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Introduction

This paper aims to provide an insight into the recently emerged phenomenon of sustainable events and its development as well as a prediction for the future paths this environment friendly way of organising events might take. Furthermore, this work will explore the opportunities sustainable events may offer to AccountAbility, an international, small non-profit think tank, and the ways these innovative practices could be implemented most efficiently by the organisation.

AccountAbility has seen the reality of non-functioning traditional institutional and organisational accountabilities a long time ago and since then is dedicated to creating innovative tools, standards and concepts that enable people to have a say in the decisions of institutions that affect their lives; oblige these institutions to lead an effective two way dialogue with their stakeholders and embed the practice of accountability in their whole work (AA Fact sheet March, 2008). Therefore, democracy, active citizenship and collaboration are core principles entwined in AccountAbility's work, building the foundation of all organisational outputs. Another principle AccountAbility has wholeheartedly embraced is sustainability and responsible development.

Since the organisation is committed to sustainable progress, it is aiming to embed sustainable practices in its internal structure as well. Some of the achievements already in place are carbon offsetting and office re-assessment which help reducing the carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions of the organisation and therefore minimize its carbon footprint. However, as the organisation is expanding its senior management team travels more and more often which contributes to increasing AccountAbility's carbon footprint. As a result, the sustainability practices adopted are not doing enough in order to maintain AccountAbility's carbon footprint low.

Problem statement

Currently there is a gap between AccountAbility envisaging itself as a low-CO_2-emission organisation and the reality. In order for this imbalance to wane, the organisation would like to adopt more ways of responsible tackling of its everyday work which will result in re-thinking of the current practices and the creation of new, more sustainable ones. One of the ways this could be done is considering the adoption of sustainable events management which will result in organising small, medium and big events on behalf of AccountAbility by using responsible practices and acting on the organisational triple bottom line. The organisation is holding a number of convenings and workshops worldwide, big institutional events once or twice a year, report launches and also small to medium internal meetings. The benefits of organising these events in a responsible way will be CO_2 emission reduction, cost reduction, institutional image improvement and increase in staff satisfaction (Sustainable Events Management Survey, April 2008).

The communication plan, taking a central place in this paper, has the objective to point out the most effective methods for tackling the issue of increasing CO_2 emissions by adopting a responsible way for organising internal and external events on behalf of AccountAbility. It has been agreed that AccountAbility's employees will assist the research and will provide sufficient information for its

progress. A project account manager has been appointed in the face of Fernanda Polacow, Communications Manager at AccountAbility, who agreed to facilitate the research and help the implementation of the communications plan in the future.

Overall organisation goals

The overall organisational goals are broader than the specific communication goals described in Chapter 3. The organisational goals are as follows:

- Carbon dioxide emission reduction
- Events cost reduction
- Improving AccountAbility's image by positioning the organisation as an active sustainable events management practitioner

The aim of the communication plan in this paper is assisting AccountAbility to achieve the following goals:

- To understand how the idea about a sustainable events management system is accepted internally and if AccountAbility's staff is willing to use it
- To communicate effectively to its staff the existence of a practical guide/database of sustainable service and product suppliers (venues, caterers, event materials) which could be consulted whenever an event should be organised
- To apply suitable communications strategies in order to show people internally the value of considering sustainable principles when organising events
- To position AccountAbility as an active sustainable events management practitioner and consequently improve its image amongst its stakeholders

Central questions and sub-questions

The central questions and the relevant sub-questions of this paper are as follows:

1. *What is the future of sustainable events management?*
- What is sustainability and why is it important?
- What does sustainable events management refer to?
- Why is sustainable events management important?
- What are the current trends and developments in sustainable events management?

2. *How can AccountAbility transform its current events management system into a more environment friendly one?*
- Is there an events system at AccountAbility?
- What are the size and scope of AccountAbility's events?
- What is the level of awareness of what *sustainable event* means among AccountAbility's staff?

- What is the motivation of the staff to use the system and if they are interested, what features would they like to see in it?
- What would the positive consequences of the introduction of a sustainable events management at AccountAbility will be?
- What are the possible obstacles to the introduction of sustainable events organisation at AccountAbility?

Target groups of the research

- *Primary target group*: AccountAbility's employees
  - ➢ *Target segment group (A):* Employees who are closely involved with events organisation.
  - ➢ *Target segment group (B):* Employees who are not directly involved with events organisation.
- *Secondary target group*: AccountAbility's members including individuals, large organisations, specialist organisations, NGOs and academia.

Objectives of the research

The primary objective of the research is to find out suitable communication solutions to assist the implementation of a sustainable events management at AccountAbility by analysing the following aspects:

- The attitudes of AccountAbility's employees towards sustainable events implemented in the organisation
- The obstacles to the smooth implementation of sustainable events
- The specific strategies that have to be adopted so that the constant use of sustainable practices when organising events is secured

The secondary objective of the research is to come to conclusions about the future of sustainable events management built on the current trends and developments of sustainable events in UK, USA and Canada (these are the most active sustainable events countries hence they were selected as a sample for the research).

Justification of the research methods

a) Desk research: Since the topic of the research on AccountAbility is very specific it was relevant to consult the organisation's website, internal documents such as reports on performance and innovation and the organisational welcome handbook. This facilitated a deeper insight into the structure and functioning of AccountAbility as well as its positioning, aspirations and strategies for the future.

The desk research on sustainability consulted mainly university papers, reports from environmental organisations and newspaper articles on the subject. The sustainable events management research focused on journals and reports from events organisations and events research bodies. Also specialised (sustainable) events magazines, websites, newspapers and other publications were important for this research to analyse this segmented events market and its development.

b) Field research: This research was conducted via direct observation in order to collect primary data about the direct implementation of sustainable events practices. The author of the paper visited CONFEX, one of the biggest events exhibitions worldwide in order to find out about the scope and size of the sustainable events industry, how fast it is developing, what it focuses on and who is currently embracing it.

c) Survey: In order to find out what the attitudes and opinions of AccountAbility's employees on a possible sustainable organisation of events are, an online survey was conducted. The survey was accessible on AccountAbility's website with the link being distributed internally in an email in order to encourage people to fill it in.
- *Target group:* This survey was conducted among AccountAbility's staff without regards to location or job position
- *Population size*: 33 employees
- *Sample population*: 100%. Everybody had access to the survey
- *Respondents:* 24 people successfully completed the survey

The main objectives of the survey are:
- *Attitudes*: To identify whether AccountAbility's staff is in favour of the introduction of sustainable events organisation
- *Behaviour:* To understand what would the employees like to be included in the sustainable events management system/guide since this is directly connected with maximizing the use of this system

d) Interviews: In order to understand which departments at AccountAbility are organising events, what these events consist of, how often they are organised and what methods are used for putting them together, personal interviews were conducted with Josephine Walford from Membership, Hanne Thornam and Anna Turrell from Advisory Services, and Kezia Nielson from Standards Team who are all responsible for coordinating meetings, convenings and events for AccountAbility. The interviews also provided information about their opinion and willingness to implement sustainable practices when organising events.

Structure of the paper

This final paper follows the outline suggested by the authors of *Setting up a strategic communication plan* book written by Marita Vos, Jose Otte & Paul Linders (2003). It consists of four chapters. The first chapter is devoted to sustainability and sustainable events. This unit of the paper aims to explore in depth the nature, impact and development of sustainable events in order to make an educated conclusion about their future. This analysis will also facilitate positioning AccountAbility's efforts for organising responsible events into the context of sustainable events industry worldwide. The second chapter is the situation overview combining internal and external analysis of AccountAbility and resulting in a SWOT matrix pointing out the bottlenecks of the situation. The communication plan itself, allocated in the third chapter, consists of communication analysis and formulation of the communication strategy which points out in detail how the problem could be tackled. Finally, the fourth chapter is providing a conclusion which summarises the most relevant findings of this research.

Chapter 1: The future of sustainable events management

Chapter Introduction

This chapter aims to make a prediction about the future of sustainable events management. It is therefore relevant to first understand what sustainability is and why it is important nowadays and afterwards look at the role and importance of sustainable events management. An analysis of the opportunities and developments in this industry will contribute to formulating an educated conclusion about the future of events organised in a responsible way. This analysis will also facilitate identifying the broader context around AccountAbility implementing a sustainable events organisation and will map out some of the external threats and opportunities for the organisation.

Part I: Sustainability nowadays

Definitions

In the recent two decades sustainability became a much discussed subject. Media, governments, research bodies, companies and individuals have all contributed to the debate around sustainable development, sustainable growth, sustainable agriculture, sustainable communities, sustainable living, sustainable business etc. The main questions arising from all the sustainability talk in the world nowadays is: 'What exactly is sustainability?' and 'What does 'sustainable development and growth refer to?'.

The term sustainability is most commonly defined as 'the capacity for continuance into the long term' (The SIGMA Project, 2003). Therefore, everything sustainable should possess the characteristic of endurance with implications of infinity. Following this logic, sustainable development must be a development which guarantees it will be able to sustain itself infinitely or at least for a long unspecified period of time, meaning it will continue to develop throughout time without changing its core. One can encounter another question here: what is/are the object/objects of this development? Applying this definition to the social, economic and environmental aspects[1] of our world, one can claim that sustainable development is a development which exists in such a way that it aids the economic growth of countries and businesses, preserves the environmental resources of the planet Earth and in the same time fosters social growth by stimulation of community engagement into the above mentioned processes. This explanation is developed on the basis of the definition of sustainable development given by *The Brundtland Report*[2] in 1987 which defines it as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.'

Both sustainable growth and sustainable development are still to be finalised in terms of accurate definitions. Regarding *sustainable growth* the Brundtland report calls for 'a new era of economic

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[1] These three aspects are agreed to be the triple bottom line of sustainable development

[2] This is the common name of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) *Our Common Future* Report

growth - growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable' (Bartlett, 1998). Albert Bartlett makes a strong point by defending the thesis that sustainable growth is an oxymoron when applied to material things. He claims that if we accept that the word *sustainable* stands 'for an unspecified long period of time' and growth - for 'an increase in the quantity of something', then keeping in mind that the Planet Earth is only one and offers limited resources, we can see how with time the sustainable growth will result in an infinite quantity which has to fit in a finite space. Therefore, the term sustainable growth is contradicting itself when applied to the quantity of material things (Bartlett, 1998).

Sustainable development on the other hand is a term defined more than 300 times and yet it still hasn't been given a full, exhaustive definition which follows smoothly and doesn't contradict itself. The Brundtland Report claims that "sustainable development requires meeting the major needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life." (Brundtland, 1987 p. 43; cited: by Davis, nd). However, this description proves to be very elastic. As it touches the surface but doesn't define exactly the core, it could be used in a broad sense for any human activity proven that this activity evolves over time and that it incorporates the triple bottom line: environment, economics and society. For example we can speak about agricultural sustainable development, technical sustainable development, sustainable development in publishing, printing, journalism, building, design, sports, events and any human activity which is beneficial to the society, the environment and the economy and progresses over time. Some of the above mentioned areas have already adopted somewhat sustainable approaches (meaning good for the environment, society and the growth of economics) and this has been reflected in the way they have recently started to be called i.e. sustainable agriculture, sustainable building, sustainable design, sustainable events etc. *Sustainable* here is standing for the efforts of these businesses to sustain the environment, the society and themselves for a long unspecified period of time.

Even if it has been in circulation for the past 20 years[3], the term *sustainable development* still hasn't ironed out all logical discrepancies in its meaning. However, the concept behind it is clear - economic growth incorporating environmental preservation and social responsibility. This idea represents a challenge to the developed world as we know it today and urges for re-thinking the way civilised life has been structured and maintained for the past century.

The issue at a glance

The world's development is currently extremely unsustainable. This could be easily seen by looking closely at each aspect of the triple bottom line of sustainability. First, environmentally wise, due to human activity, the world experiences global warming, depletion of natural non-renewable resources and loss of biodiversity. Second, economically, the world is still divided in developed, developing and underdeveloped nations. Therefore, the world's resources are not equally distributed and they are abundant in some places while completely lacking in others. Third,

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[3] The term is in circulation since 1987 when it was used officially for the first time in the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*

socially, many people are prevented from enjoying basic social rights such as healthcare, education, freedom of speech and in general decent quality of life.

Environment

The environmental side of the issue is very important since it is a prerequisite for the development of the other two aspects of sustainability. Without equilibrium in the ecosystems, stable climate and abundance of natural resources, neither the economy nor the society could be developing in a balanced, healthy way.

