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Sustainable Behaviour Changes Among Employees: A Guide for Tourism,
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Sustainable Behaviour Changes Among Employees

A Guide for Tourism, Hospitality and Events Industries





Empowering businesses in the tourism, hospitality, and events industries to nurture a culture of sustainability among their employees.



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Introduction

Fostering sustainable practices within the workplace is a growing priority for businesses in the tourism, hospitality, and events industries, as emphasised by organisations such as UKHospitality. Employees in these sectors play a crucial role in shaping customer perceptions and experiences. By adopting eco-conscious behaviours, they can significantly enhance a company's reputation and contribute to a lasting competitive advantage.

This guide is designed to empower businesses in the tourism, hospitality, and events industries to nurture a culture of sustainability among their employees. It provides actionable ideas and strategies derived from focus groups* with industry managers, employees, and future workforce entrants, as well as a review of relevant literature.

Developed as part of a Knowledge Exchange initiative led by academics from the University of West London, this guide addresses the unique needs and challenges faced by businesses in the tourism, hospitality, and events sectors. It aims to equip these businesses with strategies to inspire positive change and drive sustainable practices within their organisations.

We would like to thank all the focus group participants for their invaluable input in creating this guide.

Why encourage and embrace sustainability?

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

Sustainability in a business context can be defined as the ability of firms to respond to their short-term financial needs without compromising their (or others') ability to meet their future needs.¹

WHAT IS EMPLOYEE SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOUR?

Employees' engagement in sustainable behaviours refers to actions taken by employees to perform their work in an environmentally friendly manner. These actions include recycling, using resources efficiently, minimising waste, reducing energy consumption, participating in environmental initiatives, and developing more sustainable policies.²

WHY ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOUR CHANGES AMONG EMPLOYEES?

Encouraging sustainable behaviour changes among employees is crucial for business sustainability. Promoting sustainable practices requires strong organisational support, effective human resource practices, proper infrastructure, and appropriate incentives. When these elements are effectively implemented, they can enhance operational efficiency and foster a culture of stewardship and innovation.

Encouraging sustainable behaviours will help your business to:

- > Enhance brand reputation and competitive advantage.
- > Improve profitability and reduce costs by optimising resource use.
- > Attract eco-conscious employees, customers, and investors.
- > Boost job satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement.
- > Strengthen organisational commitment to sustainability.
- > Drive environmental performance by reducing the company's footprint.
- > Foster innovation and help your business differentiate itself.



1 Bansal and DesJardine (2014), *Business sustainability: It is about time*, p71.

2 Meng et al. (2022), *An integrated framework of behavioral reasoning theory, theory of planned behavior, moral norm and emotions for fostering hospitality/tourism employees' sustainable behaviors*, p4517.

Factors influencing sustainable behaviour changes among employees

PERSONAL FACTORS – “Why should I do it?”

Challenge: resistance or reluctance to behavioural change

- Employees may resist change and prefer to stay in their comfort zones.
- Established routines and habits can make it difficult to adopt new sustainable practices.
- Sustainability initiatives might be viewed as an added burden rather than an integral part of their job.
- Perceived lack of support or an increased workload can contribute to resistance to behavioural changes.

“People want to contribute to sustainability within the business, but they are also wary of making drastic changes to how they do their jobs or live their lives.”

Industry representative

Key factors influencing sustainable behaviour changes:



Environmental values: The extent to which an employee cares about the environment and believes in sustainable practices.



Knowledge and awareness: The level of understanding an employee has about environmental issues and the impact of their actions.



Attitudes and beliefs: The employee’s personal opinions and feelings about sustainability and its importance.



Social norms: The influence of peers, family, and colleagues on an employee’s behaviour.



Perceived control: The employee’s belief that their actions can make a difference in promoting sustainability.

Engaging in sustainable practices can enhance employees’ well-being.

ORGANISATIONAL/INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

Challenges:

- Organisations often prioritise economic goals over sustainability.
- Sustainable activities are perceived as costly and effort-consuming.
- There is sometimes a lack of understanding of how individual actions contribute to the broader sustainability goals.

“Putting our colleagues at the heart of the business, since we know that the business is only as good as the people who run it.”

Industry representative

Key factors influencing sustainable behaviour changes:



Leadership commitment: Making sustainability a priority for the company is essential. When leaders prioritise and model sustainable behaviour, it sets the tone for the entire organisation.



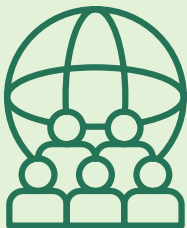
Supportive systems: Providing training, resources, and rewards for sustainable actions empowers employees to make a difference. The availability of resources is key for promoting employee engagement in innovative sustainable practices.



Positive workplace climate: The workplace climate can either foster or hinder employees' sustainable behaviour. A collaborative and encouraging environment fosters a sense of shared responsibility for sustainability.



Clear communication: Explaining the company's sustainability goals and the impact of individual actions helps employees understand their role.



INDUSTRY EXAMPLE:

Offering employees a full day of paid leave to volunteer, allowing them to choose their preferred activities. Some employees may be passionate about and wish to engage in community projects, while others may prefer environmental initiatives. This approach gives employees the opportunity to contribute to causes they care about.

