... towards a sustainable future

Scaling-up:
Learning to embed sustainability skills and knowledge in the workplace

Final Project Report

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Executive Summary

“A new business model for Tesco is required; the whole world needs to make the changes now. I am surprised how much I have changed my work and personal life with the knowledge I have.” (Tesco participant on RoundView course)

Overview of report

Sir Terry Leahy, Tesco’s CEO, set the stage for Tesco to be a leader in creating a low-carbon economy, saying in 2007: “We are going to have to re-think the way we live and work.”

This report describes the findings of a research project funded by the Sustainable Consumption Institute (SCI) entitled ‘Scaling-up’, which took place between August 2009 and January 2010.

Dr Joanne Tippett (School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester), and a research team from the University of Manchester, undertook this SCI funded research, and are the authors of this report.

This report has been produced for the SCI and Tesco, with the hope that it will also be helpful to others who seek organisational change towards more sustainable practices.
Overview of ‘Scaling-up’ research project

Overall aim of the project

To find effective ways to embed new thinking that maximises people’s understanding of sustainability and changes in behaviour, in the context of ‘training the trainers’.

This initiative followed directly from an earlier nine-month SCI project entitled ‘Sustainability Skills in the Workplace’ which had as its key objective:

To identify effective training and communication methods to enable people to understand sustainability issues and take action – and to implement and assess a learning pilot which delivers this in Tesco. (Full report available from www.sci.manchester.ac.uk.)

Feedback from Tesco staff involved in the Sustainability Skills project was positive, demonstrating significant shifts in attitude and awareness, and increased motivation to take action towards a sustainable future. The Scaling-up project was designed to build on this, and explore how to spread and embed sustainability learning throughout the organisation.

Sustainability action research

Training Tesco staff in Stores and Head Office

Overall, both projects have involved 78 members of staff (30 in Stores and 48 in Head Office) attending training, with 105 additional members of staff being interviewed or attending focus groups. Five training courses have taken place, three in the earlier Sustainability Skills project and two during this Scaling-up project. Training was carried out in Stores and in Head Office in both projects. The research team delivered the training.

A ‘new’ sustainability framework

The basis of the training was a whole-system framework for understanding and decision-making around sustainability. This framework draws from decades of previous development, including The Natural Step, Cradle-to-Cradle, Industrial Ecology, PP4SD and the Principal Investigator’s earlier work. New tools and processes were developed and tested in the action research. The framework became known as ‘the RoundView’.

The RoundView is a positive, whole-systems approach to sustainability. The motivation for its development was to make the ideas accessible to staff at all levels. The hope was to increase not just participants’ capacity to act, but also their motivation and enthusiasm for change, and their ability to communicate effectively with each other towards this end.

Interactive and hands-on learning approach

An important aspect of making the ideas more accessible and easy to communicate was developing clear, simple graphics and hands-on learning tools to engage learners with the ideas. Several rounds of development and feedback have enabled clarification of key points. This has built on open source development of learning tools, which the Principal Investigator started after attending a Natural Step course in 1997.

Researching how to ‘scale-up’

In addition to developing and piloting the RoundView training course, the current project explored and tested mechanisms for ‘scaling-up’ sustainability learning, to encourage and enable rapid spread throughout a large organisation. In-depth focus groups and interviews were combined with a small-scale train-the-trainer pilot in Stores and Head Office. This was further informed through secondary research and the literature.
RoundView Guidelines for Sustainability – Key points

- Training in pilots increased motivation, understanding and skill in staff at all levels
- Potential to help meet the big sustainability challenges in a positive and forward-looking way
- Offers a framework for strategic decision making
- Grounded in science and research
- Positively framed and accessible
- Hands-on and whole-brain tools to engage learners and support learning
- Creates a shared language to enhance cooperation and creativity
- Draws from decades of previous development, in particular from The Natural Step, Cradle-to-Cradle and Industrial Ecology
- An open framework, able to be adapted to different contexts (within limits so as to maintain coherence of the core ideas)
- Opens up tremendous opportunities for innovation
- May help reframe the question of sustainable consumption

