Environmental Policy and Procedures Special Report

■ All aboard? Harnessing people's values to embed a sustainability ethos

Environment and sustainability managers all too often ignore the need to involve people when planning improvement projects, introducing an EMS or setting stretch targets related to environmental and sustainability aims.

The assumption is that change projects are just like any other project, and that what is needed is careful sequential planning by a small group of experts and decision-makers, with a bit of "selling" at the end. But if the changes involve asking people to behave differently (eg change travel plans, reduce waste) or think differently (develop new values, change priorities) then a mechanistic approach will not deliver the goods.

Organisations are not machines. Change management involves thinking more imaginatively about what causes things to change where you are and using that insight to get the changes you would like to see.

It is easy to assume that it is unnecessary to involve a lot of people before making decisions. After all, if you have no trouble understanding why a bin-less office will lead to more recycling, and why that is a good thing, what possible objections could rational people have? At the very least, you think, asking people for their views will slow things down. At worst, it will uncover petty problems and irrational arguments that you will not be able to counter, and the whole initiative will be futile.

That is unfortunate, because imposing changes inevitably generates resistance, which is hard to manage and can leave you in a worse position than when you started. The good news is that it is actually quite straightforward to plan and implement an engagement strategy that can harness the values and enthusiasm of people from every part of the organisation.

This special report sets out the critical steps in engaging people, so that the behavioural and cultural changes necessary to get real improvements can be embedded in your organisation.

> **A Happy New Year to all our readers!**
>
> **We are starting the year with a fresh, new look and a new environment helpline number to call for advice.**

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CONTRIBUTOR

Penny Walker
Change Management consultant

DEVELOPMENT EDITOR

Laura King

EDITOR

Kevin Whitten
kevin.whitten@croner.co.uk

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Managers ignore the need to engage people

Whether it is because they come from a technical, process engineering background, or because they assume that people just need better information to "do the right thing", environment and sustainability managers all too often ignore the need to engage people when developing new initiatives.

You may hear talk of "getting buy-in". Even this is not the most helpful way of looking at it — it implies you have a ready-made product, and what you need to do is "sell" it to people. Engagement and involvement — broadly, asking people what changes they would like to see and how to create the changes — are more helpful approaches.

Why is it so important to involve people? You have probably heard the joke about the NHS manager who complained that his hospital would be simple to manage, if it wasn't for the patients. It is the same with many environment and sustainability improvement ideas — they would be easy to implement, if it wasn't for the customers, suppliers, workforce and neighbours.

For many of the issues we want to address, the critical changes need to take place in day-to-day behavioural decisions that these people make (printing e-mails, taking the bus, reporting the dripping tap) and in the underlying assumptions people have about "how we do things round here" — the organisational culture.

Organisational culture can be the critical factor determining whether or not people challenge each other on pro-sustainability action and innovation. It colours people's assumptions about seizing opportunities and rejecting unsustainable options. It can stop people factoring in trends like climate change or long-term shifts in public opinion into strategic thinking and investment decisions.

Culture is not changed by adding in agenda items to meetings or stages to processes: if people are not engaged in the why and how, these hard-won "mechanistic" changes mean that the organisation pays lip service to sustainability, but does not transform itself into a sustainable organisation.

When we think about how to change an organisation, we have in mind an (often unconscious) metaphor of what we mean by "an organisation". Try an experiment. Draw an organisation.

Drawing an abstract concept is a shortcut to uncovering your unconscious metaphor and your assumptions about what that thing is. What did you draw? A diagram of interconnected boxes representing departments and functions? A building? A group of people? A series of tasks? A garden of plants and animals? What does your underlying metaphor say about your unconscious beliefs about how change can happen in the organisation?

Organisations are not machines, and they are not computer programs, although of course they share some of their features. Other metaphors for organisations are organisms or eco-systems, conversations, families and learning systems.

Uncovering your own underlying metaphors and experimenting with new ones will help you to have new insights into how change can happen and what might be blocking change — insights that you might have missed by sticking with a narrow, unconscious metaphor.

Having revealed your unconscious metaphors, and identified some new ones to experiment, you are better equipped to see new aspects of your organisation, and how change really happens within and around it.

Seven-step cycle of planned change

If you follow the seven steps shown in Figure 1, your "change" project will stand a greater chance of success.

