in to a company's sustainability credentials, as well as those that are. By involving senior staff members of a partner NGO in his company's management training programme as delegates (trainees), several benefits were achieved. The NGO's own management team learned more about the commercial and managerial skills required to run a successful organisation. In addition, both parties benefit from the greater understanding of each other's issues and challenges, through the relationship that developed between the members of the two management teams. In the long-term, the NGO's improved level of understanding of how a company operates-it's constraints, objectives and values-helps the relationship between NGO and company to be less confrontational and more collaborative.

3. The benefit of volunteering and other employee initiatives
Presented by Stéphanie Pullès, Head of Corporate Responsibility at Bouygues

Stéphanie Pullès, Bouygues UK Head of Corporate Responsibility since 2010. Over that period, Stephanie has set up an inclusive strategy for Corporate Responsibility and embedded responsible behaviour in the company. Stéphanie has introduced new programmes and tools, including a network of expertise and owners of sustainable issues such as community engagement, sustainable construction, environment, economical impact, diversity and wellbeing.

How to engage your staff

Below are a few key points to help start the process of engaging your employees:

- ✓ Identify the behaviour you want your staff to engage with
- ✓ Be clear about the objectives you want to achieve
- ✓ Develop a step-by-step programme including communication strategy
- ✓ Roll out the programme and build the team
- ✓ Embed the team in the organisation to ensure momentum
- ✓ Measure impact to ensure continuous improvement

Rule number one, **keep it simple**! Don't focus and look for too many objectives at once, it will overcomplicate and dilute any engagement.

Below are two examples on how to engagement your staff:

1. Employee volunteering

One of the ways of engaging your employees is encouraging their involvement in the community.

Studies show that by encouraging employees to volunteer during work hours helps change their behaviours; hence getting them engaged in sustainability.

To effectively encourage your staff to volunteer, you need to:

- ✓ **Keep it easy to mange –**The real challenge is making the process easy. Creating an online tool can help. The tool should be accessible online and provide details of volunteering activities; once they decide which activity they would like to do, they can register for it by simply clicking a button. Volunteers should also be able to leave feedback about their experience.

- ✓ **Introduce policy** – Policies are created to motivate people; a case in point is deciding to exchange a day of work with a day of volunteering. That would create a policy that people would follow. Also, by appointing a volunteering coordinator, you work on increasing participation. Volunteering coordinators will already know the client and what is needed. You can also measure the policy outcomes by calculating volunteering hours and collecting feedback.

- ✓ **Resistant groups –** some people won't **EVER** get involved. The reason is simple; they just don't care. Luckily it won't represent the majority of your employees. Avoid being tempted to try to change people's behaviour and focus on resistant groups. It may distract you from providing enough support to the employees who do care and can become advocates for your work. The focus needs to stay on the people who do show interest.

- ✓ **We can all be competitive –** knowing your people is important. And knowing how competitive people can be, can help motivate people to organise or participate in activities. Once people have participated once then it is likely that they will come again and book another activity because it's fun!

All the above can be delivered internally with no cost other than the time spent building the online platform and developing policies in-house.

Furthermore, it is important that someone is responsible for its implementation, e.g. project managers can encourage employees do use the online platform.

2. Female Employee Network

Female employee engagement can be tough. In companies such as the construction sector, the number of females employed is usually lower as it is a male dominated industry still. According to several statistics, female employees can have a difficult time when trying to speak in public and get support. They are usually not taken as seriously in their participation as male colleagues.

Unconscious bias and the female networking

Behavioural change should take place to reduce **unconscious bias against gender minority.** Creating female networks are usual for sharing ideas, career advice, providing training and helps empower and provide positive support.

It is important to put tools in place and ensure continuity by making someone responsible for driving progress. Changing culture and behaviour can take years which means that measuring ongoing progress can be very helpful.

Presented by Yvonne Bennett, Group Head, Culture Development Programme,
J Murphy & Sons

Introduction

Yvonne Bennett joined J Murphy & Son in October 2011. With 13 years' experience as a Culture Development Programme lead, she is responsible for the continual development and international implementation (UK, Australia, Canada and Ireland) of the Murphy 'Never Harm' Culture Development Programme. The programme continues to receive industry recognition and praise for its different approach to sustaining Never Harm culture in SHESQ. A certified Master Practitioner in NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), background in forensic psychology, and a professional Performance Coach, Yvonne has held international business development and marketing director roles within the IT and Telecoms industries, working with FTSE top 100 organisations**.**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and positive language

By studying how people learn and how their behaviour can be influenced and modified is key in order to engage your employees in sustainability. One way of engaging your employees is by applying positive language and the NLP tools.