This action research project – Key points

Further developed the approach to sustainability—the RoundView—that was successfully deployed in the Sustainability Skills project

- More staff trained and engaged in improving the learning initiative
- Enhanced and further tested the curriculum
- New framework for effective learning process (SHAPE) developed

Piloted small-scale train-the-trainer initiative in Stores and Head office

- Developed indicative model for building internal capacity (practitioner, facilitator, trainer)
- Train-the-trainers pilot led to increased capacity in Champions (Stores and Head Office)
- Explored tools and resources to support trainers

Developed possible next steps to evaluate the approach more fully within Tesco

- Developed a practical process for applying the Guidelines in roles and functions
- Made suggestions for building on enthusiasm of participants and Champions

Explored and suggested what might be needed for a successful potential roll-out

- Integrated analysis of the cultural context in Tesco with insights from the literature
- Synthesised insights from asset-based development, diffusion of innovation and transition management to develop suggestions for scaling-up
Sustainability training for Tesco staff

“It made me think about the wider impact of my decisions, both at work and home, on our planet.” (Tesco participant during RoundView training).

The RoundView Guidelines for Sustainability learning initiative piloted during this Scaling-up project comprised two sessions of training separated by a period of approximately two weeks, both in Stores and Head Office. The Stores sessions were each of two hours duration; the Head Office sessions were three hours each. Participants were asked to undertake a task (phrased as a ‘Next Step’) in-between sessions. (For details of places and times and number of attendees please see pg. 25).

**Enhanced understanding and motivation**

Virtually all participants in Head Office and Stores reported developing a broader view and better understanding of sustainability. Increased motivation to make changes and continue to learn about sustainability was reported across the board. For example (from feedback):

“Helped reflect not only the issues but how to plan for changes which can lead to a sustainable future”

“Gained a better and deeper understanding of present and future issues”

“Made me think of how I can influence”

“Re-energised me”

**Challenges in implementation**

Significant challenges, however, were identified in transferring the learning to the job. A repeating theme was frustration with the lack of ability to make significant changes in working practices, due to lack of agency and opportunity. Several of the interviewees expressed that it was not clear to them what they could do in the workplace. For example, one participant in Head Office felt that:

“… we don’t really have an opportunity to be that impactful at work. In terms of us sitting around doing our job we have got a paper bin, a plastic bin we have got can bins and people have been kind of using that but besides that… there isn’t very much going on in the office to encourage it.”

The systemic and complex nature of the changes required was appreciated by staff as a potential barrier to implementation. This was expressed, for instance, by a Head Office participant who identified “The fact that my Next Step needs to be taken on by others too, and Tesco as a whole to make a positive impact” as a challenge.

A related theme that emerged was the need for senior management to be on-board for real action to take place, and for messages supporting change towards sustainability to filter down through from the top levels to line managers and Stores Directors.

**Staff ‘Next Steps’ reflect new thinking**

Despite these challenges, there were many examples of staff appreciating and understanding the message underlying the RoundView Guidelines, as illustrated by these ‘Next Steps’ from Head Office employees:

“Consider more seriously, alternative methods of operating my business in order to help preserve natural resources”

“Every time I make a decision, think about whether it can, in time, lead us to a sustainable future”

“Develop my knowledge and educate and influence those around me”

“To review my plans and actions against the sustainability guidelines and make sure I consider the environmental impact of any planned activity and opt for sustainable choices wherever possible”
The RoundView Guidelines for Sustainability

“This is why I’ve been so interested in the RoundView, because everything about sustainability is usually being told what we should stop doing, not what to do. As human beings we rile against that. This can be very powerful, especially as it says we can carry on living and enjoying ourselves but in a better and more clever way.” (Tesco Champion in Head Office)

A positive view

The RoundView enables a practical and accessible appraisal of the ‘big picture’ of sustainability to be included in decision-making at every level. Significantly, the RoundView provides a positive vision of sustainability. As the late systems thinker and member of the Club of Rome, Donella Meadows, (1996, 118) said:

“Environmentalists have failed perhaps more than any other set of advocates to project vision. Most people associate environmentalism with restriction, prohibition, regulation, and sacrifice... There may be motivation in escaping doom, but there is even more in creating a better world.”

