



The vision to prevent more environmental issues starts with engaging the people who deliver it.

Engaging employees at DEFRA in a long-term vision

Using the World Café technique to capture employees' thoughts, opinions and experiences to help shape a vision for a more sustainable society over the coming 20 years.

Engaging Government department employees in a long-term vision that will change the way we all live and work is a big challenge. And it was one faced by DEFRA, the Government department responsible for environment, food and rural affairs in the UK.

Having committed to delivering a compelling vision for a greener society for 2030, DEFRA recognized that the people responsible for delivering this vision, those who'd have the best chance of helping make it a reality, were the employees in the department – at all levels.

DEFRA understood early on that a vision created behind closed doors with senior management and ministers might be carefully worded and inspiring but without the involvement of the people, it would struggle to become something that DEFRA was striving to achieve.

Kate Moore, head of internal communications at DEFRA, saw a presentation on how EM(IC)* had engaged Renault Trucks' dealer network in driving sales in a recession at a Melcum member-exclusive event. She was interested to find out whether a World Café could be the answer to involving employees in developing their vision for a greener society in 2030 and if so, how?

Consulting and planning

The consultation process with EM(IC)* identified that not only was emotional engagement part of the objectives but also that employee contribution was going to be critical to help shape and build the final vision.

The solution was to invite employees from across the department and its partner agencies to a World Café, hosted in Westminster, to identify what a greener society could look like in 2030 and what role they would be play in achieving that vision.



About Defra...

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is a Government Department in the UK whose purpose is to secure a healthy environment in which we and future generations can prosper.

As we build a low carbon, resource efficient economy, Defra helps people to adapt to changes, deals with environmental risks and makes the most of the opportunity we have to secure a sustainable society and a healthy environment.

“The people who'd have the best chance of making the vision a reality were the employees.”

"Our challenge was that we weren't starting from a blank sheet of paper. Some parts of the department were already ahead in coming up with ideas as to what might be included in the vision but it wasn't complete. The challenge was to engage our employees and build on what we had - without making it look or feel like it was already a done deal," says Moore.

Amanda Jongeneel, director at EM(IC)*, was confident that using a World Café was the right approach. "It was obvious from the beginning that presenting a 'work in progress' vision and asking employees what was missing wasn't going to work. To get the buy in we needed, we had to really listen to and capture not just the initial observations but also the deeper thoughts, opinions and experiences of these people. We needed to capture it verbatim and we needed them to know that their input would form a critical part in shaping the greener society we all hope to live and work in by 2030."

Training facilitators

The role of the facilitator at a World Café is fundamental to the success of the event. They dictate the quality of the output as well as the positive experience for the attendees. They need to be confident but not brash, and be people who are relatively well known. Critically, it's important that they have the ability to listen and facilitate without influencing and can encourage fun and free expression naturally and without coercion.

For this World Café event, 34 facilitators needed to be selected from DEFRA's employees and trained in hosting World Café dialogue. Then in early November 140 DEFRA employees converged in Westminster to take part in the first World Café.

"Because of DEFRA's objectives and the content, we needed to pose two questions to the audience – one to define a clearer picture of a greener society and the other to discover what part of that society would individuals in DEFRA be most proud to have played a part in implementing.

“The passion for the subject was obvious straight away by how quickly people got to the things that they personally cared about.”



TONE...



Keep it Grounded...

Because of the seriousness of the subject, EM(IC)* didn't use funny icebreakers or gimmicks to get the conversation going. Following a positive but thought-provoking presentation from senior leaders at the department, the Café kicked into action.



PEOPLE CONTRIBUTED



“We really wanted to understand what the personal drivers were for individuals at the department”

Amanda Jongeneel,
Director, Em(ic)*

The World Café in more detail...

A World Café is a facilitated conversation process. It's an innovative yet simple methodology for hosting dialogue about questions that matter. Questions such as "Imagine a greener society in 2030. What changes will you be most passionate about and why?"

These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross pollinate ideas and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, or community.

A World Café brings to life the collective intelligence of any group, increasing people's engagement and capacity for action in pursuit of common aims.

Each World Café is different as they're designed to deliver on each company's unique objectives. However, the format for a successful World Café follows a unique and proven formula:

“Despite its simple format World Cafe’s are difficult to get right...”

1. Take an employee group that's to be involved in the objective and bring them into a World Café environment.
2. Set the tone using senior leaders and a World Café host.
3. Ask them a powerful and emotive question that encourages reflection on positive experience and let the conversations commence.
4. Delegates move through a process of facilitated discussions and table rotations that expose them to the dialogue and ideas of up to one hundred other people, depending on the size of the group.
5. Stories, experiences, ideas and important points are captured on paper table cloths and index cards. Everyone is encouraged to write, doodle and draw.
6. A facilitated group discussion is held to wrap up the conversations and to draw out key themes and ideas from the entire room.
7. Output from the World Café is collated and fed into the company's objective. Effectively, building your plan (in this case DEFRA's vision) based on what employees feel strongly about and using the ideas they think will work.

For more information on engaging employees in your vision and strategy please contact:
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