



Creating Sustainable Workplaces and Organizations



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What is Sustainability?



Randall H. Reid
Alachua County Manager

Sustainability entails living mindfully of the future, embracing and respecting life in the present, and caring for the wellbeing of generations to follow. The concept is broadly defined as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

The ability to adapt to change has been a crucial element to the historical survival of mankind and increasingly the key to success as an organization, corporation or community. The ability to sustain our organizations and communities in the face of rapid global change and resource competition is the

critical issue of our age. Citizens, employees and stakeholders must play a part. Managers, CEOs and leaders, practicing transformational stewardship, increasingly seek to find sustainable practices and strategies for their organizations. These principles of sustainable organizations are more holistic than business practices of the past. They recognize both the need for return on investment, the wise use of resources and seek the well being of their employees and stakeholders. These principles describe a workplace or locality that honors the diversity, the inter-relatedness, the value and the uniqueness of the people, places and collaborative processes within our organizations. Sustainable organizations utilize locally appropriate technology and strategies to secure their future and benefit their locality. This brochure is an initial guide to actions necessary to create sustainable organizations and workplaces.

Sustainability in the Workplace

Business jargon follows the trends of the marketplace. Some ideas do not last, while others have a deep impact on our world view. Sustainability is not a short-term trend. It has begun and will for the foreseeable future shape the business world by redefining profit, return on investment, capital and corporate responsibility. Visionary companies are now beginning to shift toward business practices that respect people, profit and planet to remain not just competitive, but secure in their respected markets.

One tenet of sustainability is that we must measure our resource use and account for the external costs of our goods and services. The beauty of going “sustainable” is that many of the changes we make are beneficial to our health and environment, while saving us money. Reducing our energy and water usage, as well as waste produced, all translate into less resource utilization and therefore, lower costs.

Whether you are concerned with cutting operating costs or reducing your business’ carbon footprint, decreasing consumption of shrinking stocks of natural resources is more than a political or ethical choice. It is necessary for the viability of an organization, community and country.

In the near future, efficient use of locally available resources goods and services will play a huge role in reducing the high costs of power for buildings and water. In addition, conservation of resources will reduce the expense of future energy imports and reduce widespread health and environmental damages and costs that result from burning fossil fuels. Buying locally also supports your regional economy.

Therefore local businesses are an integral part of the solution. Every action, no matter how small, can contribute to the global effort to reduce our ecologic footprint. The movement toward a sustainable business model has been catalyzed by three main drivers:

- 1. Environmental Pressure:** As our energy and natural resource demands grow, impacts to ecosystems are proportionally growing and causing more damage to the health of our planet and communities.
- 2. Economic Pressure:** Sustainability presents opportunities for efficiency that can improve business performance and competitiveness, while reducing operating costs.
- 3. Social Pressure:** Investors, customers, environmental groups and the media have begun to make sustainability the profitable choice.

Seven Areas of Concern

In the next century, as the human population doubles and resources available per person drop by one-half to three-fourths, a remarkable transformation of industry and commerce will have to occur. Through this transformation society will be able to create a vital local economy that uses radically less material and energy.

The following seven areas will begin to provide your office with strategies that save you money while improving the efficiency and vitality of your business:



Energy: Use energy efficiently and seek renewable energy



Water: Conserve and prevent pollution to water resources



Transportation: Reduce CO2 travel emissions



Waste: Reduce, reuse, recycle



Communicate: Engage and educate employees



Collaboration: Diversify and integrate the workforce



Health: Encourage a healthy lifestyle

Energy

Energy conservation and efficiency offers the largest, most cost-effective opportunity for businesses to reduce the enormous financial, health, and environmental impacts associated with burning fossil fuels.

Commercial buildings consume about 40 percent of the world's energy. The major electric consumers in commercial buildings are heating, cooling, and lighting. To get the most savings prioritize conservation first and efficiency second, looking for no-cost and low-cost solutions with immediate benefits and short payback times.



