

REFLECTION ON BREWDOG'S SUSTAINABILITY PROGRESS

Assignment 3 – BMSP7003

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Reflection on BrewDog's sustainability progress.

Introduction

BrewDog have faced many challenges since its introduction of their 'BrewDog Tomorrow' sustainability plan in February 2020. Its sustainability initiatives have been seemingly overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic, an open letter from employees accusing the business of a 'culture of fear' (BBC News, 2021), and then most recently sexual harassment claims towards CEO James Watt (BBC News, 2022). This essay will consider what has been achieved so far within BrewDog's sustainability plan, if BrewDog's culture is suitable to allow for further sustainable development, and if there are any barriers or drivers to this process.

Does BrewDog's success depend on a change in the organisational culture?

'BrewDog Tomorrow' has full support of CEO James Watt. BrewDog however, as outlined in the previous report, have an organisational culture that has been questioned. Blanco-Portela, Benayas, Pertierra and Lozano (2017) highlight that common barriers to change within organisations are misunderstanding, lack of trust, and within the group level, group conflict. BrewDog must strive to improve the organisational culture, rebuild trust, in order to allow BrewDog to focus on their sustainability initiatives. Hitchcock and Willard (2015) argue 'sustainability is at its core an issue requiring organizational culture change'. Taylor (2016) argues that 'culture accelerates change by influencing the mass thinking, and thus behaviour, and leaders must build cultures that suit their goals'. The sustainability goals of the business can only be achieved when the culture is correct within the organisation. In response to the claims against the business, BrewDog launched an independent

culture review, (BrewDog, 2022a) which led to a workplace code of conduct for all employees (BrewDog, 2022b).

According to Fraser (2010) ‘ineffective leadership’ including ‘unwillingness to address major issues’ and ‘unwillingness to acknowledge’ which included ‘taking no responsibility for mistakes or issues’ are some of common factors which ‘contributed to breakdowns in trust’. While BrewDog has completed the business review, and implemented the new Workplace Code, Watts himself, has often avoided immediately apologising for accused actions. Watt for example has been ‘accused of trying to intimidate former staff’ who were to appear on a documentary on BrewDog’s culture (Davies, 2022). BrewDog chairman Allan Leighton has said that “James has committed to making improvements to his management style” (Daly and Bonnar, 2022). Taylor (2016), however, argues that ‘attempting to change individual leadership behaviour, without a corresponding effort to change the culture within which they operate, is a slow and often an unsuccessful process’.

In the model of trust violation and repair by Lewicki and Bunker (1996), it would be recommended that BrewDog use repair processes that will ‘address both the cognitive and emotional components, either directly or indirectly through changed behavioural outcomes’. Furthermore ‘while it is the violators who are generally required to initiate the process and expend much of the effort, the victim must also recognize the violation, make attributions about the violation and violator that enable trust repair, and accept the repair initiatives of the violator in a way that moves the relationship forward towards a more healthy and productive future state’ (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996).

Taylor (2016) argues that ‘culture change occurs when messages change’, one of these sources is from behaviours. Watt has been criticised for the use of a private jet whilst promoting sustainability (Former Employees of BrewDog, 2021). Taylor (2016) argues that ‘behaviour change by some

individuals is not enough to build a new culture although it is an important part of the process. Progress and future initiative are both accelerated by working within a framework of cultural development'. BrewDog has been accused of a 'culture of fear', which needs to be stopped from the top levels of the organisation, as Taylor (2016) argues 'many people, wishing to fit in, read the signals about how to behave, and adapt their behaviour accordingly'. This could be converted to a focus on sustainability, for example through focusing on being the sustainability leader in the market, and the SDG they have not previously focused upon. Taylor (2016) highlights 'culture accelerates change by influencing the mass thinking, and thus behaviour, and leaders must build cultures that suit their goals'.

Taylor (2016) argues that a business can 'plan to develop a culture that supports sustainable practice'. Taylor (2016) highlights that 'individual actions and efforts become much more powerful when they exist within a coordinated plan to change culture'. Cosby (2014) emphasises 'innovation', describing this leadership competency for sustainability as a one which 'supports culture for change practices'. The 2007 Green Workplace Survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management reported that there were 'several perceived positive outcomes of those instituted programs, including improved employee morale, a stronger public image, and increased consumer confidence' (SHRM, 2007).