Strategies for encouraging sustainable behaviour changes



TRAINING AND AWARENESS

- > **Provide training and workshops:** Educate employees about the importance and benefits of sustainability. Behavioural change occurs when employees' knowledge and awareness of sustainability are deeply integrated into their perceptions, making training a crucial factor in this process.
- > **Instil sustainability values:** Design training programs to instil sustainability values into employees' personal skills and practices. Encourage them to adopt pro-environmental values and integrate these principles into their daily lives.
- > **Use visual aids:** Create posters, infographics, or videos to highlight key messages and make sustainability information more engaging. Use visual prompts and cues to remind employees of sustainable practices in their daily tasks, such as signage near recycling bins or energy-saving reminders on light switches.
- > **Assess the effectiveness of training programs:** Determine how well these trainings are received and their impact on employee behaviour.



INCENTIVES AND RECOGNITION

- > **Reward sustainable behaviour:** Offer incentives like gift cards, extra time off, or recognition awards for employees who consistently demonstrate sustainable practices. Tailor rewards to individual preferences and highlight the positive impact of their actions.
- > **Create competitions or challenges:** Encourage friendly competition between teams or departments to reduce waste, conserve energy, or implement innovative solutions. Celebrate achievements and recognise contributions to create a sense of shared purpose.
- > **Celebrate successes:** Publicly acknowledge and celebrate individual and team achievements in sustainability to reinforce positive behaviour. Share success stories through internal communication channels to inspire others and demonstrate the impact of collective action.



LEADERSHIP

- > **Show genuine commitment:** Top management should be genuinely involved in sustainability efforts rather than offering superficial support.
- > **Instil and assess values:** Knowledgeable leaders can instil sustainable values and ensure employee actions align with company goals. They should also recognise individual differences to create effective strategies.
- > **Address barriers:** Leaders need to address perceived barriers and help employees understand how they can change their behaviour.
- > **Prioritise sustainability:** Make sustainability a key focus in new initiatives and discussions, rather than treating it as an afterthought.



EMPOWERMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

- > **Involve employees in decision-making:** Seek their input and ideas on sustainability initiatives to foster a sense of ownership and commitment. Create opportunities for employees to share feedback, suggest improvements, and actively participate in shaping the company's sustainability agenda.
- > **Create green teams:** Form dedicated teams of employees passionate about sustainability to lead initiatives, develop solutions, and champion change. Empower these teams to drive action, share knowledge, and inspire others to get involved.
- > **Encourage innovation:** Provide opportunities for employees to propose and implement their own sustainability projects. Create a platform for idea sharing and experimentation, and support employees in bringing their creative solutions to life.
- > **Gamification:** Introduce elements of fun and competition to encourage engagement with sustainability initiatives. Create challenges, quizzes, or rewards systems to incentivise sustainable behaviour and make it more enjoyable.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- > **Communicate regularly:** Frequently update employees on sustainability initiatives, progress, and success stories through newsletters, emails, and internal platforms. Use clear, engaging language to capture interest and encourage participation.
- > **Clearly articulate sustainability strategies:** Ensure that the company's sustainability goals and policies are communicated effectively to employees. This can strengthen the alignment between company objectives and employees' sustainable practices.
- > **Customise communication and engagement:** Tailor strategies to address the specific needs and interests of different employee groups.
- > **Avoid misinformation and greenwashing:** Ensure that communication is honest and transparent to prevent undermining sustainability efforts and discouraging employee engagement.



RECRUITMENT AND STAFFING

- > **Embed sustainability in job descriptions:** Ensure that job postings and the recruitment process emphasise the importance of sustainability to attract candidates who are committed to eco-friendly practices.
- > **Highlight sustainability efforts:** Use promotional channels to showcase the company's sustainability initiatives and culture, allowing potential employees to understand and connect with these values.
- > **Encourage sustainability-focused hiring:** Attract and retain professionals with an interest in sustainability to foster positive changes in employee behaviour.
- > **Promote pride in sustainability:** Employees are more likely to feel pride and satisfaction when working for a company dedicated to sustainable practices.
- > **Influence through example:** Hiring individuals who are enthusiastic about sustainability can inspire and motivate those who may be less engaged.



INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT

- > **Provide resources and tools:** Ensure easy access to recycling bins, compostable materials, energy-efficient equipment, and other resources that support sustainable practices. Make these resources readily available and clearly labelled to facilitate their use.
- > **Make sustainability convenient:** Offer options like bike racks, carpooling programs, or public transportation subsidies to encourage eco-friendly commuting. Provide incentives and support to remove barriers to sustainable choices in the workplace.
- > **Lead by example:** Demonstrate a commitment to sustainability through the company's own operations and practices. Implement policies that prioritise resource conservation, waste reduction, and renewable energy use to show employees that sustainability is a core value.



This Guide on **Sustainable Behaviour Changes Among Employees** was developed as part of a Knowledge Exchange initiative led by:

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CALL TO ACTION

We encourage you to implement the strategies discussed in this guide and share your success stories with us.

*Your feedback is valuable.
Please share your thoughts with us.*



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