

# The role of talent development in environmentally sustainable hospitality

## A case study of a Scottish National Health Service conference centre

Role of talent  
development

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of strategic talent development in supporting environmental management in the hospitality sector, as well as exploring its practical implications.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper examines a single public sector case study in the hospitality industry, a National Health Service conference centre. This case is part of a larger study in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected in six public and private sector workplaces in Scotland.

**Findings** – The findings emphasise the key role of leaders as change agents, and in promoting sustainability and encouraging workplace low-carbon behaviours. The findings demonstrate that an inclusive approach to talent development can play a key role in creating a pro-environmental culture and can significantly contribute to the long-term environmental sustainability of organisations.

**Research limitations/implications** – The scale of the research is limited to one public sector case study and restricted to the Scottish hospitality industry. Extending the research to multiple case studies in both the public and private sector in Scotland would be useful.

**Practical implications** – This paper makes recommendations about the role of line managers, blended learning strategies, organisational culture and employee participation in supporting workplace learning for sustainability.

**Originality/value** – This paper examines the role of strategic talent development in supporting environmental sustainability in the hospitality industry and provides unique insight for both academics and practitioners into a single public sector case study.

**Keywords** Sustainability, Environmental leadership, Pro-environmental culture, Talent management, Talent development, Public management

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

In recent years, interest in environmental management (Ones and Dilchert, 2012) and “green” organisations (Robertson and Barling, 2015) has been receiving more attention from academics and practitioners. There is also evidence of a growing consensus that learning and development is a primary intervention for promoting sustainability in the workplace (Garavan and McGuire, 2010). Environmental management is an attempt to control the

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human impact on the natural environment. At the organisational level, it refers to “performance in managing natural resources and the natural environment in the process of conducting business” (Ones and Dilchert, 2012, p. 450). Work organisations are often cited to be the largest contributors to climate break-down (Robertson and Barling, 2015, p. 5). Creating “green” organisations, including hotels for instance, involves workplace pro-environmental behaviours (WPEB) that encourage energy efficiency, waste reduction, recycling and water conservation, and incentivises front-line workers to use alternative low-carbon forms of transportation (Kennedy, Whiteman and Williams, 2015). Alongside environmental management and green organisations is the concept of a low-carbon work system (LCWS), which has been defined as:

A planned approach to organization design, culture, and human resource (HR) practices to deliver low-carbon outcomes in the workplace as well as to align the organization and its processes to achieve innovation and sustainable high-quality results for the organization, workforce, and customers (Bratton and Bratton, 2015, p. 277).

Although the evidence on the connection between strategic talent development and low-carbon behaviours in hospitality and tourism is not well developed (Baum *et al.*, 2016; Fraj *et al.*, 2015; Pelham, 2011), published studies suggest that sustainability initiatives are more successful in organisations that attempt to embed shared values about the importance of sustainability into organisational culture (Chandana *et al.*, 2013; Mackenzie and Peters, 2014). However, others suggest that the area of environmental sustainability is under-researched in human resource management (HRM) scholarship (Jackson and Seo, 2010, p. 278). This paper is written in the context of a less frequently studied strategic question facing leaders in the hospitality industry: “How do talent development practices enable and improve environmental management in the hospitality industry?”. The purpose is to have an informed discussion on the dynamics around talent development and environmental sustainability, as well as to explore practical implications. The research investigates talent development interventions that can influence employees’ attitudes and behaviours. It examines a variety of approaches to the development of talent focusing on inclusive approaches. It explores how learning and organisational culture, as enablers of change, shape line managers’ and other employees’ perceptions of environmental sustainability. The paper examines three questions:

- Q1. How does talent development influence environmental sustainability in the workplace?
- Q2. How do leaders support a pro-environmental organisational culture?
- Q3. To what extent does the case study demonstrate a strategic approach to talent management?

### **Pro-environmental organisational culture and human resource management**

A supportive organisational culture is central to the process of environmental sustainability change (Brio *et al.*, 2008; Norton *et al.*, 2015). A number of scholars have studied just how an organisation’s culture influences the way it furthers environmental sustainability (Russell and McIntosh, 2011). A *pro-environmental organisational culture* has been defined as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it adapts to the challenges posed by human activity’s impact on the natural environment in a way that permits day-to-day functioning, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to

new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to environmental sustainability (Norton *et al.*, 2015, pp. 329-330).