Maintenance

- Contact your local utility provider and ask for free energy audit
- They will provide you with no to low-cost ways to save money through best practices or rebates
- Keep all equipment clean and maintained such as air filters



Lighting

- Use daylight if possible and then compact fluorescent light bulbs or new light emitting diodes (led bulbs)
- Install lighting sensors to automatically turn lighting on and off in space that is less used



Heating and Cooling

- Set your thermostat to a 78 F in the Summer and 68 F in the Winter
- Invest in Energy Star Equipment



Equipment

- Optimize energy settings on computers, monitors and other electronics
- Unplug devices that are not in use and utilize power strips
- Reduce the amount of equipment in use: consolidate several printers into one efficient multi-use device

After investing \$76,000 in more efficient light bulbs and lighting equipment, Alachua County is saving more than \$220,000 a year over five years.

Water

A commercial office building is a significant consumer of water. Commercial water use can account for 10 percent of a city's water consumption. Even a moderate sized building of 107,000 square ft consumes over 2,800 gallons of water a day or more than 1.8 million gallons of water a year. That is enough to supply 40 average sized homes. This brochure identifies a range of practical changes that can reduce water usage.



Conserve

- Fix leaks: Millions of gallons of water are lost every year through leaking pipes
- Install water saving fixtures: Using low-flow sink fixtures at the tap can decrease water usage by 50 percent
- Update plumbing fixtures: Consider replacing toilets with low-flow toilets that use 40 percent less water or waterless urinals



Reuse

- Consider grey-water, reclaimed water or rainwater harvesting for landscape irrigation



Localize

- Encourage conservation, by using native landscape material and use of local water sources first

Alachua County plans to install over 60 waterless urinals. These devices will save over 3 million gallons of water a year and \$25,000 dollars.

Transportation

Since the oil price spike of 2008, there has been interest in improving public transit and the walkability of communities. About 28 percent of the energy in the United States goes to transporting people and goods. Carpooling or taking the bus, instead of single person car trips decreases CO2 emissions and reduces the cost of commuting. The option to walk, bike, bus or carpool gives people more choice and makes for a healthier community and a better planet.



Getting to Work

- Locating your business near public transportation routes can save you and employees money on parking and gas expenses
- Promote walking, biking, and public transit
- Incentivize carpooling or car sharing programs



Telecommuting

- Offer a telecommuting option to employees
- Consider alternatives such as audio and video conferencing



Business Travel and Corporate Fleets

- When travelling, ask if it is possible to choose low carbon options or offset your emissions locally
- Right size your vehicles for the jobs they need to perform choosing the most fuel efficient option

Since 2001, Alachua County has incorporated hybrid vehicles in its fleet. Because of this, over a nine year period approximately \$100,000 in fuel savings has accrued as compared to conventional sedan and small SUVs gas consumption.

Waste

Offices produce millions of tons of waste every year such as paper, printer cartridges and computer equipment. Recycling this waste we can reduce the demand for new material, which cuts CO2 emissions from factory production. Below are simple ways your business can begin to save money through the reduction of material consumption.



Reduce

- Promote electronic documents to save on paper waste and costs
- Compost food waste
- Print double-sided with smaller fonts and wider margins
- Reduce plastic waste: use tap water instead of water bottles



Reuse

- Provide reusable water bottles or cups for your employees



Recycle

- Provide recycling cans with signs of what can be recycled
- Consolidate trash cans

Alachua County reduces waste through providing recycling bins to employees, as well as requiring employees to print double-sided.



Communication

In order for sustainability in the workplace to have an impact, business owners must make an effort to engage their employees. Promoting sustainable practices can have benefits in and outside of the workplace. Many of the strategies used in the office that reduce carbon emissions and save money can also be used at home by employees and customers. Changing the work environment is the first step toward changing our society's consumption mentality. By making sustainability a part of organization's culture you are demonstrating to your customers the value our planet.



Awareness & Knowledge

- Post signs concerning sustainability, recycling, and costs of over consumption
- Hold employee sustainability in the workplace workshops
- Communicate targets and goals



Practice & Challenge

- Provide incentives such as an employee thank-you luncheon, off-site picnic or recreational activity.
- Display progress and savings
- Challenge your employees to think of creative ways to be more sustainable through competitions or games

Alachua County communicates sustainability through many initiatives and programs. Recently, an organic demonstration garden was planted in front of the County's administration building with the support of student volunteers and donations. This project raises awareness on the importance of creating local food sources, working together as community and saving resources.