The RoundView provides a positively articulated and scientifically grounded framework for a ‘change in direction’. Put plainly, destroying the world more slowly is not a recipe for long-term success. This image of a ‘change in direction’ is used to inspire, inform and engage people in making changes that lead society towards a truly sustainable dynamic.
Origins of the RoundView
This framework synthesises ground-breaking earlier work to articulate a positive description of sustainability at a whole system level (that of the Earth). Specifically it draws from The Natural Step, Cradle-to-Cradle, Industrial Ecology, PP4SD and earlier work of the Principal Investigator, Dr. Joanne Tippett. A core driver for the creation of this framework was the need for the concepts to be accessible to a wide range of people, in particular to both Head Office and Stores staff. Several rounds of review and development during this action research have helped to simplify the language, clarify the core concepts and improve the legibility of the graphics used to communicate the ideas.

Positive Guidelines for a sustainable future
The Round View defines sustainability as “All people thriving, now and into the future.” It then looks at the conditions that need to be met on a whole system level for this to be possible, specifically including social as well as environmental considerations. These are described as a set of Guidelines, which can be used to help us see whether or not our actions and changes are moving in the right direction. The RoundView’s Four Stage Model of Transformation clearly sets out our current trajectory and the change in direction that is needed to move towards fully sustainable practice.

Communication between people is clearly greatly enhanced by a shared language. The RoundView provides a vocabulary for evaluating and sharing ideas around sustainability. This can support effective communication between people in vastly different contexts or roles, which is likely to be needed in the task of re-designing the way we do business.

SHAPE - characteristics of effective sustainability learning initiatives
In addition to the learning content, the RoundView is also concerned with the learning process. During the Sustainability Skills project, a model of the characteristics of successful sustainability learning initiatives was developed and used (called the ‘4As’). In this project this was extended into what became known as the ‘SHAPE’ framework: Social, Holistic, Awareness-raising, Positive and Experience-led. These characteristics underpin the design of the RoundView learning processes and methodology.

A significant element in the RoundView approach is the use of hands-on tools and striking visual images. These bring the content to life by stimulating multiple intelligences and different ways of learning. These tools used a felt-based technology that enables coloured shapes (that may be pre-prepared images for educational purposes, or ideas contributed by participants themselves) to be placed on a workspace and moved around as the conversation evolves and the learning deepens. Participants can write on the coloured shapes, and thus everyone has a voice, and can contribute to the discussion.

An open framework
The RoundView is an open framework, encouraging dialogue and adaptation (whilst maintaining the core integrity of the underlying ideas). In this research, elements of the curriculum were adapted to suit the Tesco context (such as adding small competitions, incorporating Tesco language, such as ‘Next Steps’, BRAG and ‘Know your stuff’, whilst retaining the clarity of the core messages and principles.)
Spreading and embedding the sustainability learning

“One of the things that really stood out for me is that it’s not just slowing things down, it’s actually changing direction. And I think that’s something that’s really powerful and I can take away and say to somebody and they’ll sort of say ‘oh, I need to listen now’ ‘cause it’s not just ‘well I do my bit so I’m ok I don’t need to worry’ it’s actually more than doing a little bit—that’s not enough—it will make a difference but it’s not the big difference that we need to get to. I think that was really powerful, and something I can take away and say to everyone else.” (Head Office Champion)

This research explored ways to embed sustainability learning within the cultural DNA of a large organisation. This was done through analysis of the data gathered in both rounds of action research in Tesco, and a development of key themes from the literature.

Tesco context

Four tensions between the organisational culture of Tesco and the characteristics of the RoundView learning approach, which could impact on the scaling-up of the learning initiative, emerged from the analysis:

- Streamlined and standardised training with clear outcomes vs. open-ended reflective learning that encourages questioning
- An efficient company that gets things done vs. time for staff to explore and develop ideas without pre-defined or immediate outcomes
- Focused working units vs. cross-functional communication and cooperation
- Top-down dissemination of ideas and approaches vs. learning from all levels of the organisation

Ways to work with these dynamic tensions creatively, so as to align with the organisational strengths inherent within them, were developed. Perspectives from the literature on asset-based development, diffusion of innovation and transition management were synthesised. Further informed by insights from staff (particularly Champions), this led to a range of suggestions for how a programme to scale up sustainability learning within the organisation might be approached.