➢ *Climate change*

One of the main environmental issues today is climate change and in particular global warming. This issue is a mirror of the changes the world is currently undergoing due to the impacts of the rapid industrialization of the 20th century. According to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992; cited by: IPCC, 2001) climate change and in particular the severe global warming we are witnessing today is an anthropogenic caused phenomenon. The main reason for the rapid temperature rise (about 0.6°C since 1900) is the greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) increase. These gases (mainly carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons), reducing heat loss into the space and therefore maintaining Earth's temperature beneficial for sustaining contemporary life, have increased by 70% between 1970 and 2004 (IPCC, 2007) due to growth in the use of fossil fuels which are providing electricity, transportation and petrochemical industry products to the developed nations.

Although there have been many skeptics opposing the idea of global warming, their number is quickly diminishing due to irrefutable data and observational evidence from all continents and oceans showing that many ecosystems are being affected by temperature rise.

➢ *Non-renewable resources*

Another result of the impacts of the growing human activity on the planet is the depletion of natural non-renewable resources, mainly fossil fuels (coal, petroleum and natural gas) producing energy. Due to the growing human population (expected to reach 9.4 billion by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008) the demand for non-renewable resources is increasing, however the supply is diminishing. This discrepancy will result in a crisis if not tackled quickly and effectively.

➢ *Loss of biodiversity*

The increasing anthropogenic development in the recent 50 years has had detrimental impacts on ecosystems and diversity of species. One third of the land area on the planet is converted to agricultural lands and another 40% is under conversion which means that less than 25% remains intact (GLOBIO, 2001). This is a direct consequence of the growing world population and its basic needs whose satisfaction has led to overexploitation and depletion of marine fisheries, reduction of land productivity, air and water pollution, soil contamination and deforestation. As a result species are going extinct 1000 times faster than the typical rate of Earth's past which is unprecedented in human history (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2006).

Economics

The world's countries are still being divided into three categories based on their economic performance: first, second and third world or according to another categorization: developed, developing and underdeveloped. Basic resources such as food, water and shelter are profuse in some parts of the world and scarce in others. Around 40% of world's population lacks energy and remains literally in the dark (Litovsky, 2007). Every second child in the world lives in poverty. Millions of children don't have access to safe water, shelter or health services. As their basic needs couldn't be met, approximately 26 500 children die every single day in the same world where developed economies are booming and being able to meet not only the basic needs of their citizens but also a lot of unnecessary wants (Shah, 2008). While some parts of the world are progressing, others are quickly regressing, not being able to sustain normal development for their citizens. This enormous imbalance points out how un-sustainable human existence and development are.

Society

Economic and social rights (ESR) are a necessity for every human being in order to maintain *at least* their physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1943; cited by Green, 2000). However, basic rights such as social security, healthcare and education are not available to this 3 billion people (half the world population) living on less than 2 dollars per day. As a result from this poverty about a billion people entered the 21 century without being able to read, write or even sign their names. In the same time, less than 1% of what is being spent on weapons every year could have sent every single child to school by the year 2000 (Shah, 2008). Education is the key to improvement of weak economies. However, these fragile economies are not even presented with the chance to send their children to school which helps for the vicious cycle to close. This unequal distribution of resources and the slow re-thinking of the world's structure and functioning contribute to the unsustainable development of the present world.

Part II: Sustainable events management

Sustainable development, as explained in the previous section, is a major challenge for today's world as the inability to achieve it quickly puts at stake our environment and humankind's well-being. Therefore, the developed and developing nations are trying to re-think the functioning of the human activities which results in developing new ways of operating various industries. One of the young industries participating in this re-structuring is the events industry. Since about 10 years events companies, governments and academia mainly in UK, USA, Canada and Australia but also in some countries in mainland Europe and South America, are trying to develop and give voice to a new way of organising meetings and events - a way that spares the environment, reduces events costs and aids local communities. These meetings are referred to as sustainable, green, responsible, ecological, environmentally-friendly, zero waste or carbon neutral. Each of these terms has a slightly different meaning and none of them is completely accurate or exhaustive.

For the purposes of this paper the term *sustainable meetings and events* will be used even though it is literally contradicting itself. A meeting/event is a process with a clear beginning and a clear end. Sustainability, on the other hand, implies endurance for a long, infinite period of time. Therefore, the two components of the term sustainable meetings are literally contradicting each other. However, logically there is no contradiction as the term sustainable events stands for events which are organised in way that aids sustainable development.

Definitions

Although meetings and events seem like similar activities there are some substantial differences which require the terms to be defined. A meeting is 'an off-site gathering, including conventions, seminars, workshops and symposiums, which bring together people for a common purpose – the sharing of information' (Allen *et al.*, 1999; cited by Presbury & Edwards, 2005) while an event is a 'celebration or display of some theme to which the public is invited for a limited time only, annually or less frequently' (Getz, 1997; cited by Presbury & Edwards, 2005). Therefore, meetings are strictly knowledge-building-and-sharing orientated while events might be knowledge-orientated but might be also celebrations of personal, corporate, social occasions and festivals. For the purposes of this paper where it is necessary to refer to both meetings and events the term *sustainable event/s* will be used as a collective noun.

Sustainable event is a term referring to event whose management incorporates interdependent economic, environmental and social objectives and integrates these objectives into its decision making. Narrowing down the definition, a sustainable event ensures that all of its aspects such as location, food, transportation and event materials are ethically sourced, environmentally friendly and community beneficial.

Events industry opportunities

The events industry is relatively young but rapidly and constantly growing one. Despite fears of upcoming economic recession, the world's biggest events agencies are optimistic about the future of events organisation which is part of the hospitality industry acting as an umbrella for a few other service industries such as accommodation, catering and tourism. The hospitality industry in North America alone is organising over 1 million meetings and events and over 12,000 trade shows. This turns it into about $100 billion corporate industry (Peters, 2007).

There is an undoubtedly huge environmental impact generated as a consequence of all meetings and events organised annually. Some of the direct results are air pollution, big amounts of GHG emissions leading to global warming, depletion of non-renewable resources and generation of hazardous waste dangerous for human health. However, if the way events are organised is re-thought, the environment won't be the only one to benefit from this change. A re-structuring of events organisation by incorporating sustainable practices into all of its stages will reduce costs for event associations and their supply chains and also maximise delegate satisfaction.

Events organisers and agencies

About 67% of meeting and incentive professionals worldwide have already implemented sustainable ways of event organisation. Moreover, 76% of event agencies have incorporated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies into their functioning and half of the remaining 24% claim they are in the process of creating a CSR strategy (Bell, 2008). There is growing social and governmental pressure for doing so, but the main reason behind this shift is economic gain. When organising an event in a sustainable way, there are usually big cost savings involved. A five day conference for 2,500 attendees, organised in an old-school way usually uses 62,500 plastic plates, 90,000 cans or bottles, 75,000 cups and 87,500 napkins. This generates enormous amount of garbage and has to be paid for additionally. On the other hand, a conference for 1,300 attendees organised in a sustainable way can save money as follows: approximately $3,900 from using on-line registration instead of printing and postage; approximately $1,950 from providing online handouts instead of printed ones; approximately $12,187 from providing water in pitchers instead of plastic bottles; approximately $975 from recycling plastic badges[4] (McKinley *et al*, 2007). Whatever the size of the event, these small steps to sustainability are saving money and sparing the environment which are usually the main two motives for adoption of a sustainable way of events organisation.

Supply chain

When preparing an event, agencies usually have to engage venues, hotels and caterers. Each of these supply components could also benefit from a sustainable policy. If a hotel, for example, changes sheets and towels on request rather than daily only for one week, it can save not only money but also energy equal to 200 barrels of oil which is enough to run a family car for about 289,682 kilometers. Programs for saving water such as "second glass of water on request" instead of providing this glass in advance save huge amounts of water. An average hotel implementing only this single practice can save about 91,262 liters of water annually. The same could be easily done with food and any other resources (McKinley *et al*, 2007).

As hotels have a big purchasing power (for one week they purchase more than what an average family does for one year) they have control over market trend setting. Therefore by putting in place sustainability policies regarding catering for example, hotels are usually generating demand for ethically sourced and organic food therefore helping the business of sustainable catering to proliferate.

Delegates

Clients of the events industry are always looking for delegate satisfaction as this is directly connected with the fulfillment of their own goals. Therefore the delegate is one of the major factors setting the demand. According to a comprehensive worldwide survey conducted by the leading events magazine *Conference and Incentive Travel* about 20% of clients specify CSR requirements when hiring an events agency (Bell, 2008). This is still not an impressive number but

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[4] Data based on real case studies

the trends are optimistic. Consumers in developed and developing nations are taking into consideration sustainability more and more often and actively asking for it being incorporated into different industries. By choosing sustainable products and services they are setting a tipping point in the market which restructures itself in order to meet the demand.

Figure 1 depicts the course of market generated demand for sustainability in the events chain. Usually this starts from the consumer or in this case the clients and delegates. However, currently there is also a trend of a 'two-way demand'. Events agencies which have adopted sustainability practices due to cost savings and government pressure are marketing these to their clients in order to generate awareness and interest and create a better market for this service.
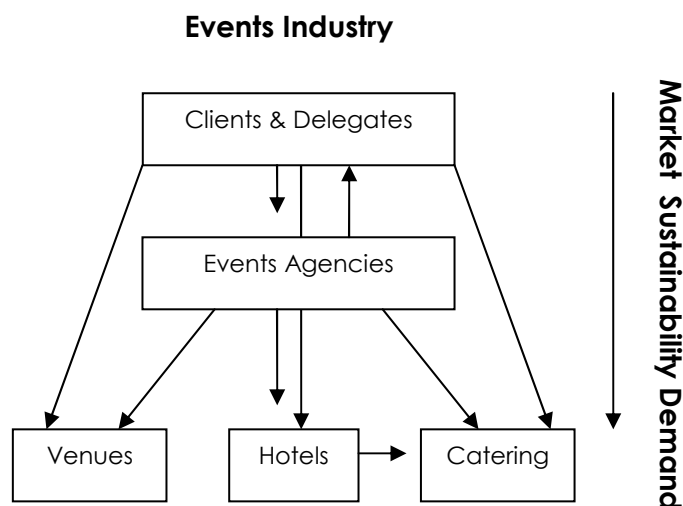
Events Industry

Figure 1

Standards

In November 2007 the first world's standard for sustainable event management BS8901 was launched in London by the British Standards Institute (BSI) which has also developed the famous Quality ISO 9001 and Environmental ISO 14001 standards. BS8901 officially marked the efforts of the events industry to create a common framework for creating and measuring the sustainability of events. The push factor for the standard's development was the 2012 Olympic Games in London. The standard is a big step forward, but as the first one in this field it still has some weak points to deal with. Even if it is already available for event organisers, venues and the supply chain to use, it is still not finalised. BS8901 needs revision as it currently has no accreditation scheme in place. It is still fluctuating between being a management standard or an inspection standard. However, BS8901 is the first major step to finding a constructive solution to the lack of global sustainable event industry standard.

In February 2008 a new attempt for creating a Green Meeting Standard was launched by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX). The goal is to learn from the mistakes BS8901 has made and to construct an easily measurable standard for sustainable events (Wilson, 2008).

Whatever the standard for sustainable events will be, it is extremely important that it is positioned in an unambiguous way and that it provides easy and clear guidance to responsible events practitioners. The second logical step for a good standard is global spread and use by the relevant industry worldwide, as happened with ISO 14001 for instance. The unification of standards in the sustainability field is a big challenge. There are so many different certifications and standards that some of them tend to sometimes lose their importance. The events industry has the opportunity to avoid this mistake by setting a few but quality standards in the field and giving them the chance to become global.

Part III: The future of sustainable events

The events industry is so young that 95% of the meeting professionals are still alive today (McKinley *et al*, 2007). This presents a great opportunity to set the standards of future development learning from the challenges the world is facing today and incorporating sustainability into all events practices. This is also a unique chance to inspire other industries to do the same.

In a little more than a year two standards for sustainable events management have been developed[5] in two of the more powerful world countries – UK and USA. The reason behind the creation of these standards is nothing more than competition. BS8901 was developed so that the Olympic Games 2012 in London could be 'the greenest' known to the modern history so far, competing with Beijing 2008 and previous Olympic Games aiming to be called sustainable. The North American standard on the other hand has as its base the idea to outperform BS8901 and provide better guidelines for the events industry. The healthy competition here triggers progress and aspirations for best practices. Whatever the rationale and the reasons behind the standards' development the important fact is their existence and slow but steady increase in importance and implementation.

The standards, being a tool that will facilitate the events industry to become more sustainable, are an essential initial step. As the industry is awakening to the importance of being responsible it needs instruments to start practicing what it preaches. BS8901 and the North American standards are exactly this necessary base for further progress.

The most powerful tool for a change nowadays, the market, is close to a tipping point. Consumers are beginning to realize the power of their decisions and are either choosing *green* alternatives or at least realising it's better to choose them. This shift in thinking is already resulting in sufficient demand for sustainable products and services so that businesses have already started supplying the market with *green* alternatives. *Green* is trendy and on top of that it satisfies the most important need people have – to feel useful (for the environmental, social and economic development). Therefore, the *green* demand could only grow in the future, despite predicted economic and CSR[6] recession.

