

People Powered Change

A Community Building Approach
to Sustainable Transformation

Radboud Universiteit



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Preface



Peggy Van Casteren

Head of SDG & Community Impact Johnson & Johnson Benelux



True transformation occurs when change happens simultaneously top-down and bottom-up. It's the combination of these two forces that drives real change and transformation. These days, real transformation, sustainable transformation is needed when we want to address issues like climate action and biodiversity, but also inequalities, decent work and good health and wellbeing. All these wicked problems in society need systemic and integrated action. Big companies like Johnson & Johnson can make a difference. This realization emerged from my 25-year career at Johnson and Johnson, where my passion for people, love for nature, and interest in business ethics led me to a new role as head CSR for Belgium and the Netherlands.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

During my first 100 days in this role, I engaged in numerous conversations with both external and internal stakeholders. It became immediately apparent that there was a significant divide between the social sector, NGOs, and foundations on one side, and the corporate world on the other.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provided a valuable framework and common language to connect people and the different sectors around the biggest challenges the world is facing.

MY PERSONAL MISSION

This exploration led me to formulate a personal mission: by 2030, I aim for EVERYONE at J&J to incorporate the SDG's in everything they do. It means that every J&J employee balances the positive and negative impact on people, planet, and business in every new project or idea. It is about maximizing positive impacts and minimizing negative ones and, in this way, creating sustainable innovation.

My first biggest insight was that sustainability is more than only projects and activities: it is also about why we do what we do and how we do things. It's a change journey, a transformation where

people go beyond 'ego' and take the long-term perspective in consideration. It's a journey where people connect with each other and work together in the entire value chain that goes much further than only their department and even their company. Another huge insight was that I want to stand for an integrated approach between sustainability and business and to aim for a sustainable business strategy instead of a separate sustainability and business strategy.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION

In my quest, I connected with academic experts, including Prof. Wayne Visser and his team from Antwerp Management School. Prof. Wayne Visser guided J&J Benelux through the Integrated Value Management process, a top-down approach/methodology involving context analysis, stakeholder interviews, workshops, and conversations with our leadership. This process resulted in a double materiality matrix, local ambitions linked to global J&J goals, and measurable targets and KPIs. This approach fostered sustainable innovations and enhanced our company's reputation and license to operate.

The top-down approach is needed to give guidance to employees.

In addition, a company can also use their biggest capital, the human capital to accelerate change/transformation. J&J Benelux has more than 8000 employees. I discovered that most of them show

an immense passion, drive, energy, and knowledge on the SDGs, especially the young graduates. Imagine the impact we could make by mobilizing all this knowledge, passion, and energy!

My journey led me to dr. Willem Elbers and drs. Bernadette van Dijck from Radboud University in the Netherlands. Together, we share the belief that genuine change occurs when it's driven both top-down and bottom-up. While the top-down process was underway with Antwerp Management School, Willem and Bernadette brought expertise in community building and uniting human capital to accelerate change, resulting in the birth of the J&J SDG Community.

CURRENT PROGRESS

Currently, we have a group of 50 SDG pioneers working to make a huge impact, multiplying their influence a hundredfold. They play a pivotal role in enhancing CSR literacy within the organization, a critical need for large companies. Furthermore, they are the boots on the ground to map existing projects and link them to our sustainability ambitions. They come up with genius ideas on how to increase our societal impact. They serve as connectors—an essential quality for both organizations and society at large.

In my personal mission to integrate sustainability in everything we do, I found out that people are key in this

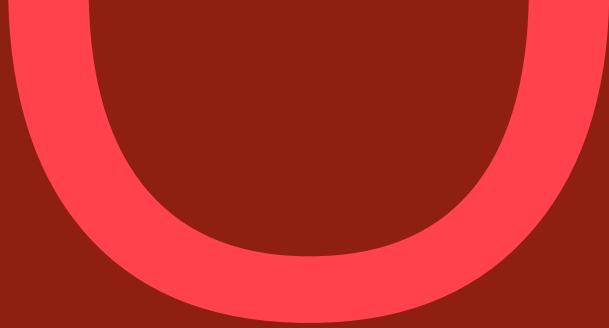
GRATITUDE

transformation. We need to invest in circularity and climate action, but investment in people is the new 'green'. When companies trust their people, make them resilient and invest in 'human connection', they have a superpower to thrive and to become future fit.

Resilience is the superpower to build a thriving team, organization, community. Community building helps to support resilience at all levels (individual, team, organizational, societal level.)

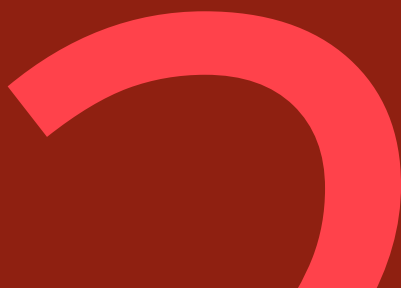
I want to express my gratitude to a lot of passionate colleagues within J&J: First of all, our community builders Veerle Van Gool, Mieke Capals, Eelse Akker and Sophie Wilbrink. The community members and the leaders of the different workstreams. I want to thank Bert Verstappen, Willem De Vocht, Leaders Kris Sterkens, Jan Van der Goten, Tom Aelbrecht, Hilde Claes, Michel van Agthoven, Mariska Koster and Paul Korte for their support and believe in the process. Global Leaders for their inspiration and honest feedback Paulette Frank, Jessica Moore, Kyle Peoples.





The Sustainability Challenge

Willem Elbers



Business as part of the solution

If you're reading this, you're undoubtedly aware of the numerous sustainability challenges our world faces. The environment is deteriorating at an alarming pace, casting a shadow on the prospects for future generations.

Similarly, inequalities rooted in income, gender, race, and sexual orientation are on the rise across many regions. To secure a healthier, safer, and more equitable world for our children, we cannot afford to continue with business as usual (Scheyvens et al, 2016). It's imperative that we take action immediately.

Traditionally, government intervention was the go-to solution for sustainability issues, but now it's clear that corporations also have a critical role. They drive economic growth, create jobs, and provide essential services. However, many businesses rely on resource exploitation, environmental

externalities, and disposable consumer culture. Furthermore, as major employers, companies contribute to societal inequalities through biased hiring practices. Progress requires companies to take responsibility for both their economic and social/ environmental impacts (Benn et al. 2014).

The motivation for companies to embrace sustainable practices extends beyond their ethical duty. Sustainability has become an essential element for corporations aiming to stay competitive and relevant in today's business landscape. Various factors are propelling this shift toward sustainability, including investor expectations, regulatory requirements, operational efficiency gains, and the pursuit of new business opportunities. Equally important is the growing emphasis on the "human connection," which underscores the importance of employee engagement and purpose. The ability to foster this connection is increasingly vital for building long-term organizational resilience and attracting and retaining top talent. In sum, the spotlight on sustainability is here to stay, and companies that fall behind risk jeopardizing their organizational health and survival over the medium and long term (Lozano 2013).



