

Green behaviour change: A case study of Eco Concierge

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'Tell me and I will forget, show me and I might remember, involve me and I will understand.'

Chinese proverb

Two of the significant issues that have been reported as having a negative influence on the extent to which people engage in green behaviour such as recycling, related to their pre-conceived ideas and attitudes about such behaviour (e.g. Nigbur, Lyons & Uzzell, 2010) and the inconvenience which they perceive it engenders (e.g. Tucker & Speirs, 2003). Eco Concierge was established in 2009 with the sole mandate of challenging such ideas and removing those barriers – essentially to take the hassle out of being green. In one sense, a concierge service that works with individuals and businesses to help them green their lifestyles and operations. It therefore represents one way in which organisations can become greener and also can help their employees do so. However, it is also much more than this; by emphasising the need to go green without compromising the perspectives, values and character of its clients and also by specialising in green behaviour change that uses proven behavioural change research as a basis for the development of an effective service operation, it aims to enable deep, significant and lasting change towards a greener future.

The work of Eco Concierge is underpinned by the UK government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA) Pro-Environmental Behaviours Framework. Individuals' uniquely-held values, as well as their lifestyle and stage, result in dramatically different perspectives on environmental issues. By tailoring messages to reflect a deeper understanding of each personal outlook, it's possible to deliver solutions that appeal to individuals; not only achieving initial behaviour change at the point of interaction, but also long-term habit and lifestyle change.

The absolute starting point for Eco Concierge and its *modus operandi* is the fact that three out of five people in the UK want to be greener but don't know where to start (or what to do next), or don't have the time to make the changes. These numbers are based on an array of segmentation evidence in this field including DEFRA's pro-environment behaviours work, recycling, energy conservation and uptake of organic food studies and Marks and Spencer's internal market research. Crudely put, around 36 million of the people in the UK could contribute to a less environmentally impactful society, but they either haven't been engaged, or aren't being served the right information. Tapping into this potential would close a substantial gap in the market and move us a long way towards a more sustainable future. We'll come back to this. But firstly, it is important to examine the significance of individual behaviour change and why – as we've seen in our work – engaging with businesses to motivate their employees to be greener is effective.

The context

The work conducted to date on behaviour change theory is vast; that on environmental behaviours specifically is evolving and deepening at a rapid rate.

A recent WWF report said, 'It is now beyond dispute that any proportional response to today's environmental challenges will require profound changes to the way that most people in developed countries, and many of the richer people in developing countries, choose to live. This will entail widespread but far-reaching changes in individual behaviour, fundamental changes in business practice, and the implementation of ambitious new policies and regulations to drive these changes by government.' (WWF, 2009)

Taking this and the numerous other calls to action into consideration, Eco Concierge aims to facilitate the change through enhancing the effectiveness and rate of individual behaviour change. To date our work has been most successful through taking our approach and applying it to employee engagement initiatives within public and private sector organisations. The missing link in effective Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) engagement strategies often stems from failing to take the environmental management systems through which many companies operate much of their policy in this area, and make it directly relevant to, and involve employees. In this case study, we briefly summarise how we have reached this conclusion and outline how we have used this information to enact a practical and successful business proposition.

Corporate social responsibility and the primacy of employee engagement

First we need to understand why CSR has become a central pillar in many businesses. According to Rochlin and Boguslaw (2001), there are multiple drivers that influence/motivate corporate behaviour:

- **Values:** based on personal morals, and a desire to 'give back' to society.
- **Compliance:** government regulations and grass-roots activists create compliance pressures.
- **Intangibles:** intangible factors include reputation, brand and relationships.
- **Market:** market drivers lead to 'typical' projects and investments, such as product launches, production, purchasing or employee training.

As an attempt to deliver against one or all of these objectives, CSR has emerged over the past decade as an influencing factor of corporate behaviour and response to environmental issues is now considered one of the fundamental offerings that 'should' be delivered in this realm. Yet several shortcomings have been identified in current CSR approaches; by using information on the identified gaps which exist in this area, Eco Concierge's approach is designed to remove barriers or improve existing strategies.

Googins (2002) has argued that conventional approaches to CSR are limited due to the boundaries in which the area has developed. The following areas were identified as barriers to successful CSR.

- Over-reliance on philanthropy.
- Weak brand for corporate citizenship.

- Citizenship fragmented across the organisation.
- The shareholder stranglehold.
- Programmes versus practices.

