Promoting environmental behaviour in the workplace:

A survey of UK organisations

March 2012

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1. Background

1.1. About this report

This report presents the key findings from our second environmental behaviour survey. The previous survey was published in December 2010. As with the first survey, it is UK wide and explores the approaches that companies take to encourage pro-environmental behaviour among their employees.

Like the 2010 report, this research examines the green initiatives currently being used by organisations, where responsibility lies for the implementation and management of green initiatives, and which methods organisations have been using to encourage staff to behave in a pro-environmental way. The report also explores whether organisations have evaluated the effectiveness of their environmental initiatives in encouraging employee environmental behaviour; the perceived facilitators and barriers to effective environmental practices within the organisation, and the role of organisational culture.

Although the sample size in this year’s survey is smaller, this report supports the findings from last year’s survey, with a consistent picture of environmental behaviour year-on-year. As in 2010, management involvement is perceived to be the most important facilitator to encouraging and supporting employees to be ‘green’, and the lack of management commitment and support is seen as the most significant barrier. Consistent with last year’s findings, only a small percentage of organisations reported carrying out any form of evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the environmental practices they use, and Human Resource Management practices continue not to be used to any great extent as a means of engaging employees to think about their actions at work in relation to the environment.

1.2. Research aims

This research provides incremental data to the 2010 survey, with the overall research aims the same as in 2010:

- To explore the different environmental initiatives that are currently implemented in UK organisations
- To determine the methods that organisations use to encourage their staff to behave in a pro-environmental way and establish the extent to which organisations evaluate the effectiveness of these methods
- To identify the key facilitators and barriers for effective environmental practice in organisations
- To explore the role of organisational culture in promoting pro-environmental behaviour

For a detailed literature review, please see the 2010 report.
2. Method

The survey was sent to approximately 1,000 organisations between July 2011 and January 2012. These organisations had not taken part in the 2010 survey. A total of 101 responses were received, giving a response rate of 10%, with 65 completed responses used for analysis. It was requested that the survey be completed on behalf of the organisation by the main person responsible for managing environmental initiatives.

The sample consisted of 8 directors, 12 senior managers, 13 middle managers, 1 junior manager and 8 non-management staff (23 respondents did not give their managerial level). 40% were female, 23% were male (37% did not respond to this question). The mean age of respondents was 41.5.

The demographic characteristics of the different organisations represented in this sample are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company information</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Company information</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Industry sector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (1-50)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>Business services</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (51-250)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>Public &amp; voluntary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (251-5,000)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>Manufacturing, hospitality &amp; retail</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very large (5,000+)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>Energy, construction &amp; transport</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity/not for profit</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Less than £1m</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private limited company</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>£1m-£10m</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public limited company</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>£11m-£100m</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>£101m-£500m</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Over £500m</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Survey findings

3.1. Current environmental initiatives

- We asked respondents to indicate which green initiatives their organisation currently used (see Figure 1). The top three initiatives were all the same as in last year’s survey. As in 2010, the most popular environmental initiative at work was recycling of waste materials, with 82 per cent reporting they do this. This was followed by
having an environmental policy in place at work (63 percent) and switching off all PCs at night (60 per cent).

- The two least popular initiatives were the same as last year: carbon offsetting (20 per cent) and having energy efficient air conditioning (20 per cent). Sustainable sourcing of food was also among the least common initiatives used (25 per cent). However, more organisations reported purchasing green energy than in 2010, with 34 percent of responding organisations saying they are doing this (compared to 20% last year). This may reflect the increasing availability of green energy within the marketplace.

![Figure 1: Current environmental initiatives being used by organisations](image-url)
• Additional examples of environmental initiatives that individual companies report using include having a bike purchasing scheme and servicing bikes on site, no plastic cup policies, working from home as self-employed, solar water heating, heat recovery and green building schemes.

• Overall, there were few very differences to the 2010 data.

3.2. Management of environmental initiatives

The survey asked who had responsibility for managing and implementing pro-environmental initiatives within the organisation (see Figure 2). Organisations most commonly indicated that the responsibility lies with all staff (27%) and/or with the property and facilities team (27%). The HR department has responsibility in 10% of organisations. A third of respondents (32%) indicated that more than one team shared responsibility in their organisation.

![Figure 2: Responsibility for managing and implementing environmental initiatives (% organisations)](image)

*Note: some organisations indicated responsibility lay with more than one team.*

3.3. Encouraging pro-environmental behaviour at work

In addition to the green initiatives that organisations use, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which organisations use specific methods to encourage their staff to be ‘green’ or pro-environmental (see Figure 3).
Figure 3: Practices used by organisations to encourage pro-environmental behaviour

*Note:* Percentages not always based on N=65 due to missing data

- The most commonly reported methods are the same as last year’s survey, with the same methods making up the top six, with more than 30 percent of organisations reporting that they always or often use these methods.