Understanding how change happens where you are

In some organisations there are clear steps that people need to go through, to get new policies or procedures agreed and adopted. There may be a series of teams that are there to scrutinise and agree things. There may be an expectation

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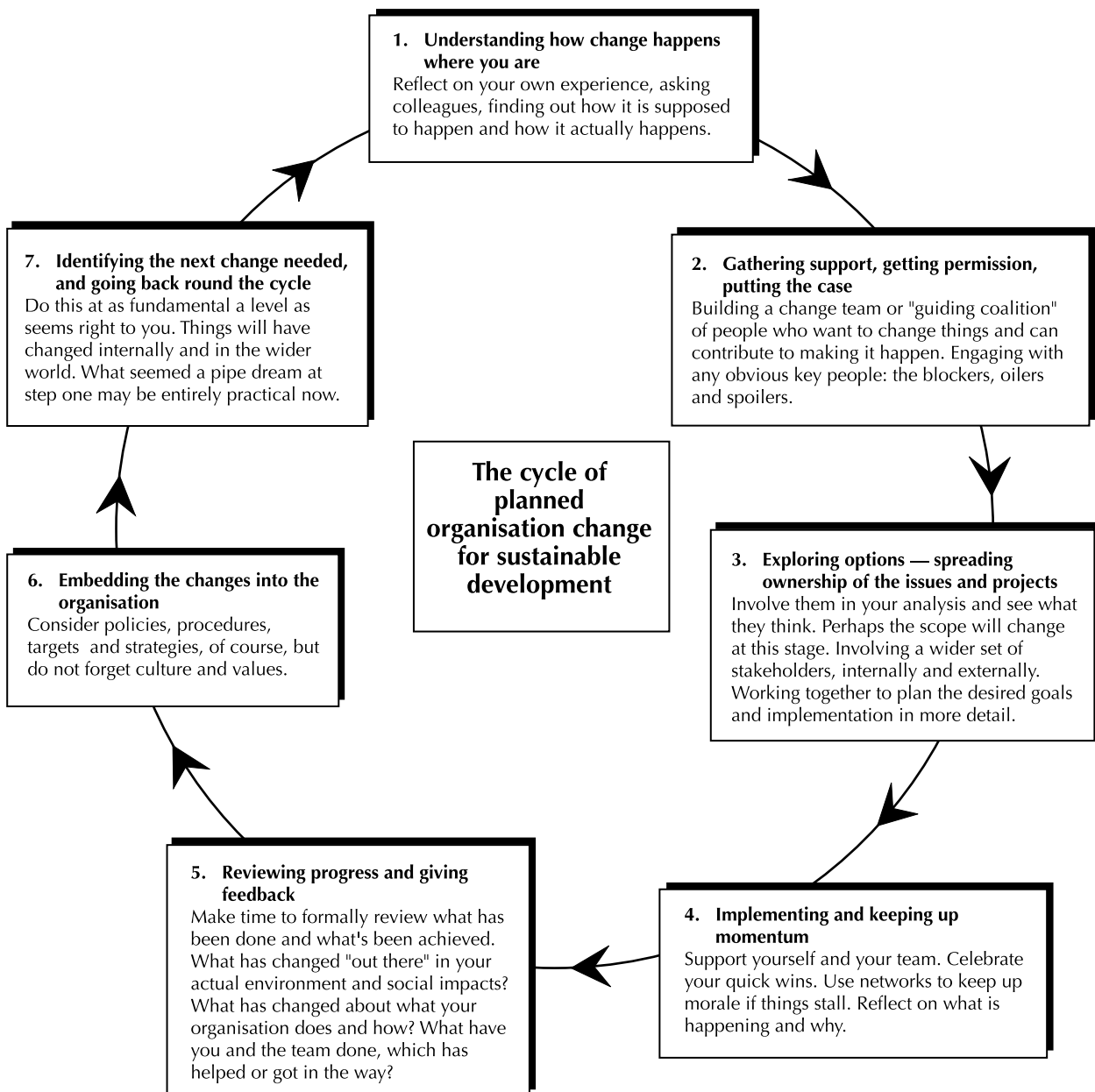
that certain groups of people will be involved and consulted at different stages. These expectations may even be written down in an organisational manual or be set out on the intranet.

In other organisations, there is an expectation that people can take the initiative and get on with things without so much oversight. In many smaller organisations, informal conversations with the right key people may be the way things get done.

What is the "right" way of getting things changed in your organisation?

Figure 1 — The Cycle of Planned Organisation Change for Sustainable Development

1. Understanding how change happens where you are
Reflect on your own experience, asking colleagues, finding out how it is supposed to happen and how it actually happens.