Added to these factors is the lack of understanding about issues across the spectrum of a company and a lack of ownership of the work internally. Typically CSR doesn't fall into central business activities, so is frequently the first area to be disbanded, or is often offered only rhetoric in day-to-day business. Pedersen and Neergaard (2008) state that in order to move beyond the rhetoric of CSR one of the first steps is to embed social and environmental concerns into the strategic management and performance measurement systems that increasingly guide corporate decision-making and behaviour.

A recent study (Runhar, Tighelaar & Vermeulen, 2008) confirms that a lack of knowledge by employees and employees not being eco-minded were both significant barriers to a company's environmental leadership; these barriers need to be overcome if corporate strategies are to truly reflect the rhetoric of proactive environmental leadership. Education and training of employees needs to be tailored to better engage them on issues. CSR is unlikely to permeate the organisation unless social and environmental concerns are integrated in the management frameworks and measurement tools of the business mainstream.

Engaging with employees and empowering them to act through the company in a non-superficial way is a most effective means through which to increase output towards and ultimately achieve or enhance environmental strategies and goals. It has been identified that employees are also compelled by a company's CSR activities. Indeed, companies pushing the boundaries on CSR activities and prioritising this area of activity offer a legitimate way to attract and retain good employees, indeed, many companies big and small, including Cisco Systems, General Electric and IBM, view employee engagement in CSR as a 'strategic imperative' (Bhattacharya, Sen & Korschun, 2008).

Evidence on the appeal of strong environmental strategies for prospective employees should not be underestimated. According to a survey of recent US graduates from recruitment firm MonsterTRAK, 80 per cent of respondents said they are interested in a job that has a positive impact on the environment, with 92 per cent stating they would choose an environmentally friendly employer (MonsterTRAK, 2007).

But few organisations have figured out how to use CSR properly as part of their employee engagement efforts. They fall short of communicating their CSR intentions and initiatives to their employees and tend to keep CSR decisions in the hands of senior managers. At the same time, they fail to understand which CSR initiatives work best to excite which groups of employees. All in all, they fail to capture CSR's considerable potential to help them fight the war for talent (Bhattacharya et al., 2008).

Employees will always vary in terms of knowledge about the issue and also willingness to act. A central element in Eco Concierge's approach comes from identifying individuals that are keen to take action and use them as internal champions; inviting employees to develop, influence and manage the process will also empower them to get involved. Ensuring that all employees are aware of environmental-related activities that are planned or in progress will encourage those that are not so engaged to better understand what is

taking place. We know that communicating the initiatives and actions to employees is paramount for achieving success (McDonald, 2007). Similarly, in keeping the initiatives in employees' minds and to maintain interest, periodic communications and events can be effective. We have also found that a common frustration and even cause of stress amongst professionals is not having the time to organise their personally green lives, hence the value of linking workplace programmes to Eco Concierge's individual offer for employees at home.

When used properly, CSR can strengthen employees' engagement by creating the feeling that they are part of a larger corporate mission and that the company shares their values, as well as by helping them enhance their own social connections (McDonald, 2007). By offering a tailored approach to employee engagement or empowerment, Eco Concierge is able to facilitate the achievement of company objectives by effectively working with employees to integrate positive changes made at home and at work into their professional lives and thus the business. Furthermore, by initiating a whole-of-company ethos, Eco Concierge attempts to create linkages between social, environment, marketing, human resources and other organisational entities; therefore ensuring that environmental objectives are anchored within a strategic framework strongly linked to a clear competitive advantage (Googins, 2002).

The case of Eco Concierge

At the moment sustainability initiatives generally fall into one of two categories: infrastructure change or mass communication campaigns. Eco Concierge, along with a few other niche companies, have differentiated by specialising in behaviour change, viewing this niche as a low-cost, high-impact and long-term solution that allows sustainable living to mean something to everyone. Eco Concierge is a social enterprise that helps individuals and businesses to take their own 'journeys' towards greener living. For individuals, we do this by understanding their lifestyle, values and current environmental impacts. Once we have this information, we are then able to create personalised action plans which we then deliver. For businesses, we engage employees in company environmental objectives, and offer our individual services as a means of creating an important link between business principles and employees' values to build a more engaged workforce and efficient operating model.