Sustainable Development Goals

Initiated by the United Nations in 2015 and endorsed by all 193 nation-states, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present an unprecedented opportunity for positive change. Comprising a total of 17 SDGs, 169 targets, and a set of underlying indicators, they serve as a global compass to address an extensive array of global challenges, including inequality, poverty, employment, pollution, and climate change.



Crucially, the SDGs depart from the notion that the responsibility for progress lies not solely with governments but with society at large, encompassing the corporate sector. Businesses are explicitly called upon to fulfill their role, and many corporations worldwide have integrated the SDGs into their sustainability strategies. SDG 17, for instance, underscores the necessity of cross-sector cooperation, recognizing the vast scope and intricacies of the challenges (United Nations, 2015).

The SDGs hold a unique significance. In addition to their concrete and universally acknowledged nature, they offer a much-needed source of hope and optimism at a time when disaster fatigue and a prevailing sense of helplessness pervade. Conceptually, the SDGs provide a robust framework that emphasizes the interconnection of various societal issues, reinforcing the idea that these challenges cannot be addressed in isolation. Take, for instance, the case of Covid-19, initially perceived as a health problem, which subsequently had profound educational implications and affected individuals of diverse gender and age groups disparately. The SDGs serve as a reminder that such 'wicked' problems demand comprehensive solutions that transcend narrow thematic perspectives. Moreover, they establish a shared language, enabling different societal sectors to engage in meaningful discussions about sustainability challenges and collaboratively discover solutions.

Corporate sustainability challenges

In many sectors, the notion of business being solely driven by profit maximalization no longer reflects reality.

In the past decade, many companies have made considerable progress in their sustainability efforts, although progress remains uneven and challenging (Van Tulder et al. 2021). Many companies are transitioning from a 'do no harm' mindset, as embodied in (risk-oriented) ESG policies, to a 'do good' mindset (positive impacts on SDG agenda). At the heart of this progress lies the corporate recognition of the importance of finding purpose and value. To embrace their role in promoting sustainability, companies have to reflect on their core values and how they can pursue strategies that align with their mission, ensuring long-term viability and fulfillment (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2019).

Yet the path to corporate sustainability remains very much challenging, with numerous intertwined barriers that need to be overcome (see Bocken & Geradts, 2020; Benn et al., 2014; Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010).

Key barriers include:

- **Existing norms:** despite publicly communicated corporate sustainability goals, sustainability in practice often remains seen as an add-on; a nice to have but not essential for organizational long-term survival and health.
- **A short-term perspective.** Most benefits of integrating sustainability in the corporate strategy only become visible in the long term, whereas corporate decision-making is often driven by short-term profit-making.
- **Narrow success metrics.** Profit and growth are traditionally the main indicators used to assess corporate success, resulting in a blind eye to positive or negative sustainability impacts.
- **Narrow incentive systems.** Most companies, particularly listed ones, prioritize short-term profit and risk management in their incentive systems at the corporate, department and individual levels.
- **Compartmentalization.** While separating operations into different departments enhances efficiency, integrating sustainability into the corporate strategy requires cooperation and information sharing across departments.
- **Lacking knowledge base.** Driving sustainability throughout the organization requires an understanding of sustainability challenges and solutions often not present in management and leadership positions.

Besides the complex and intertwined nature of the barriers that need addressing, this is also due to the difficult position in which sustainability managers have to operate (De Oliveira et al., 2023). In most bigger companies a dedicated sustainability department is responsible for driving sustainability throughout the organization. This is no mean feat, especially as these departments typically have a relatively small staff size and budget given their responsibility and lack the formal mandate to influence corporate strategy. The latter means that their success greatly depends on the ability to convince, seduce and nudge colleagues.

Given these limitations, and in light of the earlier mentioned barriers, it does not come as a surprise that many sustainability managers struggle with generating broad support for sustainability. For many colleagues, sustainability is not a topic with a clear relation to their daily work (Kok et al., 2019). Hence, progress is often slow and not always aimed at systematically integrating sustainability into the core strategy. Consequently, there is a real risk that sustainability initiatives ultimately end up as corporate window-dressing.

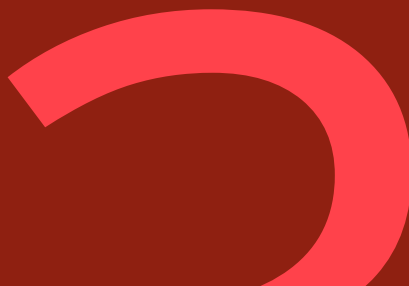
Bigger companies often face the additional challenge of having to deal with many fragmented sustainability-related initiatives that have emerged over time. Such initiatives are, for example, about diversity and inclusion at the workplace, minimizing the carbon footprint or reducing waste. Having emerged organically over a longer time period, the risk is that these initiatives lack cohesion and remain relatively small due to a lack of a unified strategy or vision. Consequently, much energy may be put into initiatives that struggle to achieve critical mass or have a sustained impact on the core strategy.





A community approach towards
sustainable transformation

Willem Elbers



A new approach

This chapter delves into the concept that a community-based approach to sustainability can effectively tackle the challenges previously mentioned in the context of corporate sustainability. It holds substantial potential for supporting companies in integrating sustainability principles into their core operations.

The ideas outlined here draw from extensive social movement research spanning decades (Cross & Snow, 2012) whilst being informed by the experiences gained during a three-year learning journey at Johnson & Johnson from 2020 to 2023. While social movement research provides valuable foundational concepts and principles, establishing a 'movement' within a corporate setting introduces its own unique dynamics and challenges. The insights presented here are a culmination of the lessons learned during this learning journey.

Principles derived from social movement theory were carefully adapted and rigorously tested to make them applicable

within the corporate environment. It's worth noting that while our approach to community building for sustainable transformation has reached a certain level of maturity, it is an evolving work in progress.

