

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE: FROM UNAWARE TO BECOMING ENERGY CONSCIOUS

Submitted by: Team Energy

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In the wake of the pandemic, how can organisations embrace the opportunity to reset their energy efficiency habits? TEAM Energy's, Senior Energy Consultant, Sam Arje, explores how behaviour change training can support the journey from unaware to energy conscious.

Over the past few months, we have seen one of the largest behaviour change movements in history. Covid-19 has required us all to change the way we go about our everyday lives. The world we knew in January is very different from the world we know today. Globally, governments have issued guidance and enforced changes to help protect the population from the effects of Coronavirus, changes that over time have become the social norm. The public health initiative around the pandemic is a great example of how people can adapt and change.

This might be seen as an extreme example of behaviour change, and of course, I am in no way comparing the social, economic and emotional impact of a worldwide health pandemic, to your organisation looking to reduce its carbon emissions, but what this demonstrates is how leaders are very capable of driving change to what is considered “normal” when it is required.

So, what is behaviour change?

Behaviour change can be described as what happens when people make small differences to the “normal” things they do to create a new habit or way of doing things. To make something that is currently abnormal, normal, and habitual. To achieve their goals, people or companies shouldn't force others to change their actions or attitudes; real change comes about when individuals inspire other individuals with what they can achieve. When organisations look to invoke change, they need to create an enabling environment and provide opportunities for employees to inspire and be inspired by each other; it is the job of the organisation to make change feel safe and easy. Motivation for change is diverse and scalable – which is why successful change programmes take time and commitment.

As it stands, there is no formal requirement for organisations to change their “normal” with regards to attitudes towards reducing carbon emissions. There are, of course, heavy financial costs through taxation and utility bills, maybe some reputational effects and almost certainly some ethical questions need to be answered. To many organisations though, these affects might not be enough of an incentive to consider a strategy of carbon emission reduction through changing the behaviour that is engrained within the company's culture.

For organisations looking to begin their journey towards energy consciousness, or to embrace some of the questions they may already be asking themselves about their energy and sustainability habits, let us consider the five typical stages that are involved in a behavioural change programme.

1 Precontemplation – before you realise change is needed

Many organisations are at this first stage, also known as precontemplation. At this point behaviour change around lowering energy consumption, reducing waste and being more energy efficient has not been

considered or appreciated that it might be of value. You are quite happy with the way things are and you may not yet see value in considering change.

2 Contemplation – you recognise a need for change

The next stage is contemplation. You now actively recognise the need to change a behaviour. This stage is when consideration needs to be made for the value of the change, finding, and activating a motivating belief. This is possibly the most difficult stage to be in. You acknowledge that something needs to be done, but may not know where to begin. For some organisations, they might consider outsourcing support.

3 Determination – planning and preparing for change

The determination stage is the point when an organisation starts preparing for action, it is a very important phase. Preparing your organisation's actions to succeed in changing the social norm you have in mind is critical. You rarely get a second chance to get your organisation to shift their working norms. Consideration needs to be made to the scale and scope of the changes you are looking to put in place. Be inspired by practices that suit the ambitions of your organisation. If you set realistic goals, your success will motivate further change. What works for another organisation might not be right for yours, so at this time, really focus on what your organisation needs.

4 Action – the beginnings of wisdom and change

The action stage is where the first steps are taken towards change and becoming Energy Conscious. At this stage, your carefully planned programme has started. All those months (or longer) spent planning at the determination stage are now starting to come to fruition. Your ideas are becoming a reality.

5 Maintenance – continue and encourage new behaviour and beliefs

At this final stage you have become a more Energy Conscious organisation, and your new learned behaviours continue. It is the continuation at this time that is key. It is important to recognise that this stage can come with challenges; it takes time and commitment to sustain change and keep up the momentum. However, keep in mind the long-term benefits as they will outweigh the efforts that will come. The strategies you used to initiate the campaign are not the same as the strategies needed at this stage to maintain the campaign. As habits start to change across the organisation, so too does the way you are making those habits evolve. Remember, you are implementing the change in culture in your organisation. Because people will be adapting to change at different rates, you may need to introduce different techniques and strategies to revive the momentum and motivate certain groups differently. Be smart here. Seek feedback from around the organisation as to what is working and what is not so you can make relevant tweaks to your campaign.

Looking to the future

Like many organisations, you may find yourself at stage one on the behaviour change timeline. Looking forward, think about the benefits of moving through the stages.

If you are at this point and still unsure about adopting a behaviour change programme, firstly consider the ambitions of the UK government and its 2050 Net Zero target. As part of a drive to encourage more sustainable practice, we have already seen the introduction of a new legislation with the Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting (SECR) regulations, which requires businesses to conduct environmental reporting. As we move towards the 2050 deadline, there may be further regulations put in place and more challenging targets to reach. By taking steps now to become an energy conscious organisation, you can mitigate the potential impact of these measures and elevate your organisation's contribution to the net zero goal.

Then there is the benefit of the return on your investment in the form of cost savings and reduced overheads. Running a behaviour change campaign around energy saving, carbon reduction and sustainability can also be one of the best payback investments you will make. As an organisation you must be able to dedicate time, especially at the preparation stage, but a change programme does not have to cost a lot to implement.

The culture within your organisation may have been in place for many years, therefore, time is needed to change it. However, the adoption of sustainable behaviours and positive organisational values, particularly if led well from senior management, contribute greatly to staff morale and a better working environment.

Break the cycle

We have all experienced a huge amount of change in the past few months. As organisations open their premises and workers return to their adjusted environments, rather than return to business as usual, consider if it worth taking the opportunity to "reset" your energy habits? Now more than ever, it might just be an opportune time to change your organisation's energy practices and develop a behaviour change programme to lead you to energy efficiency and sustainability success.

Learn more about how Behaviour Change training (<https://www.teamenergy.com/team-energy-consultancy/behaviour-change-programmes-for-sustainable-business/>) can help your organisation to become more sustainable and Energy conscious.

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Notes to Editors

For further information, please contact:

Daniella Catanzaro – Senior Marketing Executive

TEAM Energy

Phone: +44 (0)1908 690018 Ext 205

Email: dcatanzaro@teamenergy.com

EDW House, Radian Court, Knowlhill, Milton Keynes, MK5 8PJ

www.teamenergy.com

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