

Engaging Stakeholders in the Net Zero Journey

Engaging key stakeholders is essential for fostering collaboration and driving organisational change. Taking the conversation from talk to action and sustaining the impact requires more than just a clear strategy and communication, particularly when pursuing ambitious long-term goals associated with Net Zero targets. This article shares unique perspectives of contributors who explore practical approaches and lessons learnt in the area of stakeholder engagement.



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What role does the size or structure of an organisation play in stakeholder engagement?

Julia Blackwell

The type of the organisation is crucial. Quite often within local government, there'll be certain cycles in which they're looking to make their investments, or they have certain timeframes when they're looking at different projects. Getting to understand the drivers for the stakeholders is quite important. It is beneficial to gain understanding of these factors and tailor your questions and applications to them. Particularly as local government budgets run through certain phases, so you may need to think about being prepared for the new budgets coming through. It is advisable to have your projects' business cases ready to go through the different levels of management structure.

Jonathan Waldie

The size of the company impacts the dynamic of certain decision making. In a larger company there is a lot more people that have to be part of the processes so it can take longer to get to the decision that you just want there and then straight away.

There can also be more diversity and complexity when it comes to the actual stakeholder groups as well, so the larger the business is, the more complicated it will be. Whereas a smaller company can offer more agility to get through things a lot quicker.

Caroline Holman

The first stage of engagement for any organisation, irrespective of size, is to actually map out who the stakeholders are. Size really does not matter. Clear, targeted objectives, engagement plans, and a RACI (Roles, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) matrix aligned to the stakeholder map and business strategy are also critical enablers.

Which stakeholder group do you find the most approachable?

Jonathan Waldie

Department heads and managers, and general employees are generally more open to new ideas and suggestions. In addition, you don't have to present such a high level of detail to these groups that the senior management would want to know about.

On the other hand, customer and supplier stakeholder groups can be tricky. For example, it is difficult to engage customers in the hospitality industry when they are on holiday and are looking to switch off and relax.

Julia Blackwell

Quite often it's those employees who are going to be directly impacted by the changes and improvements, who are the most excited because they see how it's going to make improvements to their work environment and to the sustainability in terms of the running costs of their workplace. Generally, employees will be more engaged and embrace the changes if they are taken along with the process.

Engaging employees early on helps them to understand and prepare for the changes. However, they may be more reticent when it comes to the actual installation phase, especially if any installation work needs to be fitted around normal working or delivering services. So, expect and prepare for enthusiasm to wane a little.

Senior management will have additional concerns, such as reputational issues. Especially in the public sector, the concerns about public spending and avoiding poor decisions will be at the top of the agenda for any project approvals, so presenting a solid business case is vital. It may also be beneficial to present proofs of concept which can add a layer of safety to your plans. It may be the case that senior management like to see themselves as being innovative, however it always helps if someone else has proven the concept first, they will be much happier about continuing then.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS



How can you transition from a discussion to a tangible action?

Julia Blackwell

Sustainability is something that can morph itself into a lot of different areas and the benefits don't necessarily always have to be direct or obvious. For example, in local governments the need to continue maintaining leisure and sport facilities viable is driven by the wider commitment to provide a healthy population, which will have less of an impact and demand on health provisions within the area. In such cases you would be engaging with slightly wider stakeholder groups. You would need to also bring in people who might not necessarily be involved in the day-to-day running
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Caroline Holman

The stakeholder map, RACI and assessment of overall business objectives form the foundation and arguably basis for success. The human psyche and 'what is in it for me' comes into play. If the 'tangible actions' are perceived to be bolt-ons and additional workload; with no consideration of synergies with existing activities, then progress will be at best inhibited. Understanding and playing to the individual and collective strengths of the team(s) is also essential. Senior leadership buy-in and
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Jonathan Waldie

One campaign that comes to mind is creating green teams. At each of the Haven Holidays' 40 parks we created a team of volunteers who, as well as doing their day job, are the energy management team's eyes and ears on the ground. It took a while to set it up, but it is now embedded in people's job descriptions and we keep the engagement and interest going through league tables and incentive schemes. It is not just the company benefitting as many of those volunteers tell us that they are also being more energy efficient and aware at home, which is always great to hear.

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or management or finance, but who would help to provide impetus for the delivery of the work going forward. Sometimes it's worth looking for that slightly left of centre points and stakeholders, whom it might be slightly unusual to engage with in helping to drive engagement, and to make additional connections which will support the business case and move it to actually being a deliverable.

Part of the problem is also the fact that majority of the energy or carbon reduction projects may not be visible to all stakeholder groups. For example, changes in the plant room equipment are invisible to the management, finance or other employees that are experiencing disruption to services delivered to public or customers. Furthermore, they may lack the understanding of how the new equipment is going to be beneficial for them or the organisation. So, informing and illustrating the savings in a relevant way can help to prevent some negative pushback during a crucial stage of any project's delivery.

