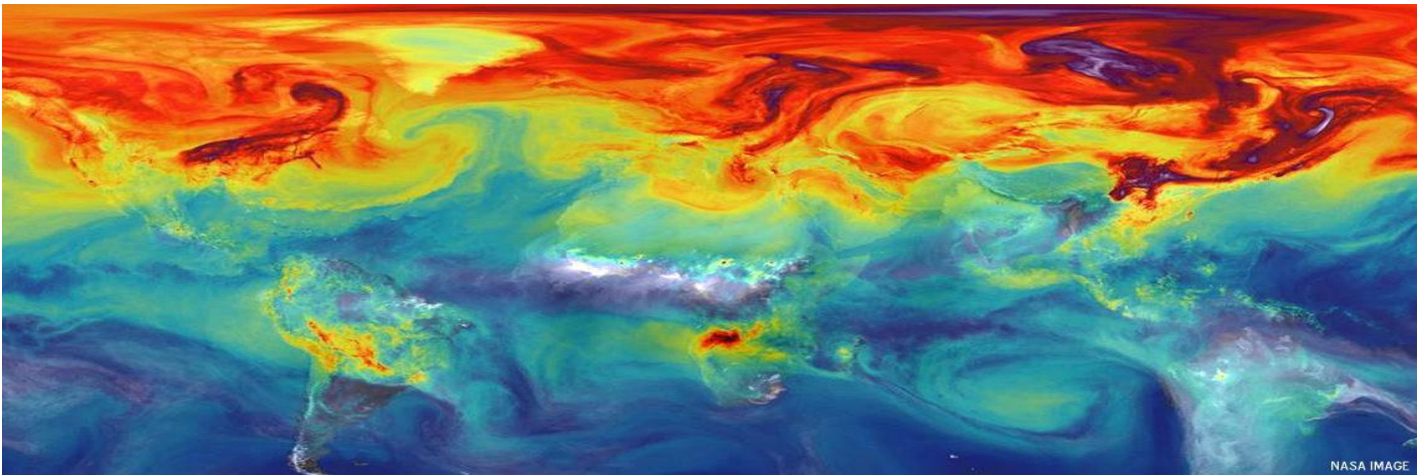




*Let's talk – change the words, change the conversation, change the outcomes*  
What do we mean by cost? ...Social cost, Environmental cost...Economic cost



## Climate 4: A Very Special Edition June, 2019

# Embedding Sustainability: The Conversation

One of the challenges of sustainability is measuring impact quantitatively but also qualitatively. In terms of actions to achieve sustainability outcomes there are clear operational objectives where qualitative measurements are relatively straight forward such energy consumption, water consumption, waste generation, percentage of products bought locally, volume of paper consumed etc. In terms of wellbeing, there are indicators such as staff sickness rates, return-to-work and health interventions, DSE assessments and survey data for example and, regarding health and safety we have accident and incidents data, the number of corrective/preventive actions carried out, number of vetting visits, risk assessments etc.

The trickier stuff lies in the realm of culture and values which is notoriously difficult to nail down but - we know exactly when we see it and feel it!

Sustainability culture moves beyond mere 'knowing' about issues and into the realm of finding that personal 'thing' - an issue/s that really strikes at the heart and drives inner change; something changes inside us and motivates us to take action. This may be an inner jolt, a feeling/knowing that things are just not right and that for our sake and for the sake of our children or perhaps people suffering in war-torn regions, that we know that we need to do more; each person will find their own turning point when they say enough is enough. A turning point for which no logo, policy or action plan can make happen but, for which we can help people find through conversation - changing the language, changing the conversation and changing the outcomes - being solutions-focussed. This is personal stuff and is completely and utterly owned by you.

## Perceptions

There can sometimes be a perception that sustainability is like trying to grasp smoke, that it lies just out of reach or that it sits in certain 'pockets' when in fact quite the opposite is true. There is already a momentous shift taking place right across the world; a change in people (the global youth strikes for example), media coverage and television programmes, change in industry and politics around the world, the recent UK government climate declaration, Welsh Government Declaration and of course the Bridgend College declaration. The economy is being transformed and it absolutely must because there is simply no option; the alternative is the stuff of nightmares and really does not bear thinking about; this is not about scaring people but making very clear the stark reality of inaction. Language matters when the Earth is in the midst of a climate crisis. Indeed, the recent scientific Special Report on the impacts of 1.5C of global warming of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded: "Limiting global warming to 1.5C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society." And it is here that we all need to pause and reflect on those words - **rapid. far-reaching. unprecedented. all aspects of society.** That is, that this is an "emergency,". The purpose, not only from the IPCC but also from Governments, businesses and people across the globe, is clearly to elicit an emotional response, a shift in language, a tipping point in behaviour towards acting on the climate emergency. And, our highest level risk to college business...

