Weekly #SportPositive Twitter Chat

Tuesday, April 14

How to drive sustainability systemically in your organisation

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Please note we have just taken salient points that were added in the discussion and have not given attribution. This document is to give a flavour of the Twitter Chat, it is not a transcription. If you wish to see who wrote points that resonate with you, to pick up a discussion, search #SportPositive on Twitter and you will be able to see the original tweets.

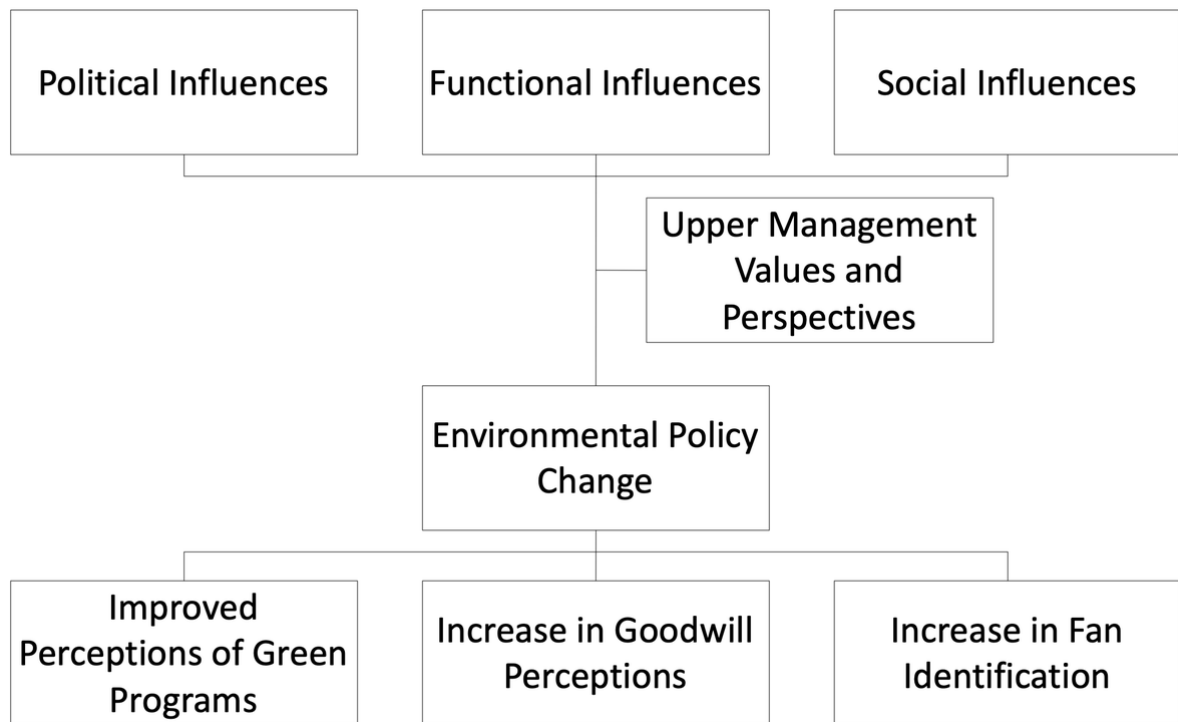..

Q1 - What are the building blocks of incorporating a systemic sustainability policy or strategy?

Truly effective sustainability policies and plans depend on a clear vision, continuity of purpose, committed leadership and a willingness to factor sustainability into decision-making. It has to be central to how an organisation works, not an add-on

Detailed a bit more in the '5 Steps to Avoid Greenwashing' article in Sustainability Report:
https://sustainabilityreport.com/2020/02/19/five-steps-to-avoid-greenwashing/

1. Commit to sustainability goals
2. Develop an action plan
3. Streamline existing policies and contracts
4. Facilitate strategic partnerships
5. Leverage what you know

A strong internal culture, upper management commitment, a vision, and a direction are all important building blocks to a strong foundation to sustain such policies, strategies, and efforts. Various pressures and 'encourage' an organization to move forward, but the progress and speed to adapt policies are moderated by upper management buy-in and support.

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I think employee incentives are key - either within a department and/or on an individual basis

(1) Sustainability expertise (2) Data collection (3) Materiality analysis (4) Goal creation (5) Communications throughout organization (6) Financial commitment (7) Continual reassessment

Celebrate milestones and goal achievements periodically and 'publicly' within the organization. Where possible, also externally - at least within a peer group or community of practice. It reinforces and re-energizes commitment

Building blocks could be inspired from ISO 26k and B Corp which set governance at the center

-> Yes! Also, gov't intervention is important in the governance influence - high performing organizations are in areas with government mandates for specific environmental protections (waste, energy, transport)

--> Fully agree, great case study of Geneva imposing zero plastic to local events which ripple effects on GVA organisers who manage other events in other Swiss states or countries and adapt them too towards better practices.

