

Implementing BS202002: Benefits management on portfolios, programmes and projects¹

The Benefits Manager's Role in Influencing Sustainability and Regeneration in Projects²

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Abstract

In today's rapidly changing world, organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of sustainability and regeneration in their projects. The benefits manager plays a crucial role in ensuring that projects not only deliver financial benefits but also contribute to the economic, environmental, social, and community well-being. This article explores the benefits manager's role in influencing sustainability and regeneration in projects, the moral imperative for doing so, and the ways in which they can make a tangible impact.

Project Leadership Team Recap, Benefits Manager's Role

The project leadership team guides a project towards organizational success. It comprises the project sponsor (who understands evolving organizational needs), project manager (ensures task delivery within budget and time), and benefits or change manager (who validates project contribution to success and suggests improvements). The benefits manager plays a crucial role in assessing project impact on stakeholders, especially those directly affected by the change.

The benefits manager also has a role across the organisation, setting standards and policies, and ensuring consistency between projects so that the combined investment (money, resources, skills, reputation) of the organisation is at its most effective.

This article focuses on the role that the leadership team and in particular the benefits manager can play, both on individual projects aligning them to sustainability and regeneration

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outcomes and advising the benefits and value of sustainability to the organization, which could then adjust the priorities for project delivery.

Benefits and Sustainability – Economic, Environmental, Social, and Community

The four pillars of sustainability and regeneration, as covered in May's article in this series (PMWJ141), are illustrated in **Error! Reference source not found.** and described as:

1. **Economic:** Projects must deliver long-term financial benefits and contribute to the economic growth of both organizations and communities [1].
2. **Environmental:** Projects should minimize negative environmental impacts, such as reducing carbon emissions, conserving natural resources, and promoting energy efficiency; and if possible promote regeneration, including reversing climate change and improving biodiversity [2].
3. **Human:** Recognizing that mental and physical health are critical aspects of quality of life. Project delivery methods (e.g., engagement and response) and the changes brought about (e.g., location, distance, green spaces) significantly affect these aspects [3].
4. **Social:** Addressing social implications both during and after project delivery, including community engagement, stakeholder participation, and the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The goal is to build stronger communities and empower individuals [4].

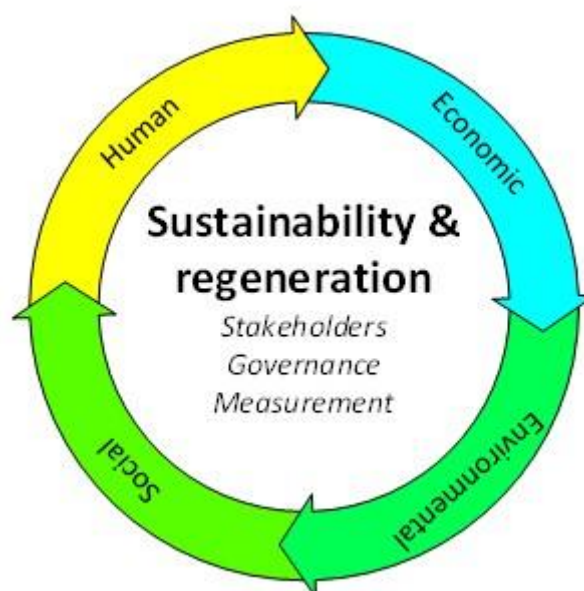


Figure 1 The four pillars of sustainability and regeneration

Governance plays a crucial role in sustainability and regeneration by ensuring compliance with regulations and implementing policies and procedures that change the way organizations and people think and plan. Projects are undertaken to improve quality of life, either for specific organizations or for a wider range of stakeholders. While exploiting resources may be profitable in the short term, the long-term consequences can be disastrous, as evidenced by the tobacco industry's liability for causing cancer[5-8] and fines for environmental destruction [9]. On the other hand, benefiting more stakeholders can be profitable in terms of positive brand image, allowing for greater sales and premium pricing, and ensuring people have the means to be customers[10].

We do projects to improve **quality of life**. This can either be for specific organizations at the expense of everyone else (e.g. to gain profit, or access to scarce resources) or for a wider range of stakeholders. It's often "profitable" in the short term to exploit although the longer term consequences can be disastrous (examples include tobacco industry [11, 12], and environmental destruction[13-15]); whereas benefiting more stakeholders can be profitable in terms of positive brand image allowing greater sales and premium pricing[16] and ensuring people have money means they can be customers.

