



CAPLOR HORIZONS RIPPLE PAPERS

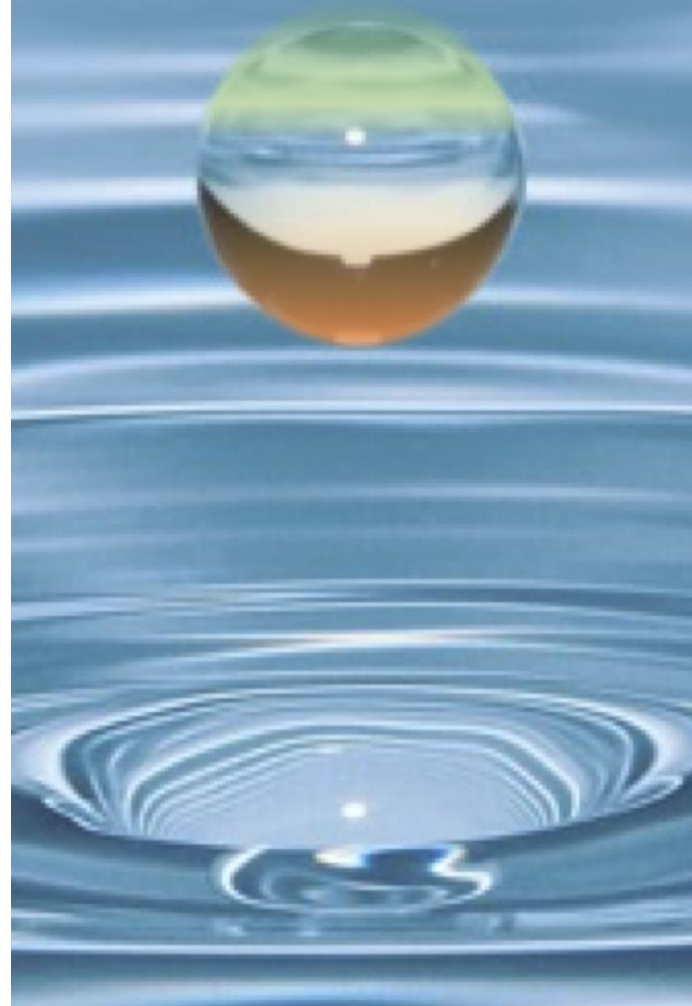
...creating ripples of change

The Essentials of a Sustainable Future



Sustainable Future

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Learning differently

Thinking differently

Acting differently

The Essentials of a Sustainable Future

Summary

The purpose of Caplor Horizons is *“to inspire and enable leaders to deliver a sustainable future”*. What follows is our overarching paper about that *“sustainable future”* - the attainment of which we believe is of such paramount significance to humankind. Included below are the essential elements that make an important difference in our view. Accompanied by a video, this is part of a series of papers. I share simple and compelling ideas in each paper that we think will help people that we work with directly, along with those who we reach via our online Forum.

In the first section, I distil the framework that Caplor Horizons has developed; this stems from the original *“triple bottom line”* thinking of John Elkington and others, since it is about having a balance between people, planet and economy:

1. People: *confront social injustice whenever you see an opportunity.*
2. Planet: *tread softly on the planet’s resources in as many ways as possible.*
3. Economy: *think long-term when handling financial considerations.*

Then, drawing on a forward-thinking example of the Welsh Government, I explain how to create practical checklists from a wider organisational commitment.

Secondly, I consider the skills of sustainable leadership put forward by Marianne Gloet; these centre on roles and relationships, strategic thinking and learning. Next, I consider the behaviours and capabilities required. I include the conviction that success for leaders will boil down to their persistence in putting the sustainability agenda into practice, influencing others to do the same and then acting as role models.

At the end, I include 7 principles about a *sustainable future* that we have identified as important at Caplor Horizons.

Introduction

Leading for Sustainable Futures is finally, it seems, being taken seriously by leaders. Thinking about the planet's resources and the needs of future generations are themes that are finally coming to the forefront of many leaders' thinking. But what does leadership for sustainability really mean for such leaders, and how can you as leaders play your part in working towards a more sustainable future for the next generations, and the many different communities who inhabit the planet?

