

What could managers of organizations do and/or not do to help to solve the world's problems?

The brilliant theoretical physicist, Albert Einstein said, “**we cannot solve our problems with the thinking we used to create them**”. I agree, we can no longer afford such mistakes and since Albert Einstein's time, we are in a very different world with a whole set of new problems - challenges from climate change, leading to disasters such as floods from melting glaciers, loss of many coral reefs and extreme weather; over population; plastic pollution; dwindling species from over-forestation – the list goes on.

For these dynamic phenomena, as managers, we are trying to equip ourselves to deal with these as well as resolve the issues but there is no ‘one size fits all solution’, preferred management theory, blog, vlog or guidebook as each issue can have its own uniqueness or environment. Take Abu Dhabi for example where I live and work. I work for a US university, funded by the UAE and governed by laws from both countries. The climates and environments are also completely different as too are the cultures. So there is not always one solution.

For the world's problems, we must continue to work with and rely on academia, research, government, policy makers with collaboration and engagement with both regional stakeholders and local communities. Ideally also management leaders and experts in their given field. But solutions through these paths can take some time.

For local problems, which can often be quicker to address, here leads to the opportunity for adaptation from general management practices to each sustainability issue and new management vision, leadership and wonderful entrepreneurial approaches by first taking a closer look at the problems close-by. In addition, it is not only managers but colleagues and community members alike that are fundamental to helping solve the problems of today and to come up with the solutions that are needed and no better way to start than in your own back yard.

These solutions and perspectives can be achieved with imagination, creativity, new ideas and strategies and it is no longer just the responsibility of world leaders, governments, policy makers, managers and activists alone but everyone's responsibility 'to do their bit' for society and at least for the part of the world they live in. We are indeed all part of this Universe and we need to ensure we do our best to sustain our planet for now and for future generations to come.

We also need to work towards a **new mind-set, with better awareness and knowledge** and as the world has changed, so must we. Whilst we lost our way in plundering resources from the Earth and the next generation, it is not too late to bring some of the more basic elements back to our communities, find ways for improvement and bring people back together to get on the right path. This is our opportunity to be real **Sustainability Leaders**.

As part of my **Proposed Strategy for Sustainability** at NYUAD, a compelling argument for the **Business Case for Sustainability** is communication and engaging with our stakeholders, namely our university community, local community, interest groups and contractors. It is imperative that they know **what we are or are not doing** in terms of environmental reputations, climate change, etc. We need to take the opportunity to make the case for sustainability work as it proves good for the planet and the bottom line. They need to be part of the conversation through shared governance.

Also as part of my Sustainability Strategy, next steps were to ensure **Value Creation** for an environmentally sound, socially just and economically sustainable culture for our own community and university. Through great leadership, and a clear, well-articulated vision as well as communications and stakeholder engagement, we will be able to drive towards a better sustainability organization than we have been. We will do this through ensuring we are rigorous in analyzing our decisions against robust frameworks, creating new policy and ensuring compliance, ethics and regulations. We need to balance societal priorities, environmental preservation and high standards of ethics whilst continuing to deliver academic success and meet our priorities. (Northwestern University Sustainability Strategy (2019))

In addition, sustainability interests are represented by **stakeholders** and they have to negotiate to create mutual interests (Freeman, 2000 quoted in Hörisch et al. 2014). Applying this to the context of sustainability management requires sustainability to be one of the most important values around which stakeholders cooperate embodying the following core challenges:

1. Anchoring sustainability in the mindset of all stakeholders.

2. Creating mutual sustainability interests based on the particular sustainability interests of single stakeholders.
3. As nature is often not considered adequately by the most powerful immediate stakeholders (Starik, 1995 quoted in Hörisch et al. 2014) sustainability management is challenged to create approaches that empower societal stakeholders or more broadly civil society to act as intermediaries between nature and the company and to consider expected long-term challenges.

Therefore, the main challenge of anchoring sustainability in the mindset of your stakeholders is to identify them. The focus of this essay has been on community, whether they are members of the university, employees of the local community or community members in general and in coming together harmoniously with shared values and shared goals.

As ambassadors, we need to put forward the Case for Sustainability in a way that excites and enables everyone to understand the benefits not only for our own context but for the local environment, the local community and the planet as well. Regulations also keep the platform high through the regulatory framework of compliance and enforcement, integrated strategy and purpose. And will develop the sustainability policies required to help address these problems.

For the next part of **What could managers of organizations do and/or not do to help to solve the world's problems** – in my opinion, to learn from the best Green Champions and game changers of today!