The events industry is taking initial steps into sustainability transition. It is gradually creating the necessary tools, marketing its efforts and achievements to its stakeholders and waiting for the

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[5] The North American standard is still in process of development
[6] Corporate Social Responsibility

customer demand for these services to further increase. As long as the industry has an incentive to assure continuance towards sustainability incorporation, the future of sustainable events will be secure and successful.

Chapter conclusion

Sustainability talk is a recent phenomenon reflecting the problems humankind has created as a result of the industrialisation and rapid development that commenced in the 20th century. Solutions to tackle the increasing problems of unsustainable growth are being developed by individuals, businesses and governments. The events industry is contributing to aggravating the situation by the old-fashioned way it is operating and is therefore part of the problem. In order to be part of the solution it has started to develop ways for sustainable functioning. What is more important is that it has started to communicate these efforts to its stakeholders in order to arise interest and use of the new services and therefore is influencing the market. As a result, the number of parties interested in adopting a sustainable way of organising their events is increasing. AccountAbility is one of the interested organisations. The next chapters will commence the analysis of this small non-profit organisation and how it could implement sustainable practices when managing institutional events.

Chapter 2: Situation Analysis

Chapter Introduction

This chapter consists of two parts: internal and external analysis of AccountAbility. The former will give an overview of all internal aspects of the organisation relevant to the building of a communications plan for the successful implementation of sustainable events management system. The analysis is based on desk research, observation and direct experience of the author of this paper as well as survey distributed internally, informal interviews with AccountAbility's employees and research of internal organisational documents. The second part of the situation analysis will give an overview of the external environment the organisation is operating in. This analysis will bring forward the opportunities and threats AccountAbility is or will have to deal with in the near future. This part is based on desk research and informal interviews with employees. Finally, a SWOT matrix will be compiled in order to present visually and clearly the strengths and weaknesses in combination with the opportunities and threats facing AccountAbility. The SWOT analysis will also facilitate the identification of the situation bottlenecks.

Part I: Internal Analysis

This part of the analysis presents a description of AccountAbility on the basis of how it functions internally. It is of great importance to understand the role of this small not-for-profit organisation, what it stands for, what its values are and what its internal climate is. Consequently, the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation regarding the implementation of a sustainable events management system will be mapped out. This information will contribute to identify how the communication plan targeted to employees at AccountAbility should be developed.

AccountAbility

AccountAbility is an independent, not-for-profit think tank and global network founded in 1996, committed to promoting accountability innovations for sustainable development. The organisation has moved from being CSR focused towards more strategic high-level work and is currently being engaged with issues such as water management, climate change and labor standards (AccountAbility Forum Invitation, 2008).

Work Streams

The four main challenge areas which AccountAbility's work focuses on are organisational accountability, responsible competitiveness, collaborative governance and citizen participation.

Organisational accountability

This part of AccountAbility's work aims to find the most practical and effective solutions to enable organisations to be innovative, efficient and accountable as well as to ensure excellent organisational performance in corporate citizenship.

As central part of these goals, AccountAbility's Standards Team has developed the AA1000 Series of Standards which includes two main standards: the AA1000 Assurance Standard, which facilitates organisational sustainability reporting through a third-independent party assessment and assures the precision and completeness of the report content and the adequate responsiveness of the organisation to its stakeholders; and AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard which assures there is a quality organisational stakeholder engagement through a principles-based, open source framework.

Another achievement in the field of organisational accountability and corporate citizenship is the Global Leadership Network's work and in particular the GLN OpenAccess Tool. The Global Leadership Network (GLN) is a partnership of ten leading global companies and research centers among which is AccountAbility. GLN believes that corporate social responsibility (CSR) should be embedded in the core business strategy of companies and not, as is the case with most companies nowadays, be perceived as an external to their business strategy factor. GLN, in association with AccountAbility, the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Boston College Centre for Corporate Citizenship (BCCCC), has created the GLN OpenAccess Tool which helps companies to align their social, environmental and governance issues with their core business strategy to ensure performance excellence in corporate citizenship.

Responsible competitiveness

AccountAbility's Responsible Competitiveness (RC) work aims to foster the creation of policies, norms and actions which facilitate the growth of sustainable markets, responsible productiveness and accountable performance. Or in the words of Simon Zadek, Chief Executive of AccountAbility and Alex MacGillivray, Head of programmes at AccountAbility, 'responsible competitiveness is about making sustainable development count in global markets' (MacGillivray *et al,* 2007). To carry out its RC work AccountAbility has been collaborating with regional and national governments, and with multi-sector alliances to help reshape markets. Some of the major outcomes of the RC work are the AccountAbility Rating (AR), ranking the world's biggest companies (according to *Fortune Global 100*) in four major areas: strategy, governance, engagement and impact; and the Responsible Competitiveness Index (RCI) ranking 108 countries according to their progress in advancing responsible business practices.

Collaborative governance

AccountAbility's Collaborative Governance (CG) work seeks to answer adequately the question of what kinds of governance and accountability mechanisms can secure the accountability and

effectiveness of today's multi-sector partnerships. The latest work of the organisation in this field - the report *Governing Collaboration: Making Partnerships Accountable for Delivering Development* is providing recommendations to partnerships in order to help them improve their governance systems and therefore, facilitate the delivering of their ambitious goals (AccountAbility, 2007).

Citizen participation

AccountAbility is also committed to finding solutions for improved systems enabling and stimulating individuals to have a say in the decisions which affect their lives. A key outcome of these work efforts is the report *What Assures Consumers* exploring the market-consumer relationship and providing recommendations on what needs to be done in the future to make sure that ethical markets are growing and developing successfully (AccountAbility, 2007).

The Mission Statement

AccountAbility's mission is to promote accountability innovations for sustainable development. The organisation strongly believes that today's world of challenges needs to hold those with power to account as this '*civilizing of power*' - accountability is critical to reconciling conflict, mobilizing action and addressing global challenges (AccountAbility, 2007).

Objectives and values

AccountAbility's main objective is to reinvent the key institutional dimensions of accountability as the traditional organisational accountabilities are no longer functioning in alignment with the fast-paced world's progress. AccountAbility's values, embedded in its internal and external stakeholder relations but most important - in all of its work outputs, are: transparency, openness, innovation, collaboration and objectivity.

The Market Position

What distinguishes AccountAbility from the other organisations doing similar work in the field is innovative and cutting edge thinking. AccountAbility seems to be ahead especially regarding its collaborative governance and responsible competitiveness work. This innovation is recognised also by the various organisational projects which are strongly supported financially, academically, and socially by influential worldwide foundations and organisations such as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Ford Foundation, IFC, UNGC, The Boston College Research Centre etc.

AccountAbility is regarded as cutting edge think tank creating sustainable development and accountability innovations but not as an organisation actively trying to reduce its environmental impact through all possible ways for doing this.

Place

In the recent ten years, due to the slow but steady awakening of the world to the importance of being sustainable, accountable and responsibly competitive there has been a growing demand for AccountAbility's research and consultations on a worldwide scheme which has led to the expansion of the organisation. Currently there are two official offices – one in London, where most of the team is based, and one in Washington, where the Head of AccountAbility North America, Steve Rochlin is working within a small team of two other professionals. Apart from that, there is an active AccountAbility presence in San Francisco, Geneva, Sao Paulo and Beijing with possibility for this presence to spread to more locations in the future. AccountAbility's 'delegates' in countries like Spain, Italy, Canada, Malaysia and Australia help the research and field work, care for maintaining close contact with partners, possible supporters and members and also ensure AccountAbility participates in conferences and debates on development issues.

Personnel and structure

In terms of personnel, AccountAbility is an equal opportunity employer and doesn't discriminate on grounds of color, race, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation or any other grounds (AccountAbility, 2006). Regarding position and responsibilities, the staff is officially divided into senior management team (SMT) and core team. The senior managers are often invited as keynote speakers or authors on themes concerning the strategic value of reinventing accountability.

AccountAbility is additionally structured in teams based on the different work streams as follows: Standards Team, Programmes Team, Collaborative Governance Team, Advisory Services Team, Membership Team, Communications Team, HR Team, Finance Team, MFA Forum Team and GLN Team. Moreover, these teams could be informally categorized by the goals they are serving into leading, support and partnership teams (see fig. 2). Each team has a top level manager. Although the hierarchy at AccountAbility is not something closely obeyed a slight top-bottom hierarchy could be observed in the functioning of the teams.

A frequent practice is the recruitment of interns for the different teams for short or long periods of time (from two to six/seven months). The interns have the chance to gain experience while contributing with their fresh look to the organisational work.

A noteworthy piece of information is the heavy workload across all teams. Resources and staff are usually short in most NGOs and AccountAbility is no exception. This translates into a lot of work for a staff that could benefit from expansion and/or smart restructuring of work tasks.
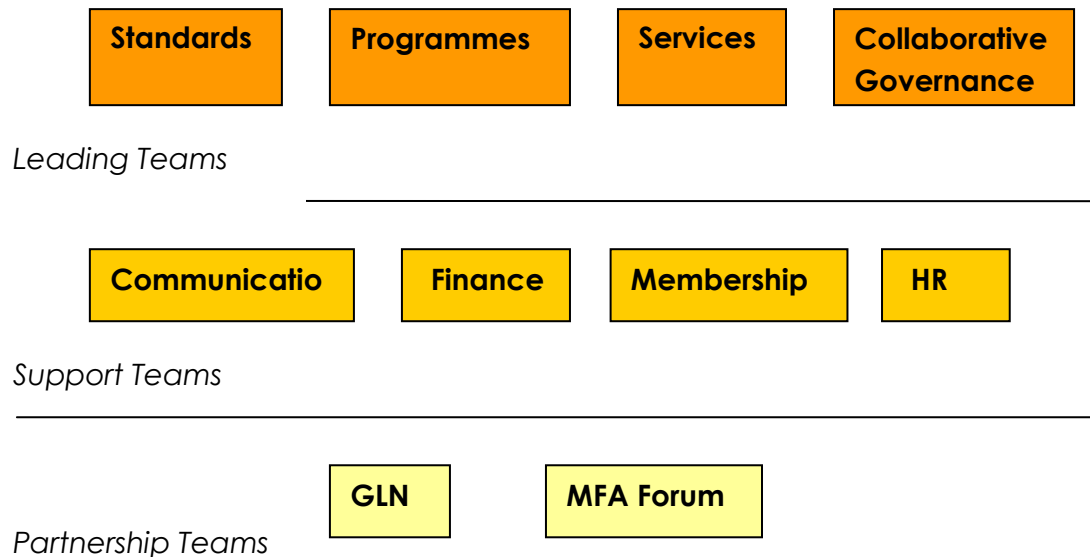
Standards	Programmes	Services	Collaborative Governance

Leading Teams

Communicatio	Finance	Membership	HR

Support Teams

GLN	MFA Forum

Partnership Teams

Figure 2

Organisational structure and culture

The organisational culture is orientated towards knowledge-building and considering this, the managers could sometimes become 'teachers'. There is always room for new ideas on board. Information sessions called 'brown bag lunches' are encouraged and facilitated by different team members every couple of months.

AccountAbility is structured in a very flexible way in terms of use of office space and working hours. On the other hand, there is some bureaucracy present which goes hand in hand with the expansion of the organisation.

Regarding internal management and communication at AccountAbility, they are both strong on a team level but weak centrally. This might affect the equal, timely implementation of practices throughout the whole organisation.

Funding

As AccountAbility is a not-for-profit organisation it operates under a restricted budget which is fundraised from different sponsors and supporters of its work. The support might come in the form of direct financing, free equipment, materials, technology, advertisement or other means of support tailored to AccountAbility's momentary needs. AccountAbility is also a membership organisation and it is partly financed by the incomes from members' annual fees.

Sustainability practices

There are a number of practices the organisation is already implementing in order to make sure it minimizes its carbon footprint as much as possible. These include:

- *Office re-assessment* which has led to switching the light bulbs to more efficient ones; use of recycled office materials (recycled notepads, notebooks, printer paper, pens, folders etc.) whenever possible; and taking extra care of switching off all electricity powered devices when not in use.
- *Carbon offsetting* of more than 60% of the organisational flights. As AccountAbility's team is crossing the world by airplane about 8 times per week on average, this adds up to a big organisational carbon footprint which AccountAbility offsets by paying its 'carbon tax'.
- *Publications* are certified carbon neutral and printed only on fully or semi recycled paper in conformity to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). They are also available in digital format on AccountAbility's website which aims to reduce hard copy use and environmental impact from shipping. Printing services are chosen with regards to their sustainability credentials.
- *Modern Video Conference Room* will be set up by the end of 2008 at AccountAbility's London office which aims to facilitate high-level meetings and also reduce flights and therefore environmental impact.

