

Executive Summary

Currently, consumers can buy sustainable merchandise, stay in sustainable hotels, eat sustainable foods, and use sustainable cleaning products. Consumers clearly are moving in favor of sustainable resources (De Groot, 2014). Although, is there a program which covers sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encourages a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of employees? Are consumers ready to explore what sustainability initiatives are needed to encourage a culture of sustainable practices? Can a business respond to those market shifts to increase competitive positioning by integrating sustainability into preexisting business considerations? In response to these questions, I undertook a project journey to create a new sustainability leadership initiative called Leadership Energy Awareness Program or LEAP. LEAP provides businesses and their employee's the steps needed to create "sustainability champions" and encourage a culture of sustainable practices.

The details of LEAP's transformation from its originality, can be linked to a graduate program which began months ago, focused on sustainability leadership. LEAP centers on, collaborates with, and educates, business employees, making lasting, sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encouraging a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of their employees. The goal is to become a sustainability champion.

In essence, the LEAP program assists businesses and their employees in recognizing a new paradigm of sustainable opportunities capturing their desire for more efficient use of resources. LEAP is the future, as it not only waits for the next amazing sustainability leader, it changes each of us and our stakeholders into the next great leaders in sustainability. If you are to become the sustainability leader you aspire to be, then you must take time to step back, reflect on your past, your present and your future. By business employees accepting this sustainability leadership transformation, this required transformation that doesn't happen overnight, as it requires intention, practice, and LEAP.

Abstract

Sustainability initiatives bear the ability to reap both direct and indirect benefits, but often face obstacles in getting business employees engaged in using less energy, water, and materials. To formulate a difference and provide direction, as a clear image of the preferred future, or a force that provides meaning and purpose, engaging and energizing business employees is a must. Therefore, the framework of this paper focuses on a project journey, engaging and collaborating with employees through a new sustainability leadership initiative called Leadership Energy Awareness Program (LEAP). LEAP is about making lasting, sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encouraging a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of employees, all with the goal of becoming sustainability champions.

Through the LEAP program, the sustainability champions educate their workforce on the business case for sustainability. They also empower their workforce to support implementation of sustainability in their daily jobs, and encourage a culture of sustainable practices. They do this by introducing LEAP into their job descriptions, performance reviews, and through team meetings. LEAP also seeks to initiate and encourage a culture of sustainable practices within any organization. It's important to engage and assist in the development of a sustainability champion's inspiring employees to use less energy, water, materials, and other resources.

Therefore, the LEAP program assists businesses with their employees in recognizing a new paradigm of sustainable opportunities capturing the desire for more efficient use of resources. Simply put, LEAP is a business approach to creating long-term value by taking into consideration how a given organization operates in the sustainable environment using sustainability champions. In sum, LEAP is a journey in sustainability leadership.

Introduction

Today, consumers can buy sustainable merchandise, stay in sustainable hotels, eat sustainable foods, and use sustainable cleaning products. Consumers clearly are moving in favor of sustainable resources (De Groot, 2014). Although, is there a program which covers sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encourages a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of employees? Generally speaking, the success of any sustainability initiative must respond to those market shifts to increase competitive positioning by integrating sustainability into preexisting business considerations. Also, the achievement of any sustainability initiative must also complement the culminating experience of the concepts, theories, and have certain guidelines and principles forming the basis for its existence. For the most part, the initiative needs to be engaging and assist in the development of a sustainability champion, delivering the same services while using less energy. Without a doubt, a new and exciting sustainability initiative is essential in capturing the businesses and their employees desire for more efficient use of resources. This sustainability initiative should include the accompanying considerations of economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity in business planning and decision making (Rondinelli, 2006, p. 1). Thus, welcome to the beginning of this project journey called Leadership Energy Awareness Program or LEAP.

Background

The project journey of the LEAP concept activated years ago while surfing up and down the California coast, getting hit from garbage - mostly plastic and rubber. However, during that time, it was believed the plastic and rubber garbage was coming from the beach. Consequently, while taking electives in Environmental Sciences working through an undergraduate degree at Penn State University, it was then realized the garbage was coming from other area's miles from the beach. That's when it I understood the need to collaborate with consumers about waste and what waste is doing to our beaches.