Throughout this course, we have been privileged to see truly wonderful success stories, which I would like to highlight in this essay as they cover a large number of the today's global problems and provide solutions, which could perhaps be adapted to our own environments. This personal engagement and aspect of my learning has really struck a chord with me as it relates to tangible and real life case studies with results that are evident to see and also hopefully to emulate.

The first Green Champion I take the opportunity of highlighting is a former and self-proclaimed plunderer, Ray Anderson and his Business Logic for Sustainability. (Anderson (2009) demonstrates the Business logic of Sustainability). Ray who identified his company as a major culprit, embarked on leading his carpet tile company 'out of this mess' with the goal to no longer extract anything from the Earth and do no more harm. He created a business model to stop digging up the Earth and converting this to pollution transforming his carpet business which had heavily relied on petroleum. Instead he used reverse logistics to ensure a no debt contribution through renewable energy. Greenhouse emissions were down 82%, sales

were up, profits doubled, use of fossil fuel was down by 60% and the use of water was down by 75%. His Cool Carpet, at the time of the video, was half way to zero impact!

As business costs were down, this paid for his company's transformation. Products were the best they had ever been; inspired by design for sustainability, people were attracted to the company and the workforce; and there was better employee goodwill. His company had a better business model and gained market share and definitely demonstrate the Business Case for Sustainability.

Next is Sustainable City Dubai, established to have zero impact on the environment, this new district and community in Dubai is the brainchild of Faris Saeed, CEO of Diamond Development and another Green Champion. (Fully Charged (2014) Sustainability City (Dubai)

Faris embarked on this venture around 2009 at the same time as the Dubai financial crisis. As a result, he needed to think differently and take his Sustainable City concept in a direction and a more creative way with inspiration from places like Japan, Denmark and California to understand their best practices. This was a creative way of linking things together and it has worked in paying tribute to the unique UAE environment. Concerned with the effects of climate change, Sustainable City Dubai is green living with 500 homes powered by solar energy, water is recycled on site with grey water used for landscaping and ponds, cars are restricted and the community grows its own vegetables. Saeed saw the whole concept from a holistic point of view and wanted the highest standards.

In addition, on a community level, the Sustainable City Dubai recently won the Happiest Community Category at the Gulf Real Estate Awards (2019).

In my own management context, what I can learn from this is the importance of learning from Best Practices as Faris Saeed did from countries like Japan and Denmark and adapting these practices to the local needs and environment. In addition, from a focus group I recently held with some community stakeholders, I was able to gather some more shared ideas and to understand what people would like to see included in new sustainable city and I include a few ideas we could potentially address:

- In Water Consumption and Management, to have drinkable water in our kitchens from the tap instead of large plastic containers
- To use repurposed grey water for landscaping and water features
- To have more water generators and water stations with water sourced from natural air around our communities

- Repurposed furniture through a Circular Economy

Following on, this lead me to consider, **is it possible for UAE tap water taste better?**

Looking at the UAE water on a grander scale, why not take this further? Most people either living or visiting the UAE prefer to drink bottled water as there is mixed advice not to drink tap water and there are often misconceptions that it is not safe. However, according to the Emirates Environmental Group (EEG), tap water is “completely safe to drink.” The EEG’s Chairman, Habiba Al Marashi, added, “It is important we tackle the misconception that tap water is not fit for human consumption.” Platinum Heritage (2017) can I drink water in Dubai.

The only issue is the tap water has an unusual taste as it comes from desalinated sea water so is it possible to improve the taste? NYUAD is in the process of setting up a Water Research Center and I asked one of the incoming leading experts (whose appointment is still in the pipeline so I cannot include his details at this stage), would it be possible to improve the taste of UAE tap water? The answer is yes and this can be achieved by mineralization, i.e adding minerals to the water after it comes out from the Desalination plants. Once the Research Center is on the ground, following the summer, this is a wonderful opportunity for to pursue this further with the potential for collaboration and perhaps even **research!**

Repurposed Furniture and the Circular Economy

A circular economy is an alternative to a traditional linear economy (make, use, dispose) in which we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life. Wrap and Circular Economy (2019)

This is a perfect solution to our impact on the planet as well our impact on our economic resources. Those normally unwanted pieces of furniture can be refurbished and repurposed giving them a new lease of life. This could also present itself as a new green business as part of our community. Currently there is a lot of buying and selling at the university campus. However, there are also a lot pieces that don’t get sold but could be exchanged especially within a close-knit community and go to new homes. My new best friend,

Take My Junk UAE (2019) is able to solve this problem of unwanted furniture and as their name implies, they collect items you no longer have a use for but don’t want to trash. They will collect white goods, which up until recently had been a major problem for disposal where you would need to pay some to send them to the landfill – the last thing you want as an Environmentalist!

