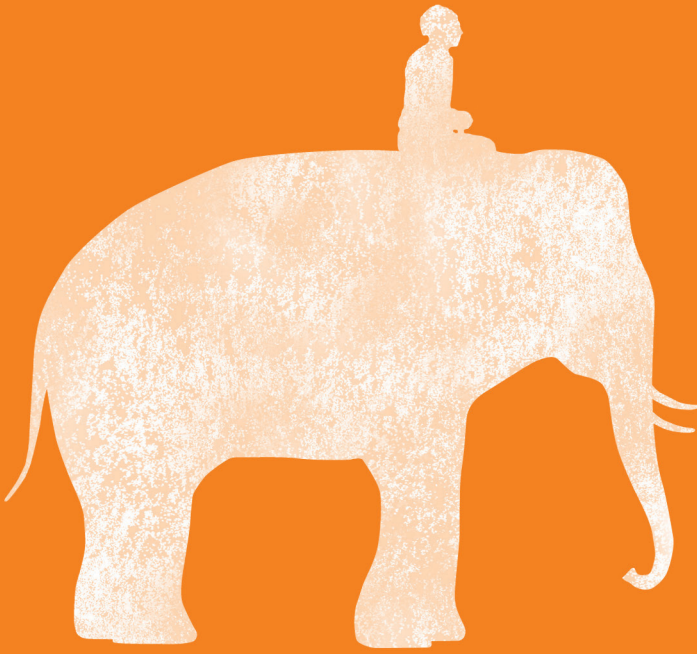


Dō



Gareth Kane

Green Jujitsu

The Smart Way to Embed
Sustainability into Your Organisation

DōShorts

Green Jujitsu:

The Smart Way to Embed Sustainability into Your Organisation

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Abstract

BUSINESS HAS RECENTLY WOKEN UP to the need to address environmental sustainability in a meaningful way. No longer is it sufficient to have an environmental policy or environmental management system – substantial changes to business practice are required. Culture change is widely regarded as the most vital and the most difficult element of this paradigm shift. The standard methods of ‘switch it off’ stickers, awareness presentations and proclamations from the top have proved incapable of delivering the shift in attitudes required. Green Jujitsu is a completely different way of looking at culture change for environmental sustainability. Instead of trying to correct your colleagues’ perceived ‘weaknesses’, it focuses instead on playing to their strengths to get them truly interested and engaged. This principle is applied to the ‘elephant model’ of culture change: providing clear guidance, inspiring people emotionally and altering the working environment. These techniques are illustrated with case studies from the author’s own experience of facilitating culture change on the front line in some of the world’s leading organisations.

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About The Author



GARETH KANE is an internationally recognised environmental and sustainability expert. He has appeared as a media pundit on sustainability issues on, for example, the BBC Six O'Clock News, Countryfile, The Politics Show and local radio. In 2008 The Journal newspaper named Gareth as a 'Rising Star, Future Leader' for his work on sustainability.

Gareth's consultancy Terra Infirma has a client list including the BBC, BAE Systems plc, Johnson Matthey plc, the NHS and East Coast Mainline. In June 2010 the company was singled out for praise in the press by UK Environment Secretary, the Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP. Terra Infirma's Green Academy online training programme has attracted participants from around the globe – from the USA to New Zealand.

Gareth was elected onto Newcastle City Council in 2004. Until 2011, he was deputy Executive Member for Environment and Sustainability which culminated in Newcastle being declared the UK's most sustainable city by Forum for the Future in 2009 and 2010. He is now opposition spokesman on Sustainability.

Gareth is the author of two books on business and sustainability, most recently *The Green Executive*.

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INTRODUCTION

What Is The Biggest Barrier To Corporate Sustainability?

THIS IS A QUESTION I AM OFTEN ASKED from the floor at speaking engagements. My answer is a little trite but very true: ‘The biggest barrier is only six inches wide – it’s the space between our ears.’

The root cause of much unsustainable practice is *attitude* – lack of priority, busy-ness, ignorance, habit, short-sightedness, despondence, fear, laziness or combinations of the above. Bad attitude seems to get worse exponentially with the size of the business – sustainable energy expert Amory Lovins has said that while ‘primitive’ animals like ants have communities which exhibit intelligence way beyond that of the sum of the individuals, the more humans you group together, the more stupid their combined behaviour¹.