Services range from a full lifestyle overhaul to ethical personal styling or home renovation. Whether it's switching to renewable energy, having a sustainable wedding/baby/holiday, insulating a home, stopping junk mail, buying a new boiler or reducing water use, the aim is to find the best solution for a given person at a given time, through understanding their values and perspectives. This derives from our three core objectives, which are:

1. to be sustainable – in purpose and operation;
2. to increase the accessibility, number and quality of opportunities for individual sustainable behaviour changes and decision making; and
3. to offer excellent client experiences that maximise the lasting impact of green behaviour change.

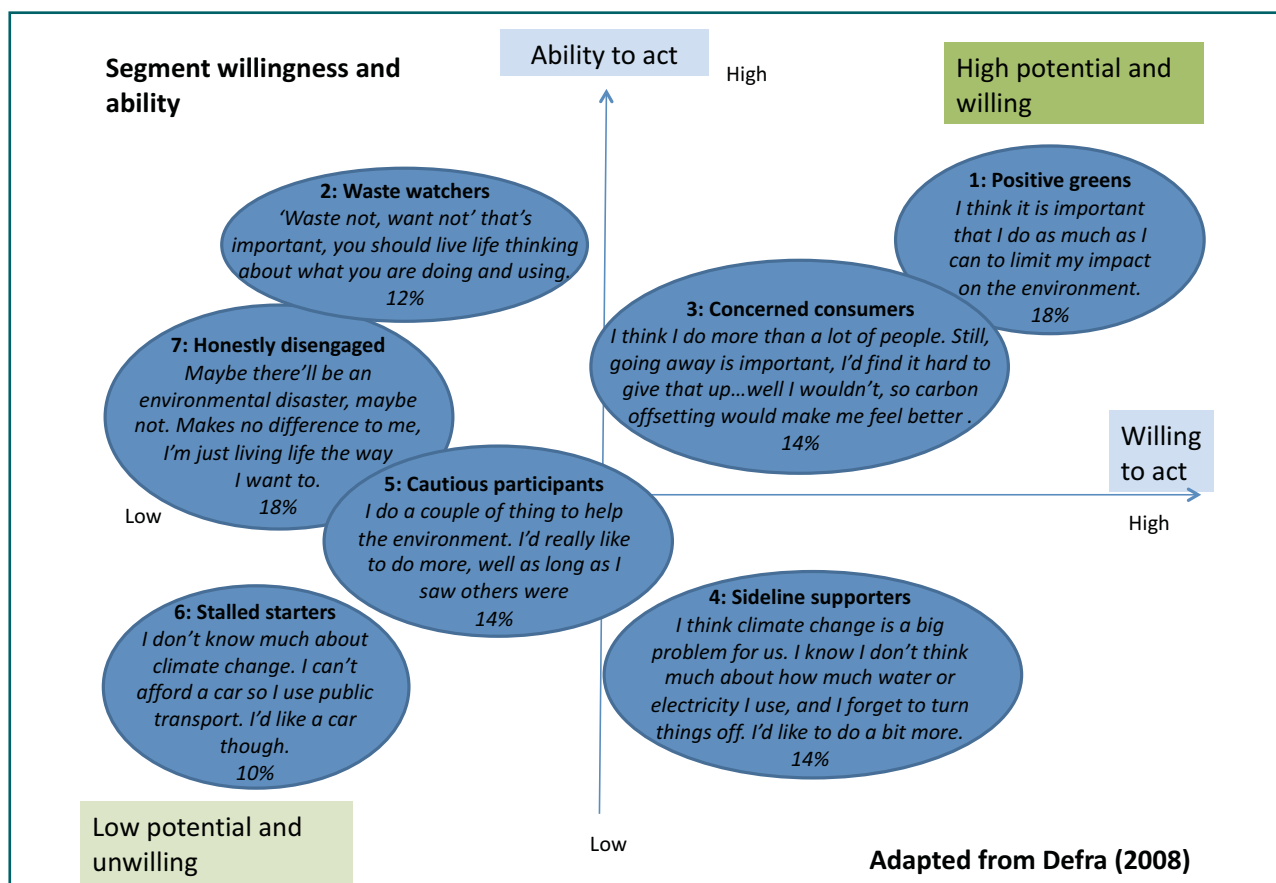
Eco Concierge is not a typical company. It is one of a growing breed of hybrid organisations, a for-profit enterprise whose mandate is to promote a social and public good and to conduct business ethically. The overarching aim is to help people make a positive environmental difference to their lives. With a company like this, it's not about retrofit 'embedding responsible values' as other companies have to do; it was the values of the people who work there that created the company and which continues to drive it. Our mission is to have a net positive effect on the world.