Government does projects to improve quality of life for the citizens they are responsible for [17]. This is a wider responsibility because government can't choose its citizens unlike commercial entities, but some of the examples in[15] illustrate that citizens can sue governments.

Project Objectives and the Influence of the Leadership Team

Projects are designed to contribute to an organization's objectives. While sponsors might focus on specific changes or outcomes, broader organizational goals can often be supported through these projects without significant delays or cost increases.

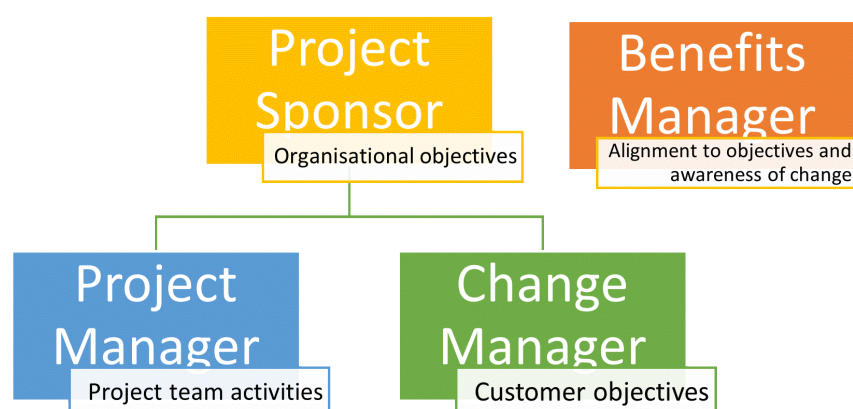


Figure 2 Project Leadership Team and their responsibility for sustainability and regeneration

The leadership team, particularly the benefits manager (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), plays a crucial role in influencing project objectives. By demonstrating how small changes can lead to significant organizational benefits, they can secure better returns on investment. For example, during the 2012 London Olympics, minor adjustments in project plans led to substantial improvements in economic and social outcomes [18, 19].

Benefits managers, through horizon scanning, can identify emerging opportunities for sustainability and regeneration before they become apparent to the organization. This proactive approach can enhance the organization's brand image, profitability, and credibility, facilitating better fundraising and investment opportunities [10, 20].

Why Sustainability and Regeneration – The Moral Imperative

There are arguments whether an organization's sole purpose is to increase profits for shareholders, or whether there's more flexibility in its objectives[21]; but without customers, most businesses would fail and without people, most governments would cease to have any purpose.

The concept of sustainable development, as defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development, emphasizes meeting present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [22]

Neglecting sustainability has led to several costly consequences:

- Climate change is leading to lower crop yields, droughts, floods, and areas of the world becoming uninhabitable due to soil loss, wildfires, and extreme temperatures[23-26].
- The loss of biodiversity is resulting in crop yield losses due to the decline of pollinators and the need for increased use of pesticides[27-29] .
- Rising sea levels are causing land loss, erosion, and the need for costly infrastructure adaptations [30-32].
- Mental health issues, including the rise of autism and depression[33, 34], affect workplace productivity and economic costs [35].

- Poor decision-making might be linked to inadequate sleep and increased stress [36], itself deliberately induced by attention-grabbing apps to make us more susceptible to advertisers.
- The breakdown in communities due to a lack of trust in authority figures, often fuelled by deliberate campaigns to spread chaos and disinformation, such as the influence of Russian trolls and Q-Anon [37, 38], is hindering long-term thinking and the ability to organize for large-scale projects. Wars over resources like crops and clean water, driven by environmental degradation and social instability [39] such as those in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan, prioritize individual advantage over community advantage and further exacerbate these issues[40, 41].

Benefits Manager's Actions and Abilities to Influence

The benefits manager's role is to influence projects to create what is advantageous to an organization. While their primary responsibility is to ensure consistency, comparability, and adherence to processes, the change manager develops and monitors benefits in each project.



Figure 3 Benefits manager's influence on sustainability goals

This means that the benefits manager can absolutely influence the direction of projects towards sustainability and regeneration (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

The key to getting attention is showing numbers and demonstrating how sustainability and regeneration directly affect the organization. This includes the impact on costs (such as recruitment and retention through credibility and work environment), income (through positive brand image and appeal to funders), assets, and intellectual property (by developing future-proof solutions).

Putting a Number on Sustainability and Regeneration

For the project leadership team (and the task frequently falls on the benefits manager), in order to justify this adjustment of objectives, we need to be able to show the numbers.