When we think about environmental sustainability we tend to envision shiny new technology such as solar panels and electric vehicles. However, it has been estimated that 60–70% of internal environmental improvements are dependent on getting staff to change their behaviour². When I visit clients it is all too common to see heating and air-conditioning switched on at the same time, hosepipes left running but stuck down a drain, valuable packaged products damaged by forklift trucks and potentially green technologies like teleconferencing facilities gathering

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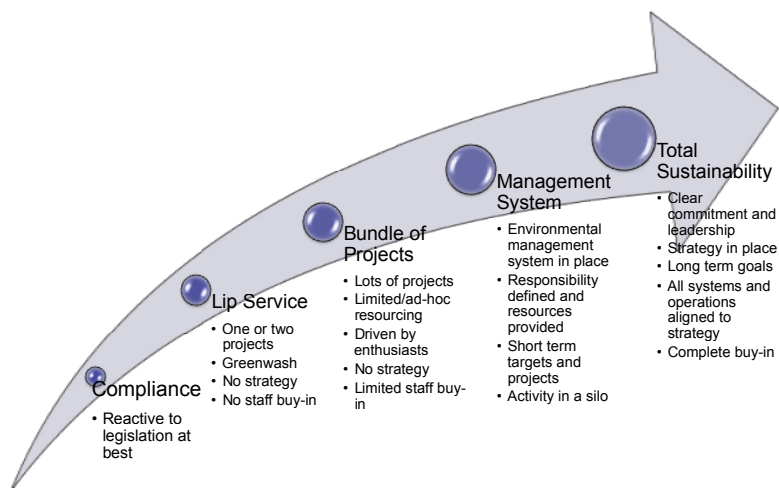
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dust. And beyond that, more substantial environmental improvements such as redesigning products and greening the supply chain depend on a proper culture of sustainability integrated throughout the organisation.

Changing the culture of an organisation is one of the key management challenges. When it is done correctly, the results can be dramatic. The uptake of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Japan has led to the country leading in the motor vehicle and photographic/optical equipment sectors, despite having no natural resources and very high labour costs. One of the key planks of TQM is that quality becomes everyone's responsibility – it needs to be embedded into the organisation.

Figure 1 shows my sustainability maturity model for organisations.

FIGURE 1. Sustainability maturity model.



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The stages are largely self-explanatory and the challenge for most organisations is to make the leap from the ‘Management Systems’ level, where environmental issues are ‘managed’ in a green silo, up to ‘Total Sustainability’ where sustainability is embedded into the organisation.

One of the biggest differences between the top two levels is making sustainability everyone’s responsibility – just like quality under TQM. This manifests itself in the attitude of employees. I can tell very quickly which businesses ‘get it’ and which don’t by a few conversations with staff members.

However, this is one area where many organisations struggle – culture change is very difficult and many simply try ‘me-too’ solutions such as awareness posters and environmental champions without properly thinking through what has to be done. This e-book proposes a smarter way of approaching culture change, bringing people along with you and playing to their strengths rather than trying to browbeat them into submission. There is a parallel here between boxing and jujitsu – in the former you try to overpower your opponent, in the latter you use people’s strengths to get them where you want them. We will be considering this analogy in more detail in **Chapter 2**, but first we will look at problems faced by most conventional environmental sustainability programmes.

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CHAPTER 1

Why Sustainability Programmes Fail

What's the problem?

I DIAGNOSE THE MOST COMMON BARRIERS in environmental sustainability programmes as:

- Lack of leadership: leadership is critical to any successful corporate programme and a lack of leadership will kill off culture change programmes before they get going.
- A lack of integration: 'green' and 'sustainability' are seen as tangential issues to the mainstream business processes and are thus of secondary importance or someone else's problem.
- A misalignment of responsibility and authority: most environmental managers have lots of responsibility and precious little authority. Conversely, people who have the power to push sustainability are given no responsibility to do so.
- A lack of accountability: environmental performance is left outside the performance management system.
- Wishful or limited thinking: 'We've appointed energy champions. Job done.'

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- Sloppy company culture in general: I find that the companies who have a poor sustainability culture usually have poor discipline, weak quality standards and messy premises.
- A lack of empowerment: 'It's more than my job's worth to turn that off.'
- Ignorance: 'If I turn up the thermostat, the office will warm more quickly.'
- Inertia: 'We've always designed our products like that.' 'That sound? That's always there. No, we don't check our compressed air system for leaks. Should we?', etc.
- Fear: 'If we try this, who'll get the blame if it goes wrong?'

You will notice that these are predominantly about attitude and culture – very rarely is the real reason money. Northern Foods have saved many millions of pounds in energy and waste costs and they say 60–70% of it was achieved through low or no-cost behavioural changes².

I say again that the true barrier to sustainability is about six inches wide – the space between our ears. Most of the problems and solutions can be found there.