Figure A



Cosby (2014), builds upon the work of Ulrich et al., (2008) and highlights the four sustainable leadership competencies above. BrewDog must effectively use these to further expand their sustainability initiatives. BrewDog appear to have strong sustainability strategic visioning with their ‘BrewDog Tomorrow’ sustainability plan. They have ‘ecological competence’ with support from Mike Berners-Lee - business acumen competence and strategic planning competence. In terms of systems alignment and employee engagement, these are an area of growth for BrewDog with the aforementioned cultural issues within the organisation that needs to be resolved. Watts needs to develop his ‘supportive communication’ which Cosby (2014) describes as willingness to ‘listen to diverse audiences with varied opinions and motivation’. The importance of this is argued by Marshall et al. (2015) who found that ‘managerial attitudes and norms are seen to act as strong drivers for undertaking active EM behaviours’. BrewDog must ensure ‘credible activism’ which is the ability to persuade employees and upper management regarding importance of sustainability’ (Cosby, 2014). The fourth area ‘measurement and metrics’ is one of its strengths, BrewDog reports on its sustainability through annual reports, AGMS and also reported the sustainability updates extensively at an EGM in August 2020, with input from Mike Berners-Lee.

Other stakeholder involvement

BrewDog must convince multiple stakeholders of the importance of its sustainability journey.

BrewDog's most recent sustainability goal, as highlighted by the previous report, was to increase the level of organic ingredients in BrewDog beer by 10% by 2026. Levi Strauss & Co has highlighted the importance of involving and discussing sustainability strategies with stakeholders. They were a founding member of the 'Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), which allows them 'to support farmers directly by investing in improved practices at field level' (Levi Strauss & Co, 2019). With BrewDog's commitment to increase the level of organic ingredients in BrewDog beer by 10% by 2026, BrewDog must work closely with their suppliers. Greenwood and Van Buren III (2010) highlight that 'in many situations, the firm holds greater power than the stakeholder and therefore cannot necessarily be trusted to return the aforementioned duty to the stakeholder'. They continue to say that 'stakeholders must therefore rely on the trustworthiness of the organization to fulfil obligations in accordance with Philips' principle of fairness'. BrewDog must therefore continue to build trust, and provide opportunities with the malt, and hop farmers, potentially developing schemes similar to Diageo, as described in the previous report.

Furthermore, BrewDog must convince their Equity Punks, and TSG Consumer Partners, a private equity firm who bought 22% of BrewDog's shares in 2017, that this is the correct approach for the

business. However, they may need little convincing – according to Peter Graf, Chief Sustainability Development Officer for SAP, ‘Sustainability is alive and kicking. It is not because of climate change. There is money to be made and money to be saved’ (Cosby, 2014). The economic value of sustainable development is supported by a survey that shows companies with sustainability-focused companies outperformed peers across industrial sectors (A.T. Kearney, 2008).

Could BrewDog a sustainability leader within the industry?

As highlighted in the previous report, BrewDog are currently focusing on UN Global Compact’s environmental principles 7-9, and are specifically aiming to increase the level of organic ingredients in their beer by 10% by 2026. This report would argue that they are currently the sustainability leader within the industry, however the business could go further in terms of their sustainability levels.

BrewDog have sustainability targets in appraisals but could develop this to promote the overall business sustainability objectives. Cordeiro and Sarkis (2008) found that ‘207 US firms S firms from the Standard & Poor 500 finds that *only* in firms with an *explicit* linkage between environmental performance and executive contracts is there evidence for an impact of environmental performance on CEO compensation levels’. There are, however, some evidence that businesses with senior managers’ pay linked to sustainability goals have better environmental management overall (Fernandez et al., 2003). Further studies, however, suggest that ‘managerial pay results from rather than causes environmental performance’ (Russo and Harrison, 2005).

In terms of the UN Sustainable Development goals, some of BrewDog’s projects fall under the bandwidth of the following SDGs.

SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, sea and marine resources for sustainable development.

BrewDog do not use animal-based finings in their beer, which are added to unfiltered beer to remove yeast and protein haze (BrewDog, 2022c). Commonly isinglass is used, which is the dried swim bladders of fish (Barnes, 2016). The sturgeon, which is commonly used for isinglass, is now classed as critically endangered (Canal Rivers Trust, 2022), therefore BrewDog are no longer worsening this issue.

SG15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and half and reverse land degradation and half biodiversity loss.

BrewDog have committed to planting their ‘Lost Forest’, which is 10,000 acres of land in Scotland. The intention is to plant 1.1 million native trees (Tidman, 2022) which will create the ‘single biggest native woodland establishment and peatland restoration project ever carried out in the UK’ (Watt, 2021). At the time of writing, however, BrewDog have not commenced their planting projects in the UK (BBC, 2022). That being said, BrewDog have been working with the Eden Reforestation organisation based in the USA which works in developing countries. However, the donations have totalled to less than \$100,000 dollars at the time of writing. Each tree costs 0.15\$ to plant. BrewDog’s marketing campaign therefore has planted just over 666,666 trees (Eden Reforestation Projects, 2022). With trees only planted for when customers scan the QR code on the pack of their

promotional lost larger, this seems to be the explanation for the discrepancy between sales of larger and trees planted (Carmichael, 2021) due to potential customer apathy.

