The Changing Role of Sustainability Professionals

In an ever changing job market, we often wonder what our next step will be. For sustainability professionals, the question is: what are employers looking for and how can I make myself more attractive? For those who would like to make the transition into the field of Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainability also wonder how to do so. These questions are rife, especially in the Middle Eastern markets where there are less formalized roles for sustainability positions at a high level.

Markets around the world are creating new positions for top tier sustainability professionals and over the last few years large companies have begun appointing Chief Sustainability Officer’s (CSO’s) to assist in increasing their company’s sustainability efforts in strategic ways. In a recent report published by Footprint Talent and WAP Sustainability Consulting titles ‘The State of the CSO – an Evolving Profile’, the growth, resilience and evolution of the function of sustainability is explored. With sustainability growing year by year, the report states that the expansion of such roles will continue growing rapidly over the next five years.

With the effects of the recession beginning to fade, most companies are beginning to look at their sustainability agendas again and we are approaching an era of ‘responsible recovery’. (see Dubai Dialogue 2011 article on page 3)

As companies reprioritize their sustainability agenda, a key area of importance is to find the right person to lead the process and giving them the right access to leaders in the organization. Currently 64 percent of CSO’s and other sustainability leaders are reporting directly to their Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – this figure is predicted to increase to 77 percent over the next five years. This figure illustrates the strategic importance of sustainability to the operation of organizations especially as the reported key motivating factors of companies have been identified as cost savings, competitive advantage, environmental benefits and customer demand. This is a shift from the past where motivating factors community benefits, employee attraction and retention.

With the evolution of incentives and desired outcomes, the skill set needed by a sustainability leader in organizations is also evolving. In the past, an individual with passion, strong interpersonal skills and an environmental background would have been sufficient to be successful in the role. However with sustainability growing as a strategic priority in organizations, skills that are valued in such leaders include the ability to think strategically, prioritize, plan, communicate, delegate and direct. The study reported that there is less preference for soft skills and more on management based experience. The general consensus of companies who expect their sustainability leaders to deliver a return on investment is that these professionals must not only have hard skills (such as LEAN/ Six Sigma), they must also be agile and responsive to policy changes, be able to monetize risks and make the link between business ability and sustainability applications. A full list of desired skills sets can be seen in Figure 1 on the following page.

In regards to formal qualifications, business degrees such as an MBA is considered an asset for sustainability leaders as they best address training needs. It is interesting to note that the qualities that organizations would like their leaders to posses are those that are taught at business schools and within MBA curriculums.

How much can a Sustainability Professional Expect to Earn?

The salary range for sustainability professional can vary depending on the market they are working in. According to the Corporate Responsibility Salary Survey for 2010 published by Acre, Acono and Ethical Performance, salaries have been static over the last three years in all markets. In 2011 we can expect increases for both in-house sustainability professionals and consultants.

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However the increment in salary levels does depend on the sector and the profitability of the organization. On average, according to the report, the Technology and Construction & Property sectors offer the highest salaries for Sustainability professionals. (Figure 2)

In the UAE, less data is available on salary trends in sustainability and CSR. However, a recent report release by Gulf Talent has indicated that most salaries irrespective of sector will increase a minimum of 7 percent in 2011. This is encouraging for all, especially sustainability professionals who have faced uncertainty over the last few years. While there have been discrepancies in salary distribution between geographical regions, there is a likelihood of a correction occurring in the next 12 months.

Another key issue that has arisen through such studies being conducted is the gender gap in the sustainability sector. On average the gender split is reported to be 56:44 in favor of women by Acre and Ethical Performance. However, despite the large number of women in sustainability – women are paid less on average than men and also occupy less senior roles. The survey found an uncomfortable fact that women are paid less than men. This is dependant upon individual positions however there are real questions about the state of gender equity in this sector.

These trends are global and as sustainability professionals we should begin to practice what we preach and ensure that for all sectors and professions equal pay is given for equal work.

To conclude, the sustainability sector is comprised of well educated and passionate individuals who have a high level of satisfaction with their work and their roles.

While there are pay gaps between genders and geographical discrepancies, as a sector they are well compensated. The recession has not eliminated the need for sustainability professionals, on the contrary the demand is higher than ever before and the scope and breadth of roles that are available are increasing regularly. As the UAE and the Middle East continue to increase investment into sustainability, the right investment must also be made into their sustainability professionals in order for them to develop and add value back to their organizations.

Launch of CSR Toolkits

The Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) has recently launched 6 Toolkits on Corporate Social Responsibility which cover the environment, marketplace, workplace, community, stakeholders strategy and CSR communication. These toolkits will serve as CSR awareness guides, management tools and support for those who would like to apply and achieve the Dubai Chamber CSR Label and the Dubai business community to achieve their CSR aspirations.

The main aim of the toolkits is to raise CSR awareness among the business community. As such, each Toolkit provides information on a specific topic and its link with CSR. The toolkits have also been designed to stress the business benefits in taking action and the risks of being inactive.

The toolkits rely on easy to understand international and local best practices and also cover local regulation. Through the toolkits, the Dubai Chamber demonstrates that is possible for any company to be involved in CSR irrespective of sector or size. The toolkits also provide companies with a CSR management tool. CSR is an essential strategy that can help businesses become more competitive both locally and internationally. As such, three types of companies have been identified: companies that want to start a CSR process, companies that have already taken actions and companies that seek to be best in class. For each category, the Toolkits offer steps for further actions and a set of questions be answered. Following these steps will lead to a CSR management process and allow companies to strive towards continuous improvement.

