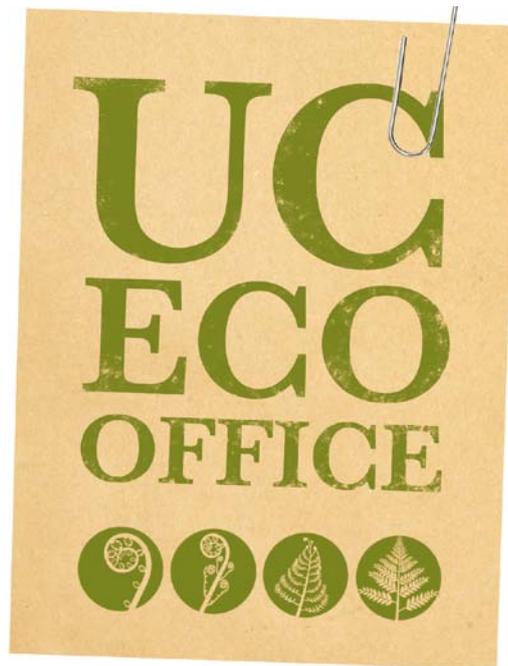


How to Grow an Eco-Office

A Guide for Eco Office Champions



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Introduction

The UC Eco Office Guide outlines a range of practical tips and examples of operational changes that UC staff can make in their offices as part of the journey towards a more sustainable UC.

Achieving sustained voluntary change within a small (or large) groups of people is often just as much about shifting people's thoughts and behaviours as well as taking practical action. The most powerful action for change is not always about having an effect on the physical world. The "best" action may instead send strong and effective signals to the people around you – your social world.

Taking action for sustainability isn't everybody's cup of tea – if it was, the world would be a different place! Achieving behaviour change with people who may not be so committed to or interested in sustainability issues is not always a straight forward process. It is important that sustainability champions in UC have good information about this as well as the 'how to' operational tips outlined in the UC Eco Office Guide.

This guide provides some practical tips and ideas on how to positively influence your world of work so that the people around you choose to change willingly in their own time, without perceived undue compulsion. This includes colleagues, lecturers, and students you work with and for every day.

The first section outlines how to develop a plan of action. The second section provides a summary of some basic principles and concepts that underlie successful voluntary behaviour change programmes.

These processes are not set in stone, and you might find it useful to adapt them. You know your colleagues the best and will also have valuable insights into how you can achieve change. It is important to trust your instincts and institutional knowledge.

Even if you work in an office with just one other person, many of these tips are still relevant.

There are many different ways of thinking about and research into how change for a more sustainable world can be achieved. The tips in this guide are drawn primarily from the discipline of psychology and are by no means exhaustive. References include

1. '*Psychology for a better world*' by Nicky Harre. (2011)

<http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/uoahome/about/our-staff/academic-staff/niki-harre/psychologyforabetterworld>.

2. *Wake Up Call* e-letters; <http://awake.com.au/> (2008-2012)

Don't hesitate to get in touch with the Sustainability Office if you wish to discuss any of content in this guide, or need further support. We especially want to hear from you if you have discovered a different process for change that has worked for you.

Thank you

A very special thank you to the UC Eco Office Network champions who offered essential feedback on this guide; Catherine Woods, Lawrence Teo, Samantha Eason, and Leigh Davidson.

How to create an Eco Office Culture – an action plan

Make the UC Eco Office Guide visible

If possible, keep the UC Eco Office guide somewhere visible or easily available where individuals can look through it in their own time.

Work with the willing

Ideally everybody in your office would take part in the Eco Office project, but that won't always be the case. Start with the people who you think are interested, and maybe other staff will come on board once they have had a chance to learn more about UC Eco Office.

Make a start

Introduce the Eco Office guide and give some reasons why you think it might be a good idea to try some of the actions in it. These could include;

1. Makes good business sense through reduced costs, increased resource efficiency and better performance
2. It helps to reduce UC's impact on the environment
3. Reinforces to students UC's commitment to sustainability
4. Clause in General Staff job descriptions: "University Service" emphasises a responsibility to "contribute to the sustainability efforts of the University through the responsible use of resources and equipment."
5. Improves public profile of UC
6. Opportunity to demonstrate leadership and team work for performance development
7. The satisfaction of making a difference.

If you think there is enough interest, introduce the office assessment, and arrange a time for all or interested staff to be part of that assessment.

Emphasise that staff don't have to tackle everything in the UC Eco Office Guide, which is simply a tool box of a wide range of voluntary activities that staff can pick and choose from, not an onerous

Other tips

Pay attention to and acknowledge any concerns or questions – these can be addressed at the next meeting(s).

It can help to have somebody from outside the office who has already undertaken a range of Eco-Office actions to attend and talk to staff briefly this can help to confidence and motivation.

Conduct an initial assessment

Using the UC Eco Office Assessment Form (contact the Sustainability Office if you need a copy), identify some activities that could be implemented. It might help to focus on a particular section in the Eco Office guide, or pick just one or two actions from different sections.