Sustainability expertise, internal support, a facility to share best practice / test with external peers and counterparts, clear objectives, commitment, good comms

Pete Bradshaw with Man City put it really clearly to me once. First, understand where you're from. As a club, be a good citizen and do the right thing. Then cost it properly, make sure your business case is watertight, achieve high level buy in and establish it as principle.

Creating our team's sustainability policy was the first major step when we launched our team. Identifying priorities from key stakeholders and aligning on a vision/mission were the foundation to building our policy. https://bit.ly/3chnB8Y

Q2: What are the challenges of ensuring sustainability is approached in a systemic manner?

The biggest challenge is that sustainability is still a fringe concept that's not familiar to many people. Next, it's that it can be hard to communicate to people all across the org how sustainability intersects with their work role

Governance is key aspect. If Top management fully incorporates sustainability, recipe can then be mixed with higher chances of success & give birth to the best sustainability systemic approach

Using data to overcoming misnomers of engaging in specific initiatives. Data have shown concerns with constraints (internal & external) are not always substantiated. 'Gut feelings' are not always accurate. (Data collection/survey can dispel those gut feelings)

Challenges are in persuading sports administrators to try something different. It's odd given that to succeed in sport is about gaining an edge, when it comes to organisational matters the sector is so conservative. In the post-COVID world sports bodies will be extra worried about costs, so it will be harder to introduce change, even though that is what they will need to do to survive long-term

If not embedded in each org role, and esp. included as a perf metric for each employee can be set aside to the far corner of the desk. Must be integral to depts across org, pref also part of vendor deals. What gets measured, matters

Orgs often focus narrowly to address one facet of sustainability. Leading with a strong energy efficiency or mental health goal is great first step, but won't ensure systemic, innovative change. Must be approached holistically cross-collaboratively

Real board / non-exec support important too. Some great sustainability programmes have suffered from changes in executive leadership, or lose focus during short term crises. Buy in at the very highest level can help navigate

What thing(s) need to happen for sustainability to move from fringe to core? Aside from there being a massive influx of team owners cut from the Dale Vince (Forest Green Rovers) cloth

-> Constant, consistent communication. Identifying areas where folks are already taking good actions for other reasons than sustainability. It's a lot of work but can be done

Sustainability is seen as its own area and department, rather than incorporated and considered in all areas of the organization

Q3 - What are the best ways to overcome the challenges of putting a sustainability policy in place?

Acknowledge the real and unsupported constraints to adoption. Address those concerns before organizing a robust team from across the organization and among various external stakeholders. Evaluating & weighing various stakeholder perspectives with perceived levels of importance placed on various initiatives. Leaders must acknowledge these concerns and how changes impact on others' current roles before proceeding forward