Scaling-up

Concepts that were seen as ‘fundamental’ to a successful wide-scale roll-out of a sustainability learning initiative, such as the RoundView, in the Tesco context were:

**Clarify and legitimise the effort to re-think practice towards sustainability through ‘top-down’ communications, and make sure these cascade down through the organisation**

Analysis has shown that core drivers for Tesco include an efficient ‘central push’, with reinforcement from the centre key to its ability to ‘get things done’. One major suggestion, which emerged clearly from the analysis of the focus groups and interviews, was the need for a clear message from the top levels of the organisation that focussing on sustainability learning and re-thinking of the way we do business is considered a corporate priority. It was seen as important that this message was supported throughout the different levels of the organisation specifically including Store Directors and line managers.
Find ways to embed action towards sustainability (even if it is ‘only’ developmental, forward thinking and strategising) into measurement frameworks such as the all-important KPIs

Evidence from participants suggested that in Tesco, what is measured and rewarded gets done. It was suggested more than once by participants, that it would be useful to explore adding new indicators of performance within a KPI on ‘strengthening sustainable practice’ – these might include, for instance, items such as leading discussions on sustainability / getting sustainability on the agenda, or proposals for how to change practice towards greater alignment with sustainability.

Work with the willing

The need to work with people who are interested and who care about making change was highlighted in discussions with the Champions. It was seen as important to have enthusiasm for the ideas and for the changes needed in order to spread the ideas effectively. The concept of working with the willing has a long tradition in action learning, as emphasised by Revan’s (1983) recognition of the importance of including people ‘who care’ in interventions for change.

Provide inclusive mechanisms to support, motivate and reward staff who contribute towards sustainability thinking or practice

Rewards for success could help reinforce the activities of the ‘willing’, and indeed all staff. This will require a related process of developing a wider pool from which the potential ‘willing champions’ can emerge—as there are more people who understand the RoundView and its possible applications in Tesco, there will likely be more people who come forward who are interested in taking it further.

Allow time for, and develop skills in, creative idea generation—then value, record and build upon these ideas

In order for the development of a diverse range of ideas for sustainability to be effective—transformational even—this will require staff to be given permission to spend time on such development. There is a clear need for a diverse range of new ideas and options in the many functions and operations of the organisation. It is an assumption within this approach—supported thus far by the results of these pilots—that with requisite training and development, staff throughout an organisation can contribute significantly to the task of ‘re-thinking’ for sustainability.

Develop a system for capturing ideas and encouraging them to flow within the organisation, so that they are more likely to reach the people with the capacity to evaluate them, and the agency to implement them

It will also be necessary to develop (and maintain) a system to capture and channel these ideas to where they are needed. This system could be specifically for sustainability ideas, or these ideas could be included as part of a more general process. This is not an easy task, and could benefit from communication between organisations to learn from best practice.

Simplify application of key ideas through provision of tools designed to make this easier

During this initiative there has been considerable attention paid to how to make teaching the core ideas simpler through embedding the core concepts and facts into the hands-on learning tools. This idea received positive feedback from the Champions who viewed it as potentially a very helpful way to assist with learning and communicating the RoundView ideas. The new Sustainability Evaluation Tool is a simple tool for assessing ideas, products and systems against the RoundView Guidelines and the four-stage model of transformation, giving a clearer idea of the relative sustainability of different ideas.
A train-the-trainer approach

“What is brilliant about the RoundView is that we are also the potential answer.”
(from a Champion’s ten minute presentation in the train-the-trainer session)

A rapid increase in sustainability understanding, skills and practice is needed; therefore developing and increasing training capacity at all levels is a matter of urgency. A train-the-trainer approach was chosen due to its potential to enable the organisation to build internal capacity, which in turn would support wide-spread scaling up of the learning initiative.

