SUSTAINABILITY IN THE PRESSURE SENSITIVE TAPE INDUSTRY

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Introduction

A 1987 report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Report) defines “sustainability” as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainable enterprises consider their stakeholders (employees, neighbors, suppliers, and customers), not just their shareholders. They substitute long-term thinking for short-term thinking, focusing on people, planet and profit (the “Three Ps”).

This paper focuses on the key elements of a sustainability program as they apply to pressure sensitive tape manufacturing companies. Emphasis is placed on the breadth and depth of a comprehensive program. While the environment is one key element of a complete program, it is not the only element, as demonstrated herein.

Background

For the past 30 years, pressure sensitive tape manufacturing companies have been subject to a plethora of environmental rules and regulations. These companies have had no choice but to comply. Now, it is time to move beyond compliance.

North American manufacturing companies are beginning to look beyond the next fiscal quarter to the future, the future of their people and their planet, as well as their profitability. Environmental compliance is a “cost of doing business”. Sustainability is a philosophy, a way of conducting business in an environmentally and socially responsible manner.

Key Elements

Many organizations think that sustainability is synonymous with the environment. However, corporate sustainability is a multi-faceted program that includes, but is clearly not limited to, the environment. There are eight (8) key elements to a corporate sustainability program, namely climate change, product design, emerging economies and globalization, the environment, governance and accountability, social capital, supplier relationships, and leadership. No single element is more important than the others. Pressure sensitive tape manufacturing companies should not hesitate to craft their sustainability programs for lack of one or more of the elements. Rather, in the development of a sustainability program, organizations are advised to focus on a select number of elements, and to bolt on additional elements as the program matures.
Climate Change

For the past several years, it has been difficult to pick up a newspaper, or to turn on the television or radio news without reading or hearing about climate change or “global warming”. While most people accept the fact that the average temperature of the globe is increasing, there is still considerable debate over the causes, i.e., natural phenomenon versus anthropogenic.

The climate change element is often the first place that sustainability practitioners focus their efforts. Organizations start by getting a handle on their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, particularly carbon dioxide (CO2). In addition, practicing organizations evaluate their “carbon footprint”, including the carbon in their operations and throughout their supply chain.

For pressure sensitive tape manufacturing companies, there are many contributors to the carbon footprint, from employee commuting practices to business travel to process heating and combustion to space heating and lighting. In addition, many of the components that go into making a pressure sensitive tape product are rich in carbon.

Once the sources of carbon are defined and understood, measures can be implemented to begin reducing an organization’s carbon footprint. Reduction measures typically include increases in energy efficiency, enhanced recycling efforts, and raw material substitution. Some sustainability practitioners also develop ride-sharing programs to cut down on the CO2 emissions associated with employee commuting to and from the workplace.

In anticipation of national cap and trade regulations that will limit GHG emissions, and rising energy prices in the years to come, pressure sensitive tape manufacturing companies are encouraged to take quick action on this element of their sustainability programs.

Product Design

Pressure sensitive tape products are typically manufactured by using “carbon-rich” raw materials from solvent-based adhesives to paper-based release liners to poly-based face stock. As a result, the product design element presents a great opportunity for improvement.

Hazardous materials substitution is a good way to get started. By substituting 100% solids and water-based coatings for solvent-based coatings, PST manufacturing companies will reduce their carbon footprint while enhancing employee welfare and environmental protection. Increasing the recycled content of raw materials such as paper release liners is another component of the product design element.

Looking down the supply chain, tape manufacturing companies should consider the life cycle impact of their products, which includes such factors as the proximity of their raw material suppliers. The further a raw material has to be transported, the greater the GHG emissions. Furthermore, a product’s use (e.g., insulation tape), its useful life (in years) and its ultimate method of disposal (e.g., landfill) should be considered as part of a sustainable product development program using the principles of lifecycle assessment (LCA).
Emerging Economies and Globalization

Countries such as China and India have benefited from increasing influence on the global economy. While these countries are offering stiff competition for North American tape manufacturers, they are also serving as an important part of the raw material supply chain.

In many instances, Asian manufacturers do not live up to the same social, labor, and environmental standards as North American manufacturing companies. In addition, the rate of growth of the Asian manufacturing community has put a strain on the world’s natural resources, particularly on the global petroleum reserves.

While cost is always an important consideration, sustainable companies consider the types of companies that they are doing business with, and hold those companies to the same set of environmental and socioeconomic standards throughout the supply chain.

The Environment

Sound environmental compliance practices are a way of life for North American pressure sensitive tape manufacturing companies. From air pollution control to hazardous waste management to storm water pollution prevention, tape manufacturing companies have had to comply with a variety of environmental regulations.