### *Internal attitude towards sustainable events*

Based on the acquired data from desk research and personal observation a survey was composed and conducted among AccountAbility's employees in order to find out what their attitudes, opinions and understanding of sustainable events management are. The survey was anonymous and accessible on AccountAbility's website with the link being distributed internally in an email in order to encourage people to follow it and fill in their answers. Out of 33 employees 24 successfully managed to complete the survey. This accounts for 73% of the whole population size.

In the first place, this survey had the objective to find out if people think there is a coherent system for organising events at AccountAbility. Moreover, the survey intended to understand whether people are in favour of introducing sustainable way for event organisation and what their opinion on the positive consequences form such a practice is. Finally, the respondents were asked to name the features they would like to see in such a system in order to assure that they will consequently get what they have asked for and apply the system.

Only the most significant results obtained from the survey adding value to the internal analysis will be presented here. The complete survey results and reports can be found in Appendix 4.

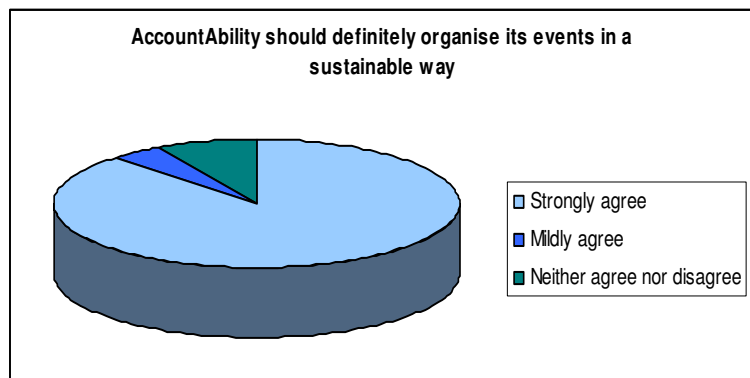### *Is there a coherent events management system at AccountAbility?*

It wasn't surprising that 71% of the respondents mildly or strongly disagreed that there is a coherent events system in place. This fact

There is a coherent events management system at AccountAbility

- Strongly agree
- Mildly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mildly disagree
- Strongly disagree
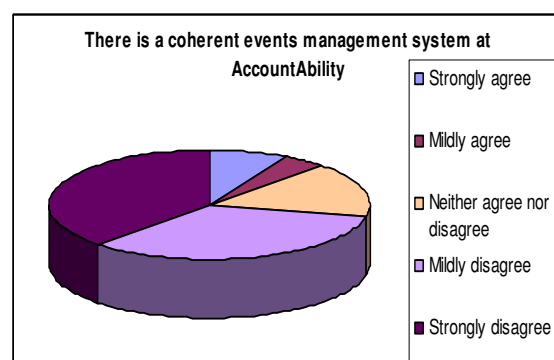
points out the niche for development of a consistent way of events organisation.

Should AccountAbility organise its events in a sustainable way?

Most of the respondents (87%) stated they are strongly in favour of a sustainable event organisation. None of them answered they disagree in some way which reflects the importance of the quick implementation of the system and implies that most of the employees are motivated to use it with the majority being strongly motivated.
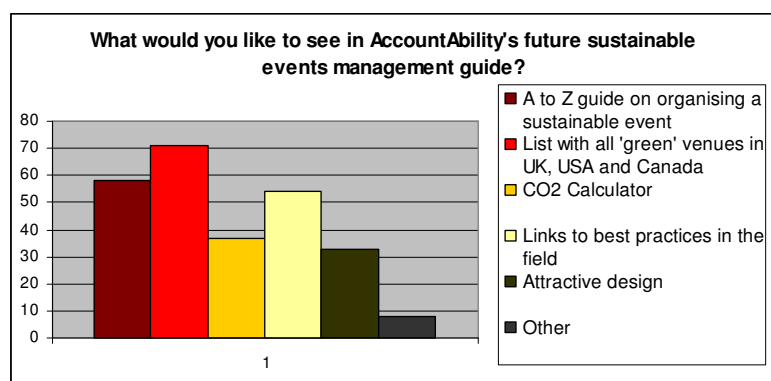
AccountAbility should definitely organise its events in a sustainable way

- Strongly agree
- Mildly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

What would the positive consequences of the introduction of sustainable events management at AccountAbility will be?

Positive consequences of introducing sustainable events at AccountAbility will be:

- Improved image for the organisation
- More opportunities for networking
- Increased level of organisational satisfaction among staff
- Easy way of organizing events
- Reducing the carbon footprint of AccountAbility
- Other

All respondents pointed at least two positive consequences with the average being three. This reflects the optimistic attitude of AccountAbility's employees towards the introduction of sustainable events management. The three most desired and expected consequences are thought to be improved organisational image, increased level of staff satisfaction and reducing the organisational carbon footprint.
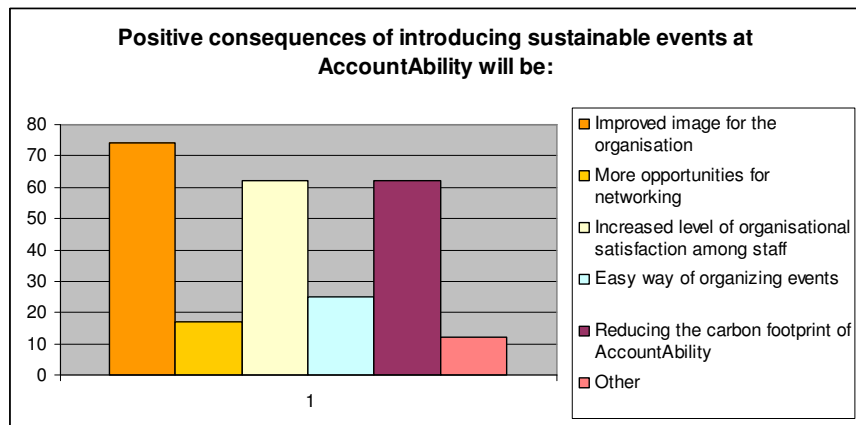
When being asked what else AccountAbility would benefit from responsible events, respondents state cost savings, better planning and use of organisational resources, alignment of AccountAbility's practice with its philosophy, becoming market leaders which would lead to competitive advantage, increased credibility and stronger influence on clients.

What would people like to see in AccountAbility's future sustainable events management system?

What would you like to see in AccountAbility's future sustainable events management guide?

- A to Z guide on organising a sustainable event
- List with all 'green' venues in UK, USA and Canada
- CO2 Calculator
- Links to best practices in the field
- Attractive design
- Other

When it comes to preferences of what should be included in AccountAbility's responsible events guide/system, people are mostly in favour of a database with 'green' venues, A to Z guide on how to organise a responsible event and best practices in the field.

Other things people specify as important are good productions and links to sites and providers that inform about sustainable events. Here concerns have been expressed about the actual value of carbon offsetting and if this can be called sustainable and incorporated into events management practices. The latter shows people still don't know what practices exactly to associate sustainable events with and therefore, an association with broader sustainability actions is drawn. This demonstrates the need for clear full explanation of the nature of responsible events.

Conclusion

AccountAbility encompasses special features that make the organisation unique at the international arena of think tanks working towards sustainable development. Its innovative thinking and ground breaking work are ensuring a leading position for this global network worldwide. AccountAbility is trying to become more sustainable internally in alignment with its organisational philosophy. It has already put in place some practices to achieve this objective which could be, nevertheless, complemented by the implementation of a responsible way of organising its events. However, in order to accomplish this, it has to make some improvements to facilitate this implementation such as strengthening its internal management and communication.

Part II: External Analysis

This part of the chapter will dive into AccountAbility's meso and macro-environment, analysing the external trends and developments which are exerting influence on the organisation's functioning. Both these sections are important in order to identify these external factors which might have an impact on AccountAbility and consequently on the sustainable events successful functioning. The results will be taken into consideration when developing the communications plan. A summarized version of the external analysis can be found in the SWOT matrix under *threats* and *opportunities*.

Meso- environment

AccountAbility's meso-environment could be characterized by various developments at national and international level such as the development of public policy research organisations, competition, expansion of sustainable events practices and trends of the consumer behaviour.

- Public policy research on different issues such as globalisation and governance, environment, economics, poverty alleviation etc. has boomed in the last two decades. As a result the number of international think tanks doing work in this area has literally exploded. Currently there are more than 5035 official think tanks operating in 169 countries worldwide. However, two major trends could be observed since 2007: the number of think

tanks is slightly decreasing and a specialisation of research topics is occurring (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2008).

- AccountAbility is operating in a field of other players doing similar work, rather than competitors. The organisation has gained competitive advantage in terms of its innovative work on responsible competitiveness and collaborative governance. Some of the major other players in the same area are Business for Social Responsibility (USA) and SustainAbility (UK). Both of them are organising events, however, not mentioning their sustainability aspect which implies they are not implementing responsible practices for event organisation. This might present AccountAbility with an opportunity to gain competitive advantage in this field as well.

- Sustainable events management, as mentioned in chapter one, is a practice which has been gradually gaining strength and expanding over the recent 10-15 years. An example of its fast development is the creation of two standards for sustainable events for one year – one in UK by the British Standards Institute and one in North America by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX), the latter still being under development. This might be seen as a quickly approaching trend that is here to stay.

- Consumer behavior regarding sustainable products is experiencing a shift towards bigger demand for ethically sourced, environment friendly products and services. The events industry provides figures stating that about 20% of clients worldwide specify CSR requirements when hiring an events agency (Bell, 2008). Considering that these statistics are relevant also to developing countries which do not have many resources, the number is impressive and clearly pictures the positive curve of consumer demand for sustainable practices incorporated into events.

Macro- environment

The analysis of the organisation's macro-environment which will focus on the US economic recession, US president elections, CSR recession and general demographic trends will help to identify those developments that could have an impact on AccountAbility.

- The United States of America are still one of the most influential global powers impacting the world's economy and development. Therefore, it is important to gain an insight into the US economic trends and foresee their future. In the past twenty years, US economy has maintained low inflation and steady growth. However, the ongoing crisis in credit markets threatens USA with economic recession on which more and more financial and stock-market experts agree. The US economic downturn will most probably weaken global economy despite the quick development of emerging markets such as China, Brazil and India which could balance the frailty to some extent (The Economist, 2007). This in turn, might affect AccountAbility's funding and enforce certain budget restrictions as the organisation receives grants from North American foundations and has North American clients and members.

- Another factor important for the future of AccountAbility's work is the upcoming November 2008 US President elections outcome. The new US President's views on today's global challenges, in particular sustainable development and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), will affect the future path of the world's policies on these issues which in turn will facilitate or impede AccountAbility's work.

- CSR recession is another aspect that shapes the broad picture around AccountAbility. Fears that as a result of economic recession, business CSR practices might be thrown overboard for the sake of cost cutting, are causing concerns not only among companies and governments but also among research bodies and think tanks which are working in this area.

- A strong world trend which might have an indirect impact on AccountAbility is the rapidly growing world population. According to the *U.S. Census Bureau*'s forecast the world will be inhabited by 9.4 billion people by 2050. This translates into vastly growing demand for re-thinking the present world governance structures and quick development of effective sustainable solutions and accountability governance practices.

Part III: SWOT Analysis

	Positive	Negative
Internal	**S**trengths ➢ Ahead of its 'competitors' ➢ Strong support in the face of foundations and organisations worldwide ➢ Growing world presence ➢ Strongly committed to sustainability practices ➢ In favour of sustainable events implementation ➢ Positive attitude towards expansion ➢ Strong management on team level ➢ Good internal communication on team level ➢ Practices in place for reduction of AccountAbility's environmental impact ➢ Flexible, open-minded thinking; room for new ideas ➢ The main office is located in one of the world's hubs of sustainability practices - London	**W**eaknesses ➢ Restricted budget due to the non-profit nature of the organisation ➢ Uniform training scheme for recruits doesn't exist ➢ Central management is weak ➢ Central internal communication is weak ➢ Employee turnover is relatively high ➢ Heavy workload

External	*O*pportunities	*T*hreats
	➤ US election outcomes ➤ Expand the organisation/develop work in new locations ➤ Strengthen stakeholder relationships ➤ Gain competitive advantage (regarding sustainability practices) and stay ahead of the other players in the field by implementing sustainable events practices ➤ Enhance the organisational image by emphasizing AccountAbility's sustainable practices (including events) ➤ Reduce the organisational carbon footprint	➤ US election outcomes ➤ Global economic recession ➤ CSR recession ➤ Budget restrictions ➤ Think tanks globally are becoming more specialised

The Bottlenecks

The challenges for the successful implementation of a sustainable events management at AccountAbility might depend to some extent on the external trends and developments but are most of all connected with the internal environment since the main target group of the communication plan is AccountAbility's staff. The bottlenecks of the situation are as follows:

- **Central management** is fragile and is usually not adopting the role of opinion-influencer for all teams which means there will not be a single mechanism that will ensure the use of sustainable events management across all teams, but on the contrary – each team will decide if they wish to adopt the system or not. If the team's opinion leader is convinced that responsible events are a valuable practice, the whole team will most probably adopt it.