There is some debate regarding whether organisations need to have an underlying “moral commitment to sustainability” (Davis and Coan, 2015, p. 247), and research suggests there is a need for the principles, assumptions and values that underpin the organisation’s norms and rules to be changed if sustainability is to be achieved (Hayes, 2014). The focus on pro-environment values reinforces the need for a transformative change to the organisation’s culture. The term sustainability-focused organisational learning (SFOL) has been used to describe the early experience of organisations pursuing a sustainable low-carbon strategy while making substantial changes to their organisational culture (Molnar and Mulvihill, 2003, p. 167). These changes may involve the use of informal learning and employee development techniques.

While organisational culture reflects the intangible elements of social context, such as values, assumptions and beliefs, *organisational climate* represents a more tangible and, arguably, a more practitioner-friendly approach to addressing the social context within the workplace (James *et al.*, 2008; Norton *et al.*, 2015). *Pro-environmental organisational climate* has been defined as “employees” shared perceptions of pro-environmental policies, procedures and practices that an organisation rewards and supports (Norton *et al.*, 2015, p. 335). It has been argued that one of the strengths of research on strategic climates is the focus on positive behaviour outcomes (Kuenzi and Schminke, 2009) such as workplace pro-environmental behaviours (Norton *et al.*, 2015). In this sense, organisational climate provides a perceptual lens through which employees decide what actions are appropriate in the workplace (Norton *et al.*, 2015, pp. 334-335). Research emphasises the central role of HRM and suggests employees’ attitudes and behaviours can be modified through a cluster or “bundle” of HRM policies and practices (Fernández *et al.*, 2003). Table I shows how HRM goals, and talent development more-specifically, can be linked to environmental sustainability, as well as traditional economic goals.

This suggests that learning and talent development can be used to support organisation strategy. Each organisation has its own strategy – a core purpose, strategic objectives and identified resource needs, which learning and talent development, if strategically planned, can be designed to support (Stewart and Rigg, 2011). When talent development enables employees to implement an organisation’s sustainability strategy successfully, it is playing a strategic HRM role contributing to both performance and improved sustainability outcomes.

	Organisational paradigm	
	Traditional: <i>financial</i>	Emerging: <i>sustainability</i>
<i>Human resource management decisions</i>		
Talent development	Does HRM ensure appropriate talent development to improve financial results?	Does HRM make the best decisions about talent development that are critical for sustainability?
Excellence of services	Are policies and practices of HRM efficient and do they ensure a return on investment?	Are policies and practices of HRM consistent with assumptions of sustainable development?

**Table I.**  
Environmental sustainability as a paradigm of strategic HRM

Source: Adapted from Jabbour and Santos (2008, p. 2138)

What role does HRM and talent development play in supporting a sustainability strategy? [Table I](#) illustrates how HRM and talent development function in supporting an organisation's sustainability strategy with potential benefits to wider society. However, these benefits often vary depending on the organisation's goals and context. For example, [Stewart and Rigg \(2011, p. 29\)](#) classify the purpose of learning and talent development along the following spectrum of outcomes: individual, organisation performance, social benefit and wider society benefit.

### Defining talent and talent development

The purpose of learning and talent development in organisations is always related to achieving some combination of individual and organisational desired benefits. This paper defines talent development as follows:

Talent development focuses on the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for all or part of the talent pool to ensure that the organization has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organizational talent management processes ([Bratton et al., 2017](#))

The knowledge base on talent development is both theoretically and empirically underdeveloped and most of the literature in the field is practitioner- or consultancy-based ([Dries, 2013](#); [Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013](#)). However, the existing evidence suggests that workplaces are designing talent development processes unique to their organisation.

The concept of "talent" is defined differently in various organisations, and its use in human resource development (HRD) is varied ([Devins and Gold, 2014](#)). For example, some commentators see talent consisting of those individuals or "A-players" who can make a difference to organisational performance, whether through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating high levels of potential ([Groysberg, 2010](#); [Tansley and Tietze, 2013](#)). Others recognise that talent can be found more widely in the organisation, so every employee has talent and potential ([McDonnell et al., 2010](#); [Redford, 2005](#)). Alternatively, others view talent as a collective phenomenon based on relationships, leadership, networks and teamwork, all aspects of social capital shared between people ([Collings and Mellahi, 2009](#); [Iles et al., 2010](#)).

