

Membership case study: Gearbulk



Good housekeeping should start at home

Gearbulk has already embarked on many initiatives to reduce the organisation's environmental impact and improve our social contribution but it is important to embed the concept of sustainability and ensure the adoption of sustainable business practices and processes across the organisation to maximise our potential not just internally but also from increased collaboration with other stakeholders

CONTEXT & OBJECTIVES:

Transformational change to create a sustainable business can only come about through the wholesale buy in of all staff from board level to the 'shop floor'. At Gearbulk, we believe that implementing our sustainability vision will be delivered not through top down/bottom up or centralised approaches but by creating a multi-level, cross-organisational process that will support our sustainability agenda worldwide while taking account of cultural, national or even local considerations.

Our objective was to embed sustainability across the organisation, create a local resource in each of our areas of operation to act as our sustainability ambassadors, both internally and externally, to champion innovation and encourage the sharing of best practice and experiences.

SOLUTION

We decided the most practical approach to ensure engagement across the organisation was to create a group-wide Sustainability Steering Group to work with the Sustainability Manager to develop and deliver a Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan.

This Group's aims and responsibilities were carefully defined with guidance from a sustainability consultant and endorsed by Gearbulk's executive leadership team. The Group's members were recruited on the basis of a mix of enthusiasm for the role, job relevance and influencing capacity. All our offices are represented, having at least one member per office and up to three in our larger offices.

An inaugural Group meeting was held to get to know each other, share ideas and develop our strategy and focus areas. We engaged a Sustainability Director from Interface Flor,

a company acknowledged worldwide to be sustainability leaders, to inspire and demonstrate successful strategies to the group. This presentation was videoed to provide a valuable resource for sustainability awareness development for our staff worldwide.

Our CEO Kristian Jebsen delivered a powerful talk, emphasising the importance to him personally and the company of embarking on this process to deliver our sustainability vision.

We used The Five Capitals model to frame a better understanding of Gearbulk's impact on and interaction with the five stocks of capital assets which we and all other organisations use to deliver our products and services – human, social, manufactured, natural and financial. Small working groups discussed ways that the Five Capital concept could be adopted and integrated into the Gearbulk culture and business process.

Subsequent to this meeting, these working groups continued their collaboration, mainly through video conferencing, to develop their ideas which formed the basis for the Strategic focus areas each with specific actions and Key Performance Indicators for each of the Five Capitals of the Strategic Action Plan.



Fundamental to the success of this group's success has been the harnessing of the company's communication systems to raise the profile of sustainability and show where progress is being made - the company's intranet, its quarterly magazine and even the CEO and COO's Quarterly Business Review presentation are used to guarantee exposure to all our employees.

This method of embedding sustainability into our organisation works very well for Gearbulk. With our employees aligned to our sustainability goals, we can influence and collaborate with our stakeholders to scale up our objectives and achievements. This may be a useful model for other companies.

OUTCOMES

- A Strategic Action plan for sustainability has given the company clear direction
- By embedding sustainability in our core management systems and processes, sustainability takes a prominent role when evaluating risks and opportunities in business decisions. This leads to more productive relationships with our stakeholders, particularly our customers who can see the added value we bring to their supply chain. The work our Sustainable Steering Group has been engaged in has raised commercial awareness within the organisation of the competitive advantage that comes with being recognised as a responsible business partner
- By setting objectives and measuring performance, real benefits can be demonstrated, for example our Waste Elimination Project is increasing recycling rates for cargo securing equipment on board our vessels and thus helping to reduce our operating costs

What's next?

We will continue to refine and improve the way the Sustainability Steering Group works together and contributes to the organisation. The group will develop current projects and support new initiatives which promote our sustainability agenda. In time, we hope to develop one or more projects into wider applications, maybe within the Sustainable Shipping Initiative or even further afield.



What are the first steps people can take to replicate this idea/initiative?

1. **Test ambition & ensure active support.**

Test ambition and ensure active support from executive management

2. **Skills and enthusiasm.**

Recruit carefully and ask for expressions of interest from ALL staff to achieve a balanced group that truly represents, and can connect to, the whole organisation. Ensure the group composition has sufficient expertise by having representation from all departments. Enthusiasm counts for a lot.

3. **Lay the groundwork.**

It's essential to spend sufficient time to prepare the groundwork before launching the initiative, it is easier to engage people positively from the outset than try and re-engage them after a failed attempt.



More information:

www.gearbulk.com/
www.gearbulk.com/sustainability