Collaboration

Collaboration in the workplace has become an essential tool for enhancing workplace morale and efficiency. A collaborative work environment is designed to empower stakeholders by elevating them to the level of decision-makers through direct engagement to solicit ideas, and active involvement. Teamwork can result in more meaningful participation and better, more creative outcomes to persistent problems than can traditional participation methods. A collaborative workplace environment fosters a healthy atmosphere and employees who take greater pride in their work and how they serve your customers.



Engage

- Introduce the concept of a collaborative workplace environment through a “Green Team”
- Hold weekly meetings to discuss concerns and possible solutions
- Shared responsibility will create a greater sense of ownership and pride in the work produced
- Buy local - support your fellow businesses and your community



Diversify

- Collaboration between a diverse group of workers allows for exposure to new ideas and solutions
- Diversity in your workplace will result in greater innovation and creativity

Alachua County has adopted an organizational structure for decision making and a policy making that features deliberately designed opportunities for collaboration between functional groups of departments and encourages opportunities for multi level, shared and rotational leadership.

Health

Sustainability addresses not only environmental needs, but also social concerns such as the health and wellness of employees. The responsibility of providing your employees with a healthy workplace environment has many benefits to your business such as reductions to absenteeism, insurance costs, and staff turnover. A healthy workplace will also promote higher employee morale, job satisfaction, and happier staff who will have increased productivity, and organizational effectiveness.



Encourage

- Provide tips for maintaining a healthy workplace
- Distribute healthy living material, and challenge employees to a lunch time walking group, take the stairs campaign, bike to work month etc.
- Promote healthy eating habits that include local organic foods



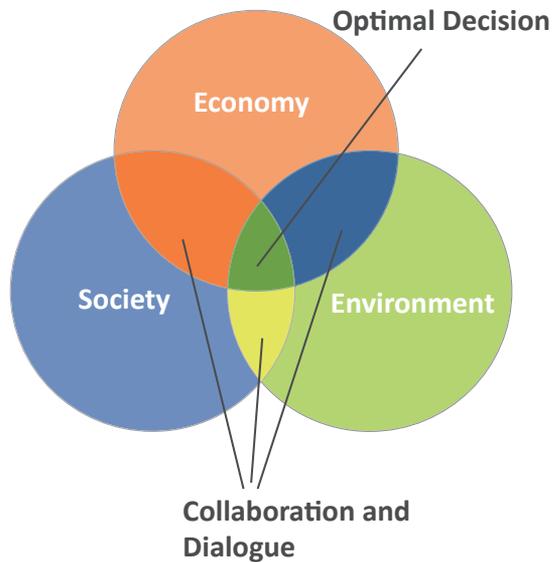
Provide

- Locate bicycle storage facilities with shower, change rooms and locker facilities for employees
- Open access to natural light and good indoor air quality
- Use green cleaning products that don't emit harsh chemicals

Alachua County has created a Healthy Communities Forum that unites representatives of businesses, governments and university employers to create broad based health care awareness and facilitate research and best practices to improve employee and citizen health.

The Triple Bottom Line: The Goal of Sustainability

Sustainable decision making strives to achieve a triple bottom line of benefits for employees, citizens and stakeholders that enhances the environment, economy and society or workplace. The greatest benefit is achieved in decisions and actions that are overlapped by all three spheres. Critical areas of collaboration and dialogue exist in the interfaces of these spheres.



Resources and Links: Green Business Practices

The U.S. Small Business Administration Website offers a clearing house of resources for growing more sustainable business practices. Off this website, <http://www.business.gov/manage/green-business/> more information can be researched on a variety of topics including:

- Energy Efficiency Guide
- Environmental Management
- Green Commuting Options
- Green Marketing
- Pollution Prevention and Recycling
- Case Studies and Examples

Recommended Reading

Natural Capitalism: Creating the next industrial revolution written by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and Hunter Lovins is an excellent treatise on the use and respect for ecosystem services and the sustainability of business.