Engaging fully with the conceptualisation of talent is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is necessary here to highlight the socially constructed nature of talent and its definition and our view that there are social responsibility and sustainability inherent in mainstream management concepts and ideas about talent and its identification ([Downs and Swailes, 2013](#); [Sheehan et al., 2014](#)). For example, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development defines talent as "those individuals who can make a difference to organizational performance either through their immediate contribution or, in the longer term, by demonstrating the highest level of potential" ([CIPD, 2015, p. 2](#)). Although talent exists in all parts of a workforce, organisational talent programmes usually focus on leadership and management capabilities and can exclude all or most employees ([Farndale et al., 2010](#)).

### Environmental learning and talent development interventions

Consensus is growing among academics that the issues of sustainability, organisational change and workplace learning are closely inter-related. Training and workplace learning is a primary intervention for developing pro-environmental behaviours ([Garavan and McGuire, 2010](#); [Govindarajulu and Daily, 2004](#); [Jabbour, 2011](#); [Jabbour et al., 2010](#); [Sarkis et al., 2010](#)). A key feature of a sustainable workplace is the presence of a comprehensive

environmental management system (EMS), which provides all employees with the tools and understanding necessary to conduct themselves in an environmentally aware manner, foster creative thinking and innovation (Bratton, 2017; Sammalisto and Brorson, 2008). The need for a change in organisational culture towards sustainable outcomes necessitates investment in training. Through an *inclusive approach to strategic talent development*, all employees can become increasingly aware of the need for environmental improvements, increase their adaptability to change and adopt a more proactive attitude. Much of the training is related to improving employee health and safety, energy saving and waste management. This imperative has resulted in an increasing emphasis on the use of online resources and blended learning strategies to support learning for sustainability (Bratton, 2016). For example, the US company 3M has encouraged employees to find creative ways to reduce pollution through their Pollution Prevention Pays (3P) programme, which has saved the company close to \$300 million (Renwick *et al.*, 2013). Training and learning is a necessary component of advanced EMS. The literature suggests that a major factor in a successful EMS is a comprehensive training programme that provides all employees, at all levels of the organisation, with the tools and understanding necessary to conduct themselves in an environmentally aware manner, foster innovation, make environmentally responsible decisions and contribute to continued environmental improvements (Daily and Huang, 2001; Ulhoi and Madsen, 1996).

The level of employee environmental awareness is one of the most important predictors of the level of adoption and success of an organisation's environmental initiatives. Perron *et al.* (2006, p. 553) report that the intent of clause 4.4.2 of ISO 14001 is to:

Ensure that employees at all levels of the organization understand the goals of the EMS and the ways their job activities impact the environment and the achievement of EMS goals.

This understanding allows employees to participate in environmental management efforts, and could lead to improved environmental performance of an organisation. Zilahy's (2003) study of the factors restricting the implementation of energy efficiency improvement indicates that perhaps the most salient restrictive factors were the level of employee environmental awareness. Research findings support the importance of employees being well versed in environmental issues, environmental processes and the overall functioning of environmental management systems to ensure that an organisation's environmental targets and objectives are achieved (Cohen-Rosenthal, 2000; Perron *et al.*, 2006; Sammalisto and Brorson, 2008).

### Theoretical integration

This paper has examined a distinct body of published literature covering environmental sustainability in hospitality, organisational culture and HRM and talent development. Given that questions of organisational culture and managerial behaviour are increasingly seen to fall within HRM theory and research, this paper brings together distinct streams of literature to focus on environmental sustainability and talent development in the workplace.

The empirical research examined in this paper is set in Scotland, where public policy recognises the need to create low-carbon workplaces. The questions that are the focus of this study, examined next, explore the role of strategic talent development in supporting environmental management in the hospitality sector, how talent development interventions can influence employees' behaviours and how leaders support a green or pro-environmental culture. The review of environmental organisational culture literature highlights the need to examine the role of leaders' influence in creating an environmentally sustainable workplace. Research consistently points to the need to examine the personal values held by leaders

towards the environment (an element of organisational culture) and whether employees have shared perceptions of those values (organisational climate). It also highlights the important role of leaders and line managers in priority setting and resource allocation. The HRM literature illustrates how HR practices and talent development functions to support an organisation's sustainability strategy with potential benefits to wider society. Moreover, it highlights how learning and development is a primary intervention for developing workplace pro-environmental behaviours. Finally, this literature review has established that with regards to environmental management little has been written about the role of strategic talent development in supporting environmental sustainability in the hospitality industry.