The Eco Concierge approach

We retain our competitive edge by working from a strong research base. We are taking steps to ensure that we keep ahead of the curve as behaviour change is proven on a wider scale. While green behaviour change is a major growth area for employee and customer engagement within large companies, the breadth of knowledge and action, personalisation and proven sustainability impact combine with our research-based approach to make us unique and successful. We have no direct competitors in operation at the moment.





Most importantly, our approach targets and works with those people who *do not* pick up on mass media communications, because they don't identify with the agenda. The premise behind this stems from the idea that there are different types of 'green' – some people who identify with the agenda, and some who don't but aren't adverse to adopting sustainable behaviours if engaged at a level on which they identify. DEFRA (2008) developed this segmentation model (see Figure 1) and Eco Concierge attempts to engage the segments of society identified as having the potential to be greener.

Figure 1: The seven population segments



Drawing on our own experience of working with clients, as well as other research on segmentation and DEFRA's segmentation model, Eco Concierge have devised an approach which identifies four behavioural types (see Figure 2). Our clustering of behaviours is based on developing the segmentation developed by DEFRA to make it more commercially applicable. It is also key to adopt an approach which is more meaningful to actual consumer experiences. Two sectors mentioned in Figure 1 ('honestly disengaged' and 'stalled starters') are specifically not targeted through our work.

Figure 2: Eco Concierge behaviour segment model

<p>1.</p>  <p>"I'm careful about saving money where I can. I can see the value of 'waste not, want not' in other areas of my life too"</p>	<p>2.</p>  <p>"I like to show my support for green issues – I'd be up for buying a Prius and things like those cool Stella McCartney t-shirts or RED ones that support AIDS charities"</p>
<p>Waste not want not – 12% of the population</p>	<p>Conscious consumer – 14% of the population</p>
<p>3.</p>  <p>"I do some things to help the environment, but it's hard to do everything. I am most likely to do something if I see others making the effort too, because it feels more fair"</p>	<p>4.</p>  <p>"The Earth has very limited room and resources so people who fly should bear the cost of the environmental damage that air travel causes"</p>
<p>I will if you will (groups together two of DEFRA segments 'side-line supporters and cautious participants') – 28% of the population</p>	<p>Positive green – 18% of the population</p>

We further couple the segmentation model on environmental considerations with a similar 'values' matrix based on Dynamic Maslow Group Theory to allow us an even better understanding of client perspectives and therefore the subsequent response we can deliver. Of course, there will be differences in declared versus actual behaviour at times, but the 'faces' are designed to hold equal appeal or status so that there should not be a feeling of any 'right' or 'wrong' answer. Ascertaining to which group an individual most identifies with allows us to respond with solutions and actions which will appeal. We don't just provide standard services with minimal impact; by combining these approaches when conducting initial consultation, we are able to tailor our work to reflect individual values.

In addition to the identification exercise, our first interaction with all clients also includes a baseline ‘ecological footprint’ calculation, following the methodology developed by the Stockholm Environment Institute. This allows us to calculate a person’s holistic environmental impact. By determining ‘how many planets’ a lifestyle is consuming, we can assess the reduction in impact our solutions will offer. We work on the premise that our services will deliver a minimum client reduction of 10 per cent footprint, which taking the UK average (3 planets) is a third of a planet. However, since our client base to date has been the more affluent market, we are finding that clients have a higher than average footprint, which offers more scope for action and therefore bigger absolute reduction in environmental impact as a result.

Conclusion

In Britain, a majority of people say they would like to do more to live sustainably – a positive life with limited impact – but do not do so because of the range of practical and perceived barriers discussed here. Eco Concierge has delivered numerous innovative and reactive projects and is developing from its beginnings and the proof-of-concept work to the development of robust programmes aimed at influencing behaviour change and habit. This is often a crucial missing component in work aimed at reducing negative environmental impacts, whereas it constitutes the central pillar for Eco Concierge. As thought leaders in the area of behaviour change for sustainable lifestyles, our ‘whole perspective’ stance, which incorporates an ecological footprint measurement and personal values, and our environmental perspective ‘segment’ identification gives us an operating model which is effective in engaging people who ordinarily wouldn’t feel engaged to deliver change beyond expectations. For Eco Concierge it is and will remain our main objective to help as many people as possible live greener lives.

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