Wherever we live and work on this planet, we can all share a common aim, to enable the people, flora, fauna on this planet to thrive and live in harmony, and to safeguard our resources for future generations. There is no simple formula for achieving this, but we are of the firm belief that education and leadership are key, and that contributing to a growing understanding of the many systemic and interconnected issues that can either enable or destroy our sustainable future is a worthwhile goal.

At Caplor Horizons we seek to play our part in this agenda by helping leaders to engage, and inspire others to do the same, across the many corners of the globe that we are able to touch in our work.

The article below contains the ideas of a number of practitioners and scholars, many of which offer specific checklists of leadership capabilities that are required by leaders who seek to make their mark on this agenda, or grow their expertise. All of these are useful. Some are more behavioural; others are more complexity or systems focused. All are, however, useful in different ways as we set out below.

There is no simple process to follow to achieve this agenda but most sustainability experts are in accord, that the most effective place to start is with ourselves!

Changing the way that we think and act in our own lives will have a ripple effect as we join with others who wish to change and make changes too, and influence the people around us. Sometimes the sustainability agenda seems daunting.

But when it starts to feel overwhelming we seek reassurance in Margaret Mead's often cited comment:

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has'.

The Caplor Horizons' view on leading for delivering a sustainable future

The idea of the 4Ps (Purpose, People, Planet, Prosperity) for practicing *leadership for sustainability* is a simple but critical idea. We subscribe to this idea, but recognise that of course to achieve this balance consistently and authentically requires a considerable effort by leaders.

Below I will explore what these imperatives mean to us in practice.

The principles of leadership for delivering a sustainable future

The word *sustainability* has been a controversial subject for some time, and often only associated with rather climate change or narrow environmental perspectives. We prefer to take a more broad-based view of the word sustainability – a concept that focuses on the way that we all live on this planet, how we share the world's resources, how we invest for our futures and the futures of future generations,

and how we address inequalities, corruption and injustice. We aim to support the development of a globally responsible leadership mindset in organisations and society.

An example of this kind of thinking is the Welsh Government's path-breaking *Well Being of Future Generations Act*. This Act defines Sustainable Development as:

'Improving the way that we can achieve our economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being.'

Their sustainable development principles, as shown below in Figure 1, resonate for us. Whilst for the Welsh government, the responsibility for sustainable change applies to the public bodies in Wales, for us the same principles may apply to any leader or any organisation wishing to make a contribution to a sustainable future.