### Methods

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of strategic talent development in supporting environmental management in the hospitality industry. The research examines talent development interventions that can influence employees' attitudes and behaviours. It explores how learning and organisational culture, as enablers of change, shape line managers' and other employees' perceptions of environmental sustainability. Firstly, how does talent development influence environmental sustainability in the workplace? Secondly, how do leaders support a pro-environmental organisational culture? Thirdly, to what extent does the case study demonstrate a strategic approach to talent management?

This paper examines a single case study in the hospitality industry, a National Health Service (NHS) conference and training facility. The case is part of a larger, multiple-case study conducted at six public and private sector workplaces in Scotland. This paper focuses on a conference centre within a health board that provides advice and services to NHS Scotland. A mixed method approach was used to explore empirically manager and front-line workers views on the role of HR practices, including talent management. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews and one focus group were conducted with HR managers, environmental managers, line managers, union representatives and employees. Participants were shown the following definition of environmental management to clarify the focus of the study:

Environmental management is an attempt to control the human impact on and interaction with the natural environment to preserve natural resources. In the workplace, this includes encouraging energy efficiency, encouraging waste reduction and recycling, encouraging water conservation, and encouraging staff to use alternative low-carbon forms of transportation (e.g. bus, train or bicycle).

Details of the case study are shown in [Table II](#).

The research was conducted from April 2013 to June 2014. The knowledgeable employees selected as a contact between the researcher and the organisation were either environmental managers, HR managers or a line manager responsible for some environmental duties. There were 17 returned questionnaires, representing approximately 70 per cent the total number of employees in the conference centre. Respondents were assured of both anonymity and confidentiality. To examine the perceptions of respondents on pro-environmental organisational climate, this study builds on Zibarras and Ballinger's (2011) research and the Trade Union's Congress's (TUC's) 2012 Green Workplaces Survey. Managers and employees were asked 17 questions each with 5-category response scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", beginning with a general question, "Do you agree or disagree with the following 'green' organisational climate statements?" Answers were invited on a five-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly

**Table II.**  
Descriptive information about case organisation

	HealthOrg
Public or private organisation	Public
Organisational turnover	£602m budget
Number of employees in the health board	3,500
Number of employees in the conference centre	25
Unions recognised	Unison, Unite, RCN, FCS
Union density	40%
Separate environmental budget	No
Full-time environmental manager or sustainability officer	Yes
Publicly available environmental policy published in the past five years	Yes
Publicly available carbon management plan	Yes
Conducted an environmental audit	Yes
EMS accreditation	No

disagree". In terms of analysis, the mean was used to measure the central tendency of Likert scale data.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with a sample of employees, including a trade union representative. A total of 12 participants were interviewed through face-to-face or focus group interviews, ranging from 30 to 120 minutes in length. To examine the perceptions of environmental managers on the role of organisational culture and HR practice, this study builds on [Jabbour \*et al.\*'s \(2010\)](#) study and in face-to-face interviews managers and union representatives were asked, "What is the most difficult aspect of developing a 'green' or pro-environmental culture?" and "How do HR policies and practices contribute to environmental sustainability in the workplace?"

One focus group interview with eight participants was conducted. The length of the focus group interview was approximately 60 min. The key questions on environmental management and talent development posed by this research's focus group interview were developed specifically for this study. To examine respondents' perceptions of employee engagement in environmental sustainability in focus group interviews both managers and employees were asked the question: "How can this organisation improve employee awareness of environmental sustainability/climate change?" and "How can this organisation improve communication with employees about environmental sustainability targets and responsibilities?" All interviews were taped and transcribed (over 75 pages of transcript). Secondary data were collected such as annual environmental and financial reports, environmental policies and internal newsletters. The transcripts were coded using themes identified in the literature and from actual terms used by participants ([Easterby-Smith \*et al.\*, 2012](#)). Statements that best explained a particular situation were selected to illustrate key points in this paper.