Another management approach to sustainability is Zero Waste. Wikipedia states (2019), Zero Waste is a philosophy that encourages the redesign of resource life cycles so that all products are reused. The goal is for no trash to be sent to landfills, incinerators, or the ocean. Currently, only 9% of plastic is actually recycled.

As part of Community Life and a Greener Campus, NYUAD has engaged its own Zero Waste and has introduced 40 Atmospheric Water Generators to help reduce consumption of plastic water bottles. A Greener Community (2019) says NYUAD is creating a more sustainable future. This technology takes in moisture from the air, and condenses and sterilizes the liquid into odourless and safe drinking water. By using atmospheric moisture, the university is also reducing the carbon footprint of consuming desalinated sea water and reducing plastic bottles and eventually hopes to reduce the usage and cost of buying the gallon-sized plastic bottles too. However, there could soon be new competition from tasty tap water!

The next Green Champion I want to highlight is **Totnes, the Pioneer Town of the Transition Movement, a community of sustainability and resilience.** Hopkins, R. (2012) Totnes

Rob Hopkins is the genius behind the Transition Movement and is an academic from UK. He created the Transition Movement in 2005 in a small market town in Devon, England with just over 8,000 people and prior to Transition, Totnes had been fairly unremarkable. The town is an experiment to tell a different story - a Transition Movement **to shift the town back to a diverse and resilient interconnected economy from a mono-cultural one destroying diversity, artisans and craftsmanship from a new modern world.**

There are now 50 countries as part of the Transition Movement including Denmark, Belgium and the US. The US chapter describes it as: The (US) Transition Movement is comprised of vibrant, grassroots community initiatives that seek to build community resilience in the face of such challenges as peak oil, climate change and the economic crisis. Transition United States (2019).

In my opinion, this could be something the UAE could join to bring people together and given the number of expats coming and going with the transient society we live in, it could be an opportunity to bring new people on board also.

The Transition Manifesto together with current initiatives include:

Seize the opportunities: provides great support for local initiatives such as craft beer made from locally grown spelt. Funding for this project was from crowd funding ensuring reinvestment in the community.

Be creative, playful and open: Tooting, a High Street of London, brought creativity back to the heart of the suburb transforming a bus turning circle from a polluted area to a pop up village green called Tooting Twirl.

Put care at the center: Wigan set up a green care farm, a service that the local authorities were not able to provide. The center also offers affordable meals to those with low incomes.

Invest in your community: Crowd funders are great new opportunities to invest in local initiatives.

Enable community ownership of assets: Totnes is working on new sustainable homes as part of a development for community ownership and affordable housing. This project also provides opportunities for local training. It is worth noting that projects such as this take years of dedication and stamina to get off the ground.

Weave your community together: With a decline of conversation, Transition has brought people back together.

Turn needs into opportunities: by approaching ideas differently, for example, a new garden was created in a red light district of Brussels and from street block set up to stop kerb crawlers. This also transforming the space to community area and changed the story!

And keep telling great stories: We can all do this. Telling stories from the above or making our own list of stories of resilience, community, sustainability and success.

Rob Hopkins measure the success of any Transition Town by how many children are playing on the streets and how many meals are being shared and there can never be too much of this. Hopkins, R. (2017) Totnes

Our community resilience here in Abu Dhabi is through different pockets of the country, towns and cities with some communities doing well whilst others may not have been able to establish communities for a number of reasons, including work schedules, being isolated, no avenue or limited outlets to become involved as you are new to the country and lack of familiar networks etc.

Like Totnes, we can turn this around. We can learn from places like Al Ain in the heartland of the UAE, which has a very tightknit community with people living there sometime for up to 30 or 40 years. From my own experience once living there for seven years, this is also as a result of less choice, a smaller community and fewer places to go so people tend to congregate together more often and more easily. It also has a feeling of having roots, with so many original members being active in community activities. It too is an artisan place with many people predominantly working in the universities, hospitals and schools as well as the military.