Have to have management support, buy-in, and follow through

Sustainability can't be - and isn't, in fact - a 'bolt-on'. It's a holistic view of the capital your org is working with currently. Not working sustainably is leaving 2/3 of your assets unleveraged
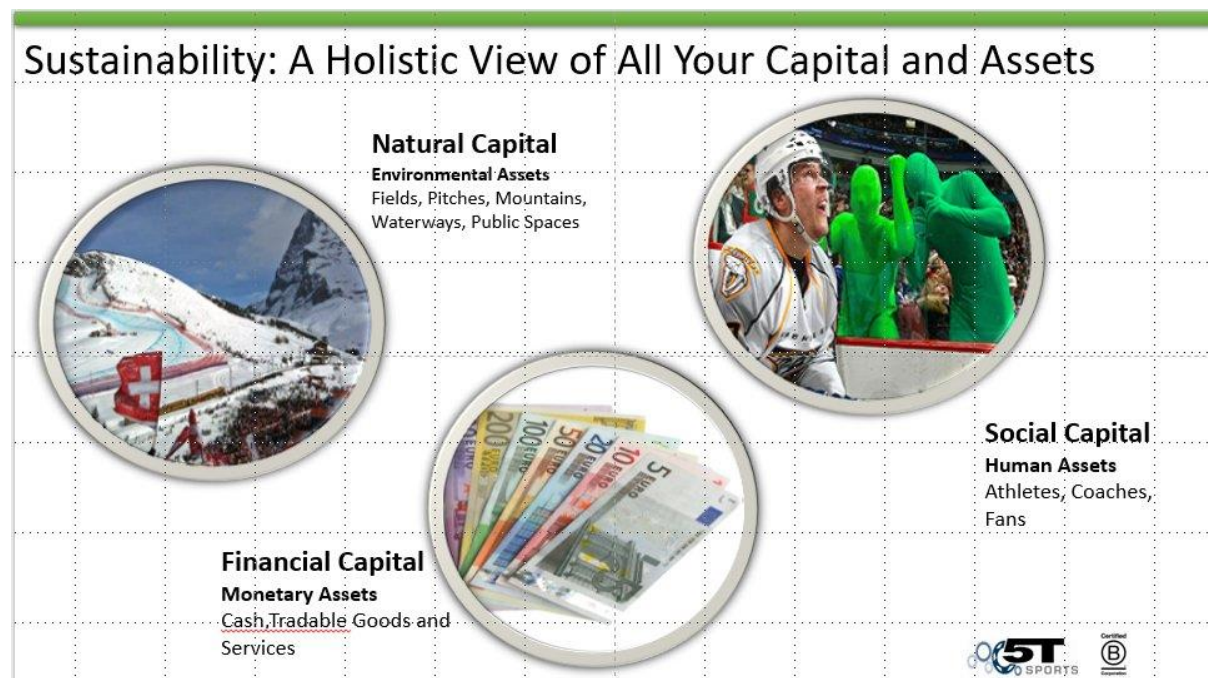
External input, 3rd party involvement (certification, reporting), NGO Advisory board, independent sustainability commissions.
Internally: sustainability champions per functional areas, a strong project management, innovation and sustainability collabs'

Calculate a clear payback period, show that environmentally sound decisions are financially sound decisions. And show alignment with fan / public opinion and policy direction. Cost effective, morally right, politically useful, and popular. Quite a mix

Utilize a cross-collaborative, holistic approach to crafting a sustainability policy & find ways that a facet of the policy resonates with the org's decision-makers, whether that's aligning to their professional goals, personal life, or fulfilling their mission

GRI recommends having mission, value, and environmental narratives to serve as a foundation in creating this organizational culture

Sharp comms: clear, brave, smart, insight-led messaging that gets the fans on board

Interview execs and team members at venues/teams/organizations where sustainability policies are already in place. I assume that the positive comments far outweigh the negative. Produce and share with your team

Support from the top makes all the difference; yes, illustrate the financial benefits but connect on an emotional level as well, align with the organisation's values

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Q4 - How can we equip and ensure all stakeholders and employees take ownership of a sustainability strategy or policy?

HR & management research shows giving a voice to ALL stakeholder groups, whether you proceed with these ideas, results in greater buy-in across the board. This buy-in accelerates these programs and initiatives and eases criticisms. Having a voice = empowering

Find ways to resonate with employees and stakeholders, whether that's aligning to their professional goals and personal life - All while showing them that they're valued and that their goals will be met in the process.

To equip, it's giving people the knowledge about the policy and how to implement in their role. Then it's about holding people accountable.

Internally: champions per functional area, project management incorporating sustainability, HR objectives including sustainability for employees. Regular stakeholder consultation, supply chain management, ethical commercial guidelines

Harness inherent competitiveness of sport. Spark a (friendly, positive) race to the top in your organisation, or better still your league / competition

The tenets of assembling an army for a mission:

1 Give them something to believe in
2 Give them something to belong to
3 Amplify their voices
4 Recognize their contribution
5 Give them a platform for action

Q5 - Let's give some shout outs! What are some great examples of strong systemic sustainability efforts that you have led or know about, and importantly, why?

I want to give a shout out to ISO 20121 - I know not everyone has embraced it, but it is the one recognised management system tool for sport and events organisers that can help make sustainability plans actually work. As for organisations doing sustainability well, I like the way

Paris 2024 are progressing. Early days still, but they are the ones to watch

Super Bowl 2020: https://triplepundit.com/story/2020/sustainability-super-bowl-liv/86361… That's a huge stage and was great to see sustainability on it.