### The organisational profile of HealthOrg

This case study involves a conference and training venue within a large quasi-autonomous, non-governmental organisation that provides advice and services to NHS Scotland. The case illustrates how sustainability initiatives have centred on event and conference planning, which provides an interesting context for the adoption of workplace low-carbon behaviours. The event planning industry more broadly presents unusual challenges not faced elsewhere in the economy, most notably that a significant proportion of the building's carbon use is consumed by customers rather than employees. Work teams were assigned the primary responsibility for developing a culture, whereby employees felt more confident

and motivated towards the organisation's sustainability strategy. Finally, this case provides an example of management-union partnership for sustainability at a corporate level.

The conference centre is part of the National Services Scotland (NSS), a non-departmental public body with an annual budget of roughly £600m and a workforce of approximately 3,500 people across Scotland. Its remit is to provide expert advice and national strategic support services to the rest of NHS Scotland. Accountable to the Scottish Government, the NSS plays an active role in the delivery of healthcare to patients and the public. This supporting role means that the organisation works closely with NHS health boards in the delivery of both healthcare and business support services. The conference centre employs approximately 25 people with about 40 per cent of workers unionised. The centre's primary clients are the Scottish Government and NHS health boards in Scotland. The venue offers state-of-the-art technology and meeting facilities, events management services and an in-hours catering service specializing in organic and Fairtrade food and drink.

To meet the sustainability needs of their clients the conference centre's management developed the "Think Greener" sustainable conference and meeting package. The package offers products and services that incorporate social and environment considerations, such as providing recycled paper, organic buffet lunch, Fairtrade tea and coffee and carbon neutral taxi service. The conference centre's "sustainability committee" or green group, a cross-functional employee committee chaired by the head of the centre, coordinates sustainability activities and initiatives. For example, the centre's sustainability initiatives include:

- improving indoor air quality by purchasing plants chosen to absorb chemicals and remove air pollutants;
- reducing energy, paper and water through staff awareness campaigns;
- installing new technology, and, thus, encouraging employees and visitors to use public transportation;
- improving biodiversity by installing an on-site herb garden and bird feeders; and
- by fostering community links by working with local universities to provide work placements to students and also participating in community projects such as the Adopt-a-Beach project.

Employees involved in the green group have visited most of their major business partners and, importantly, the conference centre actively encourages suppliers to become environmentally friendly by promoting the Scottish Business in the Community Envirowheel, which is an online tool for employers seeking to improve sustainability.

### **Results and analysis**

The case illustrates how sustainability initiatives have centred on event and conference planning, which provides an interesting context for the adoption of workplace pro-environmental behaviours. The event planning industry more broadly presents unusual challenges not faced elsewhere in the economy, most notably that a significant proportion of the building's carbon use is consumed by customers rather than employees. Work teams were assigned the primary responsibility for developing a culture, whereby employees felt more confident and motivated towards the organisation's sustainability strategy. The conference centre's sustainability initiatives are reportedly driven by both business benefits and ethical principles. There is evidence of the business case for having an advanced sustainability programme in the conference and event planning industry. Firstly, lower carbon consumption reduces operating costs. Secondly, public sector clients and corporate clients have been increasingly using sustainability criteria in making decisions when



purchasing event packages. For example, the Scottish Government has made particular efforts to promote sustainability with the publication of the “Scottish Sustainable Procurement Action Plan” (Scottish Government, 2009), and because public sector clients are the primary patrons of the centre, the management team felt that it was in a position to align their services with Scottish Government’s value statements.

### Leadership and pro-environmental organisational culture and climate

Creating an environmentally sustainable conference centre involves changing employees’ behaviours. Table III shows a summary of respondents’ perceptions of organisational climate statements averaged and ranked ordered. Majority of employees “strongly agreed” that their organisation strives for a reputation for being “green” or environmentally sustainable.

The results of the survey indicate that majority of respondents “agree” that “real efforts are being made to make this organisation more environmentally friendly”. Moreover, the results indicate that in the core environmental management areas – energy reduction, waste and recycling and sustainable travel – the majority of respondents either “strongly agree” or “agree” that efforts are being made to reduce the organisations environmental footprint and encourage and support employee pro-environmental behaviour.

