

Taking inspiration from Einstein below, in particular that, “we cannot solve our problems with the thinking we used to create them”

What could managers of organisations do and/or not do to help to solve the world’s sustainability needs?

Organisations and businesses operating in Wales today are working in a critical moment, where the impact of climate change is very real and where action and a significant shift in the way we work is needed in order to help solve the climate and nature crises. Industrialisation, over production and over consumption of natural resources have led the world to a situation where this shift of behaviours to become more sustainable and in line with our planetary boundaries must happen urgently.

The impact of climate change in Wales is very real and is worsening. From the mid 1970’s to mid 2010’s, just a 40 year time span, annual rainfall has increased by 2% and annual sunshine has increased by 6%. (Climate Change Committee, *UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, Summary for Wales*, 2021)

This growing impact of climate change poses a significant risk to Welsh businesses and organisations as the changing climate presents great risk to communities and the infrastructures that they rely on for their operations.

The UK’s third Climate Change Risk Assessment, published at the beginning of 2022, identified 61 risks and opportunities for Wales from climate change. The risks fell into several different categories including health, the built environment, international dimensions, infrastructure, and communities, and most of them have been given the highest urgency score for action, meaning that we must act now to stop the severe risks they present to our economy, environment, and society. (Climate Change Committee, *UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, Summary for Wales*, 2021)

Each of the risks presents a risk to business or organisational operations, whether that be to the wellbeing of the workforce which could prevent them from being able to perform their duties, to the infrastructure that is relied upon to provide transport for goods, or even to the energy that is needed to run their operations, manufacturing plants and offices.

These impacts demonstrate the important and urgent need for action and for managers of organisations and businesses in all sectors to become aware of the impact their operations have on climate change and embed sustainable behaviour across their entire workforce.

And to further support the argument that more must be done by managers in Welsh organisations to become more sustainable, 26 of these risks identified in the CCRA3 report have increased in urgency score since the previous CCRA five years ago. The time for urgent change is now. (Climate Change Committee, *UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, Summary for Wales*, 2021, pg. 2)

Managers of organisations have a key responsibility to help their organisations adapt their ways of working to help solve sustainability issues. and climate change is to create an organisational culture that has sustainability and resource efficiency at its core.

Organisation culture can be defined as ‘the underlying values, beliefs and principles that serve as the foundation for an organization’s management system as well as the set of management practices and behaviours that both exemplify and reinforce those basic principles’. (CIPD, Organisational Culture and Cultural Change, 2020) Or, as briefly and brilliantly put by Balogun and Johnson, “the way we do things around here.” (SUMS Consulting, Post-Covid Workplace Culture – Top Ten Tips for Defining Your ‘New Normal’ Ways of Working, 2021)

By changing the culture of the company and ensuring that sustainability becomes the underlying value and principle which underpins all activities of the organisation will create an environment where sustainable behaviour and decision making becomes the day-to-day norm. Managers that enable this cultural change will have a great impact on sustainability, and the nature and climate emergencies.

The race to reduce carbon emissions requires all businesses, and all staff within these businesses, to make significant changes to the way that they work. Historically the responsibility of reducing resource use, energy use and emissions has fallen to the role of environment or energy managers or environment teams. However, an organisation’s carbon footprint and sustainability practices are impacted upon by staff throughout the business, regardless of the roles they are in, and therefore it is important that they recognise this impact and their responsibility to work in a sustainable way.

There are a number of things that managers of organisations can do to change organisational culture. Research indicates that these can be split into four main categories;

- Leadership Tools such as role modelling, visioning
- Culture Tools such as creating company rituals, strategic planning, organisational traditions and a system of democracy
- Power Tools such as negotiations or coercion
- Management tools such as training, hiring and promotion and having operating procedures in place (Harvard Business Review, *The Tools of Cooperation and Change*, 2006)

Each of these tools can be deployed depending on the level of agreement to what it is that they want to achieve and the cause and effect of their actions on this.