However, sustainable companies go beyond compliance to green practices. For example, “water footprinting” is joining carbon footprinting as a means of determining the true environmental impacts of a company’s operations. Consider the following: it takes 35 gallons of water to make one (1) cup of coffee; it takes 700 gallons of water to produce one (1) cotton t-shirt; and it takes 630 gallons of water to produce one (1) hamburger, more than three (3) time the amount of water that the average American uses daily for drinking, bathing, washing dishes and flushing toilets.

Serious practitioners consider all of the environmental aspects and impacts of their operations, regulations notwithstanding. Many companies use an environmental management system, such as ISO 14000, to guide their green efforts and to ensure their environmental impacts are mitigated and controlled.

When considering their true environmental impacts, tape companies must look beyond the plant floor, through the front office, and down the supply chain. Looking beyond the plant floor requires participation by, and commitment from, all sectors within the operation, including accounting, human resources, logistics and purchasing, and sales and marketing. An environmental management system guides a company’s business and establishes the culture of an organization.

Governance and Accountability

Of all the elements of a corporate sustainability program, this is perhaps the most difficult for manufacturing organizations. This element lays the groundwork for transparency in corporate reporting. It requires companies to consider all of their stakeholders (i.e., employees, neighbors, and shareholders) in their decision-making.
Sustainable organizations think about the long-term impacts of their actions, they don’t live from fiscal quarter to fiscal quarter. They are not afraid to interact with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the community at-large. Because they choose to be transparent in their business dealings, sustainable companies welcome the interaction.

Charity and community involvement are encouraged. For example, Provident Bank sponsors build days for local chapters of Habitat for Humanity, where employees are invited to take the day off and build homes in underserved areas. Similarly, Starbucks coffee shops typically choose a non-profit facility in their host communities, and spend two weekends per year maintaining that facility’s building and grounds.

Social Capital

People are the most important resource of any organization. Sustainable enterprises recognize the value of their people, and take the measures necessary to nurture and protect their most valued resource. Consideration is given to professional development, employee health and welfare, occupational safety, and labor relations. Sustainable organizations go beyond the minimum requirements of the law in consideration of the well being of their employees.

In addition to the people inside of their own “four walls”, sustainable practitioners consider the socioeconomic and human health impacts of their actions on the surrounding community, and on the global community.

Supplier Relationships

Corporate sustainability extends beyond a pressure sensitive tape company’s plant floor and its office to its suppliers. Leading sustainable organizations have developed and implemented proactive measures to ensure that their suppliers live up to the same standards that they hold themselves accountable for. Examples might include a supplier audit program, supplier surveys and a supplier code of conduct. A supplier code of conduct addresses all elements of a supplier’s operations from environmental protection and employee safety to working conditions and human rights. Once the code of conduct is established and communicated to suppliers, sustainable organizations audit those suppliers on a regular basis to ensure that the requirements of the code of conduct are met.

Suppliers can be added or removed from an approved list based on how they perform relative to the code of conduct. Low cost becomes secondary to the values that are demonstrated by approved suppliers. In short, sustainable organizations want to do business with companies that share their value system.

Leadership

Without strong leadership, it would be difficult to maintain sustainable business practices. For companies that cannot see beyond the current fiscal quarter, achieving sustainability is not possible. Leaders of sustainable organizations practice “long-termism”. They consider the future of their
employees, the surrounding community, and the planet. Sustainable leaders put the needs of others before their own needs.

In August of 2000, Compac Corporation, at the time a PSTC member organization, experienced a catastrophic flood at its manufacturing plant in Netcong, New Jersey. The president of the company at that time, Carl Allieri, was close to retirement age, and could have easily walked away from a seemingly impossible situation. Instead, Mr. Allieri cared too much about the Compac employees to allow it to close down. As a result of his concern for his people, and through his charismatic leadership, the company was back on its feet and fully operational in four (4) months. All of the Compac employees kept their jobs without missing a single paycheck, a true example of sustainable leadership.

**Recommendations for Action**

Getting started is always the hardest part of any new initiative. Pressure sensitive tape manufacturing companies who are sincerely interested in developing a corporate sustainability program are urged to do the following:

1. Focus on manufacturing operations first;
2. Start small, and add on new elements as the program matures;
3. Move from manufacturing operations to product development;
4. Take credit for the things that are already in place, e.g., environmental protection, employee volunteerism, and charitable contributions; and
5. Look down the supply chain.

**Conclusion**

Borrowing a line from the movie, “The Lion King”, “in the circle of life, you should never take more than you give”. This line describes the way that sustainable enterprises conduct their businesses. Pressure sensitive tape manufacturing companies have an opportunity to take environmentally and socially responsible action, to build sustainable enterprises, and to consider the needs of their current stakeholders and future generations. Corporate sustainability requires unselfish and visionary leadership, leadership that is able to look beyond short-term profitability and inflated personal compensation to the betterment of humanity and the protection of the environment.

**Citations**

Sustainability in the Pressure Sensitive Tape Industry

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