Explaining the importance of providing learning opportunities for all employees to help support environmental sustainability change, the conference coordinator put it like this:

The best thing to do is engage people right from the beginning. There is no point in coming in here and saying this is how it is done. There is a huge risk of you not getting the buy-in. You have to have the buy-in of people. This is why it is good to set a Green Team [...] It is the opportunity to have representatives of the department to speak up and tell what their concerns are to ensure that whatever measures we are trying to implement are implemented effectively (Conference Coordinator, Environmental, Equality and Diversity Lead, 2013.07.09).

	Managers	Employees
<i>Rank order</i>		
1. This organisation encourages waste reduction and recycling amongst employees	Agree	Strongly agree
2. This organisation strives for a reputation for being “green” or environmentally sustainable	Agree	Strongly agree
3. This organisation encourages energy conservation amongst employees	Agree	Agree
4. This organisation encourages staff to use alternative forms of transportation (e.g. bus, train, bicycle)	Agree	Agree
5. Real efforts are being made to make this organisation more environmentally friendly	Agree	Agree
6. How this organisation operates internally is consistent with its external “green” brand	Agree	Agree
7. This organisation encourages water conservation amongst employees	Agree	Agree
8. Management encourage pro-environmental behaviour amongst employees	Agree	Agree
9. Management responds to environmental suggestions from employees	Agree	Agree
10. This organisation is committed to protecting the environment	Agree	Agree
N	5	12

**Table III.**  
Rank order of managers’ and employees’ perceptions of organisational climate statements

**Notes:** N = total number of respondents (environmental managers, HR managers, managers and employees). The responses provided by the participants were averaged and rank ordered in the study

This is significant as this interviewee helps explain how culture can support organisational learning. Organisational culture can shape employees' behaviour by ensuring that organisational leaders have "the buy-in of people [employees]". In that sense, organisational culture aims to increase workers' commitment to organisational goals; to motivate workers; and as an employee involvement process. Moreover, it highlights the appointment of environmental "champions" and "green teams" to support individual and group learning and to encourage others to change. The centre's "sustainability committee" or green group, a cross-functional employee committee chaired by the head of the centre, coordinates sustainability activities and initiatives. For example, the centre's sustainability initiatives include improving indoor air quality by purchasing plants chosen to absorb chemicals and remove air pollutants; reducing energy, paper and water through staff awareness campaigns; installing new technology; encouraging employees and visitors to use public transportation; improving biodiversity by installing an on-site herb garden and bird feeders; and fostering community links by working with local universities to provide work placements to students, as also participating in community projects such as the Adopt-a-Beach project.

Senior managers attempted to overcome the barriers to change by developing meaningful ways to communicate pro-environmental values and the need for engagement. Interviewees recognised that they have target-driven cultures, so many of their employees responded well to values embedded in local level goals. The sustainability manager explained it like this:

Creating that culture change is having the information, having the data to back promotional campaigns to back energy efficiency, to back resource and recycling. If you don't have the figures be it from an emission, total tons or from a cost point of view to say look, 'if we don't do this that means we can't hire [...] 3 head counts for this job, or that program, or that project, or save this much money' [...] It is having those systems and having the robustness of electricity, gas, water, and waste as a minimum to feed your campaign. And with that you can start to bring in procurement, you can bring in third-party providers, you can look at commuter travel those scope three elements of your carbon footprint (Sustainability Manager, 2013.07.08).

Efficiency savings appeared to be readily incorporated into HealthOrg's culture. This served to make corporate sustainability targets appear more relevant for employees by framing them within a local context. For example, the sustainability manager bluntly commented on the difficulties of transmitting low-carbon ideas to other employees:

Without that data supporting your discussion your arguments, whatever you want to call it, you are going nowhere. I spent most of the last year and a half on the heels of facilities management to get good data and clean data and it is still a challenge, but without it you are on the road to (2013.07.08).

Hence, management-espoused values might not be widely shared nor strongly held by most organisational members. The following section investigates the role of training and development in achieving a low-carbon workplace.

### **Learning and talent development**

The survey results show that a greater percentage of managers had received some form of environmental management training as compared to other employees. For example, at the conference centre 75 per cent of respondents reported that they had either received "no" training or were "not sure" if they had received training. In contrast, 75 per cent of managers reported they had received training. It is important to note, however, that at the conference centre, environmental practitioners represented the majority of manager respondents.

Therefore, it is plausible to assume that managers responsible for environmental sustainability would report higher levels of training as compared to other employees. The findings are displayed in [Table IV](#).

