



Changing Culture for Energy Efficiency & Resource Conservation

By John Heymann

The organizations that will be the most successful in implementing sustainable practices will be those capable of bringing about rapid and long-lasting change internally. The capacity to make those changes varies from organization to organization, and is a key factor to the success of any investment in sustainability. Enterprises that can transform their culture and organization in parallel with improvements to their facilities and property will be the ones to reap the maximum benefit – both internally and in the marketplace.

Both physical and cultural changes need to occur

Investing in physical structure upgrades and improvements without organizational and cultural changes will yield some results, yet will miss the chance to make lasting change and reap deeper benefits.

Without a plan to integrate new practices into your existing culture, you are missing a significant opportunity to boost the return on investment you've made in reducing energy and resource consumption. The California Air Resources Board has found that only 45% of the impact and savings from energy efficiency projects can be attributed to improvements of the physical environment; the other 55% come from behavioral changes.

Benefits of “Going Green”

According to a Society for Human Resources Management Green Workplace Survey, 43% of surveyed organizations have no formal or informal environmental responsibility policy, and no plans to implement one within the next twelve months. The CEO of SHRM says, “The study shows that companies really do benefit from environmentally-friendly practices, and yet a large portion of firms have no plans to go green.”

Organizations that implement environmental responsibility programs report considerable benefits, including improved employee morale, a strong public image, increased consumer/customer confidence, increased employee loyalty, and a positive financial bottom line as the result of their environmental responsibility programs.

The survey results indicate a lot can be gained from an environmental responsibility policy, yet organizations are finding that these policies and practices are not easy to implement. Some barriers cited include implementation costs, maintenance costs, lack of management support, lack of employee support, and concern for workplace inefficiency.

Where to Start

How can these obstacles be overcome? A good first step is to assess the current practices in your organization to see if they support or discourage sustainable behaviors. An assessment can also help identify areas in which to focus resources to embed “green” into the culture, supplementing any facilities changes you may be undertaking. NewLevel Group uses a practical, step-by-step program designed to engage every member of the team, and communicate sustainability efforts internally as well as externally.

The approach is illustrated through a formula of five elements that, if in place, will strengthen the capacity for change. Much like a multiplication equation, if any one element is absent, change will be difficult to sustain. The five elements, expressed in the formula are:

Vision for Change x Skills x Incentives x Resources x Action = Capacity for Change

Vision: A clear and compelling vision for change must be articulated, so all know the “what,” the “why,” and understand the direction.

Skills: A vision alone is not enough; people need the technical skills and knowledge to be able to translate the vision into action.

Incentives: Formal and informal reward and recognition systems, including feedback processes and practices that support the vision and skills.

Resources: Having the tools and equipment to do the job right not only helps with implementation of a change, it also is related to job satisfaction and increases the likelihood of positively embracing changing expectations and practices.

Action: Action steps are the specific, tangible translation of the vision into visible practices

Just Get Started

Changing long-established behaviors takes effort, time, training, and continual support. Creating a culture focused on sustainability, one that embraces environmental, economic, and social sustainability at all levels of the organization, is a worthy goal.

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