

Fostering a Sustainability Culture

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SUMMARY

- NWS and NDA Group are committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals for a fairer, greener world by 2030
- Yet, the UN Global Compact's Halfway to 2030 report shows that the UK is only performing well on 21% of these goals. So how do we better connect people with action?
- NWS has built a cultural maturity framework, based on the Inner Development Goals, to understand how our organisational culture fosters the intrinsic qualities, behaviours and mindset to meaningfully contribute to a more sustainable world

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Nuclear Waste Services

Nuclear Waste Services was formed in 2022, to create a positive legacy for people and the planet by making nuclear waste permanently safe sooner. Our strategic objectives are:

- Putting the right waste is in the right package in the right facility at the right time
- Accelerating decommissioning by innovation
- Driving value for the UK taxpayer

We achieve these objectives by: operating the UK's Low Level Waste Repository (LLWR); managing a framework of waste treatment, packaging and logistics services; finding a suitable site and willing host community for the UK's Geological Disposal Facility, and; through our role in the Integrated Waste Management Programme, delivering new sustainable waste management capabilities for the UK.



Figure 1 - The United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals [1]

As part of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), NWS contributes to the NDA's vision of transforming nuclear legacies into opportunities for sustainable development [2]. NWS's five sustainability goals align to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG's) (Figure 1) – a global framework of 17 goals for a fairer and greener world by 2030.

1.2 Our Starting Point

Bringing two organisations with two pre-existing cultures together as a single organisation is both a cultural challenge and opportunity.

Early in the process, employees were engaged in developing our Corporate Values that bind us together and establish what it means to be part of NWS. Our Standards and Expectations guide individual behaviours and practical application of our corporate values. Sustainability is identified as one of these Standards (Figure 3), meaning that NWS colleagues are already expected and encouraged to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability in the same way as their commitment to safety, security, continuous improvement, professionalism, wellbeing and respect for others.

Establishing Sustainability in this framework presents a clear message to our employees – that sustainability is part of our DNA and it is everyone's responsibility.

Yet, there is more to do. Our first annual employee engagement survey in 2022 told us that:

- Our colleagues desire an organisational mandate and clear definition of what sustainability means for NWS;
- They want to understand "how" to deliver their roles sustainably?
- They are open to new ways of working more sustainably, with motivation for change, but lack of clear direction and empowerment.

In 2023, NWS Board, NDA, Executive team, Trade Unions and teams across the organisation also shared their views on the most material sustainability issues for NWS. Both processes showed close alignment between sustainability, NWS core mission and the issues our employees and stakeholders deem to be important – which gives us a strong starting point for engaging and empowering people through our work on culture.

In a process-oriented, compliance-driven industry, permission is an interesting concept. How can we empower people to act without permission in pursuit of our social and environmental goals? How do we build the courage and confidence for people to instinctively do the right thing? How can we emulate the questioning attitude of a healthy nuclear safety culture by taking a "why wouldn't we?" approach to sustainability?

2. WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY CULTURE?

Culture can be defined as the attitudes, behaviours and opinions of a group of people within society, which shape social behaviour [3]. It is the "way we do things round here" [4]. In the complex social systems that we call organisations, culture is highly influential when embedding change and is the medium within which our sustainability efforts will flourish or wither.

Over recent years, the corporate spotlight has been on sustainability and stakeholder scrutiny of organisations' sustainability performance is increasing, as is its significance in people's (especially young people's) career choices [5, 6]. As a result, sustainability has become a strategic imperative.

Fostering a sustainability culture is essential to enable organisations to adapt to and shape the changing world within which we work. Leading thinking on sustainability leadership [7] within and by organisations highlights the need for leaders to articulate how organisational purpose addresses big societal and environmental issues, while connecting people to that purpose (Figure 3).

In this rapidly changing world, a new leadership is required, to connect people to purpose in pursuit of sustainable development. In Higher Ground, Taylor highlights the importance of an integrated approach across ethics, sustainability, compliance and employee engagement, recognising the interconnectedness of internal corporate culture and external societal, cultural and environmental issues and trends [9, 10].

The following sections provide examples of how we are working to become a purpose-led organisation.

3. FOSTERING A SUSTAINABILITY CULTURE

Culture is a focus of our transformation programme, centred on our corporate values:



Figure 2 - NWS Sustainability Standard & Expectations

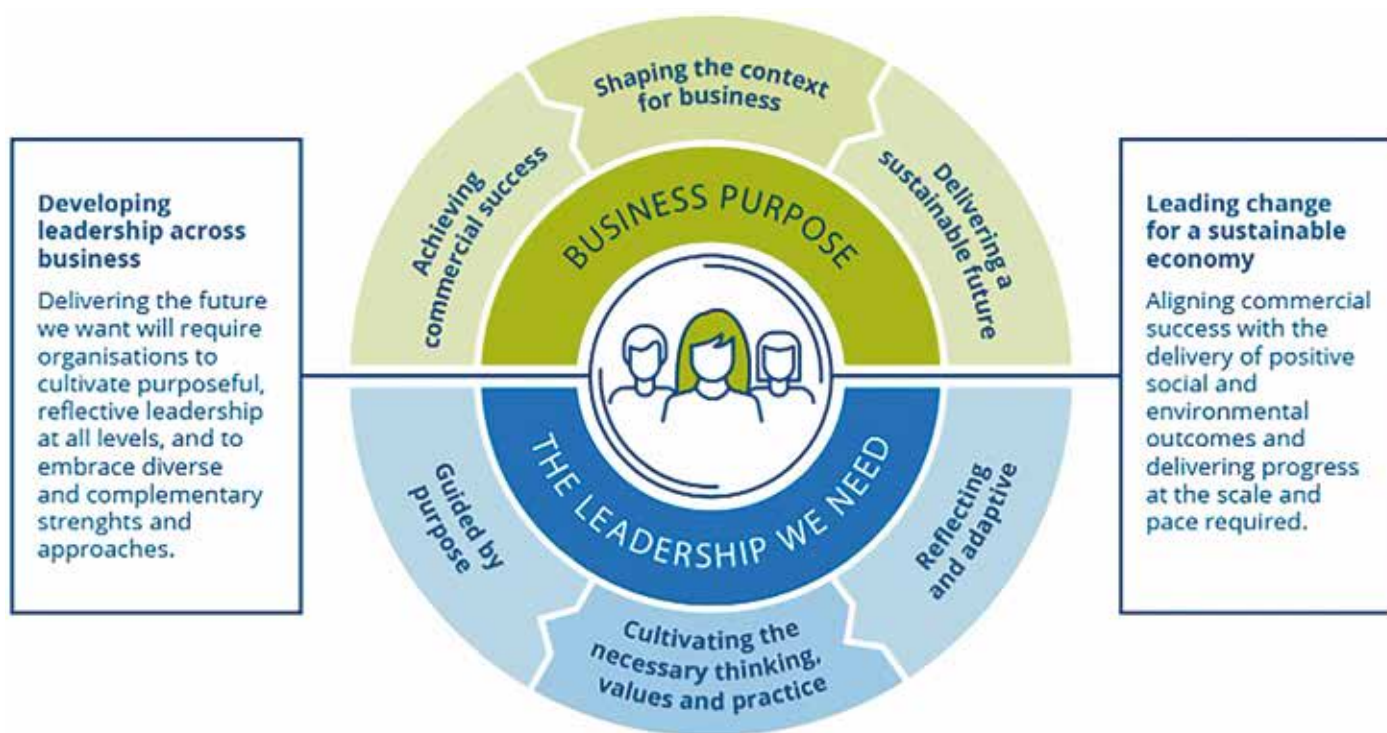


Figure 3 – Cambridge High Impact Leadership Model (© CISL) [8]

- **We are Action-oriented:** we deliver for our customers, partners and people safely and securely
- **We are Ambitious:** we are problem solvers who embrace and act upon new challenges
- **We are Collaborative and Inclusive:** we have greater success when we work together
- **We act with Integrity:** we are trusted to build a safe, secure and sustainable future

In 2023, we started to research best practice and leading thinking on what a sustainable culture looks and feels like and how we might go about sensing how our sustainability culture is maturing over time. We combined the Inner Development Goals, RSA's 10 Capabilities for a life-centric future and Cambridge High Impact Leadership models into a cultural maturity framework.

3.1 Inner Development Goals

Recent research suggests that we lack the inner capabilities to tackle the ever-increasing complexities of interconnected global societal and environmental challenges, which correlates with the lack of global progress seen towards the UN SDG's [11]. To combat this, the Inner Development Goals (IDG's) were co-created



Figure 4 - Five dimensions organising skills and qualities of human inner growth and development [13]

by subject matter experts and researchers in this field to help cultivate inner human qualities that are required to transform society via contribution to the UN SDGs [12]. The IDG's provide a framework (Figure 4) for lifelong development of cognitive, emotional and interpersonal capacity towards service to the world.

The IDG framework is designed to be simple and comprehensible to the modern mind. It deliberately differs from modern cultural norms, breaking away from a focus on development of individual competencies. This is a different way of thinking for a highly regulated, compliance-driven industry, where competency in areas such as nuclear operations is critically important. But the IDGs research identifies that notions of individual progress, development and success correlate with the lack of understanding of humans as part of nature and individual as servant to others.

By prioritising intrinsic skills and qualities such as moral compass and humility that naturally inhibit extrinsic motivations such as achievement and status, the framework challenges cultural normative definitions of corporate and individual success [13]. In many ways these are the characteristics of an inclusive, innovative, high performing culture and so we believe that this framework provides a sound basis to grow as a purpose-led organisation.

Sense-making, systems-thinking, continuous learning through experimentation and a willingness to learn through failure could be challenging to long-established public sector risk management practices. So how do we connect people at the individual level to a common purpose – at the intersection of competent nuclear operations and capacity for sustainable change?

The key lies in tapping into personal motivations. Could a technical specialist care passionately about climate change? Could a construction project manager be a protector of natural habitats? Could our head of regulatory compliance also care for people and

communities? The answer to all of these questions is, of course, that they could. The trick is to seek out tangible ways to enable people to align personal values with organisational purpose.