7. Identifying the next change needed, and going back round the cycle
Do this at as fundamental a level as seems right to you. Things will have changed internally and in the wider world. What seemed a pipe dream at step one may be entirely practical now.

2. Gathering support, getting permission, putting the case
Building a change team or "guiding coalition" of people who want to change things and can contribute to making it happen. Engaging with any obvious key people: the blockers, oilers and spoilers.

The cycle of planned organisation change for sustainable development

6. Embedding the changes into the organisation
Consider policies, procedures, targets and strategies, of course, but do not forget culture and values.

3. Exploring options — spreading ownership of the issues and projects
Involve them in your analysis and see what they think. Perhaps the scope will change at this stage. Involving a wider set of stakeholders, internally and externally. Working together to plan the desired goals and implementation in more detail.

5. Reviewing progress and giving feedback
Make time to formally review what has been done and what's been achieved. What has changed "out there" in your actual environment and social impacts? What has changed about what your organisation does and how? What have you and the team done, which has helped or got in the way?

4. Implementing and keeping up momentum
Support yourself and your team. Celebrate your quick wins. Use networks to keep up morale if things stall. Reflect on what is happening and why.

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In some organisations, as well as the stated way of getting things changed, everyone knows that how things actually happen is different. There may be a formal process, but those who are successful at getting things done actually use other ways of getting people to agree.

This distinction between "espoused" ways of doing things and "in practice" ways of doing things has been recognised in organisational theory for a long time. It is useful to spend a bit of time reflecting on your experience of how change actually happens in your organisation. Think about a particular change that has happened in the last year or so (not necessarily an environmental or sustainability change).

- What formal processes were used to develop, agree and implement the change?
- What informal communications and conversations helped to bring it about?
- Who was really in favour of it? What part did they play?
- Who was indifferent? What did they do?
- Who was against the change? What did they do to get in the way? What is their view now? If it changed, how did that happen?
- How did ideas about what should be changed, and what the new situation should be, evolve over time?
- How is the change being reinforced now? Who is enthusiastically championing the new status quo, who is tolerating it, and who is unhappy about it and undermining it?

Ask colleagues what they think, too. Getting three or four perspectives will give you a more rounded picture.

Doing this will give you a much better idea of who the key players are, how things really get done in your organisation, and the degree of flexibility you need to be willing to have in coming up with ideas and implementing them.

Gathering support, getting permission, putting the case

When you are making change, you want it to really stick. It should get under people's skin and become habit — not just be rubber stamped at a meeting and then sit on the shelf gathering dust. Changing things in this way involves planning, sensitivity to what people are enthusiastic about and concerned about, and the ability to let go. It proceeds in a series of waves, each one reaching further up the shore, as you gradually recruit more people to the team of change makers and change supporters.

What might this mean in practice?

Starting off with a small group of people who you know are already interested in environmental improvement, talk together about your (and their) ideas for what it is that you would like to see change. Perhaps it is the introduction of an EMS. Perhaps you would like to concentrate on carbon. Or maybe you think the time is right to develop some new products and services. Whatever it is, don't get too caught up in the details yet.

Instead, think about the key players you need to get on side, before you go public with your ideas. Who are they? How are they currently interested and engaged, if at all? What is their attitude to the kinds of change you have in mind — where do they stand? You may need to begin by making some assumptions. Try to replace assumptions with evidence, by talking to these people and asking them about their views.

What might make people less concerned and more enthusiastic?

Find out whether there are any people whose permission you need before you can explore the ideas further with a wider group of people. Think both about the formal permission that you need and about those people who it would be courteous or canny to touch base with — people whose help, knowledge,

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endorsement (or failure to endorse) will make a big difference to the chances of success.

At this stage, you will need to have a clear rationale for why it would make sense for the organisation to explore the idea. Consider the kinds of arguments that will win people over: they may be to do with reputation, legal requirements, customer or client interest, costs, staff recruitment and retention, stakeholder expectations. You may not need a detailed business case at this stage (although you should be ready to provide one if requested). A clear rationale, persuasively delivered, may be enough.

Exploring options — spreading ownership of issues and projects

Amongst other things, organisations are collections of people. And people are increasingly well-informed about environmental and sustainability issues. They are also, on the whole, sympathetic to taking action to improve things, if that action seems both meaningful (likely to make a difference) and doable (practical and mainstream) (Ballard, 2005).