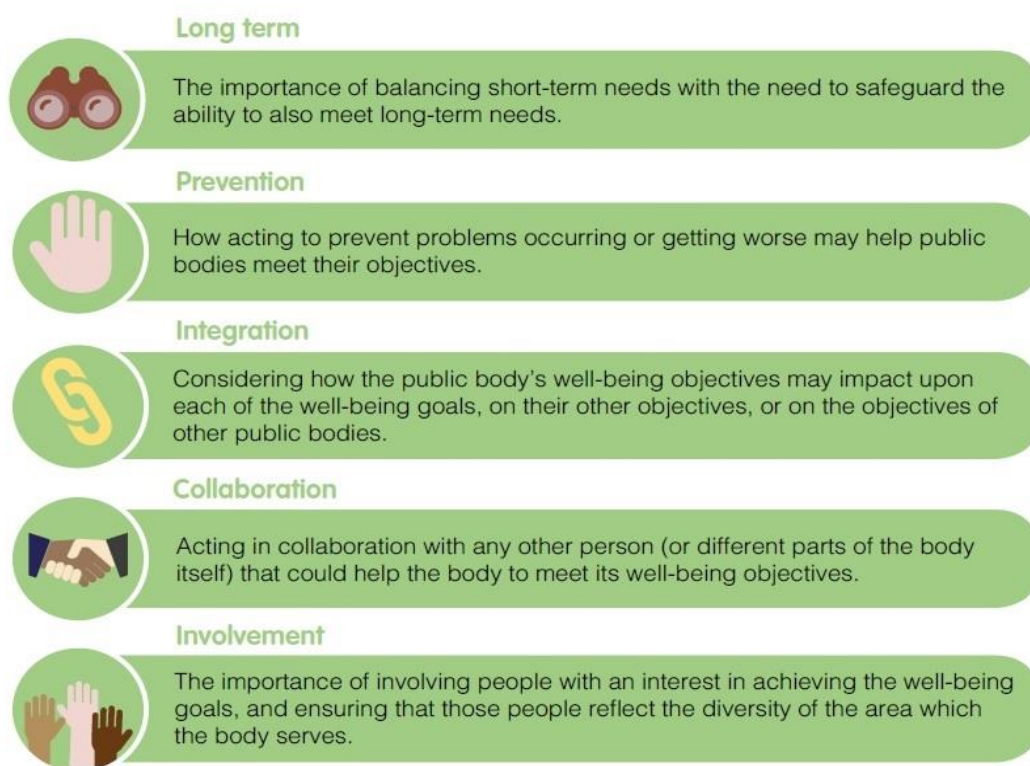


Figure 1. Source: *Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.p. 7*

If we look at this list: long term, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement, we find thoughtful and system-wide guidance for leaders. I explore below what these words mean for us at Caplor Horizons, building on the guidance offered by the Welsh Government to the public bodies in Wales, and reflecting on how leaders can make these into a practical checklist.

- 1. Long Term.** To achieve long term thinking, leaders need to keep an eye on the long term as well as short-term outcomes of their actions. Sometimes it helps to ask a very personal question to make this a reality. For example, how will today's actions impact on our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren? How can we measure progress towards sustainable futures? Are we taking actions that will have positive long-term impact on society, as well as short-term business results?

2. Prevention. In thinking about preventing problems from occurring or getting worse, leaders should ask how they can act early and monitor the results of their actions and their systemic impact inside and outside the organisation. The message for leaders is to carefully uncover the roots of the problems you are encountering, stripping away the noise in the system, and to try to address the multiple interconnected causes of these problems, and not just the immediate effects.

In today's complex world, these causes are rarely simple, nor do we often find simple or linear causes and effects. Often the roots of our complex problems are found in human perceptions, values, beliefs and cultures. All of these need care and dialogue with others if we are to disentangle them and start to work with others towards new futures. The message here is for leaders to embrace complexity and work across the whole system to prevent knock on effects from looking only at small parts of the whole.

3. Integration. Leaders need to be aware of the interconnected nature of today's world, and to think about how our actions impact on others, whether these others are our partners, suppliers or donors, customers or clients. This interconnectivity can be positive if people in organisations work in alignment for mutually beneficial positive outcomes. This can mean sharing resources, aligning our goals and aspirations for the common good.

4. Collaboration. We believe that collaboration is a core capability for today's responsible leaders, and that only through the synergies and combined energies of a collaborative mindset will we achieve the creative thinking and innovation required to build a sustainable future. Collaboration is the subject of a full article in this series and so the ideas we have developed be found in their expanded version in that document.

5. Involvement. Leaders today cannot achieve much on their own. If they see themselves as single-handed warriors or lone heroes leading a victory march, their successes are likely to be short term. Heroic leadership invariably disappoints its followers in the end. We contrast this hierarchical and heroic leadership style with a leadership process that engages and involves all. This is a leadership approach that values and builds on diversity and embraces different ideas and beliefs. And it is a leadership that develops others and empowers others to become leaders themselves, by developing a 'leaderful' culture.

Marianne Gloet, from RMIT University in Melbourne, in *Knowledge Management and the links to HRM* (2006) distils her advice to today's responsible leaders into three key areas of focus: Roles and Relationships, Strategic Thinking and Learning. We at Caplor Horizons agree that this is a useful tripod on which to build the skills of sustainable leadership. I summarise Gloet's practical guidance for sustainable leaders below:

Roles and relationships

- a. The ability to think across boundaries and establish new relationships;
- b. To create a vision and act as a role model;

- c. To work across organisations, value chains, and extended markets as well as national and international boundaries;
- d. To possess excellent communication skills and the capacity to develop broad networks;
- e. To recognise the need to collaborate, and
- f. The ability to be flexible and adaptive with people and relationships.

