

## SUSTAINABILITY SENSE: Session Two

### *Being Sustainable: how values can help*

The premise underlying this session is that changing human behaviour patterns has to be a critical component in our quest for a sustainable future. While the development and adoption of 'cleaner' technologies, governments, businesses and other collective organisations have their roles to play, what is often underplayed is the vital part individuals have to play, not only in adjusting their own personal behaviours, but in influencing collective organisations and in making best use of the emerging technologies. While most professionally-oriented education and training programmes understandably focus on providing people with specific, often technically oriented, sustainability knowledge and skills, equipping individuals with particular capabilities does not necessarily mean that they will utilise them to best effect. Develop training techniques that will embed the desire and mental capacity to engage with sustainability is, therefore, a potentially important adjunct to 'technical' training. With this in mind, a values-centred personal training regime has been developed at the University of Plymouth to help individuals cultivate the intrinsic motivations to move towards sustainable behaviour. This training is based on a progressive model (Figure 1) focuses on making personal meaning of the sustainability idea, making personal connections with the underlying issues, mobilising personal core values to deepen intention, and the development of empowering beliefs that can support and enable positive action.

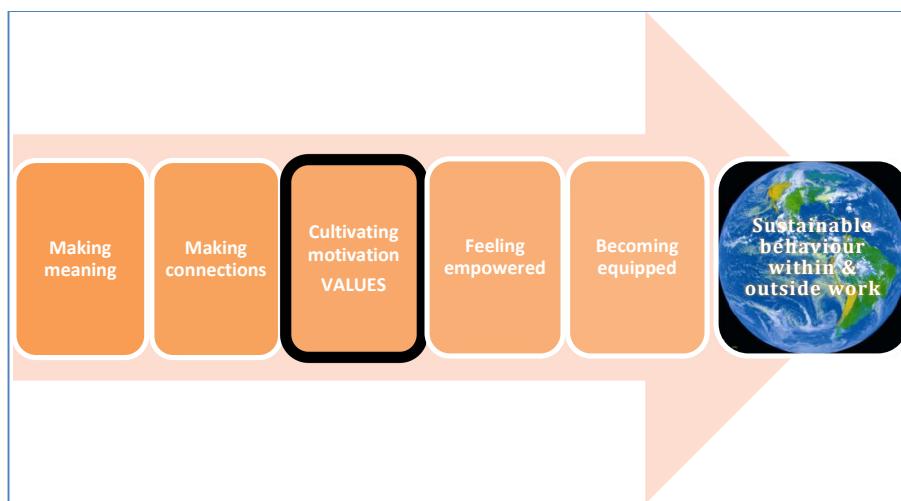


Figure 1 Personal Engagement Training for Sustainable Development

This session explained the roles of values, beliefs, and attitudes in framing behaviour. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a value as "*something that is intrinsically important or valuable to us in life*". So, our values are our ideals; the internal motivational forces that help determine the way we would like, unconsciously or otherwise, to live. If values reflect WHY we do what we do, beliefs underpin them by defining and giving meaning to our world. Beliefs are the views we hold concerning what is true or not true about the world; often manifesting as facts ('God is real'. 'The world is flat'.). Attitudes on the other hand are the interface between our inner and outer worlds. Inferred from our values, beliefs and according to some psychologists, our behaviours, attitudes are the judgements we make and feelings we experience about the specific people and situations we encounter in life. While values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are all interlinked, values represent a good starting point for motivating change because, while they are usually held unconsciously, they are relatively easy to elicit and explore; they are seen by many social psychologists as the 'driving force' behind behaviour. Within this session, participants were invited to elicit, discuss and provide feedback on their core values. Typical values that emerged were:

<i>Tolerance</i>	<i>Openness</i>
<i>Freedom</i>	<i>Integrity</i>
<i>Equality</i>	<i>Curiosity</i>
<i>Family</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>
<i>Nature</i>	<i>Honesty</i>
<i>Relationships</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>

The participants agreed that these declared values appeared to complement commonly expressed 'sustainability values' (see Table 1), which reflects previous values elicitation exercises involving over 550 individuals. It seems that, at the deepest level, many people hold values that are highly conducive to self-motivating sustainable behaviour, whether within or outside the workplace.