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advocacy will also drive and maximise collaboration and delivery.

It is also important to consider whether any stakeholder groups have been overlooked. Not everyone is a carbon / energy professional, or advocate – it is essential to find the common and, in some cases, specific 'hook(s).' This could be operational efficiency, cost savings or co-benefits (e.g. PR, reduced maintenance, asset performance etc.).

And finally use the skills available, e.g. if a member of the team is particularly good at communication, graphic design, etc. use them to help develop the engagement materials – not everybody needs to be a project manager!



How do you measure a success or failure of an engagement strategy or method?

Julia Blackwell

The public sector is still very much driven by the pounds and pence for measurement purposes. We're also educating and guiding our colleagues, and making sure that they understand that we can save energy. Even if the weather's been particularly bad and we've used more electricity or gas, we can use other metrics, such as the impact on our colleagues in the maintenance sectors. For example, whether the number of callouts has gone down over a specific period or whether there were less issues with technological failures. We try to demonstrate that with implemented replacements or maintenance measures we experience less issues in those areas. All those sorts of things are part of how we demonstrate that we've made that success.

Gillian Brown

Everything comes back to a tangible number that you can prove one way or another. At Lloyds Banking Group, we don't necessarily measure success in pounds anymore. We measure success in achievements through specific targets. They're very much about decarbonisation progress in terms of how many branches have been decarbonised, how many LED light installations have been done, etc. We set targets in these areas at the beginning of the year and then our progress is measured in those terms. Some of those changes will create energy savings, some will not, and some will create financial savings and again some perhaps not. Our way of measuring success or failure of decarbonisation projects is different, but it gives us ever so slightly different slant on it.

How do you measure a success or failure of an engagement strategy or method?

Caroline Holman

In reality any program must deliver against the business KPIs. This will, more often than not, include financial performance. Net zero, e.g. energy and carbon, is no different, but there are also other measures such as intensity metrics (e.g. CO₂e or kWh per floor area) which can be used.

Baseload reduction through 'switch of campaigns' are also popular but are dependent on the level of sub-metering and BMS in place.

In the Real Estate Sector, we also consider improvements in building certification or EPC ratings, as well as participation and success at reward and recognition events – both internal and external.

Scorecards and dashboards stimulating competition between teams, groups and departments using any of the previously mentioned KPIs are also a useful measure, and stimulus for sustained performance. Engagement can also be measured in terms of participation and skills/awareness, e.g. surveys, training, CPD, etc.

Linking performance and reward to specific net zero deliverables is frequently the most tangible way of measuring, not only engagement but also performance.

Jonathan Waldie

We set our targets at the beginning of each financial year and use league tables, which are linked to various incentives that we do for the green teams. All of this is reported on a weekly basis to the whole business and it's also discussed with directors on a monthly basis for each of the parks.

Over the years, we found that this level of engagement creates a level of excitement about the topic and keeps everyone engaged. Setting clear targets and having the data to back it up are crucial for the success of the scheme, however key part also play the incentives which need to be enticing for the teams. Historically, we have incentivised the green team with outings and cash rewards.

For this year, we decided to take it to the next level and fund an all expenses paid trip to Costa Rica, which is renown for its sustainable achievements, for the top ten green team members with a secondary incentive of vouchers for the parks' teams that achieve their targets.

In addition to this, we are providing the opportunity for our most engaged green team members to have certified training.

How do you keep stakeholders engaged?

Caroline Holman

Generally, most net zero projects are (and should be) part of the bigger picture and something which gathers momentum, breeding further successes.

A net zero strategy that is linked to key performance indicators and does not work in isolation, will play a crucial role in attracting and retaining talent, providing skills enhancement and development opportunities.

Julia Blackwell

Communication is always key. I also find that demonstrating that we acted on ideas and suggestions from colleagues plays a key role. When people see that they are contributing and are being listened to, it inspires them to do more and be more responsive to future requests. Regular reports on progress can also embed a sense of confidence that if we can handle visible projects, like a lighting refurbishment on a ward, we will be able to handle any other less visible projects as well.

Jonathan Waldie

Our parks welcome over 2.5 million guests annually, which brings its challenges. A lot of effort is dedicated to effectively communicating our sustainability goals and encouraging guests to participate in our initiatives. Feedback from guests can be surprising as they may have differing perspectives. They're on holiday and if they wish to have their heating on high in the caravan with the doors open, then that's their right. However, at the same time, we all need to be conscious of the environment. So, it is a challenge to get the right message across to our guests as stakeholders, simply because it's a very varied and large group.

If there's one thing that could be done to influence stakeholder engagement for the purposes of achieving net zero targets. What would it be?

Caroline Holman

Articulate the 'why' for stakeholders. Clear, succinct and targeted communications, which engage and stimulate diverse audiences and participants.

