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Employee Engagement: Building a Green Workplace Culture

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Abstract

Making a good impact on the world in addition to being lucrative is becoming a major focus for many organisations. With companies realizing that they have a responsibility to address social and environmental challenges, employee engagement in developing a sustainable culture is essential. It begins by defining sustainability and outlining its significance for businesses. Through authentic instances from various businesses, it delves into how involving staff members may significantly influence the establishment of a sustainable and conscientious work environment. Important tactics, obstacles encountered, and quantifiable results are examined closely to glean insightful information. The study also looks into the advantages of include workers in sustainable decision-making processes, emphasizing how their opinions may help create sustainability plans that are more successful and appreciated.

Keywords

Employee engagement, sustainability, organizational culture, sustainable practices, future trends.

Employee Engagement: Building a Green Workplace Culture

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Making a good impact on the world in addition to being lucrative is becoming a major focus for many organisations. With companies realizing that they have a responsibility to address social and environmental challenges, employee engagement in developing a sustainable culture is essential. It begins by defining sustainability and outlining its significance for businesses. Through authentic instances from various businesses, it delves into how involving staff members may significantly influence the establishment of a sustainable and conscientious work environment. Important tactics, obstacles encountered, and quantifiable results are examined closely to glean insightful information. The study also looks into the advantages of include workers in sustainable decision-making processes, emphasizing how their opinions may help create sustainability plans that are more successful and appreciated.

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1. Introduction

Organizational sustainability involves an organization's ability to meet economic, environmental, and human performance objectives. In organizational studies, maintaining employee engagement is considered crucial for sustained success. The idea of corporate sustainability stems from the term “sustainable development,” coined in 1987. Essentially, it refers to economic development that fulfills the current generation's needs without jeopardizing the needs of generations to come. In this context, green behaviors refer to actions and conduct by employees that are connected to and either support or hinder environmental sustainability (Ones & Dilchert, 2012).

Business sustainability has evolved beyond solely focusing on eco-friendly practices, now encompassing a company's comprehensive performance in finance, social impact, and environmental responsibility. This shift reflects a strategic perspective where companies integrate social and environmental elements into their plans to not only benefit the planet but also enhance financial success. Sustainability, once seen as just a trendy term, is now a key

part of corporate planning, going beyond just protecting the environment to also cover social responsibility and ethical behavior. Getting employees actively involved is seen as essential for making sustainability a natural part of how organizations work. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) stresses the significance of integrating sustainability deeply into a company's identity, promoting a thorough approach that includes everyone, from staff members onward (GRI, 2021).

In this article, we've used “firms,” “organizations,” and “businesses” interchangeably. Green Product Innovation (GPI) means coming up with new ideas to make products better for the environment (Ghissetti & Rennings, 2014). GPI aims for sustainable development and a lot of research in this area involves different fields. Studies on GPI are published in different journals, which makes it hard to see the big picture sometimes.

Businesses are seeing the value of being environmentally conscious as more people become concerned about the planet. It's a wise move for businesses as well as the environment. It lowers waste and improves efficiency, which saves money. Adopting eco-friendly procedures might provide

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the company an edge by drawing in clients that favour eco-friendly products. Employee morale and productivity are also increased since they believe their job is making a significant contribution to a greater good. To put it plainly, adopting eco-friendly methods benefits the company and the environment (Ibqmi, 2017).

From their traditional administrative duties, human resources (HR) departments are evolving into vital components of an organization's sustainability. Globally, there is a rising focus on social and environmental responsibility, and HR directors are playing a crucial role in encouraging sustainable work practices. As they support good environmental practices and corporate responsibility in general, employees are essential in guiding sustainability initiatives inside a business. They are change agents who actively impact the organization's commitment to sustainability in a variety of ways. The significance of workers' leadership in sustainability projects is becoming more widely acknowledged in today's business world, emphasising the important role that motivated employees may play in the success of eco-friendly practices (Jackson & Ruderman, 1995).

2. Importance of employee engagement in sustainability

A company's capacity to successfully implement sustainability programmes and see good improvements is greatly dependent on its workforce. Studies consistently demonstrate that adopting and promoting eco-friendly practices is greatly influenced by the strong bonds that exist between employees and the organisations. This link impacts more than just work-related duties; it also has a significant impact on employees' general performance and helps achieve sustainability objectives. Sustainability is gaining prominence in both real-world application and academic research. However, the majority of studies concentrate on macro-level concerns like establishing the business case, leaving a gap in understanding how sustainability is implemented across entire organizations (Glavas, 2012).