So, when investigating waste, it was discovered the plastic garbage floating in the ocean, has a decomposing range from 20 to 1000 years (Gogte, 2009, p. 366). Moreover, the rubber garbage such as tires, and other rubber product takes on average 50 to 80 years to decompose (Shapiro, 2014). When investigating why consumer waste and have no worries, no program covered sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encourage a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of employees. Hence the beginning of the LEAP project journey.

Program Overview

Is there a program which covers sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encourages a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of employees? Are consumers ready to explore what sustainability initiatives are needed to encourage a culture of sustainable practices? Can a business respond to those market shifts to increase competitive positioning by integrating sustainability into preexisting business considerations?

In response to these questions, the details of LEAP's transformation from its originality, can be linked to a graduate program which was the beginning of my project journey. The LEAP program was created to assist employees in initiating and encouraging a culture of sustainable practices, by collaborating, educating, linking, integrating, and developing sustainability initiatives (see Appendix A: LEAP Five Priorities). LEAP is about making lasting, sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encouraging a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of employees, all with the goal of becoming sustainability champions.

LEAP links employee's personal goals/values to overall business sustainability goals, and integrates sustainability into the employee's job description. LEAP also engages business leaders in developing a company-wide energy management plan with the help of their employees. Although, a variety of reasons, issues, and negative risks need to be addressed for effective program implementation of the LEAP program. It's critical for those who are developing and implementing a program to make a conscious effort to recognize and understand their stakeholders, so they can develop appropriate strategies. Tools such as the SWOT, WBS, and the Gantt charts have aided in the development of LEAP, although by no means was this journey easy, as there have been many challenges.

Challenges

One of the first of many challenges encountered, which needed immediate attention, was the original wording; Leadership Energy Alternative Program. As LEAP was presented to stakeholders using the original wording; Leadership Energy Alternative Program, they were confused with the word alternative. The program's objective was about collaboration, engagement, and awareness and the word "alternative" did not support that objective. Although solving the wording issue was simple, keeping the acronym the same (LEAP), and changing the word alternative to awareness, supporting the program's objectives.

Moving through this project journey, another challenging part of this adventure was to create a company focused on LEAP. This meant, creating a plan, choosing a name, having the finances, registering the name, and then promoting the business. It's also important to note, having a company is a full-time position, and working for another company is not an option, and was a risk. Additionally, a Federal Tax ID number is needed to work with city municipalities, or they will not even hold a meeting to discuss the programs offered.

Therefore, in June of 2018, Sustainability Business Consulting or SBC was founded to effectively support and integrate a focused analysis of the LEAP sustainability program. The goal of the company is to create the next sustainability leader by encouraging a culture of sustainable practices, inspiring business employees to use energy, water, materials, and other resources in a sustainable manner. SBC does this by implementing LEAP. LEAP provides businesses and their employees the steps needed to create "sustainability champions" and encourage a culture of sustainable practices.

As LEAP moved through this ordeal of risk and misconceptions, another challenge appeared, as LEAP was a new sustainability initiative and not yet a proven. Even though the LEAP name changed, a company was formed to support the program, presenting LEAP as a standalone sustainability initiative, was not easily support by many businesses. To push through this ordeal, collaborating with many business leaders from different business fields, was the answer. The suggestions ranged from not calling LEAP a sustainability initiative to aligning LEAP with other proven sustainability initiatives. After deep thought, there was only one solution, bundle the LEAP initiative with other proven sustainability initiatives.

Correspondingly, there were times, it became physically and emotionally exhausting discussing LEAP without discussing other sustainability initiatives or topics. To the point, at times when discussing the LEAP initiative, decreasing enthusiasm became the issue along with feeling as if the story of LEAP was becoming ineffective. It was clear the project journey was not over, and the LEAP program needed to be aligned to a personal journey. The solution was simple, there needed to be a discussion as to when the project journey of the LEAP was activated. With the personal journey linked to the start of the journey, the LEAP program was able to continue its project journey.

Additional challenges included understanding how to and developing documents such as a statement of work, and scope of work, and generating revenue for the newly formed company.

It was also noticed that businesses were not all the same and the LEAP sustainability workshop presentations needed to change depending on the type of business. This new consequence was one not to be taken lightly. Depending on the type of businesses, manufacturing (profit), philanthropic (non-profit), and social policy (government), LEAP needed to be presented with different sustainability initiatives. For example, when presenting LEAP to city municipalities, they are not concerned with increased employment engagement linked to profits, they are only concerned with employee engagement, collaboration, and awareness. Whereas entrepreneurs needed a link identifying LEAP to profits, and cost savings.