When considering changing the organisational culture to become more sustainable, many companies fall within the category of knowing what it is they want i.e. to be an organisation that operates within planetary boundaries and that is having a positive effect on climate change, but are not sure on how this can be achieved organisation wide.

Organisations knowing what where it is they want to be is a significant step in the right direction in achieving a culture where sustainable behaviour is day to day, and within Wales we are fortunate that there are key policy drivers that support, and require organisations to, embed sustainability within their culture.

One of these policies is the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. (Welsh Government, 2015) The Act was introduced by the Welsh Government in 2015 and gave a national translation of the United Nations Global Sustainable Development Goals. (UN, 2021) The law placed sustainable development at the heart of public bodies in Wales and made the improvement of the country's social, economic, environment and cultural well-being a legally binding responsibility.

The Act requires Welsh public bodies to be working towards 7 goals;

- A Globally Responsible Wales
- A Prosperous Wales
- A Resilient Wales
- A Healthier Wales
- A More Equal Wales
- A Wales of Cohesive Communities
- A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language (Welsh Government, 2015)

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act is binding for public service across Wales including local authorities, the health service, police and fire service. The employees within their sector account for 25% of the workforce in Wales, meaning they are a significant sector for embedding this type of cultural shift. (Business Wales, *Public Sector*, 2022)

And it isn't just public bodies who are embodying this Act, private sector companies across Wales are also aligning their missions and vision to this policy, and also have joined the public sector in it's commitment to reach net zero. (South Wales Industrial Cluster, 2022)

The South Wales Industrial Cluster, as an example, has members from across the private sector such as Celsa Steel, Capital Law, Associated British Ports and RWE who have committed to becoming net zero by 2040 (Business News Wales, 2022) – 10 years ahead of the government target of a Net Zero Wales by 2050. (Welsh Government, *Net Zero Wales*, 2021)

Whilst these policies set the reasoning for cultural change and strategic direction for organisations and businesses in terms of solving the climate crisis, it is high level and does not make explicit links for employees on how they must deliver the wellbeing goals and mitigate against carbon emissions in their day to day jobs. That is where the role of a manager comes in, to translate policy, strategy and organisational values into "the way things are done around here."

A key tool that can be used by managers to ensure sustainability is embedded into the organisation's culture is to ensure it is a key feature of the recruitment process. Including

specific roles and responsibilities relating to sustainability within job adverts and job descriptions, which are then monitored in staff key performance indicators (KPIs), can ensure that “the company hires employees who are going to be a good fit for the new culture the organisation is trying to establish and maintain.” (HR Daily Advisor, *Company Culture and Job Description*, 2017)

Specific responsibilities for staff within job descriptions and outlining the individual tasks that they must carry out to support the sustainability objectives of the organisation, can help employees to understand how their roles have an impact on sustainability and emissions.

A number of organisations have started to include sustainability related statements within their job descriptions. Bridgend College’s process for including sustainability within job descriptions was highlighted as an example of best practice on the Environment Association of University and Colleges (EAUC) website, Sustainability Exchange.

The college, as part of its recruitment process, asks staff to have an understanding of sustainability, what it means and what they could bring to the organisation. The criteria are essential for senior managers and desirable for other staff.

The college implemented this change after a restructure of its management style to become more joined up and distribute the responsibility of sustainability across the institution. (Sustainability Exchange, *Bridgend College’s Institutional Structure and Sustainable Job Description*, 2022)

However, whilst including general awareness of environmental issues, organisation policies or missions within job descriptions can ensure that employees are somewhat aware of their organisation’s objectives, it does have its limitations.

This way of writing environmental behaviour into job descriptions does not translate the environmental legislation, or organisation’s policies, in a way that employees can understand how they must work and behave whilst carrying out their day-to-day tasks in their roles. A member of staff could have an awareness of climate change and what it means for the environment, but not how their role and behaviours in work have an impact upon this.

