

CHECKLIST: DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

By Jon Bentley

*There is no one recipe for a successful sustainability initiative. This shouldn't be surprising, as the context for each business will be quite different. For one, engaging suppliers in joint solutions to reducing packing waste may be key whilst, for another, developing energy efficiency solutions for end customers will be the focus. In this checklist for Criticaleye, **Jon Bentley**, Energy and Environment Partner at **IBM Global Business Services** outlines some common themes, which provide a good place to start.*

- **Make sure your sustainability strategy is tightly linked to your business strategy** so that getting results from sustainability is aligned with getting results from a more conventional business perspective. If there is conflict, business priorities tend to win out.
- **Engage and align your customers, your suppliers and your staff** in the sustainability programme and ensure that all share in the 'win' from achieving sustainability objectives. Connecting efforts internally with those that touch customers and involve suppliers leads to a more resilient and robust programme with greater longevity and more significant results.
- **Develop a broad portfolio of sustainability objectives** and allow staff to express creativity in finding ways to meet these objectives. A broad set of objectives enables wider participation and helps to avoid unfortunate trade-off consequences that can arise from very narrow and limited focus.
- **Set high targets** but allow time for these to be met so that the targets become the motivation for creativity, innovation and perspiration, but their nearness and scale doesn't petrify the organisation. Then measure and publish progress against these objectives.
- **Define the sustainability agenda from the top** but allow the execution to be developed and managed bottom up. It has to be clear that sustainability is an integral part of the business agenda and that initiatives have the sponsorship and support of the CEO but, whilst some changes will need central coordination and design, most will be driven best at the grass roots level.
- **Communicate the sustainability agenda** in ways which connect and make sense to all constituency stakeholders. This means using plain language, carefully explaining the logic underlying new and unfamiliar concepts (like climate change), underpinning everything with a factual as well as a moral and emotional basis and avoiding polarising terminology.
- **Measure, manage and motivate behavioural change** to ensure that all sustainability initiatives are genuine and have consistent underlying objectives and behaviours. Avoid accusations of 'green washing' and eco-manipulation at all costs as these can derail fundamentally sound programmes.
- **Align your company with aspirational peers** so that you can collaborate, share knowledge and gain strength through association.

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