Include all interested staff. This will help to build an understanding of the extent to which their office is already undertaking a range of Eco Office actions. Make sure that all staff in the office understand the results of the assessment, and most importantly celebrate what you are doing already!

The assessment should help to identify what staff are most enthusiastic about changing. If you are not sure about how colleagues would receive suggestions for change, pick one

small change recommended in the guide that you enjoy, feel confident about, and have control over, and keep at it without making a big deal of it. That way you can send a simple, clear message to the people around you without creating conflict.

Make a plan and make it happen

1. Discuss which actions staff would like to try first.
2. Ask for volunteers to commit to complete those tasks or actions. Allow people to take on a role that suits them.
3. Set goals – what will get done by when? This will help to keep people accountable to the plan and the group.

Other things to discuss include

1. What resources do people need? It might be a small change in office routine, finances approved, tutoring on how to make 'green' purchases, or more information (e.g. location of "Free" tables around campus)
2. Problem solve - are there any barriers to achieving change? How can these be addressed?
3. Is it possible to provide incentives to encourage people to change in some way? An incentive may as simple as an afternoon tea shouted at a local cafe for the team that manages to achieve a measurable reduction in paper use.

Make your plan visible to everybody

Make your commitments and/or goals public – write them down, and put them up somewhere in your office where everybody can see them. If possible, ask people to sign their names next to the tasks they have volunteered to undertake.

This will help to remind people about their roles and responsibilities, plus remind the group as a whole they have agreed to work towards more sustainable office-practices.

Review regularly and celebrate achievements

Review the plan regularly so that individuals can report on their individual goals or tasks, and the group can track their overall process, and problems or barriers to change are addressed. Staff may come up with lots of good ideas through the review process. Make sure that you record those ideas and follow up on them when appropriate.

It is very, very important to celebrate the changes achieved by each office or individuals. There's nothing like some Fair Trade chocolate shimmied down with a cup of Fair Trade coffee to bring on a bit of cheer. Contact the Sustainability Office to find out if we can source some treats for your celebrations.

Tell people about your achievements too! Enthusiasm is infectious and can have a lot of impact.

Eco-Office Certification

At some stage, introduce the Certification Process and suggest this might be something the office could think about working towards. Some offices may decide to take part in the Eco-Office Certification straight away. Others might choose to try a few things first before they commit to a certification process.

Achieving "four ferns" could be a great way to provide structure and motivation for the collective efforts of your office.

New staff

When newcomers enter the office, give them an “Eco Office induction”, with clear messages about any key behaviours and activities you have adopted in your office.

Keep connected with other champions and change agents

Advocates for change need support and networks. Few people can keep going at anything without being in a supportive group of like-minded others. Keep in touch with the Sustainability Office, and come to our monthly Eco Office Network meetings.

Foundations

Learning – we learn by watching others

What we see people doing matters. Visible signals are crucial our brains are highly tuned to noticing others’ behaviours and, when they seem to work as planned, making them our own. Examples include

- displaying UC Sustainability ‘Fronds’ certification system on your wall or door
- having a ‘free’ table next to every UC office.
- stickers reminding people of different key behaviours around an office.

We are very attuned to the goals and aspirations of others, not just how to do things.

Champions quietly (and sometimes not so quietly!) demonstrate practices to those around them. One-on-one close-contact modelling is likely to be much more powerful than the modelling displayed by remote public figures. You don’t need to lecture people, have difficult conversations, or tell people they are wrong.

There are, however, a few ways you can help the process along, and make your own behaviours more contagious

1. Make it visible
2. Tell people about it
3. Demonstrate it to them
4. Provide people with resources and information for doing it
5. Help them, or join them, in getting started

Directly observing and feeling the benefits of a new behaviour is a much more powerful trigger for change rather than merely reading about it or hearing about it over dinner. The best change is achieved when people chose to do things of their own volition.

Role modelling is exponential. If your acquaintances go on to become role models themselves, and then we stand a good chance of reaching the tipping point in sustainable behaviours which our society and planet are in need of.

If you are not sure about how colleagues would receive suggestions for change, simply pick one small (preferably visible) change that you enjoy and have control over, and keep at it without making a big deal of it. That way you can stick to your own values but also send a simple, clear message to the people around you. Examples of this type of action include

- Use a ‘keep cup’ for your daily trip to the cafe for coffee or tea, or a stainless steel water bottle.
- Circulate one copy of a memo or report rather than printing out multiple copies.

- CEPS offer a free service making note pads from recycled paper. Whip round your colleagues every now and then and collect any paper they are planning to recycle, and make it into a notebook for your own use.
- If you've done something in your spare time that is relevant to a sustainable life style (worked in your vegetable garden, draught-stopped or insulated your house, or participated in a carbon offset program for your next holiday overseas), drop it into your morning tea conversation every now and then.