- **Internal communication** is strong at team level but weak centrally. This might affect the spread of news for best practice sustainable events organised by some of AccountAbility's teams or other useful information regarding responsible events across all teams.

- Most of the **finances** are allocated to the different teams in the form of annual budget. This means the financing of the future sustainable events management system will depend on the willingness of these teams to adopt it and support it financially. If in some cases, organising a responsible event means spending a little bit more money, the conflict with other team's expenditures might finish unfavourably for the sustainable event.

- Sometimes the organisation of responsible events requires more time invested as information lacks due to the still not-mainstream nature of this type of events. This might conflict with the **heavy workload** of AccountAbility's staff and eventually result in neglecting some of the responsible event's aspects.

Chapter Conclusion

The international attention to sustainability has been consistently growing over the past twenty years and even the expected economic and CSR recessions are not likely to impede its increasing importance. The sustainability concerns have fostered the development of sustainability incorporated into events management. The latter is quickly spreading as a concept as well as a practice within developed and developing countries. Companies which decide to take the lead and organise their events in a sustainable way are gaining competitive advantage and are more likely to raise satisfaction among their stakeholders. AccountAbility is presented with a unique opportunity to prove it really stands for innovation by adopting a responsible way of organising events and thus outperforming its competitors in this area as well.

Chapter 3: The Communication Plan

Chapter Introduction

This chapter will start with communication analysis of the field of forces in which AccountAbility is operating and will then map out the parties involved directly or indirectly with sustainable events as they will be part of the successful communication for implementation of responsible events practices within the organisation. Furthermore, the second part of the chapter will define the target groups and objectives of the communication plan. This analysis is important as it will set the base for the consequent formulation of the strategies which will lead to successful realisation of the communication and policy goals. The third part consisting of the communication strategy and concept will give an answer to the second central question of this paper: *How can AccountAbility transform its current events management system into a more environment friendly one?*

Part I: Communication Analysis

Field of forces

An organisation operates in a complex field of forces. It is necessary to have a knowledge and understanding of these internal and external parties and their own interest and direction, as they may be involved with AccountAbility's work regarding sustainable events management.

The organisation and its fields of forces regarding sustainable events management are given in Figure 3 and explained below.

- *Competitors:* A number of competitors are operating in the same or similar work field as AccountAbility (the most noteworthy being BSR and SustainAbility). The organisation will not only distinguish itself by implementing a sustainable events system and live up to its reputation of hub of innovation but will also have the chance to spread this practice among its fellow organisations which will strengthen relations and reinforce the good practice.

- *Conference & Events Associations:* AccountAbility might share best practices with these associations after it starts organising its events in a responsible way which will provide an opportunity for its promotion to the networks of the relevant associations and events bodies. The associations on the other hand might well be interested in initiating work with NGOs and think tanks as this area is currently not that well worked out.

- *Events delegates & beneficiaries:* A big number of AccountAbility's delegates are from countries different than UK, US and Canada where sustainable event practices are currently most popular. This means the delegates will not only benefit from participating in a sustainable organised event but will also have the opportunity to possibly spread the idea in

their countries through their networks. This in turn will strengthen AccountAbility's position at least with the primary networks.

- *Government:* By using the sustainable events system and consequently reducing its carbon footprint AccountAbility might fall into the category of organisations which have successfully reduced their CO_2 emissions to the national target set by the government which in turn will improve the organisational image.

- *Members:* AccountAbility is a membership organisation. On one hand, the contacts with sustainable events networks (venues, suppliers etc.) might attract new members. On the other hand, current members will benefit from learning and participating in AccountAbility's sustainable events.

- *Employees:* The people who work at AccountAbility are the most important factor for the successful functioning of the responsible events system. They are the motor which has to start the sustainable events engine and that is why it is extremely important that they are convinced in its easy applicability and value. They will in turn benefit from the improved organisational image and increased staff satisfaction (Sustainable Events Management System for AccountAbility Survey, 2008).

- *Media:* In order to successfully improve AccountAbility's image via the new sustainable events management, this should be communicated to relevant media: events, CSR and sustainable development orientated media.
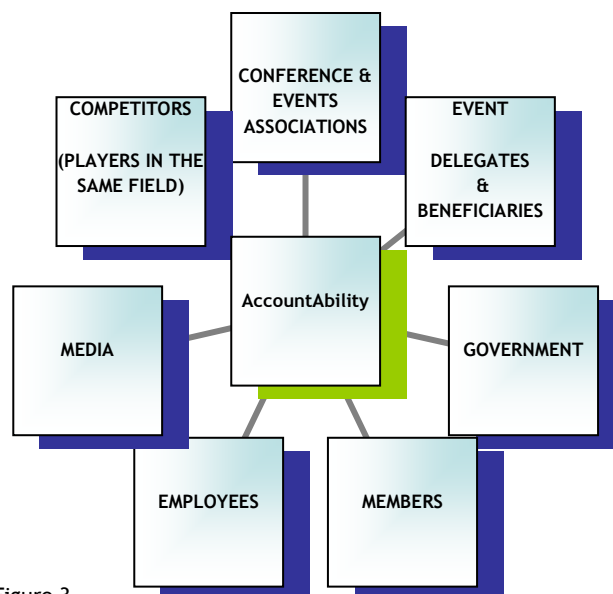
Figure 3

Interested parties

The interested parties regarding sustainable events which might play a direct or indirect role in AccountAbility's implementation of a responsible events management are explained below and depicted in the Interested Parties inventory scheme.

As explained in chapter one, responsibly organised events are not only a luxury practice paved with good intentions and implemented sporadically by a few events organisers. Almost all world events, conference and incentive associations, having thousands of members worldwide, are discussing, creating and implementing ideas, policies and even standards for sustainable events. Influential bodies such as the Green Meeting Industry Council, Meeting Professionals International, Meeting Strategies Worldwide, ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association), EIA (Events Industry Alliance), Eventia (The Events Industry Association) and others are devoting a huge part of their resources to educate people about *green* events and set standards for best practices.

The biggest event industry fairs and exhibitions such as CONFEX and IMEX are recently holding seminars on sustainable events and helping spread the word and the methodology for their implementation. In turn, event organisers are quickly picking up what they feel is setting to be a market trend that will stay for a long time and are aligning their services accordingly. As they create demand for sustainable venues, catering, stationery and other sustainable event materials, the suppliers' market, struggling to maintain economic advantage, is providing the necessary sustainable products and services. Therefore, the circle of demand and supply is reaching a balance and even if sustainable events organisation still hasn't reached the height of the regular events market, it is close to a tipping point.

Some developed countries' governments are also involved in the sustainable events industry by helping with information and campaigns. A good example is the UK government. On the whole, UK is an active in sustainability solutions and actions country which creates a favorable climate for AccountAbility's first steps into organising responsible events.

Specialised 'green' and events media is active in reporting on responsible events practices. Events Review UK, CSR news and GreenBiz are just a few examples which AccountAbility could be interested to contact after it starts organising sustainable events.

Below is a list of the parties involved in the normal cycle of organisation of sustainable events.

Interested parties inventory

Products and services suppliers	*Governments and politics*	*Interest & pressure groups*	*General*
▪ Fair-trade and organic food producers and suppliers ▪ Recycling industry ▪ Hotel and accommodation industry ▪ Tourism industry ▪ Venues ▪ Transport companies (airlines, taxis, trains, bicycle rental companies etc.)	▪ National governments and the EU ▪ Educational institutes such as universities	▪ Pressure groups (such as environmentalists, ecology activists etc.) ▪ Events organisation companies ▪ Events fairs and exhibitions ▪ Meeting and events associations	▪ Events consumers & beneficiaries (including organisational members) ▪ Media

Communication network

The communication network graph (fig. 4) visualises the interested parties mentioned above and outlines the relationship between them. It is obvious that AccountAbility will not be the only information sender regarding sustainable events. Other parties sending various information concerning responsibly organised events are governments, universities, suppliers of sustainable products and services, events organising companies, media and others. All of them have different views and affiliations and therefore will either weaken or strengthen AccountAbility's message of its efforts and success to implement sustainable events organisation. The media is also part of the intermediaries as it informs and influences public groups. The active involvement of the media will raise awareness and certainly interest in AccountAbility acting on reducing its CO_2 emissions. AccountAbility's employees could also be considered intermediaries as some of them will spread information to others. The receivers of the message of events organised in a responsible way by AccountAbility will be the event's beneficiaries or delegates on one hand and on the other hand these will be the AccountAbility's employees who haven't participated in the organisation of a particular event but will learn about it consequently.
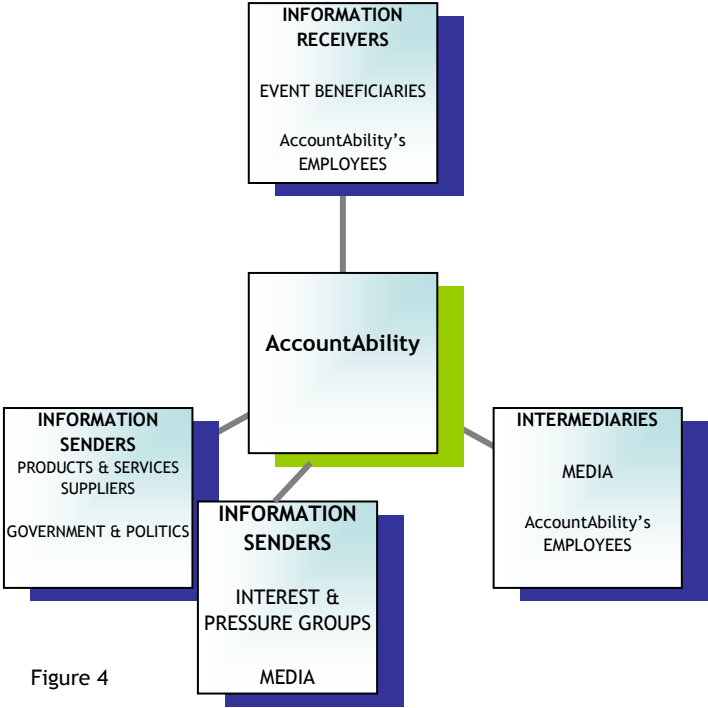
Figure 4

Communication goals

Through the implementation of a responsible events organisation system AccountAbility would like to reduce its CO_2 emissions, communicate this to its stakeholders, position itself as an active sustainable events practitioner and consequently improve its image. To achieve these goals communication's role is to: 1) internally: show AccountAbility's employees the system's values (knowledge), create a positive image of the system in their minds (attitudes) and predispose them

to use it (behavior); 2) externally: inform AccountAbility's external stakeholders, in particular members, about the new sustainability practice.

Part II: Target Groups and Objectives

This part contains a description of the two main target groups lying in the foundation of the communication plan. A focus is put on the analysis of the primary target group's knowledge, behaviour and attitudes towards introduction of sustainable events. Furthermore, the *effect* communication objectives are determined in order to facilitate the creation of the communication strategy in the next section of this paper.

The target groups are as follows:

- *Primary target group*: AccountAbility's employees, in particular those responsible for organising events of any kind on behalf of the organisation for the purposes of the organisation. Personal interviews were conducted with the main staff responsible for events management and additionally a survey was conducted with most of AccountAbility's employees.
- *Secondary target group*: AccountAbility's members including individuals, large organisations, specialist organisations, NGOs and academia. Desk research and informal interviews with AccountAbility's membership team were conducted in order to analyse this group.

Primary target group

The primary target group of the communication plan is AccountAbility's employees. This group can be defined as people who are employed by AccountAbility to do a certain type of work for which they are remunerated. It consists of male and female employees coming from different nationalities, ages and races with British nationality predominating. This group will be divided in two segments on the basis of whether employees are involved with organising events or not:

- *Target segment group (A):* Employees who are closely involved with events organisation. They usually work in Membership, Standards, Services, MFA Forum and Communications teams.
- *Target segment group (B):* Employees who are not directly involved with events organisation.

Primary target segment group (A) analysis:
This segment group is relatively small. The size varies but is usually about seven or eight people in total. The group is not homogeneous when it comes to same team background but is homogeneous in the sense of same level organisational hierarchy (event organisers are always coming from the

core team rather than from senior management). There are four main departments organising events at AccountAbility: Membership, Standards, Services and MFA Forum. The events are not consistent and their number, place and frequency vary greatly from year to year depending on the nature of the work. Sometimes, other teams might organise events as well although this is less often and therefore these teams are not taken into account in the current segment group. Usually one or two people per team are handling the event organisation. These people may vary due to the nature of the event and its target group. The target group is highly involved with the subject.

