

17.14: Human Resources and Sustainability

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the role of human resource management in advancing sustainability



Given the business case for sustainability, what can a human resource management do to advance sustainability within their organization? Here are four key actions, derived from the Human Resources chapter of *The Business Guide to Sustainability*, to move the discussion forward:^[1]

- Introduce the topic to senior executives: If senior management isn't thinking about sustainability, present the business case and related resources or arrange an executive briefing.
- Align HR systems to embed sustainability in the culture: Incorporate sustainability into job descriptions, selection and evaluation criteria, employee orientation and training, evaluation and compensation.
- Model sustainable practices: Assess HR impacts and make changes to practices and procedures—for example, recycling and leveraging technology to minimize paper use and waste—to set an example and get a sense for what's possible.
- Measure the impact: Incorporate sustainability initiatives in existing measurement systems in order to quantify the benefits and track progress.

Hitchcock and Willard also identify classic change management mistakes to avoid, including:

- Spray and pray training—Providing training without an associated plan and systems for implementation.
- The big black hole—Conducting training and soliciting implementation ideas that are never assessed, acknowledged or acted upon.
- Language hijack—Failure to recognize that terms such as “environmentalist” or “climate change” may evoke different responses, from engagement to resistance.

Practice Question

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/17302>

As is true at an organizational performance level, Human Resource management stands to benefit from a successful implementation. Sustainability positively impacts employee recruitment, engagement and retention. To illustrate, here are 3 key takeaways from a 2016 Cone Communications Millennial Employee Engagement study:^[2]

- 64% of Millennials consider a company's social and environmental commitments when deciding where to work
- 88% of Millennials say their job is more fulfilling when they are provided opportunities to make a positive impact on social and environmental issues and
- 83% of Millennials would be more loyal to a company that helps them contribute to social and environmental issues.

For perspective, millennials currently represent 50% of the workforce and are projected to constitute 75% by 2025.^[3]

1. Hitchcock, Darcy and Marsha Willard. *The Business Guide to Sustainability*. Earthscan. 2006 ↵

2. "2016 Cone Communications Millennial Employee Engagement Study." Cone. 2016. Accessed July 18, 2019. ↵

3. Donston-Miller, Debra. "Workforce 2020: What You Need to Know Now." Forbes. May 5, 2016. Accessed July 18, 2019. ↵

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