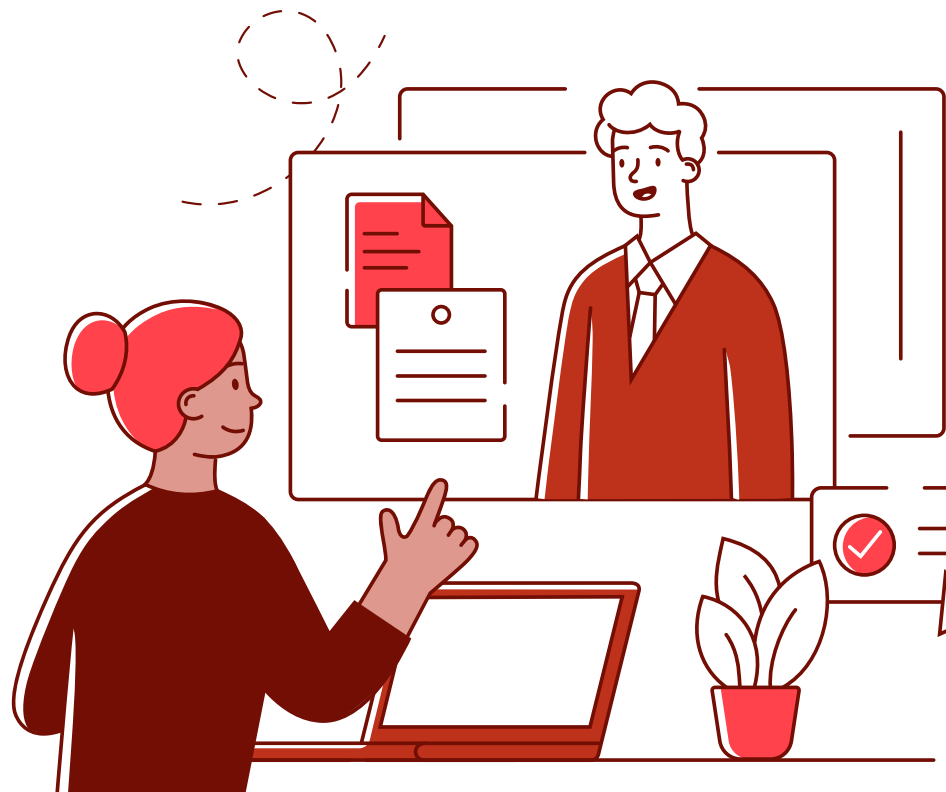


Community building as change pathway

Building upon the theory and experience of social movements, a community is defined as a network of employees of a company, who meet each other regularly, and who cooperate to achieve sustainability-related goals on the basis of shared concerns, values and desires.

Community members, who are company employees, join forces for various reasons, but chief among them is the intrinsic desire to push for sustainability to be integrated into the company's core strategy and decision-making.

A community approach builds upon the energy already present in the organization. As our experience in Johnson & Johnson showed, many employees have the desire to contribute in some way to sustainability, both in their private lives and at work, but don't know how. In a sustainability community, they can find like-minded people and start acting whilst being part of something bigger. In a way, a community is a vehicle to unite employees, empower them and channel their passion into a force of change.



As an alternative to management-driven approaches, the premise of the community approach to sustainability is that it revolves around unleashing the commitment and energy of employees to push for change. Community building has the potential to strengthen existing sustainability efforts by adding a crucial dimension that is currently lacking: employee-driven collective action. A community has the potential to inspire and mobilize colleagues, fostering widespread awareness and uniting voices toward a common cause, prompting shifts in attitudes and practices regarding sustainability.



Veerle van Gool

Veerle van Gool

Community builder Johnson & Johnson Belgium

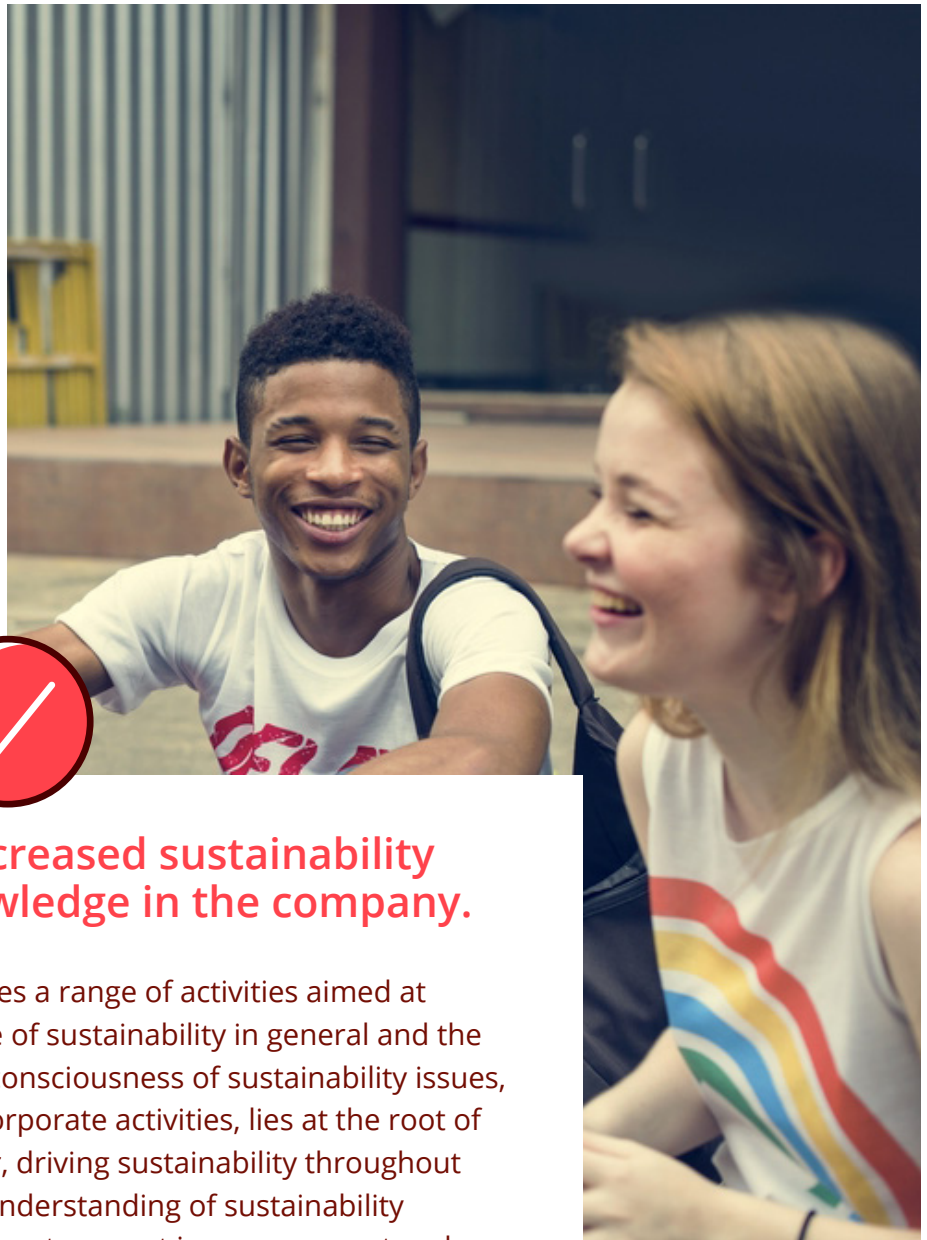
"I was truly overwhelmed in early 2022 when Peggy Van Casteren, Head of SDG & Community Impact, asked me to become the SDG community builder for the SDG community that was about to launch in Belgium. Honestly, I had no idea what it entailed and what my exact role would be. However, I was deeply committed to the mission we have at Johnson & Johnson: 'Healthy People on a Healthy Planet, leaving nobody behind.' I wanted to contribute to that mission in every way possible, so I took the plunge."

