

## Waste Audits



Monday  
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## The changing face of the Environmental Manager

Monday, 21 September 2009

**The 1990s saw the emergence of the Environmental Manager, mainly in the manufacturing sector. They were largely responsible for ensuring operational compliance, implementing the environmental management system and leading cleaner production and eco-efficiency improvements. Today this role has evolved into something much more complex - the Sustainability Manager. By Dan Atkins.**

The environment manager, traditionally coming from an OHS background, was required to apply management systems and reporting frameworks to progressively build environmental considerations into manufacturing operations. At the time the business case for going green was often hard to convey, with low energy and water costs and little marketing incentive to move beyond a compliance approach.



More recently, the environment manager has evolved into a sustainability manager, taking on a role now requiring a broad range of experience, skills and competence that extend far beyond the technical based skills largely required in the past. With training and education, partnership development, stakeholder engagement and continuous improvement just some of the requirements of today's sustainability manager, the role requires someone with not just a broad skill set but also an understanding of the business as a whole.

Communication skills are now a prerequisite as they are necessary to translate technical information and enable the marketing department to incorporate a company's environmental and social performance into sales materials. Interpersonal and relationship skills are required to communicate and negotiate with an increasingly diverse range of internal and external stakeholders.

Today's sustainability manager is increasingly called upon to inspire product innovation as well. Whether developing a new 'green' product or finding ways to improve existing products, as more and more consumers critique the environmental credentials of what they purchase, product innovation has emerged as a key responsibility and opportunity.

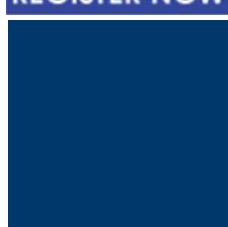
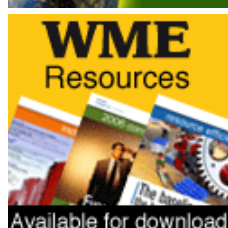
Understanding the complexity of legislation, such as that of the proposed CPRS, NGRS reporting requirements and ACCC trade practices stewardship, is emerging as a key challenge for many organisations. It is now the responsibility of the sustainability manager to figure this out.

Another key role of the sustainability manager is to understand their organisation's strategic objectives and identify and communicate how sustainability aligns with specific KPIs and contributes towards overall business performance.

### Taking the next step

As we enter an era where a dramatic shift in business thinking and practice is required, silo thinking and activity is stifling the step change solutions that are called for. To achieve this change and successfully migrate to the next level of development for sustainability manager – the Chief Sustainability Officer – those in the role must continually develop their interpersonal, communication, executive and leadership skills.

In his book *Good to Great* Jim Collins spoke of the qualities possessed by leaders that help an organisation go from good to great. The fifth and penultimate level of leadership is about humility. Successful organisations that have endured and sustained shareholder value are the ones that, when a CEO leaves the organisation, are able to sustain momentum and achieve continued success. The CEO ensures they build the leadership capacity of those around them to enable an effective transition.



The same can be said for a successful sustainability manager. Success lies in the ability to be humble, allowing other staff members to join the sustainability space and building their capacity to embed sustainability into the organisation's core business practices.

Essentially it's all about collaboration.

*Vantage Point columnist: Dan Atkins is MD of the Shaper Group, a set of companies that works with businesses, government and not-for-profits to improve their competitive advantage and reputation through sustainable business practices. Contact at DA@shapergroup.com*

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