Lastly, the Toolkits provide companies with a relevant and accurate support regarding the Dubai Chamber CSR Label. The Dubai Chamber CSR Label is a CSR framework launched at the end of 2010 is used by companies to manage their CSR strategy and receive recognition. A growing number of companies have decided to follow this CSR framework as it is locally relevant. The first companies to be awarded will be disclosed shortly.

To find out more information on the Dubai Chamber CSR Toolkits at www.dubaichamber.com/csrtoolkits
How Your Employees Can Volunteers with Us

ENGAGE Dubai has begun 2011 with a bang. Following a very successful year in 2010 where more than 300 volunteers gave their time to give back to their communities, we have had an unprecedented level of interest in the program as it continues to grow steadily. Our efforts were recognized by the CEO of Business in the Community UK, Stephen Howard, who sent a congratulatory message to our participants, played at the ENGAGE Dubai recognition ceremony in January. ENGAGE Dubai is currently one of the most vibrant and largest ENGAGE chapters globally.

So far this year, two organizations (KPMG and Unilever) have assisted our new community partner, the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWAC) by providing support to the Media and Human Trafficking Forum as well as donating all the non perishable food items needed for 2011 for their residents. A big thank you to both who stepped up and assisted with minimum notice. We will be holding more volunteering opportunities with the DFWAC this year.

We have had volunteers from FEDEX and TNT Express who have also given their time to lecture students on sustainability at the University of Dubai. ENGAGE Dubai sends guest lecturers to the university every semester to encourage students to learn about sustainability through real life case studies.

ENGAGE Dubai also supported the annual Al Noor Funfair for the second year by sending 415 volunteers from companies such as DNATA, Union National Bank, TNT Express, DLA Piper, FEDEX, ENOC, Nakheel, Dubai Chamber of Commerce, Barclays Capital, Serco, Rakbank, Lootah Gas, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, DLA Piper, Manipal University , CHEP Holding, Dugas among many others. ENGAGE Dubai constituted the majority of the volunteers who were present on the day and helped make sure the funfair ran smoothly. ENGAGE Dubai is an important supporter of the funfair and our partnership with the Al Noor Centre for Children with Special Needs is long term and sustainable. While donations are critical for operating this is not the only support community partners require. Charities and voluntary organizations often lack manpower for events or projects and this is where companies can add real value. Volunteering programs, like ENGAGE Dubai, also have a positive and long lasting impact on companies by enhancing the skills of their staff, increasing employees’ motivation and encouraging them to have a greater sense of belonging in the community.

Fourth time at the Address Dubai Mall. This year, the theme of Dubai Dialogue is Responsible Recovery and we will explore the lessons learnt from the crisis, the evolving roles of the private sector and the importance of social media in recovery. Attracting over 300 participants, Dubai Dialogue has become the largest CSR and sustainability conference in the UAE and will see prominent speakers come together for the first time to the Middle East. Speakers presenting include:

- Mallen Baker, Founding Director, Business Respect
- Dr Alan Knight, Founder, Single Planet Living
- Gerald Lawless, Executive Chairman, Jumeirah Group
- Dr Stephen Brammer, Warwick Business School

To find out more and to attend the Dubai Dialogue 2011 please visit www.dubaichamber.com/responsiblerecovery

The result of sustainability conference Dubai Dialogue: Responsible Recovery on 27 April 2011.

The Dubai Dialogue: Responsible Recovery conference will be held for the
Who Do You Trust? A look at how trust has become a valuable commodity

Trust is the most valuable asset for an organization’s brand, image and has tangible value. As trust in an organization increases, sales and loyalty tend to increase and as a result the brand becomes stronger. Trust has become an essential part of doing business and of recovering from the global financial crisis.

While trust in business organizations have stabilized, according to the recent release of the Edelman Trust Barometer for 2011, this trust is different from before and thus is conditional, based upon what the organization does and more importantly what it communicates. In the past, organizations used a ‘fortress’ framework where brands were protected, information was controlled, recently a new model has arisen. This model can be termed as a ‘trust triangle’ where there is an expectation for companies to act collaboratively to benefit society, be transparent and communicate openly through various forms including social media. Trust has become not a commodity that can be bought, but is a privilege for a lucky few who conduct themselves accordingly.

Trust protects reputation. While that may seem to be an obvious statement, the correlation between how easily people believe the bad in a distrusted company can be seen in Figure 1.

Recent results show that trust in governments has increased radically in China, Brazil and Japan however in markets such as Germany and the USA, it has decreased in relation to the increase in trust in businesses.

Technology firms are at the top of most trusted sectors followed by automotive and telecommunications. One example is how many technology firms are continuing their services to Wikileaks thus sending strong messages to consumers about their beliefs and values and positively impacting trust levels.

Another interesting turn of events occurred recently where the board overseeing the AA1000 standards resigned en masse. AA1000 standards is a widely used corporate responsibility standard and was established by AccountAbility in the UK. AccountAbility recently announced that they would be taking a new strategic route and undertaking a shift from a think tank/policy and research body to offering CSR consultancy services as well as overseeing the AA1000 standards. The mass resignation has come as a result of offering such consultancy services (which may integrate elements of the standards), are a conflict of interest as there is no clear separation of standards and services. This has resulted in mistrust in many pockets around the world as some of the most respected names are criticizing the move by AccountAbility. This issue shows that not even firms that specialize in corporate responsibility are immune from the expectations and side effects of a drop in trust from the stakeholders.

The expectations of the community are that businesses invest more time and effort to create stakeholder value. The concept that a business should be accountable for their actions just as individuals are is the underlying lesson for all. As information becomes more freely available, there are no secrets. Organizations attempting to conceal issues are rewarded with high levels of mistrust. The tables have turned and are now facing a direction that is correct. We are all interconnected we all must assume responsibility for the good, the bad and the ugly.