Earth Charter Core principles (Earth Charter 2006)	UN Millennium Declaration Core values (Leiserowitz 2004 p7)	Forum For the Future Educational values (F4F 2005, p293 )	Oxfam Global citizenship values (Oxfam 2003, p4)	BT Plc Suggested corporate values (BT 2003, p 24)
<i>Care and respect for life</i>	<i>Respect for nature</i>	<i>Respect and integrity</i>	<i>Value and respect for diversity</i>	<i>Respect for equity</i>
<i>Ecological integrity</i>	<i>Freedom</i>	<i>Commitment and cooperation</i>	<i>Concern for the environment</i>	<i>Respect for the integrity of natural systems</i>
<i>Social and economic justice</i>	<i>Equality</i>	<i>Co-operation and learning</i>	<i>Commitment to sustainable development</i>	<i>Respect for the interests of future generations</i>
<i>Democracy, non-violence and peace</i>	<i>Shared responsibility</i>	<i>Solidarity</i>	<i>Commitment to social justice/ equity</i>	<i>Self determination</i>
Earth Charter Initiative 2006	<i>Tolerance</i>  Leiserowitz et al 2004, p7	<i>Openness</i>  F4F 2005, p293	<i>Compassion</i>  <i>Fun</i>  <i>Belief that people can make a difference</i>	<i>Diversity and tolerance</i>  <i>Compassion</i>  <i>Recognition of the rights and interests of non-humans</i>

Table 1 Published values relating to sustainability (adapted from Murray and Murray 2007)

Participants were also invited to explore the values issue more deeply by asking:

*Are these declared values REALLY our core values?*  
*Are they 'should have' values?*  
*Do we always (or ever) act in tune with our core values?*  
*How can we learn to act on our core values?*

We are not born with values, we learn them, starting in early childhood, from those with influence over us and from our experiences. Because we hold them unconsciously, we tend to take our childhood values into adulthood. As a result, they risk becoming outdated yet powerful, influences on our behaviour and life direction. When this happens they become 'should have' values, more someone else's (like our parents') than truly our own creating conflicts between what we do (conditioned by these 'should have values) and what at a deeper level is actually most important to us. Furthermore, once we become aware of these deeper values, most of us will discover that, more often than not, we do not act in ways that are in tune with them. This is because we hold numerous values of varying significance and they compete with each other for influence. The psychologist Rokeach described core values as '*terminal*' values, meaning qualities we aspire to achieve over our lifetimes. However, in hectic everyday life, what Rokeach called '*instrumental*' values often hold

sway, being values that serve immediate rather than long term needs (or wants). Bearing this in mind the final question above is important. If we become conscious of our core values and are satisfied that they genuinely represent the ways we MOST want to live, we can use this knowledge to consciously influence our actions in various ways, by:

- **Remembering our core values.**
- **Noticing whether actions we are about to make reflect those values. This provides an opportunity for us to adjust our actions accordingly.**
- **Exploring how we can use our core values to identify and cultivate complementary attitudes such as compassion, openness, and respect.**
- **Reinforcing our core values and positive behaviours through deeper exploration, reading and training.**
- **Practising our values.**

While perhaps not the primary motivation, psychologists such as Tim Kasser and Kirk Warren Brown documented real benefits in terms of personal wellbeing that can be accrued by mobilising our values and other internal cognitions towards positive, pro-sustainability behaviours. These include an enhanced sense of life meaning, greater feelings of 'congruence' (feeling right in our own skin), and a greater sense of self-empowerment. Taken with the well documented business, social and environmental benefits of moving onto a sustainability footing, the power of values as a key motivational force, should, perhaps, not be underestimated.

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*March 2010*

(1116 words)

## Useful References

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