NLP is a model of interpersonal communication, chiefly concerned with the relationship between successful patterns of behaviour and the subjective experiences (esp. patterns of thought) underlying them and "a system of alternative therapy based on this which seeks to educate people in self-awareness and effective communication, and to change their patterns of mental and emotional behaviour."

It is a method of influencing brain behaviour (the 'neuro' part of the phrase) through the use of language (the 'linguistic' part) and other types of communication to enable a person to 'recode' the way the brain responds to stimuli (that's the 'programming') and manifest new and better behaviours.

Language is *key* in how we engage someone; what we say and the way we frame some topics are very important when trying to engage employees.

The journey of learning

People have different learning abilities and skills. Some people get more engaged 'visually', other people may need more text/auditory stimuli or a combination of both. When considering how to engage your staff in sustainability – and how to change behaviour to align with organisational culture – paying attention to the different ways people learn and how they use language can help in overcoming this issue.

NLP has much potential for teaching and learning. NLP is commonly used to offer solutions to problems encountered in teaching, for example in classroom management. NLP assumes that there are systematic relationships between an individual's language and behaviour. A learner's internal representations and processing are reflected, in various ways, in their language and their external behaviour (e.g. non-verbal behaviour – NLP courses train participants to observe and utilise these aspects). Skills, beliefs and behaviours are all learnt (e.g. skills have corresponding sequences of internal representation, often referred to as `strategies'). Learning is a process through which such representations and sequences are acquired and modified.

An individual's capacity to learn is influenced strongly by their neuro-physiological `state' (e.g. a state of curiosity rather than a state of boredom), and by their beliefs about learning and about themselves as learners (rather obviously, beliefs that one is capable of learning and that learning is worthwhile and fun are considered more useful than their opposites). Such states and beliefs are also learnt and susceptible to change. All communication potentially influences leaning.

NLP can help unveil how to communicate, reframe and engage your employees.

The 'Broker Switch' – looking at the world from a new perspective
One of the things that we learn from using positive language and NLP is that sometimes it can be very difficult to effectively make people learn and commit to what you are explaining/teaching. This is called 'the broker switch'; when we think we know the subject well enough, our attention just shifts away and we stop learning – as our brain is telling us that we already know the topic discussed. As the ancient philosopher Socrates taught us, the only way to keep expanding our knowledge is to assume that we DO NOT know it all. However many people are not aware of this and will shut down their learning process and attention without fully realising it if the topic discussed sound familiar.

So how do you engage continuously with your people? How do you manage that engagement and keep the broker switched on? That's where using NLP can make a difference.

Sustainability – a term defined for systems, not for people
There are a series of techniques that can be used to engage people and find what actually make them tick, learn and change behaviour.

When we look at the term 'sustainability', we can find several definitions as the term can be used quite vaguely and broadly. However all of its definitions have something in common; they refer to systems, not people.

That can become a problem when trying to engage people in sustainability as everything related to sustainability is very 'systematic' - and most people are not.

Systems versus culture
Sometimes it is assumed that if something is imposed as a rule people would follow it (e.g. 'health and safety regulations'). Unfortunately companies, especially the ones with higher risk of accidents at work such as construction companies, still have problems related to health and safety regulations as people sometimes don't follow the right procedures. This happens because, despite what many people may think, it's their culture and not the regulations that make people act and behave in a certain way. Trying to impose certain behaviour when people are not willing to change will just result in failure.

Unfortunately, culture (hence behaviour), doesn't change overnight. It can be a challenging and slow process. By reframing, making the subject interesting at all levels you can successfully engage your employees. An advantage of NLP in fact is it is not sector specific as it is based on the concept that changing culture applies to all sectors with no particular differentiation.

Logical Levels

Below is a NLP model that can be used for employee engagement:
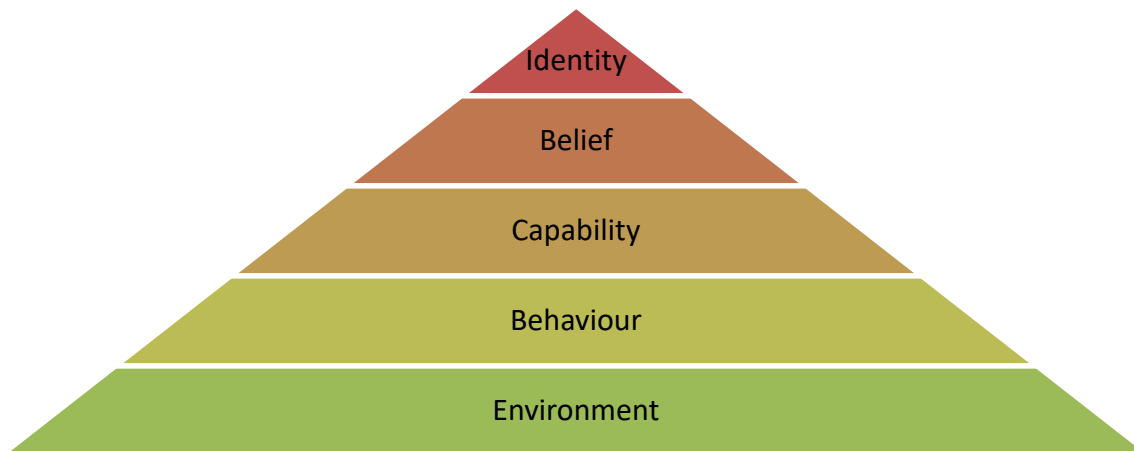
* Figure 1 – NLP model - Logical Levels