- Consistent with 2010’s findings, the responses highlight the critical role of management: both through senior management championing ‘green’ behaviour

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- In organisational vision/mission statement
- Induction programmes that emphasise environmental...
- Informal encouragement by line management
- Actively championed by senior management
- Set up of green champions/task force/green team etc.
- Encouraged via internal campaigns/publicity etc.
- Performance indicators that include environmental...
- Training courses aimed at developing environmental...
- Environmental impact factored into team/departmental budgets
- Engagement workshops or forums for staff
- Leadership/management training on environmental issues
- Organisation-based incentives or bonus schemes
- Individual incentives or reward programmes
- Recruitment and selection criteria that recognise environmental...
- Team incentives or reward programmes
- Penalties for non-compliance
- Promotion decisions
directly and via organisational vision/mission statements, and through line managers encouraging it informally.

- Again, the least commonly used methods were promotion decisions, penalties for non-compliance, and also positive incentive programmes, be they individual or team.

3.3.1. Which methods are successful in encouraging employees to be pro-environmental?

- Participants were also asked which were the most and least successful methods of encouraging staff to behave in pro-environmental ways. As in the original research, the most effective practices were considered to be internal awareness-raising campaigns, active championing by senior management and the setting up of green champions or teams. Table 2 presents the top nine most effective practices (four practices were tied for 10th place and so are not presented here).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>No. of orgs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Encouraged via internal awareness-raising campaigns/publicity etc. e.g. series of lectures/seminars/debates for employees, posters etc.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=2rd</td>
<td>Actively championed by senior management</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=2nd</td>
<td>Set up of green champions/task force/green team etc.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Induction programmes that emphasise environmental issues/concerns</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=5th</td>
<td>Performance indicators that include environmental behaviour/targets</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=5th</td>
<td>In organisational vision/mission statement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=7th</td>
<td>Engagement workshops or forums for staff to improve environmental behaviour</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=7th</td>
<td>Informal encouragement by line management</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Training courses aimed at developing/encouraging environmental behaviour</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- As with last year’s research, the least successful method of encouraging ‘green’ behaviour was considered to be giving penalties for non-compliance (see Table 3). Interestingly, this year’s sample considered that individual incentives/rewards were the second least effective means of encouraging such behaviour, which is consistent with respondents’ answers in the previous section.
Table 3: Top practices considered least effective by organisations to encourage employees to be pro-environmental

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>No. of orgs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Penalties for non-compliance</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Individual incentives or reward programmes that encourage environmental behaviour</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=3rd</td>
<td>Set up of green champions/task force/green team etc.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=3rd</td>
<td>Engagement workshops or forums for staff to improve environmental behaviour</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=3rd</td>
<td>Environmental impact factored into team/departmental budgets</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=6th</td>
<td>Actively championed by senior management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=6th</td>
<td>In organisational vision/mission statement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=6th</td>
<td>Training courses aimed at developing/encouraging environmental behaviour</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=6th</td>
<td>Organisation-based incentives or bonus schemes that encourage environmental behaviour</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=6th</td>
<td>Promotion decisions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


3.4.1. Prevalence of evaluation

- As was indicated in the 2010 report, only a small number of organisations (18%) reported evaluating the effectiveness of their environmental practices, despite this being essential to creating the desired behaviour change (see Figure 4). By far the largest percentage of respondents who reported their behaviour (38 per cent), said that they had not evaluated the effectiveness of their initiatives. This once again highlights that organisations may be wasting their efforts by failing to consider the effectiveness of their schemes.

3.4.2. Methods of evaluation

- Of the small number of organisations who reported evaluating their environmental practices, the most common method of evaluation was employee surveys. Two other methods were noted, which were monitoring spend/savings and auditing. These methods varied from last year’s survey, although the numbers responding to this question were small.
3.5. Facilitators and barriers

A key research objective was to understand the facilitators and barriers to pro-environmental behaviour in the workplace (see Figure 5 and Figure 6).

The top three facilitators for effective environmental practice (see Figure 5) as perceived by those surveyed this year are the same as in 2010. These are:

1. Engagement and commitment from staff (95 per cent indicated that this was important or very important).

2. Managers’ support and openness to pro-environmental practices (93 per cent indicated that this was important or very important).

3. Senior management commitment (90 per cent indicated that this was important or very important).

This adds support to the findings last year that both manager commitment and employee engagement are important to encouraging pro-environmental practices. As managers also play a key role in employee engagement, these findings show clearly the critical role that managers play in this – both senior management and line managers. Indeed, 88 per cent of organisations considered informal encouragement from line managers to be important or very important in facilitating environmental behaviour. And 100 per cent of respondents considered it to be at least moderately important that managers factor environmental concerns into commercial and operational decisions.

Interestingly, 97 per cent considered technology (e.g. ‘green IT’ light/motion sensors) to be at least moderately important in facilitating ‘green’ behaviours in the workplace, compared to 86 per cent last year.
Figure 5: Facilitators to pro-environmental practices

Note: Percentages not always based on N=65 due to missing data

The top three barriers within organizations (see Figure 6), were perceived to be:

1. Lack of management commitment and/or support (74 per cent of organisations indicated that this was significant or very significant).

