Description

Talking with a friend after a lecture on sustainable development, a conversation emerged about the unseen usage of electricity that emails consume. It was brought to my attention that data contributes massively to global warming (Davies, Maidment and Tozer, 2016), as data centres use large amounts of power and heat (Whitehead *et al*, 2014) and then requires more electricity to power air conditioning units so that the centres do not overheat (Watson and Venkiteswaran, 2017). After the conversation I found more information regarding data centres and realised that these complex systems must constantly be switched on, contribute to carbon emissions and consume at least one percent of the energy usage world-wide (Davies, Maidment and Tozer, 2016; UKERC, 2020).

Feelings

Before this conversation I had never heard anything about the amount of carbon dioxide that digital consumption activates (Whitehead *et al*, 2014). During the conversation, I was initially very intrigued about what I was learning and began to question why the impact of undeleted emails is not more widely known about. These emotional responses highlighted that I cared about this experience and a stimulus for change had been triggered as explained by cognitive appraisal theory (Omdahl, 2016). I am very grateful I had the conversation for it has enabled me to evaluate upon hidden impact of choices, opportunity to respond in a different manner and engage in approaches that make a difference (Scoones *et al*, 2020).

Evaluation

Previously I had disengaged from conversations regarding sustainability because of the disruptions caused climate change protesters. These protests had not managed to convince me of their argument and I believed their focus on the environment and animals to not be as important as issues that human life experiences (Norgaard,2011). My knowledge of the subject was very limited and created moral disengagement as it did not appear to cover the areas of interest for me, so therefor I disregarded the topic (Moore, 2015). However, learning that I have a carbon footprint and understanding the impact that environmental issues of today will have on future generations has taught me to engage more with the subject and make changes where possible. For this reason, taking time to delete emails is important as information and emails that are kept will increase the heat of data centres and therefore play a part in impact climate change is having on the planet (Flucker, Tozer and Whitehead, 2018).

Analysis

After the experience I realised that the module had exposed me to a new way of understanding sustainable development and has revealed more about what I value and what is important to me (Lacewing, 2005). These responses show a cognitive response that is more likely to lead to change in attitude (Maio and Haddock, 2010). It is not possible to get fibre optic internet cable to my house, which would make the internet connection more sustainable (Morley, Widdicks and Hazas, 2018), however in my capacity I can permanently delete emails that I do not need, sign up to less subscriptions and choose to use the internet less. I understand there are many things regarding sustainable development that are beyond my control but that there are also small things that I can do to alleviate some of the stress the planet is under (Tardini *et al*, 2020). On reflection, this experience has been positive because it has changed my attitude towards sustainable development. It is now my responsibility to continue and convert this new knowledge into better practice, as that will continue to be very valuable for a long-term change of habit (Moon, 1999).

Conclusion

Now, after the completion of the module, I realise that it is also my responsibility to make lifestyle changes that will contribute to a more sustainable lifestyle. Taking the time to consciously delete emails and pass on the information I have learned to others within my social network will create less data storage and in turn, less electricity and carbon emissions (Watson and Venkiteswaran, 2017). Although value difference exists, is important for me to share the information learned so that others may also have the power to decide the impact they wish to have upon the planet (Tardini *et al*, 2020). Undeleted emails are indeed having an impact on the planet, but also on the present and future generations of humanity and animal life and create hidden costs. Therefore, as forementioned, deleting emails will reduce the effects within all three pillars of sustainability (Morley, Widdicks and Hazas,2018; Scoones *et al*, 2020).

Action Plan

It is important to have a detailed action plan that clearly states the steps one will take to achieve the goal. For this reflection I have chosen SMART plan because the goal is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound. This creates a detailed action plan that can effectively be put into practice and gives clarity to ensure the goal is met (Ogbeiwi, 2017).

My SMART action plan that will help to reduce some of my environmental footprint will be to delete emails immediately after I have read them and after I moved the information needed to my diary or downloaded it onto my computer. This will contribute to a more sustainable planet as the data stored by me in data centres will be lessened (Watson and Venkiteswaran, 2017), especially as I currently have two email accounts: personal and student. To begin, this will seem like a chore as I have many emails to sort through and have emails that backdate a few years but once these old emails have been deleted, the process will be quick and practical. As stated by Dean (2013) on average a habit takes around sixty-six days to develop and will need attention and perseverance by repetitive action until it becomes an unconscious task. As it is a conscious decision to delete and not store emails, it will become part of a routine, which will develop into a habit until unconsciously I will perform the action (Dean, 2013). This process will not take much time per day to achieve as it is almost an instantaneous action if maintained controlled.

I believe this plan is SMART and I hope to also share with friends so that the hidden impact of electricity becomes more exposed and for the unseen usage to diminish as others too make a conscious decision to reduce the hidden impact of their environmental footprint.

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