- *Knowledge:* What do the segment group know about sustainable events?

The segment group is well aware of sustainability issues and solutions. However, when it comes to sustainable events there is slight confusion about what their content and specifics are. This is attributed partly to the ambiguous nature of the term and partly to lack of sufficient information on the topic. The main confusion is if these events are on sustainability topics or if they are organised in a way which helps sustainability.

- *Attitudes:* To identify the opinion of the target group about sustainable methods for event organisation.

The interviewees representing Membership, Standards, Services and MFA Forum teams all stated it is a very good idea to try implementing sustainability practices for event organisation. However, they mentioned that despite their big enthusiasm sometimes it might be difficult to do that as half of the events are organised by partners on behalf of AccountAbility which means that first of all these partners have to be briefed about sustainability importance and opportunities and then facilitated to organise events in a responsible way. Another obstacle mentioned is that sometimes AccountAbility is piggybacking on other events and it is therefore not in a position to set rules for the way the event is held.

- *Behaviour:* To understand whether they would like to apply sustainable practices in events organisation in the future.

All of the interviewees are eager to adopt sustainable events practices. A slight concern was the cost: 'as long as it wasn't ridiculously more expensive, because we do have budgets, obviously we're a not-for-profit organisation… I would certainly, as long as it was reasonable, look to organise events in that way' (J. Walford, personal interview, April 2008). Another important factor for assuring implementation of the system is its easy applicability and also delegates' face-to-face interaction which was mentioned to be a very important aspect as sometimes it is crucial for securing AccountAbility's role as mediator (A. Turrell, personal interview, April 2008).

Primary target segment group (B) analysis:
This segment group is relatively small but bigger than segment group (A). It includes all AccountAbility's employees who are not involved in events organisation directly. Usually this category consists of about 25 people. All of the above people are generally interested in sustainability although the interest of most of them is aimed at higher level (governance) practices rather than everyday activities. This group is not as involved in the subject as target segment group

(A) since they are not directly responsible for events management. They don't require a lot of information as the subject is not a priority for them.

- *Knowledge:* What do the segment group know about sustainable events?

Segment group (B) is as confused about the exact meaning of sustainable events as segment group (A). They are not fully aware what could be counted for a responsible event practice and what is beyond this category. This implies the need for information campaigns to raise awareness about the nature and boundaries of sustainable events.

- *Attitudes:* To identify the attitude and opinion of the target group about sustainable methods for event organisation at AccountAbility.

In general target segment group (B) is in favour of the subject: 87% stated they are strongly approving sustainable events introduction. However, some of them are quite sceptical about the implementation of such as system at AccountAbility as they don't think the organisation is involved in that many events which in turn doesn't generate such a big environmental impact and therefore is unnecessary to implement a responsible system. The need for showing the values and benefits of sustainable events is standing out here.

Primary Target group Choice motivation
- *Priority*

As the main policy goal of the plan is to reduce organisational carbon footprint via responsible way of events management, the main group of people that will be the engine for the realisation of this project are AccountAbility's employees and in particular the ones organising events.

- *Feasibility*

The main event organisers (segment group A) have an affinity with the subject and are highly in favour and motivated to implement sustainable events practices as long as the latter are easily applicable, not more expensive than normal ones and don't sacrifice the delegates' interaction.

- *Accessibility*

There are no obstacles to contacting both target group segments as they are employees and therefore have access to all types of internal communication channels.

Secondary Target group

This group can be defined as individuals, large/corporate organisations, specialist organisations, NGOs and academia, paying membership fees in order to be the first ones to receive the latest information about AccountAbility's work, innovations and best practices as well as special discounts for reports and events AccountAbility is involved with.

The target group consists of about 300 members and could play a significant role in achieving the second policy goal of this plan: to position AccountAbility as an active sustainability practitioner regarding events management. The members, especially the corporate and specialist ones manage their own networks and therefore could act not only as a goal in itself but also as intermediary

group who informs or influences other networks about the sustainable events practices of AccountAbility.

The group is not homogeneous in terms of organisational goals, size and geographic location. However, as AccountAbility members, these individuals and organisations have all indirectly stated they are interested in accountability and sustainable development practices. Therefore, it could be assumed they will hold a positive attitude towards sustainable approach for events management.

In terms of knowledge and what the target group knows about AccountAbility and its sustainability organisational practices, it might be noteworthy that members are aware of AccountAbility's efforts to reduce its environmental impact through organisational reports printed on recycled paper certified by the FSC. However, the other internal efforts such as carbon offsetting and office re-assessment are not communicated externally. Therefore, an information campaign about implementation of sustainable practices when organising events will contribute towards positioning AccountAbility as an active sustainability practitioner.

Secondary Target group Choice motivation
- *Priority*

Since one of the policy goals of the plan is to improve AccountAbility's image via communicating the implementation of sustainable events management system, the organisational member network is the most relevant place to start this process. It is large enough by itself – 300 members. Moreover, some of the members are large corporations and organisations maintaining contact with their own big networks which means they can disseminate information further acting as an intermediary group.

- *Feasibility*

This group has a strong affiliation with AccountAbility and therefore is more likely to approach the subject seriously. Moreover, AccountAbility's experience in sustainable events management will be welcome for a lot of these organisations which are committed to CSR practices.

- *Accessibility*

All members are easily accessible via the organisational network database. AccountAbility's Membership Team is maintaining close contact with most of the members and informing them on a regular basis about organisational news and updates. Therefore, communication on sustainable events implementation won't appear as something out of the norm.

Communication Objectives per target groups

Objectives are crucial for determining the success of the communication activities (Vos *et al.*, 2003). The *effect* communication objectives in this plan are devised according to the acronym SMART: Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Time Specific (Smith & Taylor, 2004). The general communication goals of this plan are to 1) raise awareness and interest in sustainable events management practices among AccountAbility's employees so that they can start implementing them when managing events and also to 2) create awareness of the responsible

events implementation among AccountAbility's members so that the image of the organisation benefits positively.

	Primary Target Segment group A *(AA's employees who are closely involved with events organisation)*	Primary Target Segment group B *(AA's employees who are not directly involved with events management)*	Secondary Target Group *(AccountAbility's members)*
Knowledge	• To create awareness of the exact meaning and scope of sustainable events among 100% of the target group • To create awareness of ways for sustainable events implementation by informing this group about: the steps that need to be followed, how the database of sustainable suppliers should be used, best practices in the field, points of contact if help is needed.	• To create awareness of the exact meaning and scope of sustainable events among at least 80% of the target group • To raise awareness about the direct link between organisational goals (to reduce CO2 emissions & improve image) and the implementation of sustainable practices for event organisation • To create awareness of who should be contacted in AA if more information on the subject is necessary	• To create awareness of the exact meaning and scope of sustainable events • To raise awareness about AccountAbility using sustainable ways of events organisation
Attitude	• To associate sustainable events @ AccountAbility with improved organisational image • To take pride of organising events in a responsible way • To think about sustainable events as a necessity	• To create a positive image of sustainable events • To associate sustainable events @ AccountAbility with improved organisational image • To take pride of the fact that their work place is using responsible event practices	• To regard AccountAbility as an active sustainability practitioner in terms of events management (for a start)
Behaviour	• To stimulate the intention of the group to use sustainable practices every time they organise an event • To stimulate the intention to communicate their best practices with the rest of the team (target group B) • To stimulate the intention to help others (target group B) use sustainable practices if they have to occasionally organise an event	• To intend to use responsible way for event organisation should they need to manage an event at some point in their work	• To intend to share information about AccountAbility's practices and policies with other parties interested in sustainable events management

Part III: Communication Strategy

This part of the communication plan will explain how AccountAbility should communicate with its employees and members by identifying the proper strategy in order to reach the communication objectives and the organisational goals.
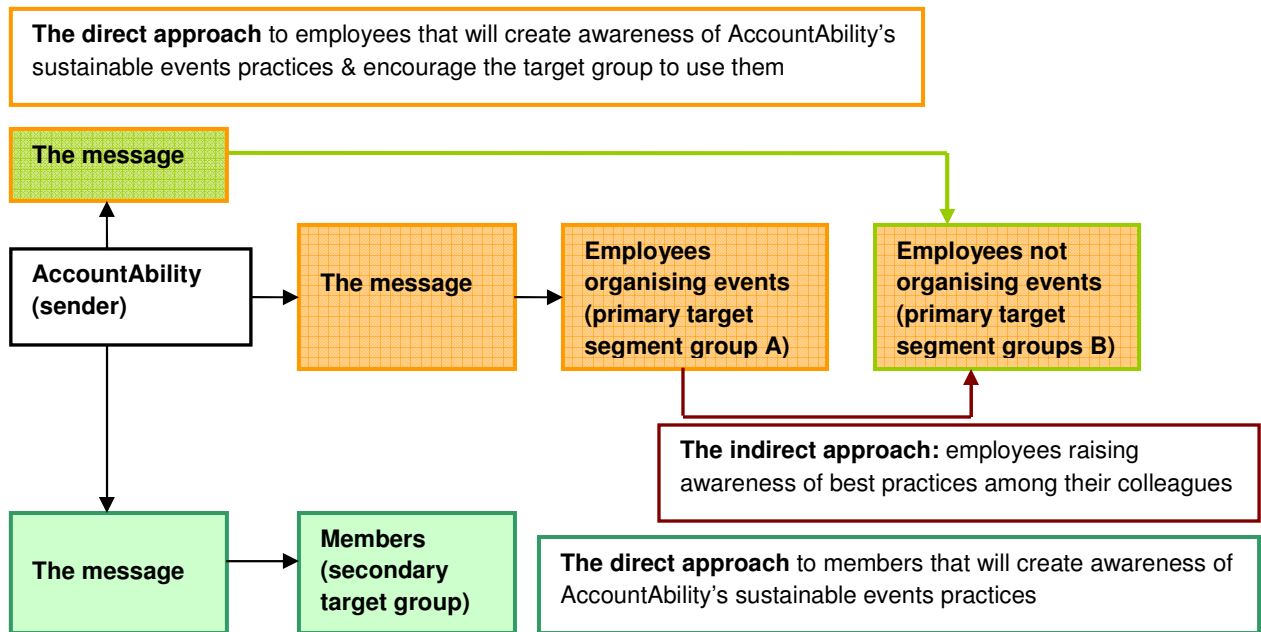
The communication approach

In order to reach the communication objectives, it is important for AccountAbility to establish a two-level communication approach to employees and a direct one-way approach to members.

- The approach to employees is divided in line with the primary target group segmentation (employees who are and those who are not involved with events organisation). Both employee groups can be contacted directly via internal communication channels (such as emails, intranet and face-to-face presentations) with an open, two-way, personal style of communication. As mentioned in the situation analysis, AccountAbility's organisational culture could be categorized by informality and flexibility. Therefore it is important to adopt a personal approach to both target segment groups. However, the messages will differ together with the level of rationality of the approach. The people who are responsible for events management will benefit from a more rational approach as they are already engaged with the subject whereas for the others a rather emotional approach will be more productive. In addition, the central message targeted at the event organisers has to be more specific and explain how the sustainable events work in practice and what steps they should follow, whereas the message targeted at the rest of the employees should consist of more general information on responsible events and their significance. The event organisers group will additionally act as an intermediary group as it will further disseminate information about AccountAbility's best practices in event management to the employees who are not directly involved with events.

  Parallel communication will be utilised for both target groups without regards to the SMT and core team organisational division as this is not the main criteria for target group separation in this plan.

- The approach to members should be direct one-way communication, utilising business 'tone-of-voice' as this is a necessity for external communication. The central message will reach the target group via organisational communication media such as newsletter, bespoke emails and website. The aim is to position AccountAbility as a *sustainable events practitioner* brand which not only talks about sustainability but also 'walks the talk'. This will be done via informational positioning since for some of the members these values might not be a priority and therefore a transformational approach wouldn't be the most suitable one for the whole target group.

Central Theme

The central theme of the communication strategy should place an emphasis on the fact that due to the implementation of sustainable events AccountAbility will practice what is preaches (and will also reduce CO_2 emissions, increase staff satisfaction and improve its image). This emphasis will best be reflected in a slogan such as *Sustainable events: walking the talk*. The rationale behind this slogan is to focus on the fact that AccountAbility is not only *talking* (on strategic level) about sustainable development via all its work outputs but is also *walking* towards sustainability by taking practical steps such as organising its events responsibly. The active position, the devotion and the alignment of organisational philosophy with practice is the very core message here. This framing will be beneficial for both members and employees as they will feel that AccountAbility is not only about talking and teaching others how to optimise their work in order to be more sustainable but is also about doing that itself via all possible ways. The slogan and the idea behind it will be easily identified by the target groups as most of them (as CSR or sustainability professionals or supporters) are aware of the famous book *Walking the Talk: The Business Case Study for Sustainable Development,* published by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

The instruments and strategies

Since the central part of the strategy is concerning internal communication, the communication mix will consist of a combination of in-house instruments such as intranet, direct emailing, posters which will be displayed in the London office and sent out as PDF files to other locations with active AccountAbility presence, e-newsletters, a webinar targeted at members which could be also attended by internal staff and interactive meetings that will be divided into learning/training

sessions for the staff organising events and informative sessions for the rest of the employees. An important instrument for the event organisers at AccountAbility is the practical guide that will provide detailed advice, step by step event preparation, case studies and contact information of event suppliers which aims to facilitate the organisation process as much as possible.