Research has shown that employees are not always aware of their organisational strategies and how their roles play a part in this. As Sabina Nawaz wrote in the Havard Business Review in 2021, strategies within organisations are sometimes at such a high level that they “leave too much to the imagination of an employee operating lower to the ground”. (Havard Business Review, *5 Reasons Your Employees Don’t Understand Your Company’s Vision*, 2021) Additionally, a report undertaken by Achievers in 2015 on the North American Workforce, found that approx. 60% of employees didn’t know their company’s vision. (Entrepreneur, *How to Engage Employees Through Your Company Vision Statement*, 2017)

It is essential that the targets within strategies are adapted for delivery by different roles at different levels across the whole of the organisation to ensure that working behaviours are in line with strategies.

Another limitation of writing environmental behaviour into job descriptions in this way is that it relies on employees having some awareness of climate change and how their individual actions within their workplace contribute to the emissions of the organisation.

The recent Public Attitudes report from BEIS undertaken in Winter 2021 showed that 50% of people interviewed had a “fair amount” or a “lot” of awareness of the concept of Net Zero. If we were to take these same statistics and apply them to a workplace, there are still 50% of people, a large proportion of the workforce, who have little or no knowledge of net zero. (BEIS, *Public Attitudes Tracker*, 2021)

This further supports the view that having statements in job descriptions that relate to organisations sustainability policies, or general awareness, is not enough to ensure environmental behaviours are carried out day to day by staff. As mentioned above, strategies must be adapted for delivery, into deliverable actions for staff working at ground level within organisations.

This can be achieved by identifying the key responsibilities and tasks of roles and explicitly stating, within job descriptions, how they must be carried out in a way that is sustainable. This would mean reviewing all job roles, from senior managers and heads of departments to officers and business assistants, roles across the whole organisation, in order to adapt their responsibilities to ensure they include specific asks of them to work in a way that is sustainable and relevant to their role.

In practice this could look like an estates manager having the responsibility of maintaining any land that belongs to an organisation in a way that supports and enhances local biodiversity written into their job descriptions or the responsibility to improve the quality of land to maximise carbon sequestration or supports flood alleviation.

A construction or economic development officer would have written within their job descriptions, not just that they write specifications to tender for regenerative projects but that they write specifications that utilise circular economy building materials within construction projects that meet Passivhaus standards.

Officers working within Human Resources would have responsibility for monitoring staff commuting habits and encouraging the increase of use of active travel and public transport through the expenses process, and therefore influencing the reduction in single occupancy car journeys.

Pensions Officers could, for example, have responsibility for ensuring that all pensions funds are invested in renewable energies and local businesses, and divested from fossil fuels.

For Finance Officers these responsibilities could include, as well as the management of payments, checking that funds are being spent in a way that is line with strict environmental criteria.

This list is not exhaustive as it is recognised that organisations have a variety of different roles that is suitable to their operations, but through a thorough review of these roles and analysis of how they have their activities will have an impact on sustainability and the organisation's carbon emissions it will be possible to ensure that sustainable behaviour will be able to be added to tasks. This may always be to include new tasks to bring about this cultural change, but to adapt the current tasks to embed sustainability within them.

The inclusion of sustainability within job descriptions, and across the culture of organisations is also a key value driver for organisations. It has been found that the commitments that businesses make in relation to sustainability, as well as the initiatives they run, have a positive influence on staff retention and customer buying behaviour. (Harvard Business Review, *How to Make Sustainability Every Employee's Responsibility*, 2018) It can also appeal to the hearts and values of employees who are looking to be part of organisations that want to make a difference and work differently, which helps to widen the talent pool and ensure organisations are recruiting good quality staff whose values align with their own.

It is evident from the increasing risks of climate change that is vital that organisations, and their employees, urgently change their ways of working to become more sustainable. And due to the historical culture of organisations where sustainability was seen as the role of the energy managers of environment teams, "someone else's' job", it requires a significant culture change in order to achieve this shift. By ensuring that each member of staff is fully aware of their specific roles and responsibility in delivering on organisational sustainability policies and missions, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and national Net Zero targets through their job descriptions, this goes a significant amount of the way to ensuring an organisation where environmental behaviour is fully embedded and just "the way things are done around here."

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