Economic factors such as economic slowdowns create challenges causing stakeholders to be hesitant. Realizing this challenge, I met with business leaders and found a lack of interest from those leaders about implementing sustainability initiatives. According to Amaeshi, Ogbechie, & All (2014) “Despite the challenges and complexities involved in working through an organization’s value chain-many organizations are complicated systems-we find that it is useful for embedding sustainability practice in an organization’s culture” (p. 8). As a result, from my collaboration with the business leaders, they viewed sustainability initiatives as challenging, and complex, misunderstanding sustainability initiative intentions and requirements, creating further challenges.

The newest challenge is to develop a workshop focused on LEAP and continuous improvement, for a business leader in the aerospace industry. This business leader is very interested in LEAP and how it compliments continuous improvement engagement, which he believes will benefit their manufacturing sites through the state of Arizona. This business leader is also interested in having LEAP and Continuous Improvement, presented to two other sites outside of Arizona in the states of California, and Ohio.

Without a doubt, reaching out for suggestions is always a challenge, but for those who are reading this paper. Therefore, any responses to this paper are welcomed. On another note, one of the challenges considering is how to collaborate with business employees about reviewing and providing input about the overall philosophy of the LEAP workshop presentations. This critique provided to those business leaders is a stakeholder survey email distributed the night after speaking at the event. Receiving the feedback from the stakeholder survey either through the night of the presentation or email is becoming the issue, although considering a telephone conversation or a face-to-face might be the answer.

Opportunities

New challenges created new opportunities, hence, being invited to introduce the LEAP program to a steel manufacturing plant in South Carolina to a robotics company in Southern California was unexpected. Additionally, presenting LEAP and other sustainability initiatives to the City of Goodyear Public Works Department, and the City of Goodyear Economic Department Innovation Hub were great opportunities.

As a result, being invited back to the City of Goodyear Economic Department Innovation Hub to speak about sustainability and profitability was unanticipated. The workshop was a success, as the program manager of the event indicated the workshop broke a record for the largest number of entrepreneurs attending this event. Furthermore, speaking at the Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce about Sustainability for Business featuring LEAP and other sustainability initiatives drew a crowd of over 20 businesses.

Additional new opportunities are completing the scope of work featuring LEAP and other sustainability initiatives for three additional workshops. Those three additional workshops will be focused on city municipalities within the state of Arizona and as stated earlier an aerospace company. Moreover, speaking at the Glendale Chamber of Commerce about Sustainability for Business featuring LEAP and other sustainability initiatives is another adventure in the LEAP project journey.

Moving through this project journey, yet another additional opportunity has presented itself, as the local aerospace has decided to offer me full-time employment to implement LEAP and Continuous Improvement. I'm considering the position, although, in doing so, I realize the message of LEAP will slow down, although this is not the end of my project journey, but the resurrection. By accepting the position, I will have the ability to reach thousands of employees, and spread the word about LEAP. Therefore, my message throughout the aerospace company will be simple; it's not what LEAP is, but it's what LEAP does.

SWOT Analysis

The process of gathering all the material in the course of conducting research, and the gathering of the facts, were overwhelming. As the LEAP program moves through its project journey, change, challenges and opportunities is an inevitable part of the process. Knowing how to handle this change, and take stock of the program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the more likely one can plan and act effectively.

To combat this issue, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats assessment or SWOT, was needed and continually updated to assertively identify factors that influence the functioning of the LEAP program (see Figure 3: SWOT Assessment). The SWOT assessment also reveals positive forces that work together and potential problems that need to be recognized and possibly addressed. It's also important to note that one needs to continually update the SWOT analysis as changes and updates to the program will only strengthen and enhance the LEAP program.