In a place like Abu Dhabi or Dubai, choice is endless and opportunities are many but you could go from one place to another and not know anyone, unless you make a special arrangement. Living as an expat has many advantages but being able to remain part of a transient community can be challenging. For example, classes in my son's primary school are deliberately divided each year to make up new classes for the next year's intake to ensure children will have different friends as people come and go all the time, especially recently with the economic downturn.

In my opinion, community is of the utmost importance to wellbeing and therefore cannot ever be understated. It is a known fact that community helps people live longer especially in the Blue Zones of the world such as Sardinia and Costa Rica where this has been proven that social engagement and people of all ages are socially active and integrated into their communities. Wikipedia states (2019) Blue Zones

In Abu Dhabi, there are many groups connected, especially at the University as it is a residential campus of creative minds. For those people not living on campus, there are also opportunities and initiatives to be involved in or waiting to be created or launched. As Rob Hopkins says, 'we can further harness and engage the collective genius in the people around us'. Can we provide an opportunity here in the UAE to have a Transitions Town? I believe so through great leadership, creativity and imagination.

And finally, with the development of future cities, which the UAE is famous for, there needs to be a way to ensure community is part of the plan. Today we are more concerned for the needs of community giving the isolation caused by the world of online 'convenience' or the loneliness epidemic people are experiencing from not being connected, being away from family networks and with long working hours. So inspired by places like Singapore and their use of green roofs as outdoor spaces throughout the city, this could be a great green space community initiative to help create outdoor spaces to converge on and mitigate climate change at the same time. Green-Urbscape (2019) indicates the social benefits include:

- According to several studies the presence of green areas has a relaxing psychological effect, helps to reduce blood pressure and lowers the heartbeat. Due to multiple benefits, green roofs substantially enhance residential and commercial property values.
- Green roofs help to provide additional green space in urban areas with limited open space and add value to buildings. Accessible roofs can be designed as community gardens, commercial or recreational space allowing numerous use opportunities.
- Green roofs can additionally create opportunities for urban agriculture. They can reduce a community's urban footprint thanks to local food system creation and ensure self-reliance on food resources.

In the UAE, green space also often helps reduce the temperature; grey water from the residences or offices below could be used for irrigation; and this would create a sustainable environment moving away from what could be an unwelcome concrete jungle.

To conclude, as a new world and country, there is a lot of focus on with new and shiny buildings and infrastructure and modern age society. Let's not forget the need for community with physical and friendly networks and together we can all work to solve the world's problems over some nice vegetables grown on our green spaces ...

Reference List

- Anderson (2009) The Business logic of Sustainability 9 June 2019 [online] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iP9QF_IBOyA (accessed 9 June 2019)
- Fully Charged (2014) Sustainability City 9 June 2019 [online], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCKz8ykyl2E> (accessed 9 June 2019)
- Greener Community (2019) [online]. Available at <https://nyuad.nyu.edu/en/news/latest-news/community-life/2019/april/a-greener-community.html> (accessed on 9 June 2019)
- Green-Urbscape (2019) [online]. Available at <http://www.green-urbanscape.com/en/content/social-benefits>
- Happiest Community Category at the Gulf Real Estate Awards (2019). [online]. Available at gulfrealestateawards.com/winners-2019 (accessed 9 June 2019)
- Hopkins, R. (2012) Totnes
6 June 2019 [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3L9n20myqk> (accessed 6 June 2019)
- Hopkins, R. (2017) Totnes
6 June 2019 [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt4Cn0AS2WI>
- Hörisch, J., Freeman, R.E., and Schaltegger, S. (2014) Applying Stakeholder Theory in Sustainability Management: Links, Similarities, Dissimilarities, and a Conceptual Framework. Organization & Environment.
- Northwestern University Sustainability Strategy (2019)[online]. Available at <https://www.northwestern.edu/sustainability/> (accessed 11 April 2019)
- Platinum Heritage (2017)[online]. Available at <https://www.platinum-heritage.com/blog/can-i-drink-the-water-in-dubai> (accessed 9 June 2019)
- Take My Junk UAE (2019) [online]. Available at <http://www.takemyjunkuae.com/> (accessed 8 June 2019)
- Transition United States (2019)[online]. Available at <http://transitionus.org/transition-town-movement>
- Wikipedia (2019) Blue Zones [online], 9 June 2019. Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Zone (accessed 9 June 2019)
- Wikipedia (2019) Zero Waste [online], 1 June 2019. Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero_waste (accessed 9 June 2019)
- Wrap and Circular Economy (2019)[online]. Available at <http://www.wrap.org.uk/about-us/about/wrap-and-circular-economy> (accessed 28 April 2019)