Participants explained in face-to-face interviews that environmental sustainability issues were either informally or formally integrated into different aspect of training. The most common theme was the organisation’s environmental policy. The findings reveal that environmental awareness was important and organisational policy was a priority, as well as a core rhetorical feature of the organisation’s culture. For example, all new employees received some formal environmental training through an induction programme. Interviewees described the formal aspects of the training:

The training started already with the first step of doing corporate induction, that was a coup, for many moons we were not doing corporate inductions only kind of once a year maybe or so and now they regularly, probably every two or three months. So having a sustainable development slot in that is paramount (Sustainability Manager, 2013.07.08).

Training, we have had various training initiatives over the years. Everybody will have had some environmental training. I would cover it as part of the induction in the same way that I will cover the organisation’s values and things like that [...] The events team did some training around the British (Green Tourism) standards (Head of Unit, Chair of Sustainability Committee, Conference Centre, 2013.07.08).

The findings suggest evidence of an *inclusive approach* to learning and talent development interventions. Training was seen to play a key role in shaping pro-environmental behaviours, by pursuing a range of activities that include decarbonising efforts. In addition to mandatory induction training on their organisation’s strategic aims, new employees received environmental training covering the organisation’s environmental policy.

At HealthOrg, there were varying levels of employee participation in environmental training. For example, discussing the extent that sustainability aspects were integrated into formal training, a sustainability manager explained:

So there is an ongoing bit of communication and hopefully training happening in keeping staff aware of how much are we saving, how much are we buying, etc. The next few steps really are to do, I guess going to the next level, making it more mandatory doing an e-learning module that takes 30 minutes perhaps, with 10 or 15 questions, a bit of information on why we are doing this, why are we doing that. We did one last year for equality and diversity [...] so we are looking to do one from a sustainable development point of view [...] And finally, from the assessment point of view, these are things that we need to embed in all of the job descriptions, in official objectives, and into a knowledge and skills framework that eventually it will be part of the organization. (Sustainability Manager, 2013.07.08).

The findings suggest that environmental sustainability was beginning to be both informally and formally integrated into the employees’ learning and development plans. For example,

	Managers	Employees
No	1	6
Yes	3	3
Not sure	0	3
N	4	12

**Note:** N = total number of respondents (managers and employees)

**Table IV.**  
Number of respondents (managers and employees) who had access to environmental management training

the sustainability manager explained, “The next level, making more mandatory doing an e-learning module”. Blending learning that combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods can, therefore, help an organisation achieve its environmental targets and strategic goals. This extract provides an example of strategic HRM thinking in that the management team was planning to align a key HR practice, training and development, to the organisation’s strategic goals. These findings suggest that learning and talent development is the primary HR intervention to support environmental management.

The findings emphasise the key role of leaders as change agents, and in promoting sustainability and encouraging workplace low-carbon behaviour. They suggest also that learning and talent development and employee engagement facilitated effective environmental practices. Line managers not only deliver operational targets, they enact talent development practices and, importantly, as carriers of organisational values, they foster a learning climate.

The findings indicate that talent development is an intervention for developing a pro-environmental culture. At the conference centre, sustainability dimensions were either informally or formally integrated into aspects of training. The findings demonstrate that an inclusive approach to talent development can play a key role in creating pro-environmental cultures and can significantly contribute to the long-term environmental sustainability of organisations.

### **Practical implications and stakeholder actions**

The analysis in this paper has implications for our understanding of talent development in supporting environmentally sustainable hospitality and results in some practical questions to consider. How does organisational culture shape talent development? How effective are managers in their role as facilitators of learning? Does the talent development architecture provide on time access and facilitate self-directed learning? What is the appropriate blend of talent development programmes to achieve talent development objectives? These represent important questions to consider when analysing the potential contribution of talent development to supporting environmentally sustainable hospitality.