Why 'switch it off' doesn't work

The traditional approach to behavioural change has been to slather 'switch it off' stickers and posters over every switch, wall and machine. If culture change was that easy, you wouldn't be reading this e-book.

I once worked with a company which had A3 posters on sustainability in every hallway and foyer. Each sheet was packed with text on company

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policy. As an experiment I asked one workshop contingent whether they knew the company's definition of sustainability. No-one did. I asked if anyone had read the statement. No-one had. There was nothing in this communication to encourage anyone to read. It was a complete waste of time and effort.

So why doesn't it work?

- The injunctions to act get lost amongst the noise of the multitude of messages we are bombarded with every day.
- People generally resent being hectored and may resist as a reflex reaction.
- There's no explanation of the benefits of this action either to the individual, the business or wider society.
- Familiarity breeds contempt – you soon stop noticing the signs and posters.
- The message is usually uninspiring, lifeless and dull.

At best, these programmes are launched because of a lack of imagination. At worst, they are for the ego of the originator rather than the intended audience. A prime suspect is the ubiquitous 'Please consider the impact on the environment before printing this email' line in email signature blocks, which is clearly there to say 'I think I'm morally superior to you.'

Institutional inertia

I have already quoted Amory Lovins saying that animals like ants have communities which exhibit intelligence way beyond that of the sum of the

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individuals, but the more humans you group together, the more stupid the combined behaviour (or words to that effect). As an optimist, I like to think of this phenomenon as ‘institutional inertia’ rather than group stupidity. My definition of institutional inertia is:

*The more people you get together,
the harder it is to effect change.*

You can see this if you go on holiday with a group of friends and try to decide which restaurant to eat at one evening. The length of time it takes to make the decision and act increases exponentially with the number of people involved. If you are a couple, you’ll probably be onto your coffee before a group of eight has sat down.

When you scale this up to the organisational level a huge number of factors kick in: internal politics, factionalism, fear of failure, fear to speak up, fear of standing out, the desire to belong, tradition (aka ‘the way it’s done round here’), formal and informal hierarchies, etc., etc. – they all add up to considerable inertia.

The challenge of overcoming this inertia – ‘turning the supertanker around’ – is immense. In my experience, the most important factors are strong, consistent leadership and a somewhat counter-intuitive combination of bone-headed determination and nimble culture change techniques. This e-book will help you with the latter, but the others have to come from within.

How not to do culture change

There are a number of pitfalls that many people fall into when trying to change the culture in organisations:

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- **Preaching:** preaching doesn't work. It is as simple as that. The temptation to preach is very strong, in particular amongst those of us who feel very strongly about environmental issues. But it is counter-productive and simply switches people off.
- **Irrelevance:** talking about the plight of the polar bear or orang-utan may get people's sympathy, but both are too far removed from the everyday experience of your staff to make them want to change the way they behave. In general, in my sessions I only mention the scale of environmental impacts in passing to put solutions in context.
- **Eco-clichés:** despite my long campaign against them, there is still a prevalence of eco-clichés in imagery in green messages. Pictures of hands cupping saplings make me want to scream and they send out the subconscious message 'here's the worthy but dull bit, normal service will continue shortly'.
- **Not getting leadership fully signed up:** leadership is a key plank of culture change. Unfortunately, many CEOs are scared of the sustainability agenda and have a tendency to disappear whenever the topic is debated.
- **Unintended consequences of incentives:** take care with financial incentives as they can produce all sorts of unintended consequences and it is possible to stir up resentment accidentally. Some issues, for example, staff parking, raise passions way beyond what they logically should.
- **Not realigning other systems** such as human resources policies so they promote a more sustainable culture. We will look at this in more detail in **Chapters 5 and 6**.

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- Taking your foot off the pedal: the secret of success in fostering green behaviour is to keep going.
- Cognitive dissonance: this occurs when we try and hold two conflicting ideas in our heads at the same time. For example, if you try to foster a culture where sustainability is strong, then ask employees to take clearly unsustainable actions, they will get confused and cynical.

Questions for you

How would you rate your culture of sustainability from 1–5, where 1 means no culture at all and 5 means everyone understands what sustainability means to them?

Why do you rate the company like this?

What tone does your sustainability programme currently take?

How relevant is it to the day-to-day activities of your employees?

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1. Amory Lovins, Rocky Mountain Institute, speaking at Schumacher College, Devon, 2002.
 2. Kane, G. 2011. *The Green Executive: Corporate Leadership for a Low Carbon Economy* (London: Earthscan).
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