SDG13: Take urgent action to combat climate and its impacts

BrewDog is currently leading within the industry on its carbon footprint offsetting. They are now carbon negative, removing twice as much carbon from the atmosphere than they emit each year (Figueira, 2020).

BrewDog, however, do not focus their sustainability goals, on the following SDGs, and are behind other breweries in terms of actions such as water usage management, and use of wastewater in their production processes. This is an area of opportunity therefore for the business.

SDG6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

NB: Small targets for water usage.

SDG12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

BrewDog furthermore will face various drivers and barriers to become a sustainability leader within the industry. Hoffman (2000) focusing on the retail industry, distinguishes between four factors that share the sustainability agenda: regulatory, resource, market and social forces, which we will apply to BrewDog and the craft beer industry below.

Driver/barrier	Confirmed	Additionally identified	Not confirmed
Regulatory drivers		Legislation e.g. deposit return schemes ‘would be unwelcome statutory regulation’ if infrastructure is not in place (Jones, Comfort and Hillier, 2008)	
Regulatory barriers		Lack of harmonisation between different countries - (Danish EPA, 2010). – British organic certification has different requirements to the USDA certification. For example, to be organic certified under USDA, the hops do not need to be organic within the beer due to low supply available.	Lack of governmental leadership. Current UK government have implemented weak green policy.

Resource drivers	Stakeholder demands for increasing financial returns, and possibility of cutting operational costs. Increased investor appeal Strengthening their reputation and brand name (Hoffman, 2000).		
Resource barriers		Developing upstream supply chains to organic farming is costly. Businesses are reluctant to invest in sustainability strategies (Danish EPA,2010).	
Market drivers	‘One of the drivers to engage with sustainability strategies in supply chains is consumer demand for greener and healthier food what creates the market opportunity to increase sales through green product		

	differentiation’ (Smith, 2007). The UK global market has shown an increase in demand for sustainable products.		
Market barriers		Complexity of supply chains, for example use of sub-contractors, increases difficulty of improving sustainability throughout (Chkanikova, and Mont, 2012).	The extent of which organic certification is important to BrewDog consumers. ‘Consumers’ willingness to pay the extra price for eco-labelled products is low When faced with the choice between environmental quality and price, the latter appears to be a somewhat more important factor’ (The Gallup organisation and European Commission, 2009).

Social drivers	Studies show the ‘emergence of the ‘ethical’ consumers who view their shopping choices as an exercise of political power and moral responsibility’ BrewDog’s beers such as ‘Lost Larger’ should appeal to this segment. (Boström et al., 2005). Negative publicity in the media. BrewDog has faced heavy criticism over its culture in the last few months. The business needs to re-establish their reputation.		
Social barriers		There may be ‘insufficient consumer interest and awareness of sustainability issues’ (SDC, 2005). ‘In this time of economic recession even	

		ethical consumers are lacking commitment’ with issues such as inflation, and rising energy prices, customers may not seek sustainable beers by BrewDog at a higher price point (Anstey, 2009).	
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Conclusion

Whilst there is criticism of BrewDog’s sustainability initiatives, and even their intentions, it must be acknowledged that BrewDog are on a journey towards significant levels of sustainability. It is clear, that the organisational culture needs attention, and BrewDog have models available to them, such as Cosby’s (2014) sustainable leadership competencies. Trust needs to exist within the organisation before they can continue their sustainability journey. There are sustainability areas of development such as wastewater management, energy consumption, and the promotion of sustainable consumption of their products. BrewDog seems to be within the first phase of business sustainability ‘enterprise integration’, where businesses are ‘responding to market shifts to increase competitive positioning by integrating sustainability into pre-existing business considerations’ (Hoffman, 2018). BrewDog can move towards ‘market transformation’ which is ‘founded on a model of business transforming the market’ and ‘creating those shifts to enable new forms of business sustainability’ such as its Lost

Forest (Hoffman, 2018). BrewDog have committed to this change. Mike Berners-Lee, researcher on carbon footprinting described BrewDog and their sustainability efforts as ‘it raises the bar for other companies and it makes the statement, if a brewery with pubs and bars coming out of a pandemic can take this kind of action - this strongly, right now, then there is no real excuse for the rest of the business world’ (BrewDog, 2020b). They are, in my opinion, the leaders of sustainability within the craft beer industry.

Wordcount: 2500

Accompanying video.

NB: My intended audience for this opinion piece video is the general public, or those interested in the topic, rather than the senior management of BrewDog itself.