Strategic thinking:

- g. The ability to demonstrate purpose-driven leadership; and
- h. To align sustainability objectives to business goals.

Learning:

- i. The ability to pose questions and engage in critical enquiry;
- j. To be values aware;
- k. To be a systems thinker;
- l. To see holistically; and
- m. To recognise the fluid evolving nature of all systems.

Gloet's roles and relationships points echo many of the ideas we have discussed in our Essentials of Collaboration article. She also reinforces, in these, the research findings of the Welsh Government's principles of Integration, Collaboration and Involvement (as discussed above).

The behaviours and capabilities required by leaders for delivering a sustainable future

Looking at the *behaviours* of the leader themselves, Laura Quinn and Jane Norton's article *Beyond the bottom line, practicing leadership for sustainability in Leadership in Action* (2004) is very helpful in this respect, suggesting that success in achieving the sustainability agenda requires leaders to develop:

1. Focused commitment.
2. Long-term strategic thinking.
3. Communication.
4. Buy in at all levels.
5. Persistence, and
6. Shared ideas with suppliers, customers and even competitors.

This simple list is, in our view, a baseline for leaders seeking to build sustainability into their daily behaviours.

Complementing these ideas, Dr Mary Ferdig from the Sustainability Leadership Institute, in an article entitled *Sustainability Leadership, co-creating a sustainable future*, offers her own *sustainability leadership principles* for 'any one of us who cares enough to engage with the process of creating transformative change'.

This is a more systems-orientated perspective than Quinn and Norton's checklist, but the leadership capabilities she proposes are entirely complementary with it. Ferdig argues that leaders of sustainable futures need to be mindful of complex systems:

1. Facilitating others in active learning and participation;
2. Acting as catalyst for change;
3. Adopting whole systems thinking;
4. Dealing with complexity;
5. Meaning-making through conversation and interaction with others;
6. Supporting others to uncover and nurture the leadership potential within themselves; and
7. Building meaningful connections with other human beings and the earth.

Redecop's (2010) important book, *Leadership for Environmental Sustainability*, also reinforces the idea that today's responsible leaders need to understand complex systems by focusing on two key ideas:

1. The importance of understanding time, culture, and context in order to drive sustainability; and
2. The importance of generating adaptive learning by understanding the critical principles of interdependence, open systems, and cycling of resources, including leadership talent.

We agree with Redecop's essential messages. The first implies a mindset that seeks to understand the world around us, our environment, our cultural context, our values and our differences. This, Mintzberg calls the Worldly Mindset, and it is a Mindset that we build into many of our leadership programmes. The second point, the essential leadership element of learning, is covered extensively elsewhere in our article: *The Essentials of Learning*. Learning is the foundation of the Caplor House model, and of all our development initiatives.

Simon Western, in his book: *Leadership, A Critical Text*, coined the phrase *Eco-leadership* (Western, 2010) for leadership that focuses on sustainable futures. For him, eco-leaders (leaders of sustainable futures) need to understand:

1. The importance of taking a holistic, systemic, ethical stance;
2. The reciprocal relationship between leadership and the environment;
3. The interconnected nature of the planet at micro, local, macro, and global levels;
4. The importance of finding more *democratised* ways of organising that challenge the underlying power relations of late capitalism.

These points echo the contributions of others discussed above, and reinforce the need for leaders for sustainable futures to take a holistic, systemic approach to change; and to recognise and pay attention to the interconnected nature of our world. Further, Western's book draws on Heifetz's adaptive leadership idea to reflect on ways to generate new cultural norms that may enable people to meet adaptive challenges, realities, and pressures and to build adaptive capacity into their organisational systems.

Leaders need to take a stand and be role models for sustainability

In the article so far, we have discussed the meaning of Sustainable Futures for us at Caplor Horizons, the principles we can establish in our organisations, as well as the behaviours and capabilities that we as leaders will need in a world that requires systems leadership and the ability to lead through complexity.