SWOT Assessment	
<p>Strengths:</p> <p>LEAP centers on, collaborates with, and educates, business employees, making lasting, sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encouraging a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of their employees</p> <p>LEAP has been presented and accepted at several companies, city municipalities, and chambers of commerce</p> <p>LEAP program assists businesses and their employees in recognizing a new paradigm of sustainable opportunities</p>	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <p>The word “alternative” in the original phrase of Leadership Energy Alternative Program did not support the objectives of the LEAP program</p> <p>Business leaders may not move forward in developing sustainability initiatives such as LEAP, because they see this as a marketing gimmick</p> <p>Business leaders may not find LEAP a viable sustainability initiative as the LEAP program is a new entry in the field of sustainability</p>
<p>Opportunities:</p> <p>Speaking at the Glendale Chamber of Commerce, and other Chambers of Commerce about Sustainability featuring LEAP</p> <p>Continued interest focused on LEAP from several city municipalities</p> <p>Growing demand for implementing sustainability initiatives such as LEAP</p> <p>Business leaders perceive sustainability as a competitive advantage</p>	<p>Threats:</p> <p>Economic factors-stakeholder resistance due to economic slowdown and compliance regulations</p> <p>Competing sustainability companies presenting their understandings of sustainability initiatives and having no idea of the LEAP initiative</p> <p>LEAP is not accepted on a national or international level as a new sustainability initiative</p>

Figure 3: SWOT Assessment

It can be seen from the SWOT Assessment (see Figure 3: SWOT Assessment), that it is extremely valuable in shaping the LEAP program. This SWOT Assessment provided a chance to view ideas from a new perspective, creating challenges, opportunities and assisting in identifying obstacles that could deter the program from advancement. The SWOT analysis also assists in realizing that the concept of new sustainability leadership as a whole encompasses different explanations, theories and leadership styles required to implement change.

Conversely, for a future strategy as a sustainable leader it is important to understand that the course of action for change is dependent upon the internal and external environment. There are also, however, further points to be considered such as deliverables and milestones.

Project Execution

Creating a significant transformation project such as LEAP, and sharing the process of how LEAP improves our stakeholder knowledge of sustainability leadership takes work, plain and simple. Therefore, when creating a project for success, the importance of documenting the deliverables, milestones and identifying short-term wins can't be understated. To support milestones, and to implement LEAP efficiently, a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) with deliverables becomes a necessity (see Figure 1: LEAP WBS Diagram).

WORK BREAKDOWN STRUCTURE (WBS)