It's amazing sometimes what can happen when people just quietly get on with things.

Emotions and messages about sustainability

Positive emotions and messages

Positive emotions bring out important personal qualities that are essential to social change – taking risks and trying new things, thinking differently, or handle threatening information.

It can be helpful to state some behaviours as normal – e.g. “70% of UC offices take recyclable stationary to the UC Free Tables”. This communicates ‘lots of people are doing this now, so it's time to join the rest of the community!’

Exposing people to **words** associated with a behaviour, plus give explicit instructions can create an unconscious readiness to behave in a particular way.

Keep negative messages infrequent or low key

Negative emotions: people don't respond well if they are angry or scared. Negative emotions dampened ability to imagine possible actions.

Sustainability messages that are negative or filled with threats of fear (e.g. we are filling the world with waste!) are complex and need to be used with care. They can immobilise or turn people off, or be useful when people aren't aware of a problem, especially when a problem is new.

Discussing problematic behaviour at a large scale can serve to normalise it. Individuals think – “everybody else is doing it, why should I change?” Focus on emphasising the behaviour change rather than talking about widespread problem.

A small dollop of negative emotions can be a good reality check. They are healthy if balanced by positive emotions 3:1. We generally need three to six positive inputs for every negative input.

It doesn't pay for messages to be too rigid, hard line, or create sudden extreme change, otherwise they will be rejected outright.

Take it easy and keep going

If pushed too hard, people will retrench back into their original position.

- Your messages may be initially rejected, but people will still be processing them over time. Just because something doesn't seem to go down well, does not mean the message has failed.
- If your message is consistent and is based on “facts” rather than “opinions” it is more likely to be taken seriously by those you are trying to persuade.
- By being consistent and reasonable you may provide someone with the support they need to take a stand.

Delayed influence

- If someone in a group introduces a new idea, we are only slightly receptive at first. But persuasion processes don't stop there.
- Over time people appear to disassociate the message from the messenger. This allows them to think about the message more clearly, at face value or for its own sake. This process is unconscious and occurs if messages are consistent over time.
- Do not feel defeated by apparent losses or lack of change. Change will occur over time!

Conflict and Compromise

Conflict may be an inevitable part of a shift. If you want to maintain positive relationships, small forays into these issues and being prepared to retreat is probably best. Delayed influence may eventually work. Asking for change and failing to get what you want, does not mean you have been ineffective.

Compromise is most likely to be about strategy rather than values. It is better to err on the side of group harmony. For example, if some staff don't like Fair Trade tea or coffee, it doesn't matter. Buy it anyway and have it available for the people that do like to drink it!

Appeal to a range of values

Sometimes it can be useful to pitch your message in a way that draws on their values (e.g. save money and improve business performance), rather than appeal to the need to care for the environment. This is because nature is a much harder sell than people.

As a general rule our moral radar is not designed to solve problems like environmental destruction. Our moral radar was developed within small social groups with the purpose of helping us get on with others in the group. Many people's moral compass requires us to look after those who are immediately in front of us, rather than caring for humanity as a whole. People know they are accountable to other people (or a business case!) in a way they are not accountable to the environment.

Good systems help to change or reinforce habits

Habits are another reason why system design is important. Studies show that as much as 50% of our behaviour is habitual, meaning we do it unconsciously, supported by stable and repetitive environmental context. As a result we are often on autopilot, not really thinking too much about the wider implications of what we are doing. In such a circumstance, we are seemingly not really in control of our decisions – our surroundings are doing the thinking for us. These surroundings can be designed to guide us towards actions which are beneficial to us, or not.

A great example of good systems design is the Academic Promotions Paper Reduction Initiative, rolled out during 2011/2012. Led by Maxine Bryant from UC Human Resources, project has saved an estimated \$8,500 per year in paper consumption and there has also been a large saving in administration time, through making one particular process electronic. The result is a model that can be adopted by other units within the University, demonstrating how economic efficiencies and sustainability can go hand in hand when thought through intelligently and systematically.

Getting things done

If a task is too hard or tedious, people will disengage. The self-control required to do things differently is like an energy source – eventually it runs out and we need to take a break. People have a limited ability to do things that require a conscientious sacrifice. That's why small steps/achievable tasks are so important.

Success will happen when the individual can manage the task at hand. People are more likely to give of themselves when they perceive a change or task to be within their capabilities.

Small actions can create or change a culture

Many people don't act on the sustainability message is because they are surrounded by examples of unsustainable behaviour and our copying nature makes it difficult for us to stand aside from these and be different. Changing is not easy, because to change sometimes requires us to give up not just material things but also habit, convenience and challenge

However if people are surrounded by others who are undertaking small, visible steps towards change, it is easier for individuals to change what they do. Whilst small actions can seem futile, swamped by the mountain of counter-productive actions, they do send a strong signal that a community is working together to be more sustainable.

The more little actions/steps that people take, the stronger people start to identify with a different set of values.