

ensuring the success of sustainability programmes

How to turn
sustainability
initiatives into
commercial success

By Keith Chanter
CEO, EMCOR UK



Today, business sustainability is increasingly important to commercial success. But achieving it is not easy, often requiring new ways of working, and even a change of business model. To succeed, organisations need to focus on securing broad multi-stakeholder commitments, as well as finding effective ways to drive greater collaboration.

The growing importance of sustainability is partly a result of broader social trends. Consumer and B2B customers alike now expect brands to be socially conscious when it comes to issues like business ethics and environmental footprint. Crucially, many of them are making purchasing decisions on this basis.

Successful sustainability

While identifying areas for quick wins is relatively simple, achieving long-term results is more complicated. Sustainability initiatives have a high rate of failure – a global study from management consultancy Bain & Company found almost half of all sustainability programmes are considered failures by the companies investing in them. A major reason for this is that too many are developed in isolation, without real collaboration with external parties or even between departments. As organisations and the industries they operate become increasingly complex and interdependent, it's simply not possible to drive successful initiatives working in silos.

Seeking consensus

So what can businesses do to ensure sustainability programmes deliver? Naturally, this will depend on what the initiative is trying to deliver; however, there are fundamentals that should prove effective in most cases. Imagine a business is keen to tackle a prominent sustainability issue today, the elimination of single use plastics. The first step is to seek companywide commitment – progress depends on gaining consensus from across the business. This means proactively communicating the value of the initiative to stakeholders. When it comes to reduced use of single use plastics, this might be reputational benefits, reduced cost or an increase in brand preference. Either way, effectively explaining the rationale to key stakeholders goes a long way to securing much needed support from the wider business.

Identifying opportunities for improvement

Once buy-in has been achieved, the next challenge is knowing where to start. Carrying out an audit will help, identifying where the opportunities for real improvement exist. This could be by demonstrating how biodegradable or recyclable alternatives can displace plastic packaging. Without properly understanding where these opportunities exist, the likelihood of success is diminished.

It should be recognised that some of these opportunities will exist outside of the organisation. That's why engaging the supply chain is a key stage in process. No business is an island – suppliers play a vital role to making an organisation more sustainable overall. Organisations should engage with existing partners to find out how they can work together to achieve shared sustainability goals

Similarly, sustainability should be top of mind when selecting new partners to work with. Making the whole supply chain sustainable depends on the support and expertise of others as well as your own.

Sharing and sourcing insights

Once initiatives have proven successful, it's important to share learnings internally as well as with customers and partners. We are all in the same boat when it comes to sustainability, and knowledge sharing simplifies the process for everyone.

External experts can be a great source of insight when it comes to defining what a sustainability programme looks like for your organisation. The UN Sustainable Development Goals provides a broad blueprint, while organisations like Business in the Community are a great source of guidance when it comes to creating responsible business models.

Organisations today face a range of challenges that affect the whole of society. The ones that succeed will be those that tackle them head-on, developing proactive and innovative solutions to ensure sustainable business practice. And while there might be some quick wins, a more long term strategy is central to true sustainability.

Working with the Supply Chain Sustainability School, EMCOR UK has launched a free e-Learning module aimed at the sustainable use and management of plastics in businesses across the UK.



Register here now:

<https://www.supplychainschool.co.uk/uk/sustainability/fm/support/e-learning-modules.aspx>

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Keith Chanter, CEO, EMCOR UK





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1 The Crescent
Surbiton
Surrey
KT6 4BN

emcoruk.com