Looking at this model most organisations focus on; environment, behaviour(s) and superficially, the capability level. However, it's proven that real focus around 'identity' and 'values' are extremely important when trying to engage and change behaviour.

With engagement usually focused on the three bottom levels, it is therefore unreasonable to expect "behavioural change" without focussing on culture and values – actually understanding what makes your workforce tick. By spending time on identity and belief, the rest should follow quite naturally.

How we communicate our Sustainability strategy

It is also important to understand how we communicate, appropriate communication and what level within the organisation we are targeting.
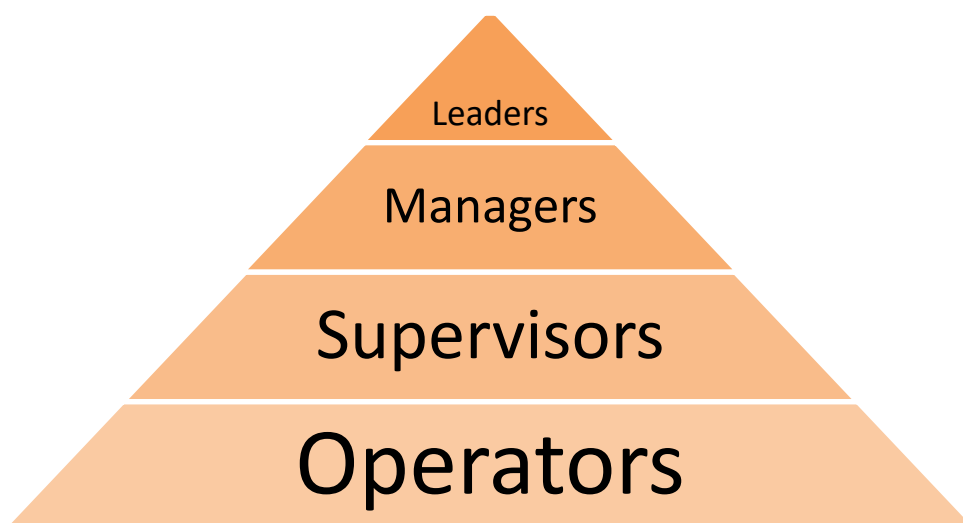
*Figure 2: Cultural Atmosphere

The model shown in figure 2, explores the different 'levels' that can exist within an organisation. When we communicate our values and beliefs and try to engage our staff, we think we communicate our beliefs and values to all yet usually, we tend to engage leaders and managers and not the 'delivery' levels (such as supervisors, operators). It is important to communicate values and beliefs to all levels and more importantly, to check the message has landed.

Behaviour change and what makes people 'tick'

Having looked at the two different models, we have a clearer idea on the importance of culture and identity when trying to engage our employees. People all have different values; hence trying to embed your "organisational culture" (and see it applied) is extremely hard. You cannot change culture for the long term through dictate alone. In order to make people change behaviour, you need to find out what makes them tick.

NLP gives you the possibility of reframing your thinking, finding creative ways and thinking outside the box on how to engage your employees. A case in point is health and safety – everyone should follow the rules as it is in their own interest. Unfortunately you won't see accident ratings dropping if you think that health and safety regulations alone would be enough to avoid people from getting hurt. People need to change behaviour and that happens when you find what motivates them.

NLP - in practice

Below you can find an example of an exercise that can be developed with your peers during workshops on how to engage in sustainability. The aim is to reason carefully about some aspects of sustainability that will help with engagement. It will make you more aware of the details to think about when trying to change staff behaviour.

Think about the following questions - taking into consideration the model below:

1. What motivates/excites you personally about sustainability engagement?
2. What do you think your teams get excited about in terms of sustainability?
3. What are the organisational drivers for sustainability?
4. What drivers do your clients have for sustainability?