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Embedding Sustainability within Organizations | BMSP7003D | Assessment 3

NYU Abu Dhabi Sustainability Progress Report
March 2020

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Executive Summary

The Leadership Management Team has agreed to support the proposed Sustainability Initiatives following our November 2019 Sustainability Management Report, assessing the level of Sustainability at NYU Abu Dhabi; and our subsequent Sustainability Plan to strengthen our role as a leading university in Sustainability.

New Developments: COVID-19 Coronavirus; Contingencies and Opportunities

NYU Abu Dhabi, like most universities and organizations around the world, continues to experience a number challenges in operating in an uncertain world including: globalisation; increasing environmental and social challenges; scarcity of raw materials; rising costs of resources and raw material; and managing reputation and information. Since writing our Sustainability Plan, the world is again in uncharted territory, with COVID-19 Coronavirus dominating every news channel and social media platform. The virus is sweeping the globe wreaking havoc and at the time of writing, there are more than 110,000 cases and tragically 3,800 deaths worldwide (worldometers.info 2020).

Around Abu Dhabi, conversations are focused on closures of schools and universities as the UAE takes the initiative and every precaution to contain the spread of the virus. As a result, from 8 March and for the next month, all schools and universities including NYUAD are closed without exception and work and study will be conducted remotely. This action is unprecedented.

Given this situation, our plans for embedding sustainability will take a slightly delayed path as the top priority is to ensure our students are able to graduate on time in May. It is often the case that Sustainability takes a back seat generally associated with the economic downturn and today, the world is experiencing exactly that. In addition, the impact from the virus is claiming corporate casualties with the airline Flybe going into administration and there will be no doubt many more casualties to come. (Fortune 2020). But the world needs to continue as best we can and we too will proceed with our plans for sustainable development by **Embedding Sustainability within NYUAD** and make contingencies as needed.

Opportunity to Reduce our Carbon Footprint

Based on the directive from our Leadership at NYU New York, all travel has been cancelled and only essential personal travel is allowed (NYU Coronavirus 2020). This has resulted in the cancellation of a number of activities including Candidate Weekend at which we would have welcomed more than 200 candidates as well as senior leadership from NYU to our campus for the last candidate weekend of the year in order to attract more elite students. All seminars and conferences, to be attended by international speakers with local participation, have also been postponed. Recruitment of international faculty and interview programs will now take place via Zoom video conferencing (Zoom 2020). One must ask therefore **could this sustainable approach represent a new norm?** Given the success already experienced this last week by most of our community in attending crisis meetings virtually, it may be a new way to in fact reduce not only our carbon footprint with less of our community flying,

but also reduce our future budgets. Indeed, there could be money saved and this could be a real game changer.

More Resilience and Efficient Systems and Strategies

Our world is in a constant flux of change whether it is surviving or picking up the pieces from the recent devastating floods in the UK or global health crises such as Coronavirus all highlighting the need for robust sustainability plans and strategies to ensure our preparedness and adaptability to our world today and our ever changing circumstances. To succeed with such challenges, we need to be more creative and from an administrative and management perspective, be **more resilient with effective and efficient systems, processes and innovative strategies in place** for achieving Sustainability and perhaps even survival in this uncertain world. So far, we have seen tremendous community spirit and resolve in adapting to and engaging online learning, vacating our offices and workstations for disinfection and doing everything possible to continue our research thereby demonstrating real resilience.

An example to follow is NYU Shanghai's Century Avenue campus, which closed its doors in February with university life grounding to a halt in the wake of COVID-19, digital learning began mid-February - and many parts of university life - from athletics to tutoring to students hanging out have gone digital also. Until students and faculty can reconvene in Shanghai, hopefully later this spring, they have adapted some innovative ways for the community to remain connected including one initiative with "everyone becoming a professional chef while stuck at home". (NYU Shanghai

Community 2020). For sure, with the creativity of our community, we are likely to have new resolve, new initiatives and resilience which is needed in these difficult times.