#### *The role of line managers in championing talent development*

The first recommendation is for line managers to play a crucial role in talent development by providing coaching and stimulating learning within teams. For example, the case study evidence examined in this paper demonstrates that training interventions could include training on environmental responsibilities and how to successfully champion environmental sustainability in the workplace. Where line managers have the ability to build teams, manage performance and coach employees, they can be key champions of worker development (Devins and Gold, 2014). However, line managers have often had little to no training in supervision let alone opportunities to develop employees, especially at lower levels of the organisation (Devins and Gold, 2014). Moreover, a significant factor to the effectiveness of managers in supporting talent development is the attitudes and beliefs of managers themselves (O’Neil and Marsick, 2014; Warhurst, 2013), where they take on the role identify as a “facilitator of learning” as well as that of a manager (Campbell and Evans, 2016). Future research should consider how different organisational contexts influence managers’ self-perceptions of the priorities and importance of their role as facilitators of learning.

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### *Developing a culture of learning for sustainability*

The second recommendation is for organisations to develop a pro-environmental organisational culture by recruiting new employees and senior managers into the organisation, who value environmental sustainability; by providing training and informal learning opportunities to workers and line managers to increase environmental awareness, knowledge and skills utilisation. For example, interventions could include training on environmental responsibilities and how to successfully champion and communicate pro-environmental ideas. Although this paper has provided examples of how HR practices contribute to the achievement of environmental sustainable workplaces, methodologically, there is the problem of establishing the direction of the relationship or “reverse causality” (Marchington, 2008). Sustainable workplaces operating as a monopoly or in favourable market conditions will both be able to meet the cost of sophisticated HR systems and invest in them. More research is required that measures the HRM-performance relationship. As Davis and Coan (2015, p. 262) note, to evaluate the effectiveness of change programmes, successful criteria need to be carefully selected to reflect the aim of improving environmental sustainability.

### *Continuous, just-in-time, blended talent development processes*

There will be a continuous demand for talent development processes with the result that such processes will need to be flexible and move away from the classroom. Talent development must also be delivered “just-in-time” (Garavan *et al.*, 2012). This has led to talent development processes that focus on delivering learning in bite-size chunks. It means instant access to development. This imperative has resulted in an increasing emphasis on the use of online resources. Blended learning that combines the formal with the informal represents a key challenge for organisations. Increasingly the lines between work and non-work have become blurred resulting in a 24/7 philosophy on access to talent development resources. Technology is increasingly used as a means to provide this access; however, there is much to be learned concerning the effectiveness of online development strategies (Lim and Morris, 2009; So and Bonk, 2010).

### *Employee participation in workplace learning for sustainability*

The final recommendation is for employers and employees to engage in more substantive forms of participation over sustainability and environmental issues (Markey *et al.*, 2016). Early involvement with employees to help in the design and implementation of any talent development initiative can be an effective means of managing organisational change. As noted, creating a low-carbon workplace is a discursive undertaking and fostering dialogue about sustainability and investing in resources (e.g. time) for unions, employees and employers to work together could help embed pro-environmental values and behaviours (Scottish Government, 2014). It also helps to maximise the benefits of shared knowledge and distributive leadership (Robertson and Barling, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

It should be noted that the factors that influence environmental sustainability in hospitality are dynamic in nature and the relationships between them continuously evolve and change. It is also important to remember that these factors are interrelated. They do not stand alone. For example, learning and talent development alone will not lead to organisational synergies and significant environmental improvements. Employee participation, commitment, effective communication and target setting are all important in fulfilling the strategic goal of creating a low-carbon, sustainable workplace.

Finally, critical debates about environmental issues in hospitality and tourism have been downplayed or ignored (Baum *et al.*, 2016). Where sustainability is mentioned it is largely viewed from a narrow liberal-economic perspective, with sustainability understood simply as a management practice, without ethical or moral ramifications and with little consideration of conflicting employee and managerial interests or wider social consequences. In answering the strategic question: “who is responsible for talent management?” it is important to highlight that the findings from this research suggest talent development interventions tend to be most successful when they consider these three contexts – individual, group and material – and not simply focus on trying to change individual employee attitudes (Cox *et al.*, 2012). In other words, when establishing an environmentally sustainability workplace, the goal should be to take an integrated approach that raises awareness and improves understanding with individual employees and groups, and builds meaning and norms around low-carbon or “sustainable” working practices. Sustainability in the hospitality requires new roles and low-carbon behavioural activities for managers and other employees. This paper considered a variety of approaches to the development of talent focusing on inclusive approaches. The more effective talent development interventions are premised on the notion that inclusive approaches are better than exclusive approaches. There is also evidence that approaches to talent development will vary depending on business context.

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