

Articles

Sustainability... The Win/Win Outcome.

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Written by John Brodie

The arrival in Australia this month of Al Gore, the American Democrat ex Vice President, promoting his new documentary about the perils of climate change, has once again focused Australia's attention on our contempt for the environment and the related disastrous consequences that contempt will bring.

Sustainability or ESDBO (Environmentally Sustainable Design, Build and Operations) offers the ability for the individual or the organisation to mitigate these consequences, while noticeably improving inhabitant comfortability and contributing to the improved profitability of the organisation.

The core of the climate change issue is reducing our loads on Natural Capital. Natural Capital is those vital infrastructure items we cant do without to survive, yet we can't replicate in any way, shape or form.

We refer here to energy, air, water, earth, humans.

Remember the BIO-Sphere built in the early 90s in America.

\$250 Million was spent in trying to replicate the earth's atmosphere while keeping 8 people alive! 8 people! After two years no human could survive in the atmosphere and the project stopped. A total failure.

As you can see, trying to keep 3 billion people alive in a controlled environment with our current knowledge and technology has proven impossible.

Unless we have buried our head in the sand we only have to notice our changing weather patterns and take even slight notice of the ongoing media coverage, to realise we have serious climatic issues we need to address immediately if we are to mitigate their impact on our lives.

But there is an upside to all of this and that is where sustainability becomes a saviour.

Sustainability is becoming the catch cry of the decade but is a smart catch cry. It is not jingoism but offers a logical and multi faceted practical panacea for the climatic issues, while at the same time providing numerous valuable benefits to your project, whether residential or commercial.

Aged Care, Retirement Villages and the Health arena in general benefits greatly from a sustainable approach.

To introduce practical sustainable outcomes into your project, whether it is through design, building or operations of new or refurbished facilities, requires an integrated, holistic and systemic approach.

Identifying sustainability as a focus parameter very early in the project is imperative for a successful result. That way successful and proven design, build and operational sustainable initiatives can be woven into the overall project concept, reducing the cost and increasing the effectiveness of these features.

Sustainability must be practical and of course cost effective or it will not be adopted as a parameter. No one is going to invest in sustainable practice if it takes 50 years to recoup the costs of that practice.

The 'World Business Council for Sustainable Development' (WBSCD) says that sustainability is "a framework for innovation"

The DJSI (Dow Jones Sustainability Index) for companies who operate sustainably and adhere to validated sustainable principles had a 15.8% amalgamated return for the 5 years before 2001 and companies in the DJGI (Dow Jones Global Index) had an amalgamated return of 12.5% for the same period, (WBSCD 2003).

Smart business practice therefore demands a sustainable approach.

"Efficiency creates wealth" (WBSCD 2002)

"Inefficiency wastes money" (WBSCD 2002).

Sustainability does make smart business sense and that is why it has become an integral feature of the design, build and operations of modern facilities.

Commonwealth and State Legislation is now another reason for deciding on a sustainable outcome.

Section J of The BCA, implemented nationwide on 1st May 2006, now legislates that all new and refurbished buildings must comply with documented energy reduction requirements through design and operations. Each year the BCA will only get tougher in energy management as the loads on the diminishing amounts of natural capital increase. (e.g.: see petrol)

Within 2 years the BCA will enshrine water efficiency measures into Commonwealth legislation.

As the costs of "Natural Capital" increases in an attempt to reduce demand (the supply and demand capital economy) the project that has reduced their running costs through a sustainable approach will experience even greater cost savings benefits.

This will only improve their profit base!

While we are talking about the profitability and legislative impacts of a sustainable approach, it is important not to forget the great improvement in IEQ (Internal Environment Quality) including resident amenity. Another positive outcome from adopting an integrated sustainable philosophy.

The use of low or non toxic finishes, reduced building emissions, improved staff functionality and therefore a happier work environment, increased resident proximity to nature and the related healing improvements are only some of the resident benefits gained through a sustainable approach.

The reasons why we should adopt a sustainable approach in Aged and Health Care can be summarised as follows.

- Noticeably Improved environmental outcomes
- Reduced running costs due reduced infrastructure demands
- Greatly improved resident/patient amenity and comfort-ability
- Improved resident health by mimicking a natural environment (Biophilia)
- Improved operational functionality resulting in reduced staff absenteeism and greater productivity
- Increased staff caring time with residents
- Government legislation demands it.
- Promotes innovation
- Increased demand for your facility
- Improved marketability of your facility
- Improved quality of construction resulting in less maintenance costs
- Significantly improved profitability

The important thing to remember within sustainability is that it is not tokenism or idealistic "greenyism".

It must become a part of your company's philosophy. It is a necessary yet smart way to approach a project .It makes smart business sense.

To reduce running costs and environmental loads at the same time as improving profits while making your residents feel more loved and cared for in a healthier environment is the essence of sustainability.

Surely a win /win situation!!