The importance of employee involvement in sustainability efforts was demonstrated by a 2020 research conducted by GreenBiz and the National Environmental Education Foundation. The study discovered a significant link between worker productivity and engagement, particularly when sustainability was a component of the employment. According to the study, engaged workers were 43% more likely to claim to be more productive. This emphasises how important it is for a business to align its principles with its attempts to become more

sustainable (GreenBiz & National Environmental Education Foundation, 2020).

Employees are the superheroes of a company when it comes to being eco-friendly. They have a big influence on how committed a company is to sustainability. Changes in the modern workplace, like having more knowledge workers, wider spans of control, and less hands-on experience, create greater challenges for managers in supervising their subordinates' performance (Gruman & Saks, 2011). Employees often come up with creative ideas, and if we let them share these ideas, we might discover better and more sustainable ways of doing things. In their day-to-day tasks, employees can contribute to using resources wisely like saving energy, reducing waste, and being mindful of resources. These small actions collectively help the company achieve its sustainability goals. Employees also play a crucial role in following sustainability rules, such as proper waste disposal, recycling, and energy conservation. Teaching employees about these sustainable practices and their importance is essential. When employees are informed, they can easily incorporate sustainability into their daily routines. Therefore, employees are like the secret ingredient that ensures the company is not only environmentally friendly but also perceived as a responsible and caring company. The study conducted by Jain et al., provides further evidence suggesting that CSR has a considerable impact on company performance, based on empirical findings. Additionally, it demonstrates that corporate reputation positively impacts organizational performance. Furthermore, a negative correlation between CSR and corporate reputation was identified, which contradicts initial expectations (Jain et al., 2022).

Sustainability is not just a trendy word for companies anymore; it is a must-have policy for success in the 21st century. Organizations cannot just talk about it; they have to make it a crucial part of how they take social responsibility seriously for the long run. Nike is a great example of this change. In the past, Nike got into trouble for how it produced things. Now, they have completely changed their approach. They have introduced a cool app called "Making." This app helps designers from all over the world make better choices for the environment. It ranks products based on how much energy they use, how much waste they create, and their impact on the environment. It demonstrates that companies are genuinely prioritizing sustainability and making significant changes in their approach.

Nike is not just stopping at using the "Making" app; they are also making sure all their employees understand and live the sustainability way. They

want everyone to be open and work together globally to make sure they are doing things that are good for the environment. This is not just for show; Nike is serious about making sustainability a part of everything they do (Nike, 2022). Walmart, another huge company known worldwide, is also getting on board with sustainability. They know it is not just about what happens in their stores; it is also about what their suppliers do and how they make their products. So, big companies like Nike and Walmart are making sure sustainability is not just a trend but also a way of doing business.

Acknowledging historical challenges related to unethical and environmentally unfriendly practices among overseas factories and suppliers, Walmart has implemented a structured supply-chain training program. This program is created to teach and train its partners in the supply chain, with the goal of promoting sustainable improvements and ensuring that the entire supply chain follows environmentally responsible practices (Flora, 2023).

3. Employee engagement programs

These initiatives are not just fancy words; they are practical steps that organizations take to make sure everyone in the company is part of their commitment to being environmentally friendly. The International Society of Sustainability Professionals has this tool called the Sustainability Engagement Scorecard that helps organizations figure out the best ways to get employees excited about sustainability. They look at what each organization needs and tailors the approach (ISSP, 2022). So, you might have things like green teams (employees who are extra interested in sustainability), chances for employees to volunteer for environmental causes, and training sessions to teach everyone about being

sustainable. In recent years, employee sustainable engagement has become a significant focus for organizations. This involves educating employees about environmental goals and implementing related programs to encourage environmental preservation. Despite various methods used to motivate employees for environmental engagement, there are still questions about how organizations effectively achieve sustained employee engagement in this aspect (Yap Peng Lok & Chin, 2019).