Recent surveys of public attitudes and behaviours reveal that 71% of people say they are "recycling more rather than throwing things away", over half say they are "wasting less food" and "cutting down on gas and electricity use in the home" and/or "cutting down on water use in the home" (Defra, 2007).

So, some of the changes we want to make in organisations rely on large numbers of individuals to change their day-to-day behaviour. Organisations are made up of people, and a large proportion of those people are already taking action in their own homes. This latent good will and knowledge gives us change makers a huge head start. So why do our great ideas and initiatives sometimes get stuck?

One of the most common reasons is that we inadvertently generate resistance, through failing to engage people early on.
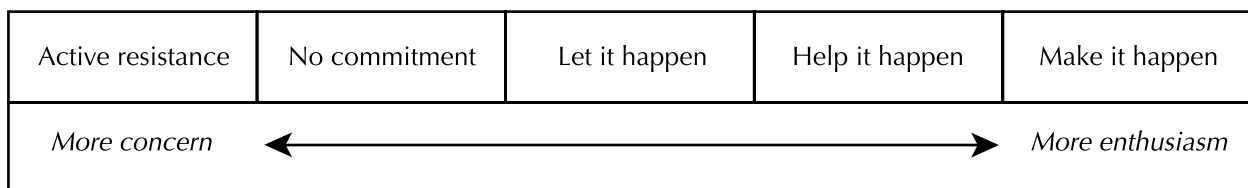
This is the trap of "decide — announce — defend". It seems attractive: you can see clearly how to get a particular improvement and get all the details sorted out before announcing it to the rest of the organisation. To your consternation, the well-designed and foolproof plan is criticised by everyone else, who come up with unreasonable, and reasonable, arguments against it. Emotions run high and the plan may even be abandoned. Why? People do not like having change imposed on them, however well meaning.

Better to take the "involve — agree — implement" path. It may feel slower in the early stages, as you identify the internal and external stakeholders and get them to discuss the problems and solutions. It saves time and leads to stronger plans in the long run, as pitfalls are spotted and designed out, and people feel as if the plan is their own, because it is.

People's energy can be harnessed by asking for their ideas, help and feedback. Surveys and e-mail can help to a certain extent, but nothing beats a good old fashioned conversation, whether by phone, video-conference, in the corridor or in a carefully planned and well-facilitated workshop.

In incremental steps, the change idea will be honed, details developed, opportunities and barriers identified and taken into account. An overall plan with timings and responsibilities

Figure 2 — Where Do People Stand?

Active resistance	No commitment	Let it happen	Help it happen	Make it happen
More concern ⬅————————————————➡ *More enthusiasm*				

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will emerge. Often people will take on particular aspects, helping to spread the word and engage more people, working out what new knowledge or skills people need and organising for them to get it, ensuring that any new equipment or resources are obtained and so on. You will need to let go, and may have to manage your anxiety about whether other people know enough or share the same vision as you. This is an inevitable part of the change moving out of your control, and being genuinely taken up by others. Welcome it, even if it feels uncomfortable!

Implementing and keeping up momentum

When implementing the plan, keep your nerve. Make sure that you see initiatives through. Do what you say you will do, even if you only get a small response initially. As you show confidence that momentum will build, more people will have confidence in you and the change. Success breeds success.

So plan to achieve some quick wins early on, and tell people what you, and they, have achieved, whilst acknowledging that there is more to do. Make sure activities are visible and that people know who to get in touch with to find out more, give feedback and publicise their successes. Use the communication channels that already work well in your organisation and try out some new ones.

Sometimes the change will get stuck. It is not always obvious what is getting in the way. This useful model helps identify and analyse the barriers in the way of a particular change, so that the right ways of overcoming the barriers can be found. The example here is related to introducing an EMS to catalyse improved environmental performance, but this model could be used for any kind of change.

Even after implementation has begun, be open to the possibility that people may spot improvements that can be made to the plan. Despite everyone's best efforts, some of the ideas may not work in practice, and need redesigning. People who were not originally

involved may hear about what is happening and want to join in. The external context may change, making parts of the plan redundant and refocusing efforts.

A great change maker is open to the need to respond to circumstances, seize opportunities and maintain flexibility. This needs to be done in a way that keeps people on board, and keeps the agreed purpose of the change clearly in sight.