"We kicked off in the spring of 2022 with an inspiring group of dedicated colleagues – we called them pioneers – guided by two professors from Radboud University. It was truly a collaborative effort to chart a new path, where we aimed to find an active, tangible interpretation of sustainability in our professional context. I had to step into my role as the leader of a self-managing team. During the course, we focused on conducting a thorough problem analysis and crafting a mission and vision for the community. It was like building the plane while flying."

"There's a misconception that sustainability revolves solely around the planet, windmills, and solar panels. But it's much more than that. It's also about people: Quality Education, inspiring young girls to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields, diversity, and inclusion. The SDG community brings together the aspects of People and Planet because these issues can only be addressed when viewed and tackled in an integrated manner. Sharing this insight with colleagues is inspiring, connecting the dots."

— I wanted to contribute to that mission in every way possible, so I took the plunge.

The strength of the community approach is that it addresses many of the existing challenges that hold companies back in embracing sustainability. There are several key goals and activities which the community is uniquely equipped to pursue and undertake.



Keygoals & activities

Working towards increased sustainability awareness and knowledge in the company.

Awareness raising encompasses a range of activities aimed at increasing people's knowledge of sustainability in general and the SDGs in particular. Increased consciousness of sustainability issues, and how these are linked to corporate activities, lies at the root of action. As we discussed earlier, driving sustainability throughout the organization requires an understanding of sustainability challenges and solutions often not present in management and leadership positions. Awareness raising can generate interest, get people to talk about sustainability and the SDGs, create a sense of urgency and build an audience. It contributes to people changing their opinions, making better-informed decisions and ultimately changing their behaviour. In strengthening the knowledge base on sustainability in the organization, the community addresses an essential pre-condition for change.



Challenging existing norms about the (ir) relevance of sustainability.

Though raising awareness is crucial, merely presenting factual information is often insufficient to fully change attitudes and behaviors. This deficiency stems from deeply entrenched beliefs that individuals are often unaware of, shaping their perception and judgment of presented facts. In many companies, despite the existence of formal policy statements saying the opposite, sustainability performance is not (fully) recognized as vital to corporate health or success. Sustainability implicitly remains to be seen as an add-on, unrelated to the organization's core operations. A community can challenge this norm by highlighting and questioning the various implicit assumptions underlying the notions that sustainability is something 'extra.' At the same time, it can promote the idea the idea that integrating sustainability in core operations is vital for corporate success.

Keygoals & activities





Keygoals & activities



Advocating for the integration of sustainability into the core strategy and policies of the company.

These are the basis for current and future decisions and as such an essential part of the path to more permanent change. Strategies and policies set goals, guide expectations, determine how decisions are made, outline what actions are taken, how budgets are distributed, resources are allocated and how performance is measured (Green, 2016). Obvious advocacy goals therefore include working towards the adoption of a long-term corporate perspective that makes the benefits of integrating sustainability in the corporate strategy and adopting broader success metrics and incentive systems that incorporate sustainability dimensions more visible.



Forging partnerships between existing sustainability-related initiatives and departments in the company.

Integrating sustainability into the corporate strategy requires cooperation and information sharing across initiatives and departments. Much more can be achieved when working together as compared to working in isolation. A community is well-placed to promote best sustainability practices across departmental silos and connect existing sustainability-related initiatives that used to operate alone. At the Johnson & Johnson this role was aptly referred to as the Sustainable Development Glue.

keygoals & activities



Another way to think about how the community is uniquely equipped to promote sustainable transformation is to think in terms of roles. Based on our experience at Johnson & Johnson, a community can play the role of knowledge broker, communicator, lobbyist, relationship broker, role model and energizer (see table 1 below). These roles have in common that they are all about promoting change within the company, drawing upon the collective power of employees.

table 1

Knowledge broker	Gathering and sharing solutions to sustainability changes across positions and departments
Communicator	Telling the story of sustainability and the SDGs in an authentic manner that resonates with people's emotions, values and personal experiences
Lobbyist	Winning the hearts and minds of key decision-makers in the company to enlarge corporate support and changing policies
Relationship broker	Connecting employees and initiatives to the community and as such building critical mass whilst breaking through silos
Role model	Setting a positive example through one's actions, inspiring and influencing others to emulate similar behavior
Energizer	Being a source of inspiration for action, providing the energy for the transition towards a more sustainable company

To maintain the intrinsic motivation of its members, the community must have a degree of freedom to set its own agenda and objectives (more about this below). While the community's autonomy is essential, maintaining the connection with corporate sustainability objectives remains crucial. From the community's viewpoint, leadership-driven sustainability initiatives offer significant opportunities to exert influence and create a meaningful impact. Overall, the strength of the community to contribute for sustainable transformation is greatest when it works within a 'sandwich' movement of visionary "top-down" leadership-driven efforts interacting with collective action community efforts from below (see Mansuri & Rao, 2012).



The SDGs as linking pin

The SDGs align perfectly with a community-driven sustainability approach. The strengths mentioned earlier, including inspiration, concreteness, legitimacy, and shared language, are all pertinent. However, what truly makes the SDGs harmonize with the community approach, based on our experience, is their integrated perspective.

As discussed, the SDGs encompass diverse sustainability challenges within a single framework, illustrating the interrelationships and synergies among goals. From a community perspective, this integrated view holds two key advantages: (1) it can unite individuals with diverse sustainability interests (green and social), and (2) it facilitates the connection of existing sustainability initiatives toward a common agenda.

By adopting the SDGs as an overarching narrative, it becomes possible to bring together individuals with varying interests under one community. People often have different sustainability concerns, ranging from climate change to environmental pollution or diversity, equity and inclusion. The SDG framework underscores the interconnected nature of these sustainability causes, emphasizing the need for collaboration to make substantial progress. In our experience with Johnson & Johnson, we observed individuals, who would have previously remained within their own interest "bubble," coming together, forging connections, and working toward a shared agenda.

Furthermore, a community rooted in the SDGs is uniquely positioned to take the lead in linking existing sustainability initiatives within the company and progressing toward a unified agenda. The SDG narrative underscores the interconnectedness of sustainability challenges and the necessity of an integrated approach for their successful resolution. Simultaneously, it highlights the importance of partnerships and bringing together diverse skill sets and attributes. From these principles, it becomes evident that there is a significant demand to connect fragmented sustainability initiatives and collaborate on a shared agenda. Community members at Johnson & Johnson also recognized this need, making "connecting existing employee initiatives" one of their primary community goals.