In the end, our success as leaders will come down to our persistence in putting this agenda into practice, influencing others to do the same, and acting as role models.

Paul Dolan, Chief Executive of Fetzer Vineyards, in an article in *Leader for Leader* (2004) entitled *Sustainable Leadership*, offers a personal example of this. After he discovered that his own business was destroying the land that he loved by its intensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, he took immediate action to transform his company into one that might be described as *sustainable*. His actions started by rallying all staff to this new possibility and drawing out their passion and creativity. For him, looking back now to the transformation, his principle lesson is that leaders need to take a stand. He sees this as an absolute, and his people as the source of (not resource for) sustainability.

Calling in his article for others to follow his lead, and for business to become a positive force for change, he adds that sales and profits continued to rise as he implemented this agenda. So here we see the triple bottom line of people, planet and economy standing side by side to support each other.

The same has happened on a systems wide basis in the Central American country of Costa Rica. Recognising that their diverse eco-system was on the brink of destruction by a small number of businesses, the government, NGOs, businesses and tourism worked together to save and support the country's diverse ecosystem which in turn would enable the country's economy to thrive at the same time as the diverse flora and fauna that lived there. An education programme to prevent further destruction of the rainforest for palm oil or bananas has been very successful in turning around the destruction of the rainforest, and replanting indigenous trees. Many species previously endangered are now thriving once again.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us come back to our acronym for Sustainable Futures. We hope that this will offer a springboard for all leaders wishing to consider future generations on this planet to take the plunge and start the journey with whatever small steps make sense at the start:

See the broad perspective and implications – Take a holistic approach to sustainability. Focus on all three areas of 'people, planet and economy' and how they are all connected. Understand and be wary of where there might be trade-offs between the three.

Uncertainty now and for future generations – We admit that we cannot know all there is to know about sustainability, even more so looking into the future. However, we must act to minimise any negative impact on this uncertain future and increase our positive impact.

Seek collaboration – Issues of sustainability are so broad ranging that there is no way we can hope to tackle them all on our own. For a future world where social, environmental and economic progress is balanced, it is imperative that we work together.

Transformation – We need to make changes that make a bigger impact, whilst treading softly.

Agile – With the uncertainty of the future, we must accept that there will be changes and we must be prepared for these by being flexible and agile enough.

Integrity – We must act ethically and with integrity. Equality should be at the heart of everything we do. Our actions must reflect this.

No right answer – In order to bring about a sustainable future we must constantly ‘challenge the norm’ and push for innovative and new ways of doing things.

Caplor Horizons – Background

Established in 2014, Caplor Horizons is an independent charity. We work with other charities and responsible businesses and now have over 50 Advisors. These are outstanding people that bring specialist knowledge and experience. They contribute their time on a voluntary basis, or at reduced rates, so that Caplor Horizons can provide high quality and distinctive services at an accessible cost.

Working locally, nationally and internationally, we help other organisations think differently about themselves and the new horizons that they face. We support them in strengthening their leadership, renewing their strategy and improving their influence.

We want to encourage and assist a new generation of organisations that are committed to making a positive and lasting impact. We believe that if we are to achieve real, sustainable change, we need to inspire and enable people to learn differently, think differently and act differently.

Our vision is: *A world where leaders deliver a sustainable future for all*

Our purpose is: *To be courageous, compassionate and creative in facilitating transformational change*

Our values are:

- **Courage** – We are courageous change makers committed to challenging assumptions, taking risks and having difficult conversations
- **Compassion** – We are open, understanding and heartfelt, encouraging the nourishment of our whole selves and others
- **Creativity** – We learn, think and act differently, and are innovative and resilient in an ever-changing world

Our beliefs are:

- Through diversity we ignite dynamic innovation
- Collaboration helps achieve greater impact
- Everyone matters
- We are all leaders in our individual and collective ways – we are all change makers!
- Learning is more effective if it is fun, engaging and creative
- Building on people's strengths creates greater resilience

Our strategic goals:

- Goal 1: Transforming Leadership
- Goal 2: Strengthening Resilience
- Goal 3: Increasing Collaboration

Learning differently
Thinking differently
Acting differently



