

Sustaining sustainability

Nadine Exter, Cognisus: www.cogni-sus.com

Context:

For over 5 years Nadine worked as an internal change agent at Cranfield University, helping to drive sustainability into products & services, culture and operations.

What the client needed:

As an internal sustainability change agent in Cranfield, Nadine worked with the Doughty Centre team to embed sustainability into the university. This was ongoing work over a period of 5 years and focused on:

- Developing relationships.
- Mobilising interested parties.
- Educating and raising awareness among different employee groups and customers.
- Aiding existing teams and individuals with knowledge and skills to plan and implement.

Our approach:

As part of the embedding work, Nadine engaged closely with the Green Team, a group of interested employees in one division of the university. She developed relationships with key members and helped suggest ideas and direction of travel. A Directors Sustainability Taskforce was developed to look beyond just green issues, and Nadine became an advisor to this group to help articulate the approach, priorities and possible actions. Linking the two groups was important to help the teams understand what were material impacts and issues to address. When the central Facilities team developed a specific EHS team to address sustainability issues, this also became a critical team to engage with and connect

Through a process of developing relationships and the different teams starting to work together to identify priorities, clear materiality and actions emerged. Critically, this process had to be owned by the teams, not by Nadine, so as to ensure lasting embedding.

Over a period of 2 years the Sustainability Taskforce and the Environmental Sub-taskforce - aided by the central EHS team – identified specific issues as most material. Nadine's role was to stimulate needed discussions and give knowledge of impact assessment, stakeholder wants and needs, legislation, certification, costs and returns, and feasibility of achievement.

Impact:

Targets were set (such as becoming ISO certified, ambitious energy reductions and schemes, e.g. 10:10 campaign), better waste management was articulated and rolled out, paper reduction plan put in place (paperless offices, removing waste bins etc), food sourcing certification achieved (Fairtrade), employee and customer engagement campaigns kicked off (e.g. Green Week), and the 3 teams also looked at how to interest the rest of the university.

In 2014 the central EHS team were given a boost to address organisational wide coordinated strategy and targets. This involved developing a full champions' network, and a new set of ambitious targets based on forward-looking materiality assessment. Nadine helped scope how the new team could look and what role they could have in embedding sustainability

- For a case study, please see: Exter et al, 2013. '*Embedding sustainability into academia*'. J of Management Development