Sticking with Our Sustainability Plan

At NYUAD, dining halls continue to operate but with limited services. Requests however have increased for plastic disposables as a convenience at this time of crisis. As a result, it would make sense to immediately waive the cost of biodegradable takeaway boxes as these are expensive and encourage use of regular cutlery in the dorms if possible to avoid plastic. Store shelves still seem to be stocked but there is a fear of stockpiling and over consuming, something we really must avoid. A physician from the University of Toronto's Division of Infectious Disease, Abdu Sharkawy gives food for thought with his viral post on Facebook ([expressandstar.com](https://www.expressandstar.com) 2020):

What I am scared about is the loss of reason and wave of fear that has induced the masses of society into a spellbinding spiral of panic, stockpiling obscene quantities of anything that could fill a bomb shelter adequately in a post-apocalyptic world. He implores all to temper fear with reason, panic with patience and uncertainty with education.

NYUAD Sustainable Development

So to continue on our Sustainability journey, we are following analytical and critical perspectives guided by the latest and best practices in Sustainability Leadership and education; we have the Management Team's commitment; and approval and support from the Leadership. Reflecting on what has been achieved so far and what's next,

this Progress Report incorporates a dynamic approach to ensure we continue to go farther.

We begun this process and road map by highlighting our goals of where we need to be as a university to achieve our role as Sustainability leaders through:

- Active participation from our stakeholders
- Clearer Communications and Promoting Sustainability
- Embedding Sustainability in the Curriculum

Stakeholder Involvement and Promoting Sustainability

Our Stakeholders, including our faculty, students, staff, community and partners, look to the university to be leaders in Sustainability and ensure our long-term ability to compete; a better reputation and stronger brand; clearer messaging and promotion of Sustainability initiatives; as well as recognizing us as an appealing place to work.

NYUAD's agenda also includes greater employee engagement and empowerment to help meet environmental goals.

Our Vice Chancellor and Public Affairs are working on an improved Communications Strategy with Greater Communication, Transparency and Accountability, which are key to the issue of Sustainability. Communications are highlighting a more cohesive story showing more stakeholder engagement and efforts in Sustainability. Our **Here, We Grow** campaign celebrating 10 years of NYUAD, captures the following messages from our community (NYUAD Here, We Grow 2020):

1. Cross-pollination of ideas and investment in state-of-the-art research technologies are key to NYUAD's continued growth across key interdisciplinary research areas including bio-innovation and health, cities, culture and heritage, environmental sustainability, and governance and peace.
2. NYUAD's community outreach, public engagement programs, and community-based learning opportunities are designed to promote meaningful involvement, embrace the rich diversity of the UAE, and cultivate ethical leadership.
3. The NYUAD community contributes an average of 650 volunteer hours a year supporting children with disabilities in educational centers.
4. In addition, in an effort to support sustainability and conservation more than 600 volunteers from the UAE wider community have been brought together to collect over 68,900 nurdles from the beach in four Nurdle Hunts events.

Also, as part of the **Roots & Shoots UAE Program**, the renowned environmentalist and UN Messenger of Peace, Dr Jane Goodall, presented awards to UAE students at the sixth UAE Roots & Shoots Annual Awards ceremony, held on February 6 (NYUAD Roots & Shoots 2020). Associate Director of Community Outreach Suparna Mathur said:

“NYU Abu Dhabi's partnership with the Jane Goodall Roots & Shoots UAE program has been mutually beneficial and rooted in our core commitments to the environment and education ... allowing us to both catalyze greater sustainable impact with our

own campus community as well as be catalysts for increased environmental stewardship across the Emirates."

In creating Sustainability Programme Leaders (Cosby 2014), in addition to employee engagement, the three other critical factors include sustainable culture strategic visioning as well as systems alignment, and measurement and metrics, which we highlight in this report. In addition to ongoing supportive communication, strategic and change management, ongoing reporting and credible activism, we are also demonstrating competencies important to changing our culture including further innovation. Our plans will extend further to future Sustainability awards and grants; reviewing and strengthening our policies; and aligning with international standards. We are also making good strides with clearer messaging in general and working towards setting up our dedicated Sustainability portfolio.

Sustainable Organizational Culture

The success of our Sustainability initiatives depends on **change in organizational culture**. Inspired by Building Cultures for Sustainability (Taylor 2016), at NYUAD:

- Culture advances change by influencing mass thinking followed by behaviour change with the support of leaders.
- People who want to fit in, will interpret the signals on how to behave and adapt as needed. Those who rigidly don't want to change won't fit in, may leave or will be left behind.