Materiality is important. Sport Ecology Group. Compared a multi-stakeholder perspective – we can add components & multi-stakeholder groups. This informs internal decisions & campaigns. With data, there is confidence & power.
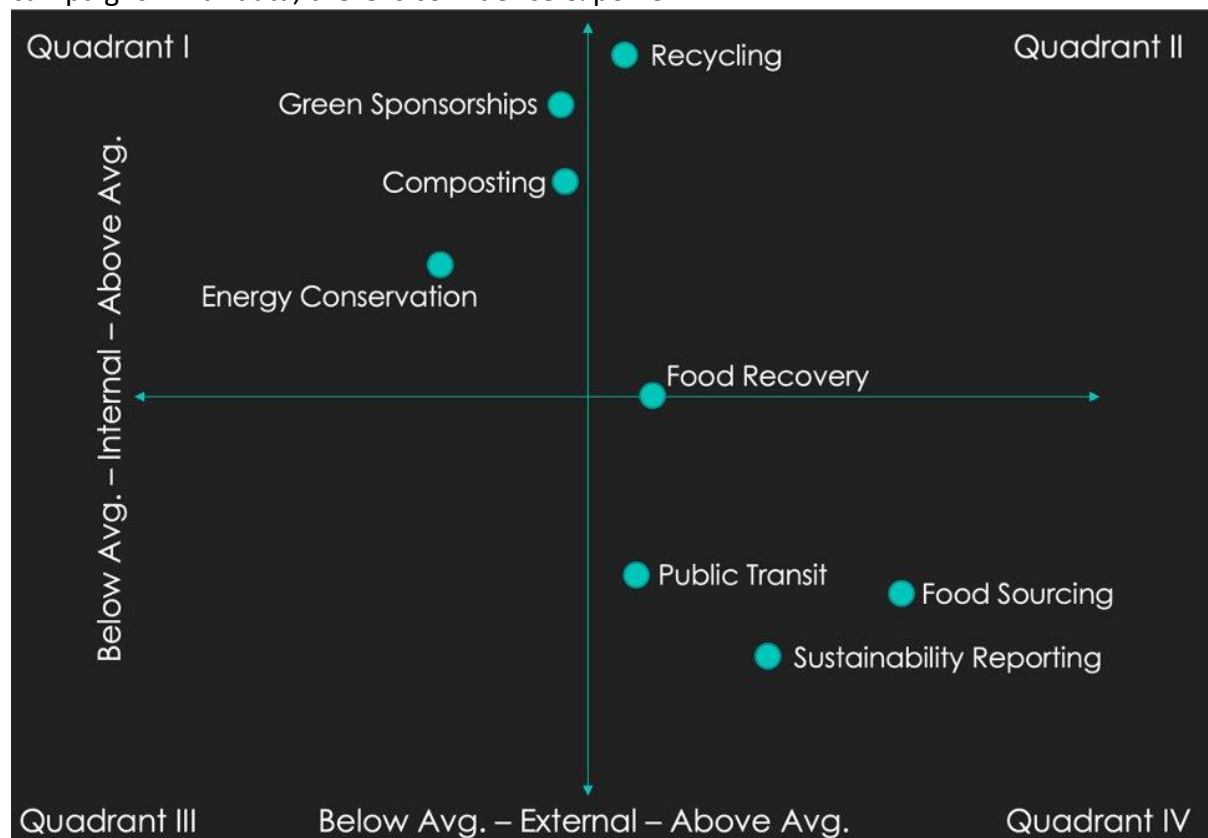
Impressive ex+ shift Lombardodier B Corp certified. High positive impact on investments, governance, +strong emotions and purpose for its bankers. Ostriches or Eagles? Losers& winners of sustainability revolution: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dpK-aWgvNU

Right now, we couldn't have more love for our friends at Principality Stadium - one of the most sustainable sports venues in Europe transformed, in three weeks, into a 2000-bed hospital for COVID-19 patients. Beyond remarkable

Great example too of Lausanne 2020 Youth Olympic village now being used by medical teams for accommodation (during COVID-19 pandemic)

Working with Jonathan Smith from GEO on Omega EU Masters, I was very impressed with the work the Foundation does and shares open source on https://sustainable.golf

We mentioned a couple in the Sport Ecology Group webinar yesterday -
- AEG 1EARTH for science-based targets & accountability: https://aegworldwide.com/sites/default/files/concentration-file/2019-04/2019%20Sustainability%20Report_0.pdf…
- FA Sustainability Team for employee engagement & consistent top-level engagement: http://thefa.com/about-football-association/what-we-do/sustainability…

Thank You!

If you contributed to the #SportPositive Twitter Chat on March 31st, thank you for being a part of it! If you didn't, I hope you find this document useful, and mark your diaries now to join us next week, **Tuesday, April 21th at 4-5pm UTC.**

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