The SHAPE of the pilot

This action research undertook a small scale pilot of ‘trainer-training’ with staff from Stores and Head Office acting as Champions. The pilot was informed by the SHAPE framework, and was thus Social, Holistic, Awareness-raising, Positive and Experience-led.

Champions were to be drawn from previous participants (though in Stores only one of the five Champions had attended the first learning initiative). The pilot had three stages:

- Pre-briefing/training session before the learning initiative
- Attending the learning initiative as ‘apprentices’
- Train-the-trainer session after the course, design and deliver 10-15 minute presentation

Analysis of pilot (Stores and Head Office)

Analysis of this pilot demonstrated that the Champions in both Head Office and Stores gained in skills and confidence. The quality of the 10-15 minute presentations that the Champions delivered in the last training session of this pilot was generally high and provided useful evidence of the value of this approach. All of the Champions (Stores and Head Office) wished to do more with the RoundView in their work, showing a high level of motivation and interest. One person volunteered as a Champion in Stores during this pilot, and a further two came to the final session in Head Office.

There was a good deal of discussion about the value of the hands-on learning tools, especially the felt based graphics, and about the idea of embedding the key facts and concepts into the tools. This approach was viewed as useful by the Champions, supporting them as trainers, providing activities that lead them through key stages of the process. This reduces the facilitator pressure to stand up and ‘perform’. Additional resources were requested by Champions, such as video clips of trainers dealing with common challenges and a ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ resource.

Stores Champion gives a RoundView presentation

An illustration of a presentation designed and given by a Stores Champion is indicative. She had attended only this round of training, said she was not comfortable with ‘science’ and initially had not felt able to give a talk. She set out activities that are already happening in Tesco, giving as examples recycling, car sharing, using public transport, being aware of the manufacturing processes of products (e.g. the FSC logo). She went on to say that these were not enough. She explained that we need to do this to benefit everyone in the long run, and that we will benefit from cleaner living, more green areas and benefits for our grandchildren. She then explained the eco-cycle, using the example of waste going into the ground and into the cycle, using the RoundView Misguided Lines images as a visual aid. This was followed by the positive RoundView picture with the commentary ‘If everything is recycled, nothing is being wasted, and everything that can be reused is reused, for example food is not thrown away, it could be made into compost… people can thrive into the future.”
Indicative model for training

Experience gained through having delivered the training course 5 times and through this train-the-trainer pilot has enabled the development of a model for training. This comprises 5 categories, each representing a skill level. The ‘foundation’ level has been directly tried and tested through these pilots, as has the ‘facilitator’ level, which is the description given to the level of skill attained by the Champions who participated in this train-the-trainer pilot. The ‘practitioner’ and ‘trainer’ levels are extrapolations based on the experience of training during these initiatives and from experience of the research team in training in other contexts. This indicative model for training is shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level</th>
<th>Training time required (rough estimate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundation</strong></td>
<td>(competent to explore practice against the Guidelines and to generate ideas to move towards sustainability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practitioner</strong></td>
<td>(competent to evaluate practice against the Guidelines and systematically work towards greater alignment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitator</strong></td>
<td>(able to deliver introductions to the RoundView and support trainers during foundation training)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trainer</strong></td>
<td>(able to deliver the RoundView practitioner training with support from facilitators)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trainer of trainers</strong></td>
<td>It is difficult to ascertain the time requirement to achieve the next level i.e. RoundView ‘trainer of trainers’, having not yet tested the process beyond the facilitator level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next Steps

“I may also think more creatively, slightly longer term. What I will be looking for next is to be challenged - I want to go into a business plan / presentation / meeting with senior managers and as well as being asked about the cost, resources, supplier/customer impact of my proposal, someone should ask me what the RoundView / community / sustainability impact and thought process is.” (Tesco participant on RoundView course)

Applying the RoundView
At its most basic level, the overall strategy for change towards sustainability implicit within the RoundView curriculum might be described as…

