



# Making it work in your business

## What is this all about?

Traditionally businesses maintain a strong focus on factors that have a clear and direct effect on their economic performance, predominantly looking at financial measures such as costs, sales and profit margins.

Many enterprises are moving towards sustainability by taking a broader view of their performance including their relationship to the environment and the community. This is not just for the 'feel good' factor. It enables them to fully assess the potential and actual impact to their business – both costs and benefits – from their interactions with the local and broader community and with the physical environment.

These concepts are embedded in terms like the triple bottom line, people-planet-profit and social, environmental and economic sustainability.

**People** - social sustainability activities focus on maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with employees, customers and the community. These activities often have benefits in terms of positive profile and customer and community support.

**Planet** - environmental sustainability activities focus on the potential impact of resource usage, hazardous substances, waste and emissions on the physical environment. These activities may have a direct cost benefit for a business.

**Profit** - economic sustainability activities focus on business growth, efficiency and productivity supporting the financial viability of the business.

# **Making it work in your business**

Making sustainability work for your business will depend on how you integrate sustainability issues into your strategic planning and management systems. It will also depend on the level of commitment you can generate with your decision makers and your operational workers.

You might decide to focus on big ticket technology improvements that require top level approvals for research investment and capital expenditure. In this case the commitment from decision makers will have a direct impact on whether you can go ahead with your sustainability activities.

Or you might focus on more immediate energy savings by switching off lights and heating that are not needed.

This will depend on commitment from all employees to apply the new policy.

How you make sustainability work in your business will be influenced by your approach to:

- establishing top level commitment to efficiency and sustainability
- embedding your commitment into the values and acceptable behaviours that make up your organisational culture
- making sure that your procedures and job descriptions cover your sustainability activities and spell out the responsibilities of workers and managers.

## What can I do?

Your approach will depend on factors such as the size of your business, your governance structure, management systems, organisational culture and your long term goals.

#### **Planning and systems**

A good place to start is a review of your operations and some strategic decisions about which sustainability activities will deliver benefits to your business. Depending on your goals you might decide to focus on improving your compliance, your efficiency and productivity, your community profile or your customer satisfaction ratings. Your review will also help to set realistic improvement targets.

You can then plan how to put it into practice. Design your systems for measuring where you are now, how much you improve over time and what that means for the business. Decide who needs to be involved to make it happen, whether you have clear changes to make or need to research options, which changes can be made through procedures and communications and which ones need a budget for upgrades to equipment, facilities or even skills.

To ensure that your improvements are maintained as part of normal operations you will need to generate commitment from your decision makers, managers and operational staff. Management systems play a role in changing workplace attitudes and behaviour so that they become the norm. They are also critical in capturing the new procedures and planning for any future skill needs.

#### **Modeling and leadership**

Strong leadership helps to convey the vision and values of your organisation. It also sets your expectations for behaviour and attitudes in the workplace. You can support employees to meet these expectations by clearly communicating acceptable behaviours and organisational values such as respect, ethical practice, compliance, sustainability, quality and efficiency. You can 'walk the talk' by showing that your own behaviour is consistent and reflects the organisation's values.

## **Employee engagement**

You may want to improve your work conditions and organisational culture in order to reduce the cost of staff turnover and improve employee engagement and productivity. These factors are often aligned with social sustainability.

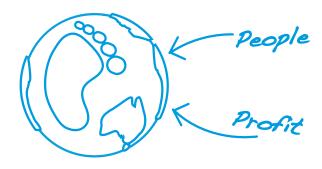
You will need support from decision makers if you are making significant changes to work conditions. Input from employees will help you target changes that are meaningful to them and will encourage a sense of engagement.

You might want to become an 'employer of choice' using strategies to retain staff and to maximise their engagement. These might include providing skills development and other opportunities to employees, showing how you have acted on their suggestions, rewarding consistent performance and innovations, having flexible working hours and providing comfortable facilities, lunch rooms and outdoor areas.

# **More on sustainability**

The Skills for Sustainability website provides more information about making sustainability work in your business. The website also shows how sustainability improvements can be achieved across other aspects of a business including:

- · facility management
- · product design, technology and process improvements
- day to day operational efficiency
- compliance



- community relationships and profile
- eliminating waste
- supply chain management.

See www.sustainabilityskills.net.au

# **Skills for sustainability**

Key areas of skills which support the viability an organisation while benefiting the environment in which the organisation operates include:

- managing relationships with the local community
- planning and implementing strategies to reduce water and energy use, waste and emissions
- developing opportunities for recycling, reuse and remanufacturing
- making product improvements and designing 'clever' products
- improving day to day operational resource efficiency
- measuring and reporting environmental/sustainability performance
- assessing environmental risks and developing responses
- · managing the supply chain.

Manufacturing Skills Australia has developed leading edge skills solutions to help the manufacturing and related sectors achieve sustainability. These reside in the Sustainable Operations, Competitive Systems and Practices and Environmental Monitoring and Technology qualifications.

For more information about sustainability skills, qualifications and learning and assessment materials see Skills for Sustainability website www.sustainabilityskills.net.au.

To view the qualifications and information on Registered Training Providers see **www.training.gov.au**.

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