A report from Deloitte University Press says that having leaders who are really committed to sustainability is a big deal. It's like having someone at the top who is super passionate about it helps the whole company to get on board and overcome any challenges (Deloitte, 2016). This means that it's not just a task for the employees; leaders play a big part in making sure sustainability becomes a natural part of how everyone does things at work. The 4 Es' formula for employee engagement delves into the essential components that contribute to a flourishing workplace. By focusing on enablement, energy, empowerment, and encouragement, organizations can establish a holistic approach to engage and motivate their workforce. This model aims to create an environment where employees not only feel supported and empowered but also inspired to contribute their best, fostering a culture of sustained enthusiasm and productivity (Fig. 1).

The employee engagement process begins with a low level of experientially and progresses through phases. It starts with raising Awareness, leading to taking Ownership and acquiring deeper Education, ultimately resulting in Taking Action. This activity necessitates a call to action, as well as the capacity to think critically and problem solve, with the latter requiring reflection, which is an essential component of experiential education. Employees that are

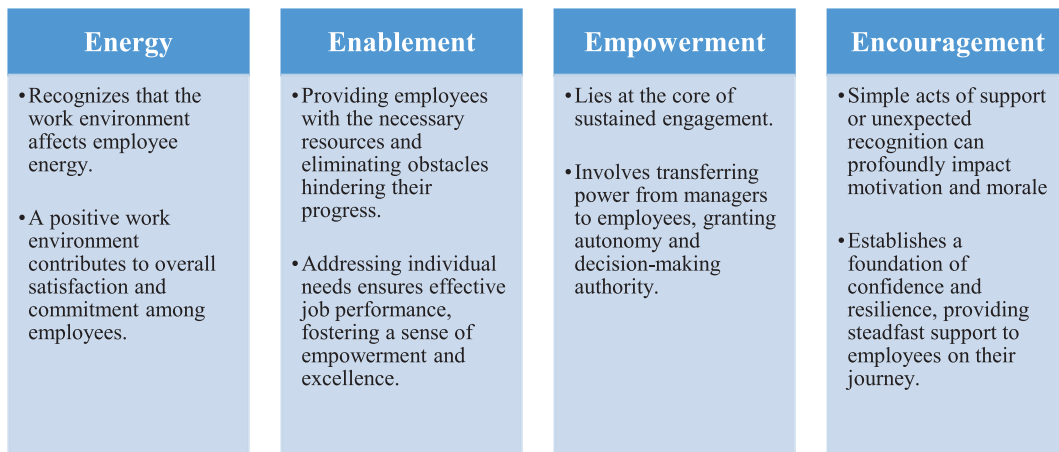


Fig. 1. 4E's formula.

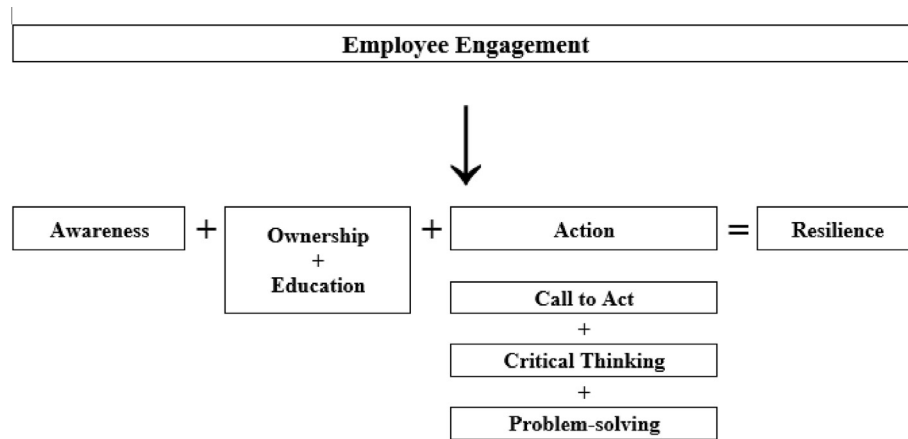


Fig. 2. Building a robust organisation.

engaged and thoughtful are more likely to be resilient, which helps build a robust organisation (Fig. 2).

4. Greening tomorrow: simple solutions for sustainability

It might be challenging to get a company to genuinely care about the environment. There are instances when doing the right thing for the environment doesn't pay off right away. A major difficulty is finding a balance between producing rapid profits and being environmentally responsible. Businesses have to tread a tightrope-like balance between short-term financial advantages and environmental responsibility. Nevertheless, businesses that accomplish this balance not only help the environment but also increase their chances of long-term success. In the end, it comes down to turning a profit and improving the environment at the same time. According to the study by Usmani, it's critical that employers and employees have a thorough understanding of one another (Usmani & Khan, 2017). Long-term, this is beneficial to the business as it helps them create a solid bond. According to the research, all parties should exercise caution in order to ensure the company's continued growth and profitability. For a brief overview of the issues that businesses encounter, how to resolve them, and what steps they may take to become more sustainable, see the table. However, because each firm is unique, they may need to make adjustments to match their own scenario (Table 1).