1. Systematically evaluate practice against the RoundView Guidelines for Sustainability
2. Take steps to redesign and change practice so that it is increasingly aligned with the Guidelines
3. Repeat the process

Implementation of such a process would require:

- Clear, and widely communicated, organisational intent to engage with such a programme
- Widespread understanding of the RoundView Guidelines arising from training throughout the organisation: in diverse functions / roles / levels
- Clear tasks set out for roles throughout the organisation that inform and implement this continuous evaluation and redesign, and which are reflected in measures of staff performance
- Measures to increase the likelihood, speed, ease and effectiveness of adoption within the culture

Apply the RoundView in specific work contexts
It is proposed that the next stage of trialling the RoundView in Tesco would be to devote some resource to applying the Guidelines within particular functions. This would involve staff analysing and redesigning their work practice. This could be done with the Champions and keen participants from the previous RoundView training. Such a trial would provide further understanding of the potential value of using the RoundView framework within Tesco. Such a trial would help inform a business case for a wider-scale roll-out, and would provide valuable further information for such a roll-out.

To this end the main report describes:

- a systematic process for applying the RoundView Guidelines through systemic analysis and redesign of existing practice
- various options for how such a process could be deployed within the organisation

Training at senior levels
It would be difficult for anyone in a position of authority to evaluate the proposals that staff would develop in applying Guidelines if they did not have a clear understanding of the RoundView themselves. Thus in order for an organisation to really test the potential and relevance of this approach, it would be necessary to have a large enough sample of key decision makers trained in the core curriculum, including at the most senior levels.
Conclusions

“This restored confidence that Tesco is ‘on the case’ on developing a ‘sustainability literate’ workforce”. (Tesco participant on RoundView course)

Advantages of moving to long-term sustainability

A strategy that seeks long term sustainability clearly has advantages over one that does not. Attracting, retaining, and rewarding great staff is a vital business task. For many candidates, an organisation with a genuine and forward looking approach to sustainability will be a preferred place to work over one without. A forward-looking approach can also help to avoid investment in measures that appear on the surface to be beneficial, but which are locked into technology that may become obsolete and expensive in the long-run.

Any organisation that is able to show real leadership in sustainability stands to gain a great deal of respect and goodwill from society, which of course includes many existing and potential customers. This was recognised by a participant in Head Office: “This is an unprecedented opportunity for Tesco to get ahead of the game.”

Possible reframing of sustainable consumption

"Doing the right things right. It’s not as easy as it sounds. Working smart may be easy, but working smart without perspective or guiding principles can ultimately become an efficient pursuit of the wrong goals.” (William McDonough et al. 2003, 434)

The RoundView provides a potentially helpful perspective on sustainable consumption. Any consumption (and related production) that is fully aligned with all of the Guidelines is—within this framework—seen to be moving in a sustainable direction. Does this mean that any amount of consumption that is aligned with the Guidelines could be sustainable?

If this framework is the robust and complete description of sustainability that it is intended to be—and it must be recognised that this is still provisional—then the logical answer would be yes, any amount of consumption and production carried out entirely in alignment with all four of the Guidelines would be sustainable. How could that be, given that there are obviously limits within any finite system? The answer is that the requirement for full alignment with the Guidelines is simply a positive, practical and functional way of describing the need to navigate within those limits. It enables and frames the continued use of human ingenuity to find ways of consuming... sustainably.

"Common sense tells us that making a decision that is not in line with our values is illogical. But that is precisely what humans have done throughout history.” (Savory & Butterfield 1999, p.91)

If society is to contribute towards a world in which “All people thrive, now and into the future”, the question is not if but when we will transform our ways of living and working so that they are compatible with the whole systems upon which all human activities ultimately rely. If such transformation is sought, there is much knowledge available to help and inform us. The RoundView framework described here represents an attempt to create a common language and set of understandings that synthesise the clear and grounded insights that are available—from The Natural Step, Cradle-to-Cradle, Industrial Ecology and many other contributions—in a way that is accessible and practical. It is a work-in-progress, one that has been greatly enhanced by the overwhelmingly positive response and input from the Tesco staff who have given their time and insights to this initiative.
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