The United Nations have set out an approach, in how they measure delivery of their Sustainable Development Goals [42] – what gets measured gets done. We'll use these as a fall back.

But let's look at some questions that could start to give some answers:

- What is the cost of climate change, war, mental health, versus the cost of doing something about them? For example how does it affect the organisation that is funding the project we're working on? Carbon emissions costs? Land lost to rising sea level or land value lost due to lower crop yields? Damage from more extreme weather, and energy costs to maintain working conditions within tolerances required by regulation [43-46]?
- Are there direct impacts on workplace productivity of carbon dioxide levels [47, 48], and the association between workplace carbon dioxide and climate change?
- How is the strength of the economy related to social cohesiveness and peace? How is it impacted by war [49, 50]?

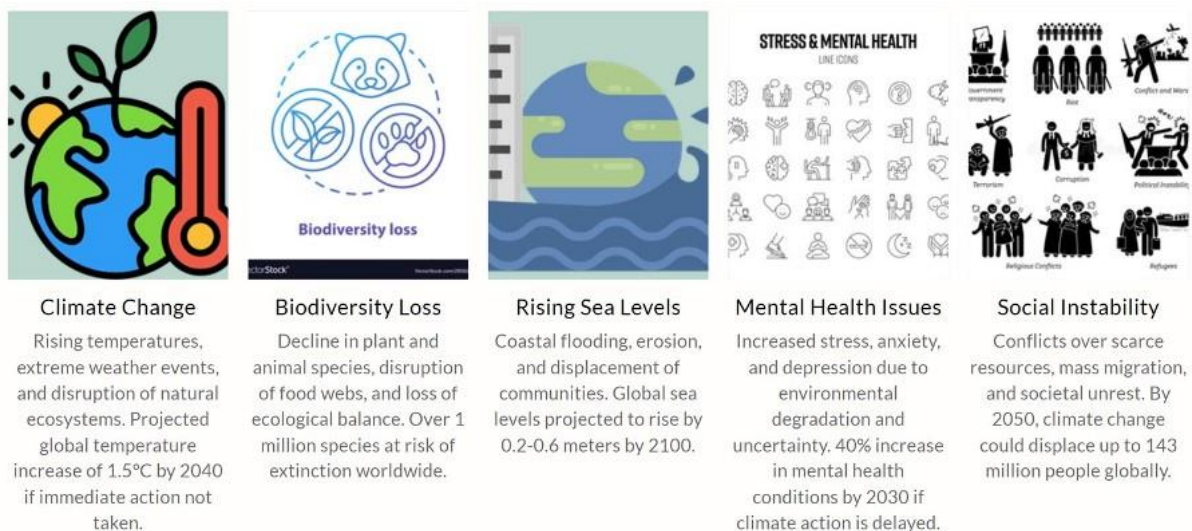


Figure 4 what are the impacts of failing to take into account sustainability and regeneration?

Pinning down the impacts inside your own company (see a suitable infographic in **Error! Reference source not found.**):

- A service to audit user experience had a Return on Investment (ROI) of over 30 times the investment for Quality Checkers [51];
- Another reviewing the cost of substance-addicted parents receiving help to keep their children showed excellent RoI [52] ;
- Many companies invest in mental health services for employees because it helps with retention and productivity;
- There's government support and positive impacts on branding and public perception (and therefore potentially premium pricing) for organisations that address environmental impacts early;

- The cost of solar and wind electricity generation for companies whose main activity is something else, are falling, and fossil fuel energy is increasing in price and cost[53].

Conclusion

The benefits manager plays a vital role in influencing sustainability and regeneration in projects. By understanding the economic, environmental, social, and community impacts of projects and effectively communicating the financial and moral imperatives for sustainability and regeneration, benefits managers can drive positive change within their organizations and beyond. Through their actions and advocacy, benefits managers can ensure that projects not only deliver short-term benefits but also contribute to the long-term well-being of organizations, communities, and the planet as a whole.

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Minney set out to become a farmer but was defeated by bureaucracy. He sold high ticket computer systems and specialist software for workforce planning; joined the National Health Service for 18 years (and as a Chief Executive for the last 7 of these) and is now a project management consultant with a sideline chairing a charity restoring the sense of community for young people.

Minney works in project management, and in particular benefits management, motivating team members by reporting what they are achieving together and changing the community and culture to want to achieve – together. At present, he's more involved on the governance side, accredited as a Social Value practitioner and Chartered Project Professional, and reviewing the balance of projects and contribution to objectives and benefits across portfolios.

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