Appropriate culture and change can result from messaging of how to behave with people following suit; from symbols such our efforts to switch to a virtual platform, as we are currently doing in this time of remaining connected during Coronavirus; and in systems demonstrating measurements of effectiveness and success. Each can be systematically reviewed and indeed what we do follows from who we are and where we are at. Not everyone has to change to succeed in Sustainability but the most effective strategy is to concentrate on the groups who have strong sustainability tendencies and mindsets and those will be the ones who will help with the ultimate mission and will be the ones who will influence and who will be followed.

Characteristics and traits of these leading groups are likely to include a broader perspective for greater good; generosity - sharers and givers not only help an organization but also develop more individually; and courage to act against the status quo and go to the level needed for change. We have seen a number of areas we can already expand upon and our Love Food Hate Waste initiative (Gazelle 2018) is a great example of generosity and courage to do something different. This has become a movement around campus with food being consumed after meetings that would otherwise be thrown away.

We also need to work to a greater critical mass with the right perspective to shift the change in culture with others following suit sending messages of what's really important and then this becomes cool and the norm.

Embedding Sustainability into the Curriculum

NYUAD, like other universities, is facing increasing pressures to change educational programs to make graduates fit for future citizenship and employment in the 21st century and also to be game changers. Education is key and we need to teach better techniques; how to use less; and provide more substantive Sustainability course offerings. We are working towards achieving this by embedding Sustainability as a topic in its own right. Our plan to embed Sustainability into the curriculum is supported and includes transforming our Environment Minor to a **Minor in Environmental Sustainability**. We have many faculty experts already and the Minor is affording the opportunity for connections among fundamental scientific and engineering concepts, economic and sociological forces, and literary and artistic endeavors (NYUAD Bulletin 2019). This will result in a deeper dive into Sustainability and will be less broad with faculty building on the most notable publications, relating to the latest research and highlighting leading experts in academia to create a more sound knowledge in Sustainability.

Sustainability Core Elective

We will also plan to develop a seven week Sustainability elective in the Core Curriculum open to all NYUAD students interested in Sustainability. Most faculty teach in the Core and have the opportunity to develop courses in their area of expertise such as expanding the Food Security course usually offered over the three weeks J-Term course, Water, Energy, Food Nexus.

Process of Course Development and Approval

Faculty via their Deans are being invited to contribute and develop courses for the new Sustainability curriculum following which, the Curriculum Review Committee of faculty experts, the Core Curriculum Committee and/or the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will approve accordingly. As the courses are more inter- and multidisciplinary this process also includes the Core Curriculum Dean. This process takes time and ongoing progress will be reported accordingly.

New Program in Sustainability - Grand Challenges Scholars Program

NYUAD is embracing Sustainability opportunities that emerge including the National Academy of Engineering's Grand Challenges Scholars Program (NAE's GCSP 2020). The program is envisioned as a combined curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular program and will help NYUAD to be further recognized as a model for a new paradigm in higher education. The breadth and features of the NYUAD engineering education have significant overlap with the GCSP and NAE Scholars will enhance what we are doing for the Engineers for Social Impact academic program through experiential learning and projects that develop globally-relevant, locally-sustainable designs to meet challenges and deliver on opportunities that enable individuals across global communities to more effectively realize their aspirations and ambitions. (EfSI 2020)

A Greater Sense of Purpose

Our initiatives are having an impact on the university, the environment and society. However, we need a greater sense of purpose to achieve our full potential or we

could lose value as well as trust from key stakeholders. There is a need to strategically look further at how to deliver value while benefiting society, demonstrating leadership and clarity to drive prosperity, security and returns. In this digital era, which sees a shift from assets to intangibles, this could be developing a new integrated framework of Society, Economy and Environment, in addition to financial reporting that includes intellectual, human, social and natural sources. According to the Arthur Camazzi TEDx talk 'Creating Sustainable Organizational Culture Change in 80 days' we need to ask: how can we keep sustainable organizational change; how do we evolve our culture; and where is our culture now? From what we have experienced so far, we could be seen as a live and let live culture where less innovation happens because people are complacent and content with what they have. We need to move to a brand congruent culture with more innovation as employees want to improve on the service and they are invested in this. One such initiative we could anticipate is working with suppliers and vendors for which we put ethical issues at their heart, ensuring compliance with human rights. As a leading educator, we are in a position to be a game changer in encouraging companies to follow international standards. Our reputation is paramount to our success and Sustainable Development is also a vital change agent to our reputation.