Figure 3 — Barriers to Change

	Individual	Collective
Subjective	Personal values, world view, assumptions. "The organisation is just doing this to tick a box, it is not serious about me changing my behaviour."	Group culture, shared mind-sets, shared norms, predominant fashion or beliefs. "An EMS is complicated, time consuming, and will just stop us doing things."
Objective	The limits of one's role or authority, skills, resources, knowledge. "The organisation will not take account of my work on the EMS, when calculating my bonus."	Political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental. "This is not a legal obligation."

Source: Wilber, 2000; Ballard, 2006

Reviewing progress and giving feedback

Change is hard, so use your progress reviews as a way of congratulating yourselves and everyone else who has played a part. Recognise what you have achieved, as well as spotting those areas that need more effort or a different approach.

When reviewing progress, look at quantitative and qualitative information. Stick to what is relevant to the things you wanted to achieve with the change programme.

Think about:

- the impacts for the environment or society, eg water used, hazardous waste generated, days lost through accidents, wells dug

- the difference for the organisation, eg job descriptions rewritten, eco-products launched, bins removed

- how the change team is doing, eg what you have done that has worked, what you have done that has not worked, how you are working together as a team.

It can help if a credible outsider (eg an auditor or certification body) has assessed your performance. Formal reviews can be presented to a senior team. Perhaps data and stories about what you have done may be reported publicly.

Showing milestones being passed and graphs of trends going in the right direction can be a great way of keeping people involved. Include quotes from a range of people from different parts of the organisation (and outside it) who can talk about their commitment and progress.

Make sure you also give feedback (thanks as well as information about how performance has improved and what has been achieved) to everyone who has been part of it.

Embedding the changes into the organisation

You want the changes to outlast your involvement, withstand the whims of the latest management initiative and to continue without the need for your change team to police them.

So they need to be embedded into formal processes and systems, and they need to have genuine support and deliver benefits to the people who make them a reality on a daily basis.

So embedding is about:

- integrating the changes into the written policies, procedures, targets and strategies

Figure 4 — Levels of Managerial Response to Sustainable Development

1. Non-responsive: Senior managers see sustainable development issues as irrelevant and/or as threatening and would prefer not to engage with it. Reluctant action, if any. No resources allocated.

2. Compliant: Managers will respond to pressure — eg a legislator, senior manager or customer — but will not be proactive. Little understanding of sustainable development issues and how they apply to the organisation's activities. Some action, recognising and responding to key stakeholders' concerns. May be a "tick box" exercise.

3. Efficient management: Managers recognise that the issue needs to be managed systematically, rather than occasionally. Measurement systems and targets, ISO 14001, carbon management, etc., are introduced. Sustainable development is delegated to someone lower down the organisation; senior managers may think they have cracked it. It is an important foundation for later progress, but relatively few yet grasp the scale of the challenge.

4. Strategic Experimentation: An important bridge from operations to strategy. Senior managers begin to recognise the substantial risks and opportunities. Well-resourced and sponsored projects are used to make breakthroughs in practice and understanding, but strategic decisions remain unaffected.

5. Strategic responsiveness: Top management teams recognise the significant importance of sustainable development. There is a strategic management focus on the ongoing resilience (eg of capital, services, facilities) of the organisation, and its context. This encompasses a future with disruptive changes in eg climatic stability, energy supply, population movements.

6. The "champion organisation": Very rare. The organisation's focus is on significantly changing the political, social, legal, technological environment in which it operates in order to promote sustainability, rather than just responding to a changing world or positioning itself with respect to the issues.

Source: Ballard, 2007

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- weaving them into the culture of the organisation — "the way we do things round here" and "what we are here for".

These are not one-off achievements, and your change team will need to continue to engage people, asking them:

- how the change is going
- whether anything is getting in the way and how to get round this
- how they have gone about achieving the progress they have made
- what other changes they would like to see
- how else they would like to be involved.

Identifying the next change needed, and going back round the cycle

From these conversations, it may be clear that a plateau has been reached, and a different kind of change is needed next. Organisations seem to move through various distinct phases when it comes to sustainable development.

Ballard's model is particularly useful in working out where your organisation is now, and triggering a conversation about where people would like it to move to. From this, conversations can identify whether and how to bring that change about.

When using the model, you may find that different parts of the organisation may exhibit traits from different stages. If that seems to be the case, bear in mind that the later phases necessarily involve the top management team at the centre of the organisation, rather than individual parts of the organisation.

If there is an appetite for embarking on another, more ambitious, change journey, then you know how to begin…

Penny Walker is a UK-based Change Management consultant. For more information, go to: *www.penny-walker.co.uk.*

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