There is a compelling case for existing sustainability initiatives within a company to collaborate with each other. This collaboration offers several key advantages, including heightened visibility, resource pooling, expanded scope of activities, increased credibility, a holistic perspective, and opportunities for learning (as shown in Table 2).

table 2

Enhanced visibility	Initiatives can tap into each other's constituencies, means of communication and networks
Resource pooling	Initiatives can gain access to each other's knowledge, expertise and networks
Enlarged scope of activities	Initiatives can engage in larger collaborative activities with a broader reach than they could achieve individually
Credibility	Collaborative activities are more likely to be taken seriously by the leadership since they encompass multiple perspectives, constituents, and spokespersons.
Holistic perspective	Combining perspectives and approaches makes it more feasible to address the multiple-faceted root causes of sustainability challenges
Learning	Instead of reinventing the wheel, initiatives can learn from each other's successes and failures.

Principles and Prerequisites

However, persuading other sustainability-related initiatives to collaborate and work together is a challenging endeavour. These initiatives may initially perceive the community as competition or a threat to their autonomy. The process of forging partnerships within the company requires time and dedication.

Just as in social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2009), communities are owned by their members, who establish goals and priorities. Since members volunteer their time and energy, their ongoing commitment hinges on the community's authenticity. This authenticity means that the community's direction must align with the shared values, interests, and preferences of its members. This sets a community apart from corporate-driven employee engagement programs (Antony, 2018).



Sophie Wilbrink

Sophie Wilbrink

*SDG Community Impact Team Johnson & Johnson
Netherlands*

During my internship with the Community Impact team, I was fascinated by the community's evolution. Engaging in workshops for pioneers trained by Radboud University allowed me to actively participate and build a network of like-minded colleagues, sparking collaborative sustainability initiatives. Observing people undergo mindset shifts was remarkable.

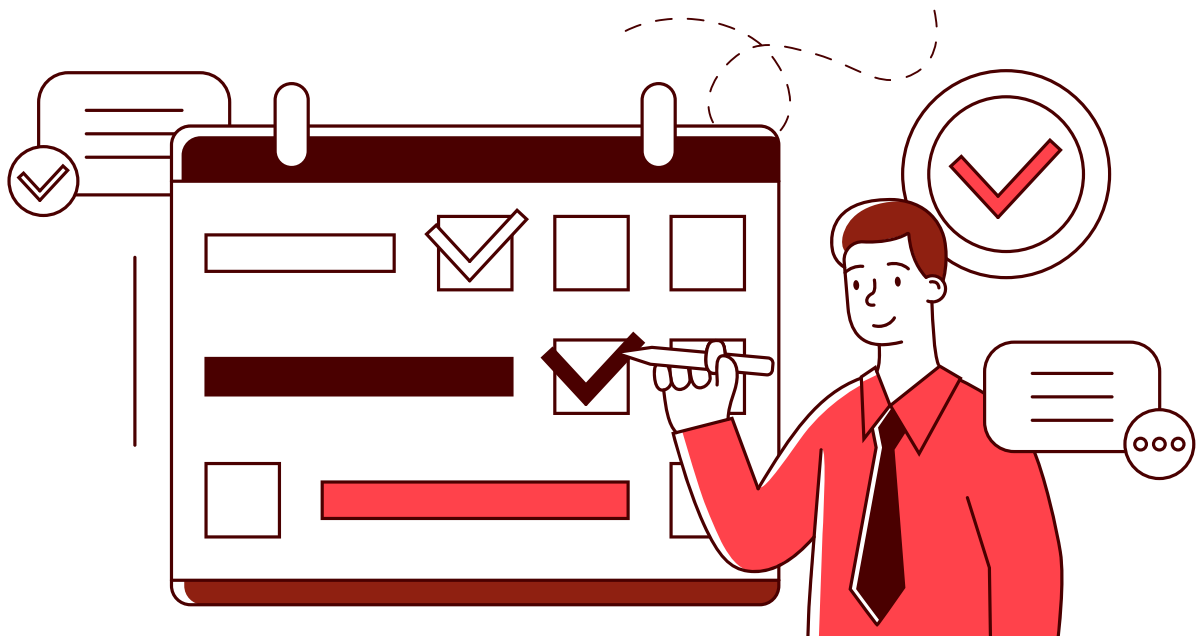
The community connects colleagues across departments, making it easier to share sustainability knowledge compared to a centralized model. Pioneers carry this knowledge to their teams, boosting engagement as sustainability becomes integral company-wide.

Several key aspects define the community for me: empowering individuals to pursue sustainability projects beyond their roles, sharing experiences to magnify our collective impact, and ensuring a well-structured community with strong leadership. An inspiring community host maintains momentum and provides a sense of direction amid busy schedules.

The journey brought rewarding experiences, from creating informative materials for leaders on sustainability to developing toolkits for immediate team action, supported by senior leadership.

The SDG community significantly influences our company's sustainability policy, integrating sustainability across departments and fostering a culture of responsible action. These initiatives align with J&J's sustainability goals, contributing to a comprehensive positive impact on sustainability efforts.

— Observing people undergo mindset shifts was remarkable.



The community thrives on the voluntary contributions of its members, who participate to varying degrees. Some individuals invest a significant amount of time, while others may simply engage by liking a social media post. Ultimately, the community's strength relies on the quality and extent of relationships among its members (Gamson, 1991). Thus, the community benefits from having members from different parts of the organization and occupying various positions. Our experience at Johnson & Johnson also illustrates how this diversity helps break down silos and ensures a flow of relevant information and expertise.

Similar to movements (Ganz, 2010; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004), the driving force of a community comprises a relatively small and dedicated group of enthusiasts. These individuals assume pivotal roles in setting community goals and objectives. They lead in organizing and implementing sustainability projects, fostering connections between colleagues and departments, and acting as ambassadors and influencers who inspire, win over, and mobilize their colleagues.



Carine van Gorp

Carine van Gorp

Associate Director, Global Trial Leader

Global Development, J&J Innovative Medicine

I was immediately excited when I received an invitation through my network to join the initiative of building the SDG community. I hold a strong belief that these goals have the potential to create a meaningful impact both in society and at Johnson & Johnson. I'm enthusiastic about embracing new opportunities and challenges within the company.

In my global role within Johnson & Johnson, I'm thrilled that this community allows me to make a significant difference at the local level as well. I'm particularly drawn to the 'People' aspect of the SDGs. In the community, I collaborate with like-minded team members to focus on SDG awareness and education - how can we embody the SDGs - while also contributing to discussions on strategy and governance.