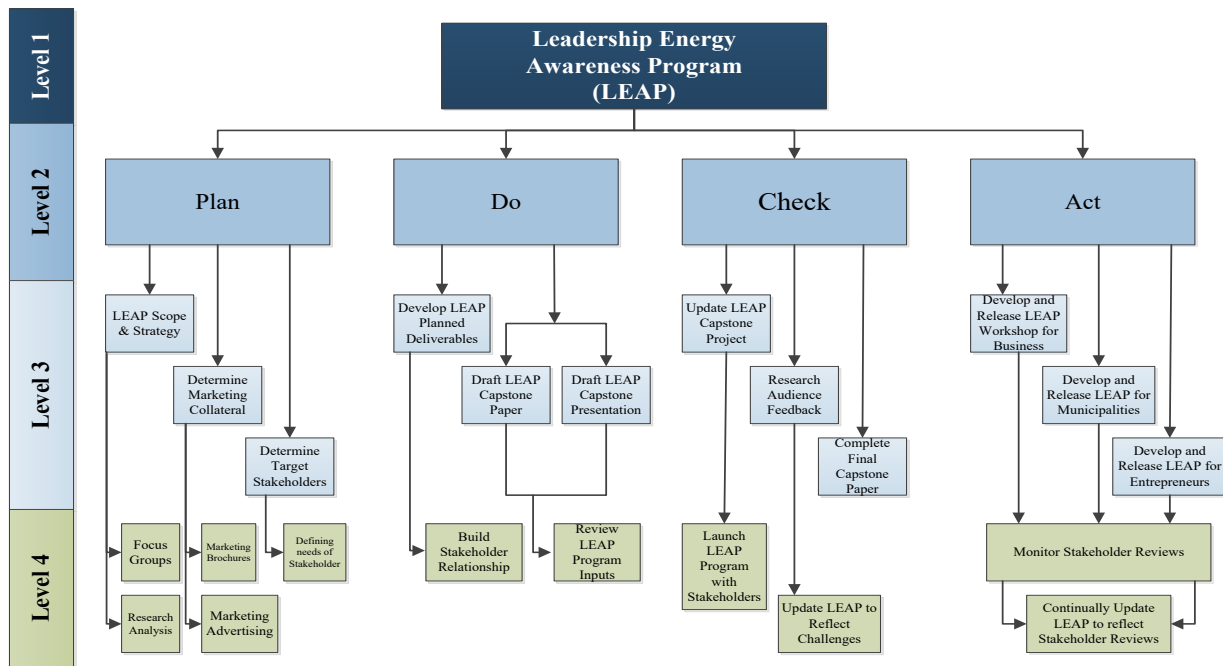


Figure 1: LEAP WBS Diagram

Given the advantage of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act), used in the WBS (see Figure 1: LEAP WBS Diagram), allowed for the LEAP project to constantly improve the activities, while moving through the project journey. Having considered the scope and timeline, the PDCA, used as the hierarchy of tasks within the WBS chart, supports a continuous improvement approach, and enhances the LEAP process (Vargas-Realyvasquex, Arredondo-Soto, Carrillo-Gutierrez, & Ravelo, 2018).

Additionally, a Gantt chart, supporting the WBS, is tracking the milestones and short-term wins across time (see Figure 2: LEAP Milestones). Undoubtedly, recognizing short-term wins maintain engagement, providing tangible evidence and validates accomplishments. This builds confidence in a sustainability leadership perspective, and the ability to put into practice changes that make for wins.