2. Lack of engagement/commitment from staff (70 per cent of organisations indicated that this was significant or very significant).

3. Unclear leadership strategy and goals towards environmental issues (68 per cent of organisations indicated that this was significant or very significant).

Entirely consistent with the last report’s findings, this highlights the fact that managers and employees are key in supporting environmental initiatives and thus attaining an organisation’s sustainability goals.
3.6. Promoting a culture of pro-environmental behaviour

- In line with last year’s findings, the majority of respondents (88 per cent) agreed that environmental issues are of at least moderate importance to their organisation (see Figure 7).
Figure 7: The importance of environmental concerns to the organisation (% of organisations)

Note: N=42

- Figure 8 shows the percentages of respondents that agree/disagree with statements that describe organisational culture with regards to ‘green’ issues. These show a very similar pattern to the last survey. Although there are some differences in the relative importance of the statements, the majority of respondents report that their organisation is interested in developing pro environmental behaviour and does its bit for the environment. Interestingly, there was also a very similar response to the statement, ‘The “green agenda” is less important because of the current financial crisis’, with just 25 percent of organisations agreeing with this (compared to 26 per cent last year). While the sample size in this survey is smaller, this is encouraging when, if anything, the background of economic news has been even grimmer than over the last survey period.

- As in the last survey the same pattern emerges of moderate agreement with statements about manager behaviour, while this was seen as the top facilitator of pro-environmental behaviour. For instance, 44 per cent agree that management practices actively enhance and encourage environmental behaviour and only 35 per cent agree that they provide practical support for this in their organisations.

- Organisations do not seem to be using the performance appraisal system or personal development objectives to encourage green behaviour. This is in line with the findings above which identified individual reward and recognition as a less effective method of doing so (see Table 3). Additionally, sanctions to penalise non-environmental behaviour are rarely used – again this is consistent with the findings above (Table 3), which identified this as the least effective method of encouraging environmental behaviour.
Figure 8: Percentage of organisations that agree/disagree with organisational culture statements.

Note: Percentages not always based on N=65 due to missing data
4. Key messages

4.1. Overall findings

More than a year on, with a different sample of organisations, the picture of UK organisations’ pro-environmental behaviour is remarkably consistent. Eight-two per cent of organisations surveyed are engaged in recycling activities and large percentages of respondents report environmentally friendly behaviour with regard to light, heat and printing. A few organisations are engaged in imaginative schemes such as bike purchasing and on site servicing. Indeed, despite the torrid economic climate of the last few years, the ‘green’ agenda has maintained its own level of visibility in this survey.

It should be noted that the sample in this year’s survey was smaller than in 2010, and that it is a self selecting sample. Those who chose to complete the survey may be those individuals or organisations who consider environmental issues to be of greater importance. However, the findings are very much in line with last year’s. There were only small areas of difference, for example in the number of organisations purchasing green energy, in the perceived importance of technology and the use of induction programmes to encourage pro-environmental practice. However these differences were small and may be due to the smaller sample this year. Further surveys run in future years will be needed to observe if this is revealing any changes in behaviour over time.

4.2. Importance of managers

As with the previous survey, the findings here show clearly the critical role of management. Both senior and line managers are key to leading and supporting pro environmental behaviour, and this is widely recognised as being critical to the success of such initiatives. Manager support and senior management commitment to pro environmental practice are considered to be key facilitators, and lack of management commitment the biggest barrier to ‘green’ behaviour at work. This seems to be particularly important given the reported lack of effectiveness of individual and team rewards and recognition. The fact remains, however, that between 30 and 40 per cent of respondents feel that managers are not supporting and leading such behaviours in their organisations.

4.3. Role of HR and evaluation

The results support the other key findings reported in last year’s report. Human Resource (HR) departments are not being utilised by most organisations to encourage pro-environmental behaviour, despite the importance of Human Resource Management practices in this area. Organisations may benefit from involving HR much more directly in promoting ‘green’ practices.

Consistent with last year, this survey found that most organisations do not evaluate their environmental practices. Only 12 of the surveyed companies reported performing any evaluation, and most of these were by employee surveys. It is important that environmental practices are evaluated to ensure they are of benefit and are actually changing employees’ behaviour towards the environment.
4.4. Final comments

This study repeated the research run last year to examine the environmental initiatives and methods of encouragement that organisations use to encourage employees to behave in a pro-environmental way. The findings in this survey are extremely consistent with those reported in 2010. This provides strong support to the conclusions reported in last year’s report.

The main finding in this report, as in 2010, was that both senior and line management involvement were perceived to be the most important facilitators to effective environmental practices, and that practices with these elements were the most prevalent and generally perceived to be the most successful.

We suggest that research continues in this area to observe any trends going forward, and that further research is needed to investigate how managers can be supported and encouraged to promote pro-environmental behaviour in the workplace.

Acknowledgements

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References