Being part of this community has introduced me to new people, and I've gained new skills and techniques. Working together on such a meaningful endeavor fills me with energy. It's remarkable how even a small community can bring so much joy

— Working together on such a meaningful endeavor fills me with energy.

While the majority of community members engage on a voluntary basis, individuals in key roles may receive (partial) compensation for their contributions. At Johnson & Johnson, ambassadors were granted permission to allocate a few working hours each week to their community-building tasks. Securing this authorization hinged on strong backing from top leadership for the community. The narrative used emphasized that community engagement directly contributes to the company's strategic goals. Similarly, key figures, such as community hosts, were allocated additional working hours to fulfil their responsibilities.¹ This practice aligns with what often transpires in social movements, where essential members receive support to invest the necessary time (Saavedra, 2018).

While a community is owned by its members, it cannot thrive without corporate support. Genuine leadership buy-in, sufficient resources, and the appointment of a community host are fundamental prerequisites for success. Our experience at Johnson & Johnson underscores that the company and its leadership can (and should) support the community by providing information and resources, offering capacity-building opportunities, and championing the community at significant events (as outlined in Table 3). This support is all about complementing and enhancing the self-determined strategies of the movement. Achieving this demands a deep understanding of the specific needs of the community, as well as a high degree of flexibility, responsiveness, and unwavering dedication to the community's vision and goals.



¹In the literature the figure of the community host is often referred to as the community manager. However, this phrase is misleading as it incorrectly suggests that one person is in charge of the community's decisions and goals.

table 3 *Corporate support to the community*

Providing information	Knowledge forms the foundation of any successful strategy. Consequently, it is imperative for the company to ensure that the community is equipped with current information regarding relevant individuals, initiatives, policies, and events that can either support or impede the community's efforts. Of particular significance is maintaining an overview of existing communities, projects, or initiatives that are interconnected with the SDGs
Strengthening capacity	The company can arrange specialized community-building expertise to assist key community members. Training and workshops can empower community members to develop competencies and skills that enhance the community's effectiveness and long-term sustainability.
Providing resources	Although community members contribute their time freely, the community still necessitates resources for organizing and executing activities. In addition to appointing a community host, the company should allocate a budget for coordinating activities and guarantee that the community can access essential departmental resources, such as those related to communication or ICT.
Championing the community	For the community to expand its reach and make a significant impact, it must gain visibility and work towards positive publicity. The company can play a crucial role in promoting the community to key audiences and at significant events.

The presence of a dedicated community host is of paramount importance (Staal & Wagenaar, 2019). This person serves as a vital link between the company and the community. Their core responsibilities encompass identifying sustainability enthusiasts within the organization to jumpstart the community, coordinating community meetings, forging connections between members and existing sustainability initiatives, and seeking synergies between corporate sustainability efforts and community activities. A community host serves as an informal leader who can attentively listen to the needs, desires, and preferences of members and assist in transforming these into actionable strategies. A duo of community hosts can be

highly effective, combining knowledge, skills, and networks. Furthermore, having a duo role helps mitigate vulnerability in case one community host is absent or departs.

Community hosts are tasked with delicately balancing the company's desire for the community to align with its sustainability objectives, recognizing that it's crucial to uphold the community's authenticity grounded in member ownership and autonomy, given that intrinsic motivation drives participation. This inherent tension underscores the vital role of community hosts in ensuring that the community remains in sync with the broader company sustainability strategies while also preserving a degree of autonomy.



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Lessons from
the Johnson & Johnson community

Bernadette van Dijck & Willem Elbers

4

Introduction

In 2020, Radboud University launched a training program for individuals passionate about sustainability within Johnson & Johnson in Belgium and the Netherlands.

The program's primary goal was to nurture effective advocates and community builders. Radboud University's team offered personalized coaching sessions to assist community hosts in both the Netherlands and Belgium. They also designed a customized course for the ambassadors, focusing on the essential elements of successful communities and the steps required to establish a thriving one. Over a period of 2.5 years, multiple courses were conducted, and the course content was continuously improved based on the insights gained.

This chapter offers an overview of this educational journey and highlights the key takeaways from the experience. These takeaways include the lessons learned regarding the community building trainings and the factors that shape community's growth and success.





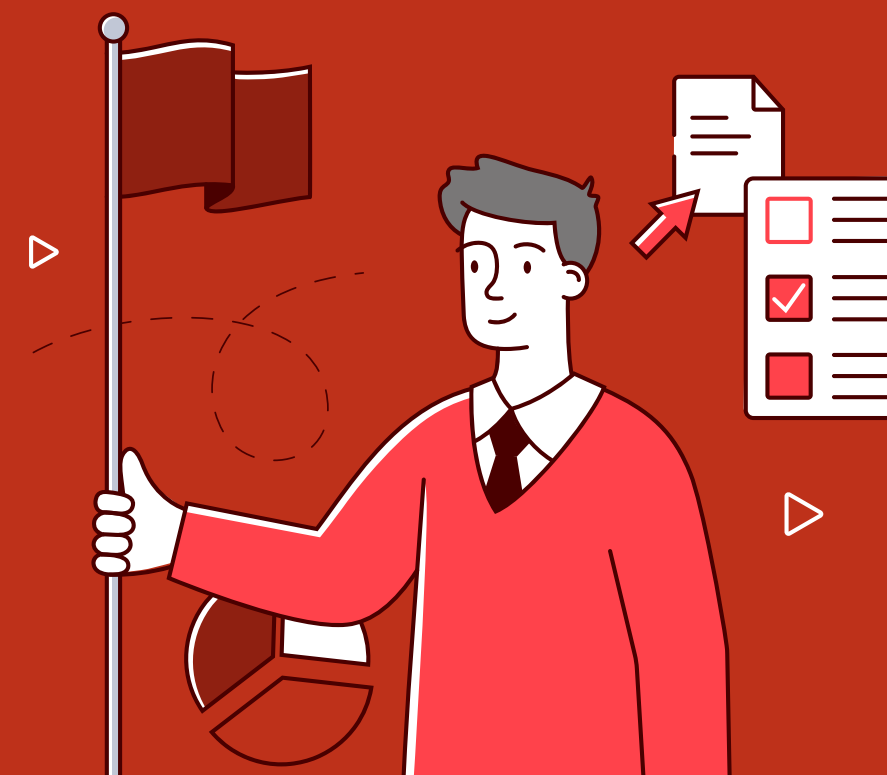
Melanie Medina Matute

Melanie Medina Matute

Senior PLAN Projects Analyst - J&J MedTech

Being a part of the newly formed Johnson & Johnson SDG pioneers community that arose following the training has been an extraordinary privilege. This community stands as a dynamic hub, uniting Johnson & Johnson individuals who are like-minded and share a common vision of fostering positive change in both the world and within the JNJ business. It provides a platform for ongoing learning, collaboration, and the collective pursuit of making an impact.