3.2 Cultural Maturity Framework

We are exploring how to apply the IDG framework as a tool to understand our starting point and journey towards a purpose-led culture, blending in aspects of the Cambridge High Impact Leadership model and the characteristics of a life-centric business identified by the RSA's "Regenerative Capabilities Coalition" [14].

For each of the five dimensions of the IDGs (Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating and Acting), we defined indicators on a scale from "Adverse Culture" to "Sustainability Leadership Culture". Figure 5 shows the indicators for Relating. An equivalent framework has been developed for each of the other four dimensions.

This construct enables us to identify approaches to sense how individuals exhibit these intrinsic traits themselves and also what they see and feel – are others living our values and displaying the characteristics of sustainability leadership? This double perspective from an individual standpoint provides two key benefits:

- It helps to shine a light on the value-action gap – the dissonance between people's espoused values and their actions;
- It avoids conflating intrinsically and extrinsically motivated behaviours, which would undermine the foundation of the cultural maturity framework in the IDGs.

As a very simple first step, we conducted a survey of a small sample of 10 colleagues across all parts of our organisation, asking them a single question about each of the five dimensions, phrased in terms of both self and others.

Example – how strongly do you agree with the following:

1. I always live our corporate values
2. Others always live our corporate values

The results showed a difference between self-perception and perception of others, with "self" consistently rated higher than

"others". This variability highlights the need to account for this difference in the design of cultural interventions, and points towards the importance of increasing visible actions and role modelling of sustainability leadership behaviours in order to close the self versus other perception gap.

Overall, this initial survey confirmed that the cultural maturity framework works as a useful tool to understand culture.

"One of the reasons I do the job I do is so I can hopefully help to leave the world a better place for everyone." - NWS Sustainability Culture Survey Response

4. NEXT STEPS

Fostering a sustainability culture is a long-term non-linear process, that will be achieved by individuals building intrinsic connection to sustainability through development of the capacities in the cultural maturity framework.

Having received significant interest in the cultural maturity framework at WM Symposium in Phoenix in 2024, we are starting to test and apply it in our work. This includes blending aspects into our NWS culture design approach being implemented as part of the next phase of our internal Transformation programme. Central to this are cultural guidelines and a cultural diagnostic asking, "when we get it right, what will our NWS culture look and feel like?"

We have also engaged across NDA Group, with NDA, Sellafeld, Nuclear Restoration Services and Nuclear Transport Solutions, to test the theory and identify ways to influence how we develop the leadership required as purpose-led organisations. This work has fed into a review of the NDA Leadership Standard to ensure that our leaders and managers across the NDA Group's 17,000 employees are developing the characteristics, mindsets and behaviours required to foster a sustainability culture.

We are keen to engage and learn from others on this journey of discovery, so please reach out if you would like to hear more or collaborate in our cultural adventure!

Inner Development Goals		Cultural Maturity Indicators			
	Skills & Qualities	Adverse Culture	Emerging Sustainability Culture	Growing Sustainability Culture	Culture of Sustainability Leadership
Relating	Appreciation: <i>Relating to others and to the world with a basic sense of appreciation, gratitude and joy.</i>	Low understanding of the impact of NWS mission on people and planet.	Impact of mission delivery on people and planet recognised as important.	People and planet respected as important stakeholders in mission delivery.	Interactions driven by citizenship, stewardship and good neighbour responsibility.
	Connectedness: <i>Having a keen sense of being connected with and/or being a part of a larger whole, such as a community, humanity or global ecosystem.</i>	Individualist attitudes dominate interactions.	Connectivity and social interaction encouraged.	Social interaction is an important driver of performance.	Individuals feel a deep sense of belonging within NWS and wider context.
	Humility: <i>Being able to act in accordance with the needs of the situation without concern for one's own importance.</i>	Interactions are functional, with limited social connection between individuals and across teams.	Thinking systems dominate, with feelings acknowledged.	Feeling and thinking systems valued without judgement in interactions.	People show care for all people and the planet in what we do and how we do it.
	Empathy and Compassion: <i>Ability to relate to others, oneself and nature with kindness, empathy and compassion and address related suffering.</i>	No consideration for people and nature. "Feelings, what feelings?" Success defined by winning, achievement and status.	Feelings feature in conversations, driven mostly by health and wellbeing. Emerging understanding of collaborative success.	We succeed together – NWS, people, planet. Our stories reference people and/or life.	Individual and collective responsibility taken for externalities of mission delivery. Our stories are characterised by life, people and feelings.

Figure 5 - Cultural Maturity framework: extract for "Relating" dimension of IDGs

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Rob is Sustainability Lead for Nuclear Waste Services. Leading and building collaboration towards socio-economic and environmental goals has been the focus of his career, including helping to establish the first Community Partnerships in the UK's GDF siting process.

He holds Master's degrees in Leadership from Lancaster University Management School and Engineering from Edinburgh University and is an alumnus of the Cambridge Institute of Sustainability Leadership. He is a Chartered Fellow of the UK Chartered Management Institute and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.



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