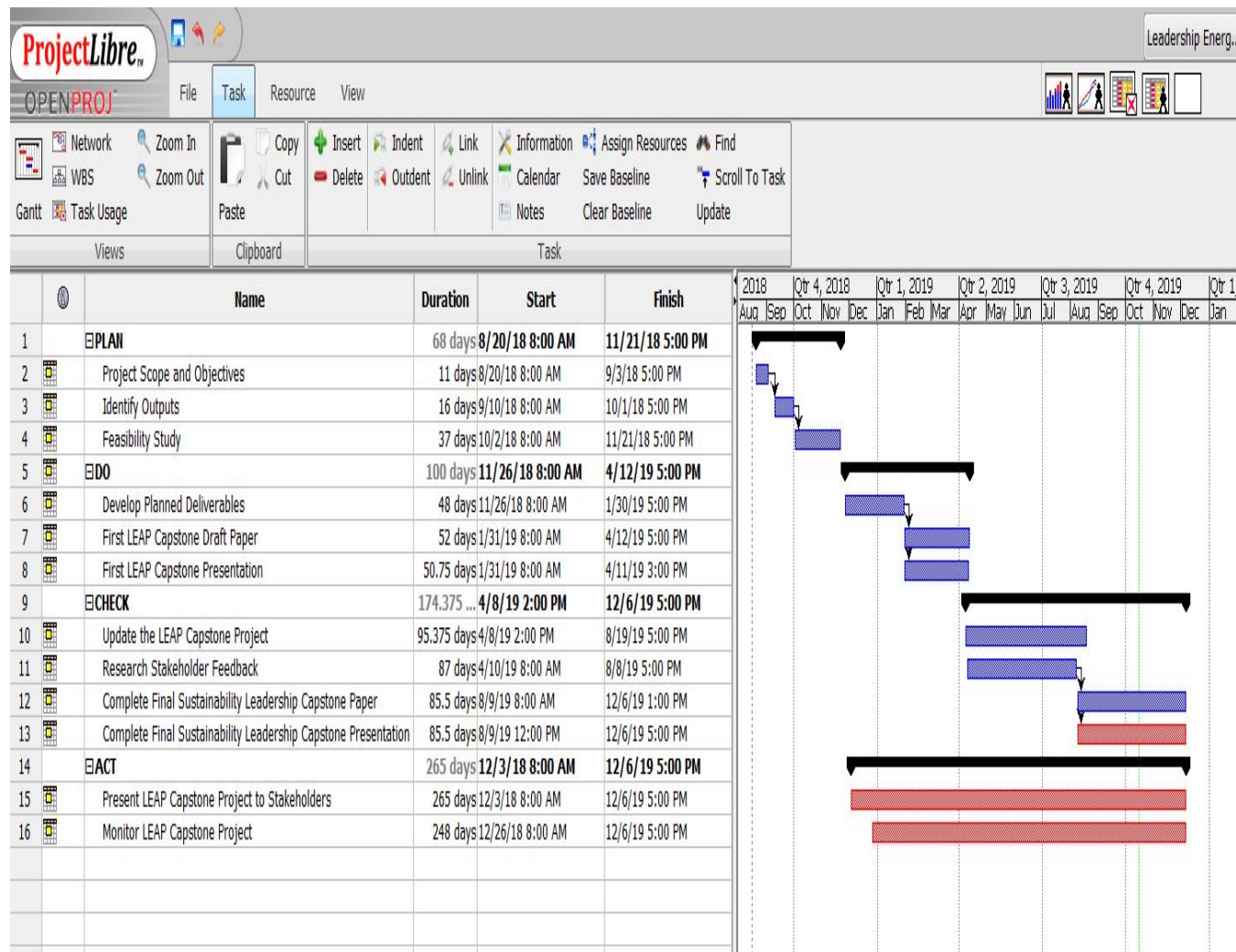


Figure 2: LEAP Milestones

Lessons Learned

As stated earlier, there's no shortage of challenges and risks facing sustainability leadership today. From economic, environmental, and social issues, to establishing a culminating experience through a change vision, mission statement, and specific strategies, this requires a deep dive into one's ideals.

Equally important, while implementing LEAP throughout the business organization, circumstances change and conflict could arise, such as old habits will no longer lead to success. This will create conflict, which is hard for most employees to get their arms around. Therefore, it's important to note that when employees are not on board with the LEAP initiative, the whole implementation of LEAP will be at a standstill. Therefore, not only presenting LEAP slightly different for each business, but collaborating with the employees on their specific needs was just as important, and was one of many lessons learned.

In contrast, as the LEAP program advanced through this project journey, the program has had some promising stories, examples of early changes to share, several challenges, opportunities, and risk. The milestones in the Gantt chart, (see Figure 2: LEAP Milestones), recognized short-term wins, how the program continued engagement, and provided tangible evidence of success and validated the achievements.

Additionally, the integration of the LEAP program with other proven sustainability initiatives has proven successful, as the outcomes are evident. The successes are due to understanding what the LEAP business leaders need and wants are, which is always essential when creating any program. Recognizing the implementation of the LEAP program is only the start; the requirements will change over time and new requirements will arise that were not considered during the first year of LEAP's commencement.

The LEAP initiative clarified the direction of movement, prepared the foundation, assisting businesses in creating a series of processes and steps toward the common goal of supporting sustainability initiatives. While continually updating and improving the project's future state, one needs to frequently evaluate and monitor these changes to ensure employee engagement. Thus, through lessons learned, the LEAP initiative took commitment, passion, and time, addressing business leaders and their employees' concerns by inserting sustainability initiatives into their organizational culture.

For the continued success of the LEAP program, the program needed to be designed to be the culminating experience of the concepts, theories, and have certain guidelines and principles forming the basis for its existence. Through the project journey, LEAP needed to transform from what is, to what it could be, from something old, to something new. LEAP is a new sustainability initiative; evolving every business leader and their employee as a sustainability champion through employee engagement.

LEAP will also need to become the business leader's core organizational initiative, creating a new organizational culture. Educating the workforce on the business case for sustainability and empowering them to implement sustainability in their daily jobs, encourages a culture of sustainable practices. Additionally, employees will recognize how LEAP motivates a new paradigm of sustainable opportunities capturing the employees desire for more efficient use of resources.

Business leaders will find implementing LEAP is a form of being; it's like an inspired and emotional operating system from which they will create action, enduring change and impact. Implementing LEAP, the message to the business leaders and their employees was short and simple: a new mindset, creating new results, changing their mindset all with the goal of having an impact to a sustainable vision.

Moving forward in becoming industry sustainability leaders, many will face various challenges, although sustainability leadership is a role that requires flexibility and the ability to adapt dependent upon changes. Future efforts should continue to focus on improving each of our sustainability initiatives, replacing old practices and institutional approaches with new ones.

The pursuit of sustainability is already starting to change the business landscape, which will force business leaders to change the way they think about LEAP and other sustainability initiatives. The LEAP program through its many workshops, has initiated and encouraged a culture of sustainable practices throughout many different types of business organizations. Ranging from manufacturing (profit), philanthropic (non-profit), and social policy (government), organizations, LEAP has been tailored to meet all the sustainability needs of the each of these businesses.

LEAP has inspired businesses to create sustainability champion's inspiring others to use less energy, water, materials, and other resources. Through the LEAP program, the sustainability champions have educated their workforce on the business case for sustainability. They have also

empowered their workforce to support implementation of sustainability in their daily jobs, and encouraged a culture of sustainable practices. They do this by introducing LEAP into their job descriptions, performance review, and through team meetings. The purpose is to make lasting, sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encourage a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of their employee's.