Main consideration when choosing the communication tools was cost efficiency. A key criterion for any NGO when deciding on adopting a new policy is price and value for money. Therefore, this plan ensures that all instruments are involving either zero costs or very modest expenses.

The table below provides a clear overview of the messages for each target group and the instruments that will help bringing these messages across.

Introducing sustainable events management		
Target group	**Message**	**Instrument**
Employees organising events	• The specifics and boundaries of sustainable events • The exact methods (step by step) for applying sustainability in event organisation • How to use the practical guide • The importance of actively communicating the success with the rest of the team	• Learning/Training session • Sustainable events practical guide • Direct emailing • Webinars • Intranet • Library with core information
Employees not directly involved with events organisation	• The importance, plus points and positive consequences from implementation of sustainable events practices in AA • Points of contact if more practical information is necessary	• Informative session = brown bag lunch • Posters • Direct emailing • Webinars • General newsletter • Intranet
AccountAbility Members	• The importance and plus points of sustainable events • AccountAbility's best practices	• Webinars • General newsletter • Targeted member newsletter • Website

Sustainable Events Brown bag information session
AccountAbility has already organised a few internal brunch sessions aimed at raising the awareness of people about certain issues mainly revolving around the broad topic of development. Previous sessions have been delivered on topics such as 'Communication for Development' and 'openDemocracy's work on promoting democracy and sustainable development'. Sometimes external speakers are invited to lead the sessions. The team is already used to this type of interactive information flow.

The Sustainable Events brown bag lunch will aim to brief everyone on the general specifications of the subject, why it is important and what the positive outcomes for the organisation will be. Even if everyone's presence is desired the main target group of the session is the staff not directly responsible for events management as this will be the main and most influential interactive session where this target group will receive the message intended for them.

The session should be conducted on a day when most of the London team is in the office since at least 90% presence is desirable. The timing is crucial and therefore should be carefully chosen. If little part of the team is attending, the impact of the session will not be that big and there will also be smaller chance of generating constructive discussion.

The session should last maximum one hour in accordance with the heavy workload of people and the covered questions should be:

- What exactly is a sustainable event and what criteria an event should comply with in order to be called sustainable?
- How important sustainable events are compared to other internal practices for CO_2 emission reduction?
- What are the benefits for AccountAbility due to sustainable events management implementation?
- Is that going to affect the overall organisational budget in some way?
- Who could be contacted if people that generally don't organise events have to do this and they would like to comply with the sustainable events system?

This session is aiming to raise awareness, point out the positive aspects of sustainable events and wake an interest and possibly personal commitment to responsible practices in event organisation.

Training sessions

These sessions are aimed only at employees who are organising events as part of their work in AccountAbility. This training will prepare them to successfully manage the arranging of a sustainable event. The session will last an hour and will cover the following points:

- What does a successful sustainable event incorporate?
- If one has to organise an event, where do they start?
- What are the steps one should go through during the organisation?
- What are some of the best practices in the field?
- How should one use the Sustainable Event Practical Guide?
- The importance of communicating all achievements in this field to the rest of the team in order to keep everyone in the loop and to show the progress to the whole team.

The session should be conducted with all people involved in event organisation together. Therefore the date and time should be attentively planned. It is recommendable that copies of the Practical Guide are distributed to everyone beforehand (in digital format so paper could be saved). A PowerPoint presentation with integrated multimedia should be utilised for better visualisation. It is recommendable that at least a quarter of the session time is devoted to Q&A so that people can have their concerns answered.

The aim of the session is to train the staff that is organising events how to do that in the most sustainable and efficient possible way.

Newsletters

The monthly newsletter which AccountAbility is sending out to a little more than 3000 subscribers among which are most of the organisational members is an excellent platform for short announcements on past or upcoming organisational reports, events and innovations. Therefore, when the sustainable events system is adopted, the news should be included in this newsletter for all to be informed. This will officially position the subject as an organisational commitment and will be the first medium to bring the news to external networks beyond the members' one.

Furthermore, targeted member newsletter is sent out every month in a special template. This communication medium could announce AccountAbility's innovation in terms of events organisation before the general newsletter has been released so members can feel they have priority in AccountAbility's communications.

Webinars

AccountAbility has started to organise monthly webinars for its members in April 2008 (J. Walford, personal interview, April 2008). This is an easy way of leading informational interactive sessions on topics regarding AccountAbility's work and developments. Anyone who is invited can participate in the sessions provided that they have internet connection and a telephone.

A half an hour webinar on Sustainable Events could be organised once AccountAbility has its own case study to present. An invitation could be sent to all members' and staff contacts. The webinar will present detailed information on the organisation's progress regarding its sustainable events efforts. The aim in terms of members outreach is to show that AccountAbility is seriously dedicated to sustainability practices and innovation not only on strategic but also on organisational level. The webinar should also aim to position the organisation as one that sticks to its commitments, outlined in previous member communication (both newsletters: general and member targeted).

Direct emailing

Direct internal emails will have a supportive function: they will bring the attention of employees to the hubs where knowledge is stored and can be consulted and will also announce the date, time and place of the information/training sessions.

Intranet

AccountAbility's intranet URL is not among the most visited ones internally. People haven't embraced it so wholeheartedly and are not being engaged with discussions and innovations on this space. Once people have built a certain attitude towards something, it is a lot more difficult to change it than to build a new attitude about something else from scratch. Therefore, the intranet wouldn't play a big role in this plan. Its purpose is to serve just as a backup platform for storing the most relevant for

everyone information about sustainable events in case people would like to access it online in a digital format. If people would like to engage, this would be up to them and will not be a goal of this strategy. People will be briefly informed about the information on the intranet without the focus being placed on this.

Sustainable Events Practical Guide

This guide will be the 'bible' for internal employees when organising events. It will consist of explanation of the criteria that an event should comply with in order to be categorized as sustainable. It will also offer three levels of sustainability commitment: for busy, very busy and extremely busy people, i.e. easy, medium and hard level. Each level will be organised in steps, i.e. 'Step 1: define your purpose and target group, Step 2: Find sustainable venue etc.' with each step providing case studies along the advice and recommendations. The guide will also include a database with suppliers of sustainable services of different character: catering, hotels, venues, technical equipment etc. so the easy location and use of these services is ensured.

The guide will be saved on the internal server where everyone will be able to access it as long as they have a set up account. However, the location of this guide will be communicated only to the people responsible for event organisation since the rest of the team doesn't have to be so deeply involved with the details. Upon request, everyone would of course always be allowed to view the document.

This guide, if found useful by the core events team, could be shared with AccountAbility's members and partner organisations in order to help them organise their events in a sustainable way as well. By doing this, AccountAbility will be viewed as a sustainable events ambassador which will most probably further improve its image.

Posters

The purpose of the posters is mainly to raise awareness of the fact that AccountAbility is seriously adopting a sustainable way of event organisation and not just taking this as a side activity. The PDF format posters will be distributed via email to everyone simultaneously without regards of their global location. Printed copies will be hung in the London office on the two main notice boards. The posters (A4) will communicate the importance of organising events on behalf of AccountAbility in a sustainable way and will enumerate the main positive consequences of this activity.

Induction pack

It is important that the guidelines for sustainable events organisation and AccountAbility's commitment to this practice are communicated adequately to the new recruits in the organisation. Therefore, it is recommendable that this information is included in the initial training and induction pack of the new employees.

The evaluation plan given in detail in the table below focuses on the main points that have to be investigated after the implementation of sustainable events system in AccountAbility so an assurance mechanism is in place. The results should be recorded and consulted when guidance for further action is necessary.

The zero rating process should be completed right before the information and training sessions so that the staff's initial knowledge is captured properly as this would be the base for further evaluation. It's recommendable to conduct the first stage rating about eight months after the sustainable event practices at AccountAbility have been launched. This period is long enough in order to provide clear results but not too long so people can forget about the organisational commitment towards responsible events practices. If a need for a second stage evaluation is felt, this could be set up following the model of the zero and first stages. The actions undertaken depend on the results from each stage, target group and subject. An emphasis should be placed on analysing the data and producing results in per cent (%). This will facilitate the evaluation according to the objectives set earlier in this chapter.

Evaluation	Target Group	Subject	Criteria	Method	Type	Results in %	Action
Zero rating	*Event organisers at AccountAbility*	Ways for sustainable events implementation	Can the group name the specific steps for organising a sustainable event	Short one-to-one interviews	Effect		None
	Staff not organising events	Awareness of the meaning and scope of sustainable events	Is the target group able to explain in what sustainable event means and what criteria it conforms to				None
		Positive image of sustainable events	What do they think about AA's efforts in this direction				
	Members	AccountAbility image	Do members see AA as an active sustainability practitioner regarding events?	Short survey			None
First stage rating	*Event organisers at AccountAbility*	Ways for sustainable events implementation	Can the group name the specific steps for organising a sustainable event	Interview	Process & Effect		If there are problems with understanding the specifics of the process or the events haven't been organised at least with the minimum sustainability requirements: second training session should be arranged aiming to gain insight into the obstacles
		Success in sustainable event organisation	Has the group managed to organise events in a sustainable way since the system has been implemented				

		Difficulties encountered	Has the group encountered any obstacles and have they been resolved				Update the guide with the obstacles and their solutions
	Staff not organising events	Awareness of the meaning and scope of sustainable events	Are the respondents able to explain what sustainable event means and what criteria it conforms to				If more than 30% of people are not meeting the criteria, organise a second informational session
	Members	Awareness of AA using sustainable ways of events organisation	Do they know about this recent AA practice?	Short Survey			If not, send more information via the targeted newsletter
		AccountAbility image	Do members s (%) see AA as an active sustainability practitioner regarding events				

Recommendations to AccountAbility

❖ It is recommendable that after having organised a few sustainable events successfully, a second brown bag lunch is arranged. The focus will be on the achievements, the personal experience of the organisers and the satisfaction of the events attendees. The goal is to keep everyone updated via a more personal approach which has a bigger chance of delivering employee commitment.

❖ It is also recommendable that the practical guide and AccountAbility's best practices are shared with the organisational networks whenever relevant as this will not only position AccountAbility as a good partner, innovator and sustainability practitioner but will also facilitate the global spread of a good practice that helps the reduction of CO_2 emissions.

❖ If AccountAbility would like to dive deeper into sustainable events management, it could purchase *BS8901: Specification for a sustainable event management system with guidance for use*[7] and try to organise each of its events in compliance with the standard. This will bring more credibility to the statement that the organisation is truly organising its events in a responsible way.

❖ Further research could be conducted on the suppliers of sustainable products and services in countries different than UK, USA and Canada. A big part of AccountAbility's events are held in places different than the above mentioned and it is therefore important to have as full as possible database of suppliers as this will greatly facilitate the process of events organisation.

❖ A monthly internal 'magazine' in a digital format could be introduced as an easy way to keep the staff informed about everything that the organisation is working on at that moment. This will differ from the general newsletter in level of confidentiality and style of communication (will be more informal). The magazine could be in PDF format and could be saved in a special folder in the internal system in order to create an archive for AccountAbility's work. It could sometimes include multimedia features such as podcasts and webcasts that will support the interactivity of the information. The magazine will profile the work and developments in sustainable events practices besides the other work streams' information.
The magazine's goal is to reinforce central communication in AccountAbility which currently needs more attention. A healthy central communication will automatically result in bigger staff satisfaction and will have a positive influence on issues such as the relatively high employee turnover at present.

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[7] The standard costs 45 GBP for members and 90 GBP for non-members

Chapter Conclusion

To ensure that the sustainable events system is giving productive results, an emphasis should be placed on internal communication and on assuring that the whole staff in AccountAbility is well informed about the new policy, its specifics and who will be responsible for its implementation. The most important aspect of the whole plan is the constant attention and assurance that people have top of the mind awareness of the importance of sustainability when organising events. The communication plan described in this chapter provides the most important points of concentration. However, this plan could be easily amended by adding objectives, target groups, communication tools and strategies should that be necessary at some point of the process.