— This
community
stands as a
dynamic hub.



Lessons learned

LESSON 1 | Reserve sufficient time for a shared problem analysis

Building a community focused on sustainability requires a shared and clear understanding of the organization's sustainability challenges, which proved to be a more time-consuming process than initially anticipated. It became evident that the collective analysis of problems, discussion of root causes, and understanding of consequences take considerable time, more than expected, but are essential since the problem analysis serves as the foundation for identifying the community's goals and focus areas. At the same time, it is also clear that excessive deliberation can be counterproductive, as ambassadors require action to sustain their motivation and enthusiasm.

LESSON 2 | Account for ambassadors' limited time

Ambassadors typically have packed schedules, making it challenging to allocate time for course preparation and assignments. Many participants even found it difficult to reserve time to attend the course. At Johnson & Johnson, a two-hour workshop was the maximum time employees could do. Hence, it's essential for educators to scale back their ambitions and align with the daily realities of course participants.

LESSON 3 | Significance of activities between workshops

It was increasingly realized that the course, while valuable, is just one component of building a strong and effective community. The true essence of the community emerges during the community meetings conducted separately from the course. In these meetings, members collaborate on tangible projects and actions, fostering mutual trust among participants and building rapport with the community host. To facilitate this, it was beneficial to provide sufficient time (typically three weeks) between workshops. Trust takes time to develop.

LESSON 4 | Invest in ambassadors' SDG literacy

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as the linchpin of the community approach. It became clear that ambassadors, despite being all sustainability enthusiasts, possess varying levels of knowledge regarding the SDGs. To foster alignment, it is imperative to ensure that ambassadors are well-informed about the content and context of the SDGs at the outset of the community building trajectory.

LESSON 5 | Recognize the challenge of the broadness of the SDGs

While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a comprehensive framework, they can also be (too) abstract from a community perspective. It's easier to generate excitement around a specific, concrete goal, such as reducing medical waste or supporting minority girls in their education. This is perhaps the biggest challenge of working with SDGs as overall framework for the community. To overcome this challenge, and enthuse employees for the broad theme of the SDGs, a compelling narrative is required (see lesson 6).

LESSON 6 | The SDGs hold the key to bridge different interests and initiatives and make more impact

The SDGs present a narrative filled with hope and potential, illustrating that positive change is attainable and that everyone has a role to play in a global movement dedicated to forging a better world. When viewed from a community perspective, the strength and appeal of the SDGs lie in their capacity to unify diverse sustainability dimensions and interests under a common framework. The SDGs possess the exceptional ability to bridge disparities, thereby opening pathways to achieve greater impact than what could be realized by concentrating solely on individual sustainability themes. Within Johnson & Johnson's community, the shared language and framework of the SDGs was harnessed to successfully interconnect ongoing employee initiatives, such as diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI), Healthy Careers, and WeSustain.

LESSON 7 | Collaborate without competing

In Johnson & Johnson, numerous employee initiatives related to sustainability coexist, each with its goals and members. When interacting with existing employee initiatives, the community must be careful not to come across as a competitor vying for attention, resources, or members. Positioning the community as the "Sustainable Development Glue" in Belgium showcased its role in building connections rather than competing for the same resources.

LESSON 8 | Frame community engagement as a direct contribution to corporate strategy

In a context where sustainability is frequently viewed as an optional extra, community involvement might be regarded as a personal pastime suitable for leisure time. Understandably, some community members at Johnson & Johnson encountered difficulties in dedicating a working hours to community activities. We discovered that it is essential to consistently present community engagement as a valuable and direct contribution to the company's sustainability goals. This offers a compelling rationale for managers to permit their employees to allocate work hours to community initiatives.

LESSON 9 | Begin with a small group of Intrinsically motivated ambassadors

Starting with a relatively small group (up to 15 individuals) of intrinsically motivated ambassadors forms the core of the community. This small group creates a safe space to develop trust, lay the foundations of the community (including problem analysis, mission, and vision), and design an action plan. A group of this size is still large enough that any dropouts do not significantly impact the community. Ideally, an ambassador group comprises individuals with diverse talents: creative thinkers for brainstorming and conceptualizing, those capable of translating concepts into concrete actions and targets, skilled communicators and writers, influencers with strong social standing, and people with the time and energy to execute tasks.

LESSON 10 | Projects drive community action

Projects play a pivotal role in the transformation of a group of individual ambassadors into a cohesive, action-oriented community. The heart of this community lies in concrete actions, where its members find unity and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully. These projects serve as magnets, drawing in new members, creating substantial impact, and sustaining engagement over time. They are the lifeblood, indispensable for generating successes that not only endure but also fuel enthusiasm and motivation.





Veerle van Gool

Veerle van Gool

Community builder Johnson & Johnson Belgium

We have established three working groups within the community, through which we have initiated some exciting activities. First, an awareness campaign by the SDG community took place in the first week of March this year, during which we conducted a baseline assessment of SDG knowledge across different Johnson & Johnson campuses in Belgium. We also created an SDG workshop, "YOU! in Action for the SDGs", aimed at informing and inspiring participants to take action. We actively seek collaboration with other communities. Additionally, we've developed a cool sustainable gadget to distribute: 'Plant that seed,' a packet of seeds for flowers and herbs featuring the SDG logo and a QR code linking to our page.

It has been an incredibly inspiring journey, and I am very proud of what we have achieved in such a short time. I have personally undergone significant development, both professionally and personally. However, there are still plenty of challenges ahead. These include how to establish a strong connection among the various cohorts that have completed the pioneers' course, addressing the uncertainties and ambiguities of co-creation and self-governance, and making the SDG narrative tangible, bringing it from broad concepts to something concrete.

I would actually recommend any company that values grassroots engagement in sustainability to establish an SDG community. It's gratifying to empower the organization in this way. It's crucial to have an inspiring leader or sponsor and 100% backing from the leadership, providing them with all opportunities. Fortunately, we have that at Johnson & Johnson Benelux!

— It has been an incredibly inspiring journey and I am very proud of what we have achieved in such a short time.

LESSON 11 | Projects should reflect an integrated sustainability perspective

While single-issue projects would certainly be easier to 'sell' to employees (lesson 5 above), unlocking the full potential of a sustainability community implies having projects that adopt an integrated sustainability perspective. Only when such an integrated perspective is used, it become possible to unite individuals with diverse sustainability interests and promote cooperation among existing sustainability initiatives toward a common agenda (see lesson 6). Examples of such 'integrated' projects include those designed to enhance SDG literacy, facilitate connections between various sustainability initiatives, or advocate for sustainability criteria within appraisal procedures. On the contrary, projects that lack this comprehensive perspective, focusing solely on singular thematic aspects like CO2 emissions or staff diversity, can undermine the community's broader objectives and potential for holistic sustainability impact.

