Recycling, Composting, and Sustainability Education at Expeditors International

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Introduction to the Project

Expeditors International (Expeditors) is a global logistics company. Expeditors has made many strides towards being a more sustainable company including implementing recycling, composting, and sustainability education at certain offices, like the corporate headquarters in Seattle, Washington. Since being hired at this company, I noticed the need for similar initiatives to be taken at the Phoenix and Surprise locations since recycling was hardly even being done. In response, I put together a group of sustainability-minded individuals to help implement some of the initiatives I had planned for the branch. This “green team” idea came from other branches at Expeditors that had done the same when looking to increase their branches’ sustainability.

Nick Griffin, my project partner and the branch manager of Expeditors’ Phoenix office, also wanted the branch to become more sustainable. To do so, my main goals were to divert a large proportion of our solid waste from the landfill, have each employee gain at least a basic understanding of sustainability, and make sure the branch has a culture of “doing the right thing” for both the planet and the branch. Nick and I created a project vision aimed at achieving improvements that were cost effective and gave the employees better working lives. What we came up with was to have an incremental plan of integrating recycling and composting into the branch operations in order to create a culture of sustainability for the branch.

The sustainability challenge of this project had a few complexities and barriers. These included that many employees’ behaviors and mindsets took a lot of effort to shift, that composting in Phoenix is not always easy, and that accurate data can be difficult to obtain. First, some people seem to resist changes, have a lack of sustainability knowledge, or may even harbor some negative feelings towards sustainability projects in general. Second, finding a compost hauler is not always a simple process since there are only really two options in Phoenix, and only one of them takes smaller amounts of compost. Third, the quantitative data that will help show the weight of how much recycling, composting, and trash is taken was not always easy to find because many haulers simply do not track these statistics and it is difficult to weigh it yourself. Overall, we knew that the sustainability challenge indicators were that there were no real sustainable behaviors taking place in the branch and that this project needed to jumpstart efforts to put in a framework that would allow those behaviors to flourish.

Description of the Methods and Interventions

My main method for completing this project’s goals was to use the tools learned from my classes on how to set up sustainable initiatives and how to successfully teach others about sustainability. I also used interpersonal relationship and project management tools to ensure people understood why I was doing this project and to keep the project on course as best as possible. Almost all the methods I used to complete this project were adapted from those I had learned in classes. I was able to use these skills by looking at my situation and what the goals for the project were and adapting to my situation as needed.
I used the lessons I learned in the realm of project management during green team meetings at the beginning of the project to help keep myself and the green team on track. I also used my interpersonal relationship tools to talk to employees one-on-one, in emails, in the newsletters, and sometimes in branch meetings to relay information about each new sustainable initiative throughout the project. The success benchmarks began as just getting the recycling and composting started and making sure everyone knew about it and how they could help. The benchmarks then evolved into promoting reduction of resource use and communicating more about sustainability, why it matters, and how to be sustainable at home and at work. The success benchmarks further evolved to include plans for future improvements with water and energy and a backup leader for my green team if I were to leave the company.

**Summarization of the Project Outcomes and Results**

Looking at the project outcomes and results, I would say the project approach I created was validated. After the announcements and dissemination of sustainability information, employees began using the correct bins for solid waste items, and many employees seemed to take an interest in what I was doing for the branch. The Global Environmental Manager also made it clear that we were doing something special; she told us we were the largest and one of the most successful green teams outside of corporate and highlighted our successes multiple times to the company in global newsletters. Also, my weekly qualitative analyses of the composition of trash, recycling, and composting showed that over time employees correctly sorted their solid waste. This is due to the signage and information provided as well as a sense of wanting to do the right thing. Another outcome of this project is that the project partner will now be able to see some economic benefits through fewer trash pickups.

Throughout the course of this project I have found that continuing to educate and making sustainable choices accessible and convenient, has helped even the seemingly inflexible employees take at least a basic interest in this project’s resulting improvements to the branch. There are also some opportunities that have arisen, like the training video and battery recycling. Beyond that, other opportunities, such as consolidating our logistics providers operations to be more efficient and working on getting electricity and water related projects, all have potential. With the scope of my project focused on waste diversion and sustainability education, I had to make sure these potential projects did not interfere with the scope of my current project while also keeping them on the table to possibly work on after the completion of this project.

**Identification of Possible Next Steps**

After finishing this project, I will hold a full training, finish the video, and work on looking into the energy and water situations as potential intervention points. Another student could utilize the findings from this project in a similar culminating experience project that focuses on another office type environment. They could put in similar infrastructural elements (composting and recycling) or use their own ideas to come up with something unique. They could also take cues from my education elements but expand further upon them and perhaps make their project even more focused on the education/behavior change. There are definitely more actions that can be taken to optimize the results, such as finding another recycling, composting, and trash hauler that will weigh the pickups and give discounts based on number of pickups and weight. The project did address the entire sustainability challenge that the project partner presented to me at the beginning of the project. The lack of waste diversion and culture of sustainability were addressed.