Simply put, LEAP is a business approach to creating long-term value by taking into consideration how a given organization operates in the sustainable environment using sustainability champions. In sum, LEAP is a journey in sustainability leadership.

Conclusion

This project journey in sustainability leadership has taken the LEAP program to greater depths than one could have anticipated. What started as an intention to further understand sustainability and the implementation, became a project journey in understanding LEAP's role in developing sustainability leaders.

Businesses accepted the LEAP strategies not only because it improved their environmental sustainability, but to leverage the LEAP program and other sustainability initiatives for their business. It could also be said that, having sustainability initiatives such as LEAP, gave the businesses a competitive edge against their competition.

As future sustainability champions, business employees will have the challenge and the responsibility not to wait for the next amazing sustainability leader. They will have the ability to change themselves and those around them into the next great leaders in sustainability. Thus, when sustainability is the focus of your business and is connected to the values of an organization, it can be a stage for greater business growth and innovation (Willard, 2012, p 112). LEAP is the future, as it not only waits for the next amazing sustainability leader, it changes each of us and our employees into the next great leaders in sustainability. If you are to become the sustainability leader you aspire to be, then you must take time to step back, reflect on your past, your present and your future. We should always move forward, and take the LEAP, as I did by accepting the full-time employment with the local aerospace company to implement LEAP and Continuous Improvement.

Get involved in sustainability initiatives, and engaged. Collaborate, and raise your awareness about sustainability initiatives, and always remember to LEAP forward.

By business leaders and their employees accepting this sustainability leadership transformation, this required transformation that doesn't happen overnight, as it requires intention, practice, and LEAP.

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Appendix A

LEAP Five Priorities

LEAP is about making lasting, sustainability-oriented organizational changes as well as encouraging a change in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of employees, all with the goal of becoming sustainability champions. (see Figure A1: LEAP Five Priorities).

Figure A1

LEAP Five Priorities

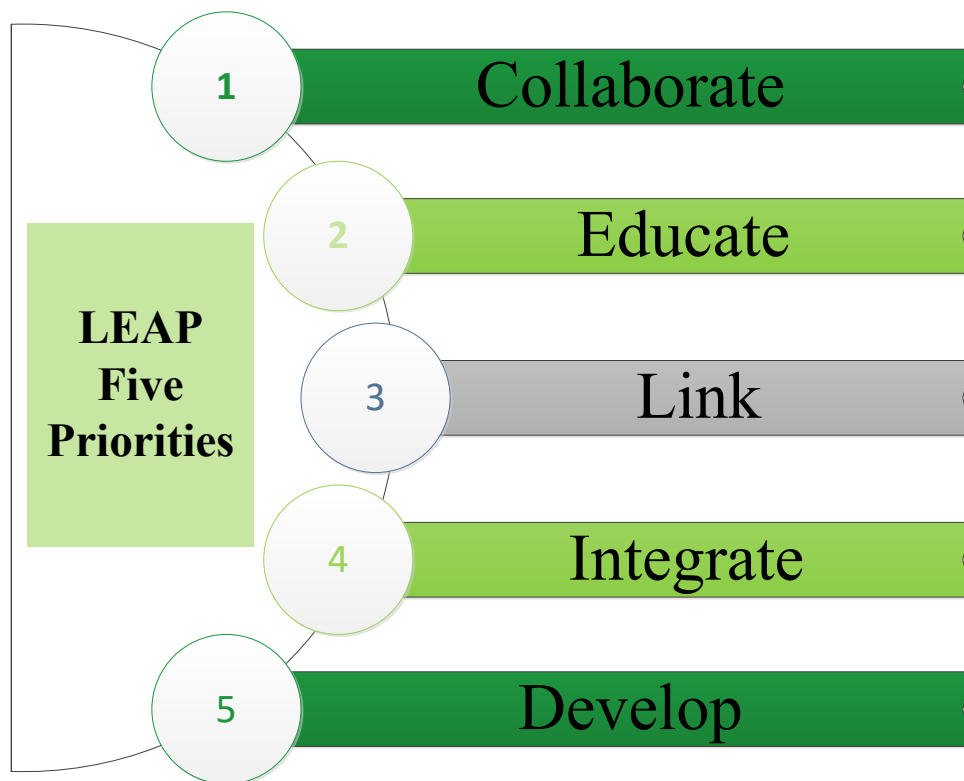


Figure A1: LEAP Five Priorities