New Roles in Sustainability and Training

In this year's round of budget planning, we are encouraging more requests to broaden our Sustainability efforts. We are also currently seeking to appoint a Director in Sustainability and Stewardship to transform our sustainability vision into a broader-based, strategic sustainability plan. In addition to the work we are already

doing in Sustainability, the Sustainability Director will be instrumental in further developing and implementing our road map for NYUAD and will focus on carbon, energy, water, construction and renovation, waste, transportation, engagement, research, and academic excellence in the field of Sustainability working closely with all our stakeholders. (NYUAD Careers 2020)

Globally, there is also a growing need for a Sustainability CFO and experts in general to professionalize the measurement and management of our organization's non-financial performance. Such a role would also be guided by our faculty and experts for their needs in Sustainability. Like all organizations, our expectations for Sustainability are rising. A Sustainability CFO could also become a chief value officer in time and expand responsibilities at NYUAD to create partnerships with national and global professional bodies such as the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) who engages in these areas—when they intersect and overlap with the FASB's boundaries of financial reporting (FASB 2020). This would ensure we follow international standards and encourage our supply chain to follow suit. Reporting is essential and such an expert is an important way forward. But recruitment takes time due to security visa clearances and in the interim, whilst we await the appointment of the new Director of Sustainability, we could look to training our existing Environmental Health, Research Labs and Facilities Directors in such reporting to add strength and capability to our organization and to ensure we are reporting accordingly.

In addition, there are more training opportunities currently for staff to participate virtually in NYUi Learn for example in Wellness and Emotional Intelligence resulting in intangible benefits to the university's Sustainability success. The UN also runs this type of course through 'Unlocking Your Emotions to Achieve the SDGs' in which experts in the fields of emotional intelligence, mindfulness and nonviolent communication explained how these tools could be deployed in education and used to help achieve a more peaceful and prosperous world. (SDGs for All 2020)

International Standards

Organizations need to select the approach, framework and reporting that works for their industry. Through our comparative benchmarking, the University of Plymouth was selected and they have adopted the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) to measure performance across environmental, social and economic sustainability. Most reporting is voluntary but the outcome results in improved reputations but we must be careful to not only report good news, as can often be the case. Results need to be pitched to our stakeholders to drive better decision-making and improve business performance towards Sustainability.

The University of Plymouth Sustainability, (Plymouth Univ Sustainability Report 2018) is a good model to follow and in addition to GRI, we can report on the following:

- Clear targets to minimize our environmental footprint
- Identify key impacts and milestones related to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2020)

- Highlight the areas we want to be seen and recognized for in our approach to Sustainability
- Create factsheets of who we are and where we are going
- Highlight clearly our role in driving economic and social vitality
- Produce an annual NYUAD Sustainability Report

Nature as a Stakeholder

And finally, an important area we could introduce towards long term environmental savings, in being bold and expansive is land conservation. Net Present Value+, expands on conventional cost-benefit analysis by including unpriced factors such as the benefits of ecological resiliency. On Saadiyat Island, we could partner further with Abu Dhabi as was a case demonstrated for the State of Maryland in the US to preserve natural wetland, home to many rare and protected species as we have here on Saadiyat including the Hawksbill Turtle. Investments made in land conservation has proven excellent value for the State of Maryland and the NPV+ analysis found that purchasing land to conserve natural resources returned benefits valued at many times over the cost of the land and we could make recommendations that the Emirate to use a similar analytical approach to guide future land purchases. (Maryland NPV+) This extensive future project could be further justification for a Sustainability CFO.

Conclusion

Our work continues in Sustainability in our teaching, learning, research and operations with the demonstration of this through our impact in Sustainability and Climate Change and the University's collaborative research and collective insight to foster climate resilience.

Our Sustainability stories and work are being communicated more cohesively through the development of our expanding Sustainability portfolio.

In organizational cultural change, we are bringing on board new Sustainability Leadership and also our courageous, generous community of influencers for the university who believe in our mission and also that of a better world.

We can look to adopting new norms such as virtual meetings instead flying.

And our Mission Statement to advance NYU as a model university for the 21st century and contribute in multiple ways to the development of a sustainable, knowledge-based economy in Abu Dhabi is being achieved through embedding Sustainability within our organization in the ways we are doing.

Sustainability is seen as essential to our planet's survival and perhaps we should **consider Sustainability formally as one of our core values?**

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