Video link: <https://vimeo.com/674001203/ca28007ac5>

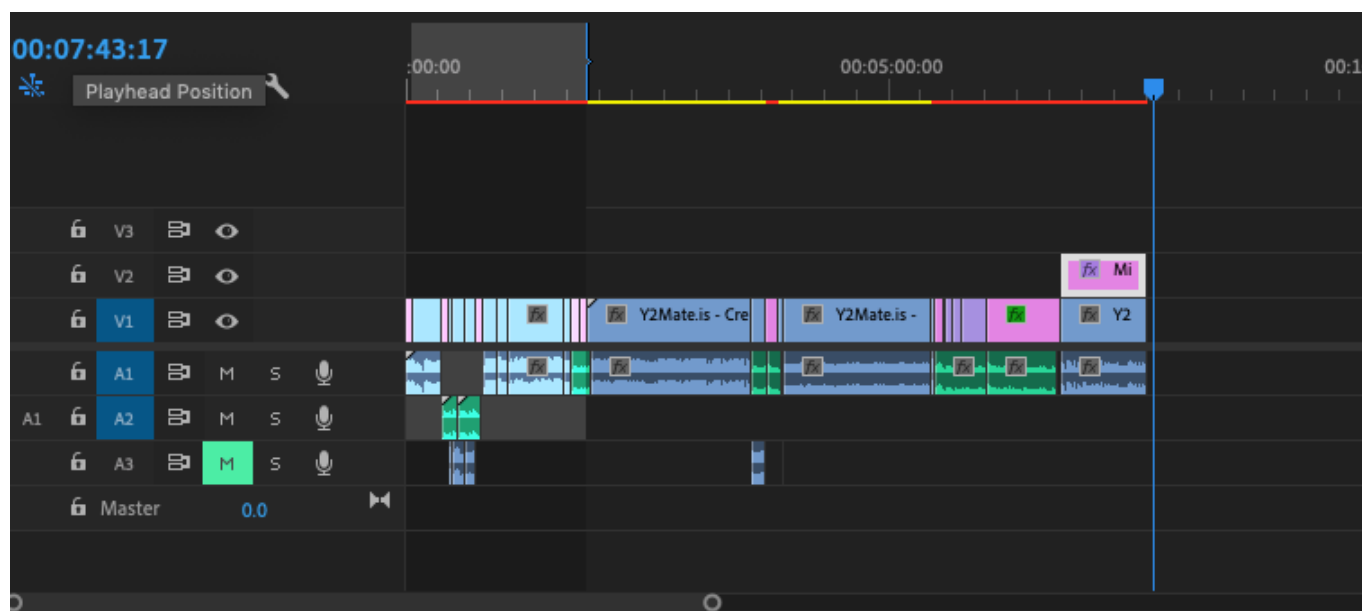
Brewdog script (voice over segments).

- 1) From beer packaged in taxidermy roadkill, to their current sustainability targets, BrewDog have come a long way since its founding in 2007.
- 2) They started the business in Martins' mother's garage, one of the co-founders of BrewDog. Over a few years the business grew. BrewDog opened their brewery in Ellon, Scotland in 2012.
- 3) In 2020, BrewDog had a pivotal moment in terms of its sustainability. They switched from shocking advertising campaigns, to a new focus on sustainability, and have become the first carbon negative brewery in the world.
- 4) BrewDog are proceeding towards the goal for BrewDog PLC to increase level of organic ingredients in BrewDog beer by 10% by 2026.

- 5) However, starting in 2021 BrewDog have faced a human resources crisis and their organisational culture has been questioned.
- 6) Whilst BrewDog have taken action towards SDG 13, 14 & 15, and have become carbon negative, they have faced criticism on their sustainability claims. They have for example promised that 1.1 million trees are to be planted, through sales of Lost Lager beer. However the recent BBC Disclosure documentary revealed that no trees have been planted as of yet. And BrewDog have applied for a £1.3 million grant from the Scottish National Forestry board to pay for these.
- 7) Whilst there is criticism of BrewDog, it has to be acknowledged that BrewDog are on a journey towards sustainability. It is clear, that the organisational culture needs attention, and BrewDog have models available to them, such as Google's sustainable leadership competencies. Trust needs to exist within the organisation, before they can continue their sustainability journey. There are sustainability areas of development such as waste water management, energy consumption, and the promotion of sustainable consumption of their products. BrewDog however, have committed to this change. They are, in my opinion, the leaders of sustainability within the craft beer industry, and they continue to seek advice from specialists, such as Mike Berners-Lee.

Approx: 800 words with other clips.

Adobe Premiere Pro was used to create the video.



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