

## Sustainability Practices in Organisations

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There is a lot of attention, rightly so, being given to the unsustainable rate at which we are destroying the world's precious resources, and the need for some fairly serious shifts in thinking if we are to halt this trend. However, are organisations paying similar attention to the energy within the system created by the people who work there? Are they creating an environment where people are motivated, can flourish and succeed, and generate their own positive energy for the benefit of others around them, leading to a strong and sustainable organisation?

People are a natural resource, and organisations are systems where people combine to create value. However, there are many behaviours which can destroy energy within the system. For example, in cultures where blaming others is commonly used as a defence mechanism, or where the leadership uses threats to get things done, the common reaction is withdrawal – a tendency to look after oneself first, to keep quiet or do nothing, rather than risk being wrong. This is a form of energy being wasted – it is being used to avoid attention, rather than positively to build something. Another example is over-use of bureaucracy, or organisations where there is a rule for everything – if people are treated like idiots, they typically will behave that way! Micro-management is a further example, again constraining innovation and creative activity, rather than encouraging it.

So how can this energy source be exploited in a sustainable way? Simply by giving the opportunity for people to release it. Everyone has the capacity for innovation and creativity, but for many, this will only happen in the work environment if there is a clear indication that such behaviour is welcomed. In practice, this requires a strong commitment to empowerment, and encouragement to take accountability at all levels of the organisation.

This may sound a simplistic solution, but it requires everyone in the organisation to act with respect to one another, and to be prepared to give trust, rather than waiting for it to be earned. Both these actions require a great amount of emotional energy – luckily, that is something which is far from exhausted.