

# Seven Steps to Solution Focused Sustainability

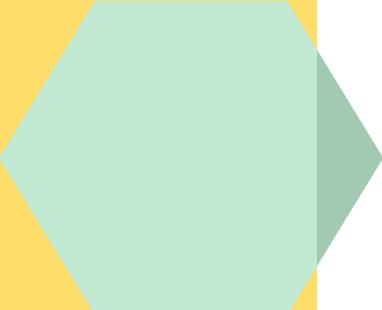
David Picton  
and John Brooker



## The Need for Sustainable Business

Sustainability may have different names – responsible business, the ‘green’ agenda or even ‘tree hugging’ – but one aspect is key: businesses with trusted compliance, visionary engagement and motivational stories see sustainability not as a problem but as an opportunity to shape better futures. Ultimately, we are all linked by a shared tomorrow, and customers, investors, government and the public are pressing companies to prove how they’re making it a better one.

Sustainability is rising fast, reflecting consumer recognition of human impacts and going well beyond ‘green’ campaigning. That escalation means that your organisation needs a robust business case for balanced sustainability, linked inextricably to your very purpose. That case must underpin the coherent



delivery of a responsible business strategy and make sense to and engage your organisation's people and customers.

One name for sustainability – *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)* – can spark eye-rolling, but our good friend, Dame Julia Cleverdon, explains that, "It's *Common Sense Really.*" CSR has evolved from something a business 'has to afford' to something it can't afford 'not to do'. Done well, with relevant and impactful results, it can be a competitive advantage for long-term business success.



Your company or organisation will be 'somewhere' on the bell-curve of sustainability maturity – maybe beginning the journey, possibly doing 'enough' to ensure responsible business or already a world-class leader. Whatever your organisation's maturity level, one approach to consider is Solution Focused Sustainability (SFS).

SFS can genuinely help organisations 'starting the journey' to navigate a landscape of abbreviations, bewildering complexity and even unhelpful corporate guilt. Businesses making good progress in some areas, sat in the middle of the curve, might use SFS to consolidate impacts or understand how to gain more traction for certain initiatives. Even companies that are 'role models' of sustainability may find it useful to polish up their next strategic ambitions.

SFS enables you to develop sustainable solutions for complicated challenges, focusing on collaboration and strengths. It encourages discretionary effort, engages people quickly and kindles the energy to make change happen. With SFS you and your people:

- Describe your ideal future in terms of sustainability
- Identify what exists already to help you achieve that future
- Initiate small steps to begin making progress.

It doesn't require you to outlay limitless resources upfront, structure a major change programme or pitch to 'the Board' for massive funding. SF is low-risk because it tackles progress in smaller pieces, proves the concept through trials and offers quick paybacks. Two brief examples of the approach are:

- 
- A UK government agency division was facing a 200% increase in the number of live projects. Using an SF approach, they handled that surge with only a 15% staff increase, whilst also improving engagement by 20%
  - Consultants on a key infrastructure project used SF to engage industry expertise, exploring innovative ways to identify potential savings on a budget worth around £1.4bn (approximately 9% at the time).

# Seven Steps to Achieve Solution Focused Sustainability

SF Sustainability helps you to take Seven Steps in a roadmap towards clear, actionable targets – steps that build a more responsible and inspiring growth business.

**Step One:** Spell out (or re-affirm) the purpose of your business – what's at the *heart* of the products, services and other elements your organisation creates, sells and delivers? A simple, clearly explained purpose that people can rally around is key to build trust, inspire commitment and work towards a strong brand reputation.

**Step Two:** Run workshops to consult with people connected to your business – those who run, supply, buy from and fund it. The crucial output will be what matters most to them – what they care about, what they want improved and what evidence would satisfy them. That is a '*Materiality Review*' and will produce a ranked list of factors for you to focus on.

**Step Three:** Define how sustainability will serve, support and strengthen your business purpose, and agree (or re-visit) how ambitious you are in pursuing improvements in those material factors. If the factors were on a giant graphic equalizer (with all sliders set to '10'), they would drown each other out, cost a fortune and leave people feeling overwhelmed and unfocused. World-beating is a laudable ambition, but 'good enough' can offer a useful start. Identifying where each of those sliders sits will also help set a timescale for the journey.

**Step Four:** Spell out what you will aim for, how you will measure achievements and how you will prove, usually through external accreditation or benchmarking, that they are credible.

**Step Five:** Arguably the most work-intensive step, develop the progress canvas to achieve success. The plan looks for small steps – if you're at '5' now on 'carbon footprint' (but want '8'), what will move you initially to '6'? Identifying, assessing and combining the actions necessary to achieve your sustainability objectives will also help to engage your people. SF workshops and coaching will help them to define '*what's in it for them*' and have them care enough to offer their discretionary effort, particularly in busy schedules of existing responsibilities.

**Step Six:** Review the resources needed to support those actions and paths, map 'what is working now' (as a foundation) and assess what you need to



learn. Before engaging any external partnerships to enhance your expertise, ensure they are people grounded in reality and able to deliver sustainability across the range of business factors you identified at Step Two.

**Step Seven:** The final step is to tell your story, using 'communication planning' to bring your achievements to life. This may be a stand-alone story, an annual report section or a fully integrated report explaining the essence of your business purpose. Your sustainability evidence will help to win work, support growth and enhance investor relations, so it must be as much a trusted part of your narrative as your financial figures. Whichever route you choose, your story must be coherent, make sense to those you consulted at Step Two and clearly serve the purpose established in Step One.

## The Three CBs

Solution Focused Sustainability helps to build the 'Three CBs' – the integrated impact pillars of Changing Behaviours, Commercial Benefit and setting a Challenging Balance. More sustainable futures need permanent changes in behaviours, and all commercial organisations have the right to amplify the commercial benefit from that future. Fundamentally, though, if Steps One and Two have been done well, SFS plans and actions will drive lasting change and inspire collaboration to tackle challenging issues across a balance of areas.

With SFS, you can integrate sustainability into your business strategy, rather than 'bolting it on'. It can fundamentally enhance your brand impact and create growth. Engaging and inspiring your people, it can be a 'pole star' around which they shape a sense of pride, develop new skills and gain huge satisfaction from changing their lives and the lives of others.

## Contact Us

If you are curious about Solution Focused Sustainability, please contact David Picton on [david@hengistinspired.com](mailto:david@hengistinspired.com) or John Brooker on [hi@yesand.co.uk](mailto:hi@yesand.co.uk)