LESSON 12 | Onboard new members effectively

Creating a sense of belonging and ensuring new members feel like part of something bigger are essential for community cohesion. New members must spend time learning about the community, particularly the shared problem analysis, its mission, vision, and strategy. This fosters an appreciation for the community's foundations, making them come alive and connecting them to personal experiences. Additionally, new members, by learning about and reflecting on existing building blocks, validate and refresh the community's foundations.

LESSON 13 | Professional community hosting is vital

A dedicated community host is essential for the success of a community. In companies like Johnson & Johnson, where integrating sustainability into the core business is a primary objective, the community host should hold a professional (part-time) position. Similar to social movements, communities need informal leadership to thrive consistently. The roles fulfilled by a community host are diverse, requiring dedication and a wide range of skills. They play a critical role in creating a supportive and engaging environment, fostering a sense of belonging, and ensuring the community stays aligned with its purpose and objectives. In this capacity, a community host serves as a facilitator, informal leader, and activity coordinator while focusing on individual member motivations.

Mieke Capals

Mieke Capals

Senior Manager Pharma Quality Systems

I am trained as a bioengineer in environmental technology, but fate led me to the pharmaceutical industry. When the SDG Pioneer Community initiative was launched, I was immediately convinced to participate. I was raised with the fundamental value of 'showing respect for people and nature,' which is deeply ingrained in my DNA. Since childhood, I have always been highly sensitive to inequalities and injustices, both towards humanity and nature, when I observed them around me. Within Johnson & Johnson, I have thus become increasingly involved in certain internal networks dedicated to mental health and global sustainability.

Within the SDG community, I co-lead the Awareness and Education group along with Veerle [community host]. Our meetings are a source of tremendous energy and fulfillment for me; it's wonderful to come together with like-minded individuals. I now realize that all great things begin with pioneers. I am proud and honored to be part of this group of pioneers and to contribute to taking our company to a new level of sustainability.

— I wanted to contribute to that mission in every way possible, so I took the plunge.

LESSON 14 | Leadership support is essential

Leadership support is paramount for securing resources, not only for a community host and community activities but also to manage expectations and legitimize the community's mission of promoting sustainability. In an environment where sustainability efforts are often seen as mere add-ons, senior leadership support is crucial to framing community engagement as a valuable contribution to the company's strategy. Such support also enables the inner circle of ambassadors to dedicate some working hours to community work. Furthermore, when senior leadership champions the community, the ideas and actions initiated by the community hold more weight.

LESSON 15 | Balance autonomy and connection

A community's authenticity relies on member ownership, where members have a say in its mission, vision, goals, and activities. It is essential for the community to maintain autonomy, especially since intrinsic motivation underpins participation. However, it is equally important for the community to stay connected to leadership-driven sustainability efforts. A balance between bottom-up and top-down initiatives is vital for the community to thrive. This approach ensures that community activities align with broader company sustainability strategies, reinforcing and supporting each other.

LESSON 16 | Digital platforms enable community growth and outreach

As the community grows, a digital platform becomes essential. This platform serves as a hub for discussions, virtual meetings, and collaborative workspaces. It also offers a space for showcasing the community and its activities to external audiences. While online interaction is significant, especially for geographically dispersed teams, personal contacts and face-to-face conversations are what truly engage many ambassadors. The choice of communication channels and platforms should be discussed and aligned with the community members to avoid information overload.

LESSON 17 | Integrate organizational history and identity into community vision

A company's historical background and core values should heavily influence the mission and vision of its sustainability community. Using Johnson & Johnson as an example, their well-established credo, rooted in the visionary ideals of its founder Dr. Janssen, serves as a guiding principle that encompasses social responsibility and strategic direction. In Belgium, this was particularly noteworthy, highlighting that the company's commitment to sustainability has been an integral part of its identity since its inception. This historical commitment adds credibility to the community's efforts. In the Netherlands, the corporate credo appears to have a lesser impact, possibly because the company has a history of mergers and lack of a cohesive, shared history.

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Steps in kickstarting the community

Bernadette van Dijck & Willem Elbers

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From what we have learned, setting up and building a sustainability community involves several key steps:

- 1 Ensure leadership commitment:** Ensure ongoing leadership support to ensure the community is perceived as contributing to the company's strategy. Secure ample resources and establish clear expectations regarding the community's purpose and operation from the very beginning.
- 2 Appoint a dedicated community host:** Find somebody who is passionate about sustainability, preferably embedded within the sustainability department, with the ability to be an informal leader.
- 3 Identify ambassadors:** Assemble a small core group (typically 15-20) of sustainability enthusiasts from different departments and positions within the company. Ideal ambassadors possess diverse skills. The community host, who has to build relations with ambassadors, is responsible for identifying suitable candidates. A continuous inflow of new members is essential to infuse the community with fresh energy and expand its reach.
- 4 Organize training:** Provide training for both the community host and ambassadors to understand the fundamental building blocks of the community.
- 5 Define community goals:** Formulate community goals relevant to the company's context and the ambassador group's interests. To do so, engage ambassadors in a joint analysis of root causes and needed measures to address sustainability challenges. From the problem analysis, community goals addressing root causes logically follow.
- 6 Form project teams:** Because the SDGs can be broad and abstract, getting ambassadors to work on tangible and well-defined projects is essential. To keep people interested, do not wait too long before developing and implementing activities. Begin with both short-term and long-term projects that use an integrated sustainability approach whilst meeting individual interests. These will satisfy the need for action, secure involvement, and achieve quick wins while pursuing more strategic goals.
- 7 Organize regular events and activities:** Plan regular events, activities, or discussions that go beyond individual projects to maintain member engagement and enhance the community's visibility.

- 8 Build partnerships:** Connect with existing sustainability initiatives to explain the benefits of collaboration. Organize meetings between different initiatives to identify shared interests and goals. Building partnerships can be a project by itself, facilitated by the community host.
- 9 Select a community platform:** Choose an appropriate online platform for community members to meet and connect. While face-to-face meetings are essential, online platforms become necessary as the community grows. The platform should align with the community's goals and strategy.
- 10 Promote the community:** Spread the word about the community through various channels, including social media, newsletters, or personal outreach.
- 11 Celebrate milestones.** Recognize and celebrate important community milestones, such as achievements or anniversaries, to reinforce a sense of belonging and accomplishment.

These steps, while presented in a linear order, may overlap or occur differently in practice. Each step is critical for the community's success in achieving its goals and promoting sustainability within the company.



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