### Top level climate risk: college business continuity

Issue/Hazard	Business impact	Opportunity
Business continuity. Climate emergency and the impact upon young people and education. Ref: youth climate action.	Young people become disillusioned with political policy-making and business action on climate action. Education may be seen as 'pointless' and young people may turn away from non-compulsory education. Fall in funded learners.	Bridgend college leads front and centre on climate action and develops curriculum which meets the needs of current and future generations.

## Conversation, discussion and decisions

So what does this mean for us and the kind of language we use. It is safe to say that we need to be cautious in using emotive language but sometimes that is precisely what we need to do in conversation. This **is** a climate emergency, a crisis and the way we frame the discussion has direct consequences on our actions. So we now need to move away from climate 'change' and talk about climate 'emergency'. We need to approach the word 'future' carefully and thoughtfully; the future is your next heartbeat, your next breath.

Decision-making (whether that is thinking about your next purchase, holiday or a whole new campus) invites us to focus less on 'what' and much more on 'why'? Asking the right questions at the very outset is important as there is a real danger that an early 'intention' creeps in under the radar, unnoticed, setting the fuse alight towards an unstoppable set of actions. In sustainability decision-making we think about the 'poorly informed majority'. This says that during decision-making people who are less informed about sustainability can make both individual and collective decisions which lead to the wrong/poor outcomes. These are often long-term and costly (social, environmental and economic costs)...hence the myriad of global challenges we currently face. For all businesses this is about re-framing the question away from "what are the greatest improvements we can realistically achieve within our financial constraints?" with a higher level of strategic thinking which

asks “what plan will deliver the best possible business case for achieving these goals?” The discussion and language used in decision-making is therefore reflected in the outcomes and a reflection upon ourselves - for good or for bad.

### **Getting the basics right**

We are all aware of the need to get the basics right and when we see poor recycling behaviour, lights/PC's being left on or doors and windows open letting valuable and costly heat out, wasted paper, litter etc we may wonder... and you are quite right, we must all get the behaviour right and we must all have the right support...and we will ! We can all start right now but watch out for our war on single-use plastics coming soon.

But we have also found, discussing with staff and students that decision-making, using a different conversation, pausing to consider and knowing about the big issues is being talked about not just a little bit but a whole lot more than you might imagine. People are much more aware now than ever before and there is, without a shadow of a doubt, a strong undercurrent of concern and desire to change. We are pushing on an open door and must help and support each other to become empowered to take action for change; this is our emerging future and you are all in the driving seat; your actions are more important now than ever before and it is quite often the little things that can make a big difference.

### **Be all that you can be**

The challenge for anyone, any business, any society is to reflect on our actions, our behaviour. Being all you can be only has value as a tool for self reflection and behaviour change when placed in a global context. Being outwards-looking and solutions-focussed is the only way that we can **‘really’** be all that we can be; actions must speak loudly and ensure that both people and our environment flourish simultaneously; humans are both selfish and altruistic and this is precisely why the moral and philosophical discussions are so important in education today. Do it right and everyone wins, but to do otherwise is to fail spectacularly. This is the foremost leadership challenge of our times....now, where's that mirror.

### **Responsibility**

An extraordinary challenge needs extraordinary ambition:

Level 1 - acceptance of the major areas of global concern (**I/we know that things are ‘wrong’**)

Level 2 - acceptance of ownership and responsibility (**I know that I/we can do something about it**)

Level 3 - acceptance of action (**I/we will do something about it**)

## A Word on 'extraordinary'

We all see the extraordinary in different ways but I would like to share some of my views of how this relates to sustainability and the climate emergency. Extraordinary is defined by purpose, values, attitudes and principles. Here are some thoughts, you may have your own:

- ❖ Extraordinary leaders are able to see the purpose of business in a global context (flying high into the stratosphere in our helicopter) and align business and risk language with sustainability language; they know that different terminology leads to different outcomes.
- ❖ Extraordinary leaders identify synergies that deliver integrated solutions that achieve multiple goals as part of a growth mindset. They scan 360 degrees for new challenges as a way of thinking rather than as a way of process. Value for money, profit and return on investment take on a different meaning.
- ❖ Extraordinary leaders demonstrate an ability to see things through the eyes of others at a local, national and international level; the most extraordinary leaders see clearly through the eyes of the non-human world too. Extraordinary leadership is the strength to walk against the incoming tide.
- ❖ Extraordinary leaders know that sustainability is not a department or job title or report, but is the end result of a strategy that understands impacts and dependencies. It is a collective responsibility and organisational culture.
- ❖ Extraordinary leaders understand the critical nature of looking back before we look forwards; recognizing generational blindness to environmental destruction (climate change, plastics pollution or loss of biological diversity are two global examples but there are many, many others) and having a solutions-focussed mindset is vital to overcoming these challenges. A baseline is something which can inform and help the most extraordinary leaders shape their decision-making. Please see Daniel Pauly's TED Talk on the 'shifting baseline syndrome'.
- ❖ Extraordinary leaders actively encourage real trust as the foundation to achieving collective results. Please see Pat Lencioni's TED Talk. This means that we must willingly open ourselves to those 'killer questions'.
- ❖ Extraordinary leaders are 'bias/worldview-aware' and know that extraordinary decision-making means ensuring that actions and intent are supported by an 'informed majority'.
- ❖ The most extraordinary leaders are able to change the language, change the conversation and change the outcome, both within and outside of the organisation. Simultaneously and positively increasing both human and environmental wellbeing; both must flourish simultaneously.

## OK, so where should we be heading?

Once thing we know for certain is that businesses and people must change the way we do things right around the world - we are all on the same journey though it is crystal clear that some have far more responsibility than others (primarily the wealthier nations). We cannot all do everything but we do have individual and collective choice and we do have autonomy; we just have to choose who we want to be at the individual and organisational level. Since the release of our Climate Emergency Declaration a new and far-reaching plan is developed; this is our 'ZERO BY 2040 Climate Emergency Strategy' and this is supported by a robust action plan which has urgency at its core. This covers everything from leadership, sustainability training for all staff at all levels, ESDGC, estates, wellbeing, safety and health, biodiversity, waste and recycling, food and drink, finance, collaboration, partnerships and long-term thinking and of course climate action (the big one). This will be available cross-college once approved.

## How you can help

The first, most important step is to talk, share thoughts and concerns and ideas. Think about the words you are using in conversation. Think a lot about the 'why?' (why am I/we dropping litter?, why am I/we not recycling? why am I/we using so much paper? do we really need to buy this product? Can I bring my own re-usable cup to work/meetings? Where does this product/food come from? Do I need to drive? Do I have the right knowledge about sustainability/climate to take into the classroom? What are the environmental consequences of my actions? What materials are these clothes made from? Can we have our lesson outside and turn off the PC's? What is the impact on health and wellbeing (obesity, diabetes, mental health, nutrition, smoking, stress, physical activity, happiness)? How does my choice/decision impact on poverty and hunger? Does my thinking take into account the impact of the climate emergency on employment skills for sustainable, low carbon economies (look at what is happening on the global scale – is this being used to inform decisions)? Am I using my knowledge to ensure that sustainability-language is the 'golden thread' in the classroom – linking to global challenges; does this bring about behaviour change, flexibility, think holistically, employability for a new economy; circular economy skills? Am I thinking about sustainable procurement (local, low carbon, performance of suppliers) – looking behind the product/service. Are we investing in high-performing buildings (low carbon development/refurbishment). Are we thinking about bilingualism, culture and diversity. What is the impact of our decisions on biodiversity, ecosystems, food (reduction of disposables in catering and events/meetings – crockery and cutlery, enhancing the eating experience).

I'm sure that you can think of many more and I have no doubt that you have great ideas.... so go on, change the language, change the conversation and change the outcomes

***This one has to succeed. Ultimately, change happens with greater impact when there is a greater, shared sense of purpose. This takes education back to its historical roots which was education for the greater good...and what's wrong with that?***

For further information or to arrange a coffee and chat please contact:

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