Sustainability in practice: 9 lessons, tips and suggestions

1. Make a list of existing initiatives (if any), such as the use of sustainability frameworks and standards and employee projects.

2. Define the sustainability strategy. Make sure it’s aligned with and integrated in the company’s dominant strategy (cost reduction, customer value, innovation) and identify the impact, risk and opportunities.

3. Link sustainability to the company’s key values and DNA. This can be achieved by:
   - Looking at how much sustainability fits in with existing key values
   - Adding sustainability as a key value.

4. When implementing the sustainability strategy, select and focus on priorities and make sure that you get those right.

5. Formulate goals based on the priorities and define concrete milestones and performance indicators. That way you can monitor and evaluate progress. Regularly review these sustainability goals and the approach taken.

6. Ensure support for sustainability inside as well as outside the organization. You can do this by:
   - Communicating and starting a conversation with customers, suppliers and stakeholders why sustainability is important to the company.
   - Demonstrating senior management support for sustainability.
   - Organizing community projects (preferably connected to your core business).

7. Create an environment in which your organization and employees can learn about sustainability and its implementation. Organize internal trainings where you discuss and explain:
   - Why the company has attention for sustainability.
   - What the main priorities are.
   - How sustainability is organized.
   - How employees can contribute.
   - Sustainability dilemmas between people, planet and profit.

8. Ensure a balance between a central direction and local initiatives:
   - A central direction ensures efficient decision-making on the strategic level and coordination of activities.
   - Local initiatives ensure a practical translation of sustainability to the different departments and functions, an increased level of support and involvement and input for improvement from within the organization. Starting small and locally is an option. Later on, the initiatives can be brought together through an overall policy.

9. Sustainability should become part of your organization’s culture and behavior. This takes time and requires patience. Emphasize it constantly and integrate it in your HR, employee objectives and remuneration schemes.
**Attention for sustainability**

- 48% some attention for sustainability
- 40% a lot of attention for sustainability

**Perceives itself as a sustainability leader**

43% of companies perceive themselves as sustainability leaders.

**Perceives itself in an advanced stage of sustainability**

48% of companies perceive themselves in an advanced stage of sustainability.

**Perceives itself in a beginning stage of sustainability**

8% of companies perceive themselves in a beginning stage of sustainability.

**Sustainability policy in place**

16% of companies have a sustainability policy in place.

**Sustainability fully integrated in the business strategy**

13% of companies have fully integrated sustainability in their business strategy.

**Stakeholder representing most important barrier for implementing sustainability:**

- Internal: Employees (48%)
- External: Suppliers, Investors, Financers, Customers (41%)

**Top-3 ecological activities:**

- 78% energy reduction
- 72% waste reduction
- 43% re-use/recycling/circular economy

**Top-3 social activities:**

- 64% employee wellbeing
- 51% employability
- 44% diversity in cultural background

**Top-3 effects of sustainability:**

- 42% improved company image
- 45% cost reductions
- 34% increased employee engagement and pride

**Can attention for sustainability within the company fade quickly?**

- 6 (strongly agree)
- 3.7 (Flemish companies)
- 4.5 (Walloon companies)

**Top-5 motivations for sustainability:**

- 50% ethical choice
- 37% cost saving
- 30% making the organization future proof
- 29% improving the image of the organization
- 26% increasing employee engagement and pride

**Impact of sustainability on strategic decision-making:**

- 57% growing
- 26% same as now
- 17% decline

1. Sustainability as ethical choice surfaces as main motivation for attention for sustainability, followed by reducing costs and future proofing the organization. Attracting new talent is hardly seen as important motivation.

2. Employees are seen as both main driving factor AND as main internal barrier for sustainability.

3. The sustainability commitment of companies is primarily inward-oriented on reducing operational costs and compliance oriented. It is least oriented towards product innovation and changing the business model.

**Companies with attention for sustainability expect in the coming years:**

- 50% somewhat more attention
- 20% much more attention
- 6% less attention

**Companies that currently have no attention for sustainability:**

- 62% expect more attention in the coming years
- 38% expect no attention in the coming years

**Impact of sustainability on strategic decision-making:**

- 57% growing
- 26% same as now
- 17% decline

**Sustainable change**

The state and face of sustainable business in Belgium

- 293 responses
- 49% Flanders
- 24% Wallonia
- 27% Brussels Capital Region

**Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals:**

- 49% not aware
- 21% fully aware