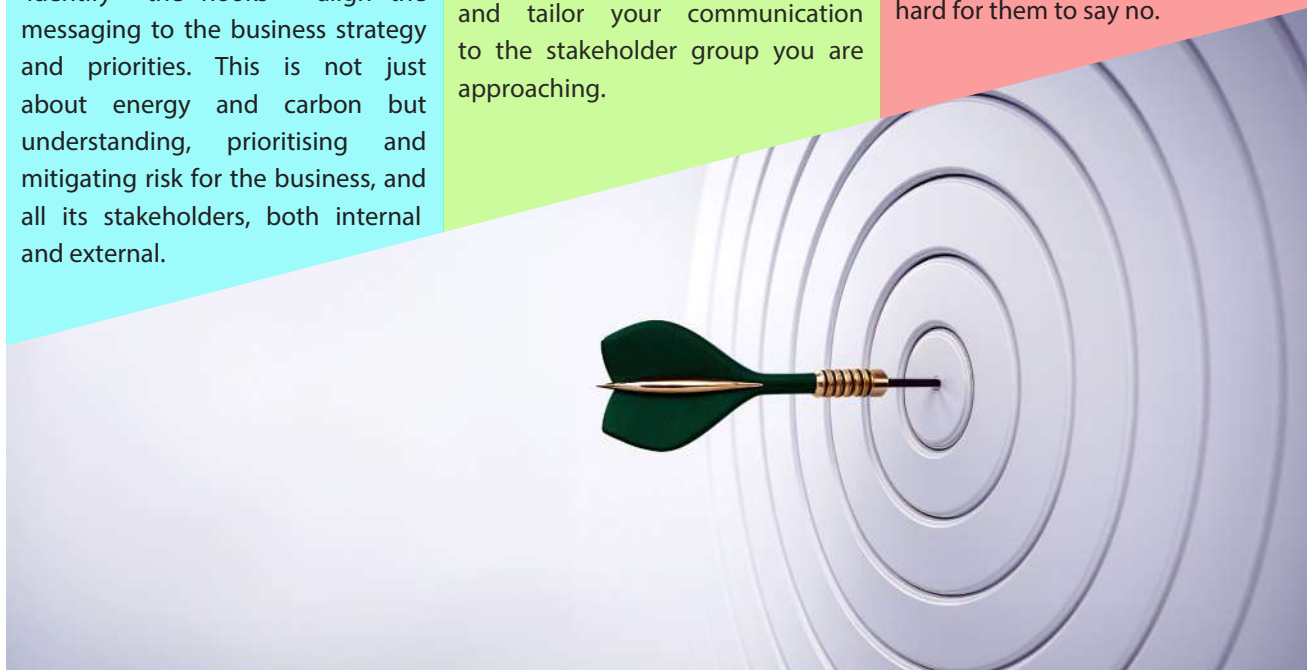
'Identify the hooks' - align the messaging to the business strategy and priorities. This is not just about energy and carbon but understanding, prioritising and mitigating risk for the business, and all its stakeholders, both internal and external.

Jonathan Waldie

It's definitely all about clear and transparent communication, making sure that everyone is completely on board with what you're trying to achieve. Make sure they also understand what is in it for them and tailor your communication to the stakeholder group you are approaching.

Julia Blackwell

Do your homework. Find out what the drivers are for each of those stakeholders. Find that hook and drive the engagement with enthusiasm so that you're providing an answer to their problems. Make it hard for them to say no.



Authors' profiles:

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Jonathan has worked in the holiday park leisure industry for over 20 years in various roles before moving into a central role overseeing aspects of facilities and sustainability for all the Haven estate. He manages capital and planned preventative maintenance for all mechanical and electrical plant, swimming pool plant operations, water infrastructure, drainage and energy management, including team engagement and behavioural change.

Julia Blackwell, Energy & Sustainability Manager, CBRE

Julia has over 20 years' experience working in the public sector. Within previous roles she was responsible for managing energy saving programmes, managing installations of new equipment through SALIX and Re:Fit, providing business cases and carrying out measuring and verification. She is currently responsible for energy management and sustainability at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.

Gillian Brown, Senior Manager – Sustainable Design, Lloyds Banking Group

Gillian is an accomplished energy and sustainability senior manager with over 20 years of experience. Within previous roles, Gillian covered all areas of energy management and led a number of large scale energy projects in some complex and highly critical buildings. Gillian now leads a high performing team driving down carbon emissions from a large and complex multi-site estate.

Caroline Holman, ESG Manager, LCP Group (part of M'Core)

Caroline is an engineering and sustainability professional with experience across various sectors including automotive manufacturing, water, and real estate. She is a Fellow of the Institute of Engineering Technology (IET), Chartered Environmentalist (Institute of Environmental Managers and Assessors - IEMA) and Chair of the EMA Board of Directors.