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White Paper

Prevent Random Acts of Sustainability



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SYNOPSIS

Introduction

Corporate promotion of environmental 'good work's and the real issues.

Problem Statement

Little to no framework to support initiatives.

Previous Options

With no framework in place support is lost when manager(s) change positions and sustainability plans have to be rebuilt.

Suggested Solution

Seriously consider the value of a formal management system approach.

Benefit 1

Provides the necessary framework for organizational structure and continuity.

Benefit 2

An ISO 14001 EMS provides recognition.

Benefit 3

Helps organizations achieve their stated sustainability goals.

Implementation

Call Dennis Sasseville today to discuss creating your formal management system.

Summary

Many companies, large and small, are making significant strides in their sustainability initiatives. Common problem areas for well-meaning companies include lack of program continuity, conflicting priorities, untrained staff, and unstructured approaches leading to inefficiencies and unmet goals. Utilizing a management system approach increases the likelihood of success with initiating and sustaining a corporate sustainability program.

Prevent Random Acts of Sustainability

Many companies, large and small, are making significant strides in their sustainability initiatives. I'm most concerned though about a class of companies which seem to do many "good works" and get accolades for their legitimate efforts, but when you look behind the curtains a bit you find that they have a weak framework in place to support their sustainability initiatives and programs. Some dart from one high profile project to the next, all good and worthy efforts, but usually led by a single champion, or at most, a small select team. When that champion moves on to another position, not necessarily even at another company, the sustainability initiatives are in danger of faltering and taking three steps backward. Why? There's no framework for the programs to sustain themselves; too many one-off initiatives and no management system (MS) in place for spurring continuity and longevity. At worse, the lack of a formal management system, like an ISO 14001 EMS or OHSAS 18001, means that company may in fact be lagging in some of its basic EHS regulatory compliance requirements. I've personally witnessed this very condition at several highly visible corporate brands – no names.

I confess that I view the world through MS-tinted glasses. But the alternative to taking the time, trouble, and management commitment to implement some sort of formal system and associated culture is not a pretty sight either. As public and supply chain reporting requires increased transparency and third-party scrutiny, some corporate programs will be exposed for their weaknesses, to the probable embarrassment of the brand holders, and discouragement of employees and stakeholders alike; A totally avoidable situation. A management system need not be destined for external-certification, although there's much to be said for such approaches, but it does need to be formal, established, recognized, utilized by employees and it must engender management's full support to be effective and provide corporate value.

Some firms choose to brand their corporate sustainability programs with catchy or memorable names. Xanterra Parks and Resorts coined "EcologiX" for their national management system (based on and externally certified to ISO 14001). I give Xanterra two thumbs up for a choice that is identifiable to external stakeholders but also easily resonates with the company's employees. Last year while on vacation I was at the front desk of a Xanterra lodge in one of our National Parks and overheard the desk agent enthusiastically explaining to another lodge guest about their EcologiX management system. Many corporate sustainability managers long for such visibility and integration for their own MS and sustainability initiatives.



But on the flip side, a number of companies I've worked with are reluctant to try and brand a program, having had one too many corporate roll-outs (with cute names or acronyms) fall unceremoniously into the flavor-of-the-month dustbin with good-riddance snickers from the troops. That type of situation is understandable as well. The initiative's name is not necessarily the be-all and end-all. The framework and inner working of a sustainability program are what get the job done. I am frequently reminded of a 2006 article in Quality Progress magazine where six-sigma instructor and consultant Edward F. Phillippe described the push-back he was getting from a client company, largely hung up with the term "six sigma" itself, not so much the need to improve on quality. His exasperated

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advice to his client, "Call it Fred" if you must!" Don't let the label become the barrier to a necessary and worthwhile initiative.

The take-away lesson is to stick with the heart of the initiative while finding ways to work within your own corporate culture. And seriously consider the value of a formal management system approach to avoid being left with just feel-good, short-lived, random acts of sustainability.

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You Can Call It Fred. Edward F. Phillippe, Quality Progress, January 2006, p. 82.

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