Figuring out how employee programs affect the environment is not just about looking at numbers.

Metrics like using less energy, creating less waste, and checking how happy employees are given a good overall picture. However, it is not just about the quantity; it is also about the quality. To really see

if a company is becoming more sustainable, you need to look at the cultural changes too.

A study by Temkin Group in 2017 talks about how important it is to understand the emotional connection between employees and sustainability projects. It is not just about the figures; it is also about how people feel and what they believe in (Temkin Group, 2017).

5. Looking ahead: emerging trends in employee engagement for sustainability

In the future, making things better for the environment, driven by enthusiastic workers, will be heavily influenced by new technology and changes in how we work. In the future, technology will play a big role in helping us be eco-friendlier. Smart tools like computers that can think (AI) and analyze data can give us insights into how well we're doing with sustainability. They can suggest creative ideas and better ways to use resources. Another cool tech, block chain, can make sure everyone is being honest about being eco-friendly, which is crucial for big industries.

Looking forward, the way we approach sustainability is undergoing a significant transformation, and it's the enthusiastic employees who are driving this change. Companies are changing the way they do things, and it's a mix of cool technology and how offices are changing. They use smart computers, special online ledgers, and smart devices that talk to each other. These tools help them see how well they're taking care of the environment and find ways to do it even better. Since more people work from different parts of the world, there's a neat global way of thinking about sustainability. This means everyone brings their own ideas on how to be kind to the Earth. It's not just about numbers; it's

Table 1. Sustainability challenges: Solutions & actions for organizations.

Challenge	Solution	Actions
Lack of Clear Understanding	Invest in educating the team about sustainability concepts and benefits.	To raise knowledge and comprehension of sustainability, plan training sessions and seminars. Promote open discussions to tackle questions and concerns, building a common understanding. Offer accessible resources and case studies highlighting successful sustainability practices.
Conflicting Priorities	Align sustainability goals with overall business objectives for synergy.	Create teams that work together on both sustainability and business strategy. Explain how sustainability and business goals help each other. Include thinking about sustainability in the decisions we make and the plans we create.
Short-Term Profit Pressure	Emphasize the long-term benefits of sustainability for resilience and value.	Make communication plans that show the money benefits of long-term sustainability investments. Share stories where sustainability projects made more money over time. Help people see sustainability as something that pays off instead of just a cost.
Difficulty in Metric Measurement	Develop clear and measurable metrics, considering industry standards.	Find important performance measures for the industry and connect them with sustainability goals. Work with others in the industry to set benchmarks for comparing and getting better. Use technology and data tools to make measuring and reporting these measures easier.
Insufficient Data Availability	Invest in data collection systems and collaborate with external sources.	Set up strong processes to collect data in the organization. Consider teaming up with outside groups or NGOs that focus on sustainability data. Use databases and reports about the industry to add to the data we already have.
Integration with Business Strategy	Ensure sustainability goals are embedded seamlessly into the overall strategy.	Create a special team or committee just for sustainability that makes sure goals match our business plan. Include thinking about sustainability in important performance measures and planning processes. Keep checking and changing our business plan to match what's most important for sustainability.

about making caring for the environment a part of our everyday routine. Think of fun things like games that turn taking care of the planet into a friendly competition, or cool experiences that make learning about sustainability interesting.

In the future, it's not just about doing the right thing for the environment; it's about making it a normal part of how we work and live. Companies are using new technologies and changing how they do things, leading us towards a future where we are all more connected, caring, and ready for any challenges. Working from home allows companies to gather ideas globally for helping the Earth. Online tools make it easy for everyone to share thoughts and work together. Smart devices save energy in offices and check on workers' well-being. Fun challenges and prizes can make being eco-friendly enjoyable. Online classes teach us how to help the environment better. Apps help manage stress and balance work and life, so people can join in eco-friendly projects. Technology helps track a

company's environmental impact, even from far away. In the future, teamwork, innovation, and tech will keep sustainability efforts fun, collaborative, and important in the workplace.

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