Chapter 4: General Conclusion

This paper was divided in two main logical parts: sustainable events and the developments and attention they are currently undergoing; and a specific communication plan for AccountAbility, a small not-for-profit organisation, which would like to implement the practices of responsible events organisation. Both parts are interrelated and the conclusions of the first one facilitate the understanding and better implementation of the second one. Therefore in order to give an overview of the bigger picture and then focus on the concrete issue it was necessary to start this paper with analysis of the nature of sustainable events.

The first direction of research which aimed to bring the author of this paper to conclusions about the future of sustainable events management was approached from different angles in order to gain a multifaceted image of events organised in a responsible way. The discoveries were not shocking: sustainable events management is spreading rapidly in the developed countries with UK, USA, Canada and Australia being the leaders, followed by some of the better developed EU countries. Sporadic efforts for sustainable events organisation are registered in some developing countries but in general there is still not a psychological unity around this issue which recognizes it as: 1) being an issue and 2) as being an issue that needs (urgent) attention. Therefore, sustainable events have a long way to go. On a high-level, being regarded more as a side activity rather than part of the actual solutions leading to sustainable development, sustainable events might stay largely unnoticed and therefore, their potential unused. However, on business level, they are gaining speed and becoming more and more mainstream. The market is a powerful tool which sets the standards for a product or service and decides if 'it'll stay or it'll go'. Currently, consumers in the above mentioned developed countries are actively demanding sustainable products and services and therefore creating a market niche for responsible events. Therefore, as long as this demand retains the same level or increases, the future of sustainable events is secure regarding market demand. However, a more important factor for ensuring that the future of sustainable events is bright is incorporating these issues into education. The more people are aware of the issues and their solutions, the more people will be involved in implementing these solutions. Therefore, raising awareness about issues of sustainable development and sustainable events management in particular is the key to a bright (sustainable) future.

The second focus line of this research was exploring the *modus vivendi* of AccountAbility, a think tank and global network which aims to start organising its meetings and events in a sustainable way in order to reduce its carbon footprint emissions in the first place. The goal of this research was to find out how AccountAbility can transform its current events management system into a more environmentally friendly one. First of all, the findings of the research show that about 80% of the staff would like to adopt the new system. However, as often willingness doesn't lead to action, a communication plan tailored to AccountAbility's needs was put in place in order to ensure the smooth implementation of the communication goals which will lead to realisation of the organisational goals as well. The core of the plan focuses on information, learning and training as this is the base for any organisational success. Therefore, by focusing on educating people about the

nature of sustainable event practices and training them how to implement these methods, AccountAbility will smoothly transition its current way of events management to a more sustainable one.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Interview with Anna Turrell, Advisor for the Advisory Services Team at AccountAbility

Appendix 2:

Interview with Kezia Nielson, Standards Team Administrator at AccountAbility

Appendix 3:

Interview with Josephine Walford, Community Advisor at AccountAbility

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Survey results and report

Interview with Anna Turrell, Advisor for the Advisory Services Team at AccountAbility (Transcript)

I: Interviewer (Raya Ubenova)
A: Anna Turrell

I: 2nd of April, 2008. We're sitting here with Anna Turrell at AccountAbility's office and I'm going to interview Anna about the events management system at AccountAbility. Hello, Anna.

A: Hi

I: Can I ask you how many events or meetings does your department organise per year?

A: It really depends on the pipeline of work we have and the individual clients. In the last 6 months we have facilitated and organised events for approximately, I would say, four or five key organizations. Four significant events…clients, sorry. And then the events within each client – approximately…five, six, seven, maybe eight approximately eight events in the last kind of 6 months or so.

I: Ok. And what's the main purpose of most of these events?

A: So, the bulk of the events and the bulk of the work that the Services Team currently undertakes is largely around facilitating and organizing convening work and these convenings are international events held regionally and tend to pick up on specific themes or questions that our clients would like addressed. So for example if we take GE which has been one of our largest clients most recently, we've just finished undertaking a series of 3 regional convenings: one in Geneva on human rights, one in DC on the intersection between environment and development and one in Delhi on the base of the pyramids. These 3 convenings were then followed by a panel event in New York and that influences the final production of GE's global corporate citizenship report for this year.

I: So I see that you're organizing your events worldwide. Can you name some more locations that you've been holding events at?

A: Ok. So our locations are kind of changing day on day depending on what our client needs. We're kind of guided by that but we're also trying to influence the client based on what makes most sense. So recent locations have, as I've said, included Geneva, Washington D.C., New York, Delhi, again Washington D.C., London, and I'm … I'm sure there are others but that are the key ones most recently. And coming…upcoming work for example the next round of GE which takes place in the fall, in the autumn, we're looking to be working in Brazil, potentially Indonesia, Ghana, Nigeria and perhaps Australia and India again.

I: Thank you. And can you give me an approximate number of people who are attending your events. I guess this varies according to the event but is there a general number?

A: Actually yes, there is. For the convening work, we tend…we have a pretty standardized formula/model and process for the work that we undertake. We tend to look to recruit fifteen external participants. What we actually do is end up recruiting more twenty giving a kind of a lead way of 5 people which means that on the day due to illness or conflicting schedules, we ultimately do lose individuals but we want minimum fifteen people at the room, external. Additional to that, we then have client representatives and that can range from 2 or 3 or 4 to for example our recent work with Coke, we had 13 Coca-Cola representatives in a room with approximately 14 participants. That's not ideal, that's really not ideal for us but again you have to kind of work with the client on what they wanted to do.

I: Ok. And within the Advisory Service Team are you the one who is mainly responsible for organizing the events or you are just sharing the responsibilities for this?

A: We share the responsibilities between…it comes down to clients: who is dealing with the individual client. For example, I work mainly on GE because it's a big client; it's our biggest client really in terms of volume and things. I also worked on Coca Cola; Hanne works on Alcoa and we'll be working…and Nestle also…and Michelle has done some work on Coca Cola as well. And obviously that's at the support level, at the more kind of management level, co-facilitation level – Jeanette, largely leads on most of it with Mairead now again on Coca Cola.

I: Thank you. And when you're organizing an event what are the main considerations that you have in mind? Is there something like a budget, or delegate satisfaction or environmental impact that you are thinking about or…?

A: Kind of all of the above but fundamentally it comes down to what the client wants. What's really important to us is that we have a clear understanding of what the client's objectives are for this work, that we can see that they have an understanding of where they want to get to, what they want to get out of it, and the questions, the challenges, dilemmas that they are bringing to the table on that day. Because our events are largely about, about discussing and debating key dilemmas that our clients have at the moment. So we're going on that line, we're going on the particular theme that they want to see addressed, the particular issues that they currently face. And then we look to the kind of the… scope for location and then kind of work, work systematically through it. Identification of our stakeholders, of our participants is also very important but that's largely tied in with our understanding of the client's needs and the client's issues that they want addressed.

I: Ok, so basically the organization of each event is quite individual because it depends on the client's objectives and what they want and need but would you say that the way you're organizing events in the Advisory Services Team is consistent? Do you have a consistent system for organizing events or it's just tied up to each individual client and you don't have clear guidelines?

A: Right. No, we have a very, very rigorous process. It's slightly dependent on the people working on the client's accounts as to how the relationships between the individuals in AccountAbility. So for example I word with Jeanette on GE, Mairead worked with Michelle largely on Coca Cola, Jeanette works with Hanne on Nestle so that there are different relationships and so you have different systems in place within those relationships of how you manage and handle the workload and understand expectations and objectives and me - clients' needs. But kind of aside from that, you do have… there is like an accountability standard practice, I would say. We have quite a specific formula of how we undertake our convening work. So for example we know that we want fifteen people in the room, we have a specific layout of how we expect the convening to, you know, be undertaken and established with a specific process, we're very process heavy. Very…not just process heavy but very…we've very strong process in place in our convening work.

I: So do you think there is some room for improvement in this system or you're satisfied with it? My question is more: would you like to use a system that also integrates environmental concerns and that cares for the reduction of CO2 emissions if this is possible in the certain case.

A: Right, so the biggest issue I think, environmentally, certainly around CO2 reduction…emission reduction would be the fact that the scope of our…and locality of our convenings, because they're so international, because our participants are so international and our clients are so international, we end up effectively causing a lot of…we've a lot of flights. We have to deal with a lot of flying and so our carbon footprint, all the carbon footprint that we help creating is significantly larger than we would like but for now where AccountAbility's convening work currently stands, we're not in a position to really move that forward significantly as our relationship with our clients change or perhaps the demands and the needs of the clients change. Then we can adapt to it. But that's currently our major issue environmental but I think beyond that, I think, for me personally, I think as much as we have a great process, a great system around how we undertake our convening work which is very tight and very rigorous, we produce results, I think we need to sometimes be a little more open to greater flexibility around what kind of situations may arise on the day. And we do, we're good at adapting, but I think perhaps, for me personally I favour more organic approach rather than a structured process. But it's an individual thing. At the end of the day we have to do what the client wants.

I: And do you think that if AccountAbility suggests an alternative way of holding convenings, do you think that the clients would agree or like you said right now, AccountAbility is …AccountAbility's

events for its clients are tailored to the needs of the clients. So basically AccountAbility is listening to what the clients want.

A: Right. So I think, if we get back to the carbon footprint issue. And this is a completely hypothetical situation. But, say we moved our convening work or event work to a virtual space. By doing that we are taking, I think, kind of removing some of the responsibilities of ourselves as facilitators and organisers and giving greater flexibility and emphasis is being put on the participants as well as the clients to come together. And our biggest, kind of one of our biggest strengths or pluses right now for us as an organization with this type of work is that we are the middle point, we are the mediator between the client and the participant as if we move the convening to say a virtual space, we're potentially repositioning ourselves outside of being that midpoint. We have to create a fine balance between kind of making a difference and being needed because at the end of the day you could just getl…connect the client with the participant and they'd have direct relationship but then our reason for being becomes obsolete. So I think, and I'm being rather black and white and a bit vague, but I think we need to and as we move forward in the way our events are managed and undertaken we need to be really mindful of our value add at this process and right now it is great and they couldn't come together necessarily on their own or independently of us because we're using our network to reach out to these participants. That's what we're there for. But as technology's changing things you know, communication may become easier and we may…our position may shift so that's something I'd be interested to see how things are.

I: Ok. Just a last question: do you think that if there's a coherent sustainable events management system introduced in AccountAbility the staff, meaning the general staff will be using it? I am asking you as a person who is here most of the time and knows how the communication works.

A: Right, I think our convening work is very specific to the services that we provide. I think in terms of some kind of more general cross overbids, things having a systematized or central system of information as they relate to events such as locations and venues – venues are really important – then yes, that has universal application across the organization because people in MFA Forum, you know, are also organizing events. And although the set up and the structure is slightly different, they'll still be looking at similar places and venues and things and that can cut down on time and kind of increase efficiency. But I think right know the convening, specific convening process is too specific to be applied across the organization and it does take time to learn and to recognize the kind of levels of rigor that you need to have within this process. You have to be quite precise about, about certain things. So I don't necessarily think it has universal application but there are certain elements that I think we can mainstream across the organization. And likewise, can be brought into our event work from within the organization.

I: Well, thank you very much for your time and your full answers

A: Thank you

Interview with Kezia Nielson, Standards Team Administrator at AccountAbility (Transcript)

I: Interviewer (Raya Ubenova)
K: Kezia Nielson

I: 3rd of April. I'm sitting here with Kezia Nielson. Hello Kezia.

K: Hello

I: I wanted to ask you: how many events per year does your department organise?

K: Ok, so since probably July/August last year we've had about 20 consultations worldwide and I've been involved with about 7 of them so that's quite…I think it's bit of a one-off. I don't think usually there's that many but because the revision process is happening[8] and because it's been global there've been quite a lot of organization to anticipate and to get over the language barriers and things like that.

I: And is AccountAbility, in particular you, responsible for the whole organization or the local partners are also taking some responsibility and helping you with organizing the events?

K: We, we initially made the contact with the people in whichever country we're going to but then once it's off the ground and we've given them the necessary documents to outline what our responsibilities are gonna be then the local partners help out using their networks and their local knowledge of, you know, say, venues or who's the right type of people to contact and that kind of thing.

I: Ok, so basically when you or the local partners are choosing a venue or suppliers, or catering, or something what kind of considerations do you have in mind when organizing the whole event? Is that delegates' satisfaction or environmental concerns, or budget? What's on top of your mind? What's the most important thing?

K: I think probably budget would be top of the list being a not-for-profit organization obviously followed by, you know, suitability to the type of event it's going to be so quite a lot the work that we've been doing hasn't required a big venue because it's been fairly small, about 30 people but obviously if we've been holding it in universities we've asked them to just let us use the lecture room. Some places have obviously decided to go quite elaborate and hire, you know, a room in a

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[8] The Interviewee refers to the AA1000AS Wiki Revision Process

hotel and they've branded it but I think it depends on what country you're going to. Say, for Malaysia it was quite posh…you know. But somewhere like South Africa it was quite intimate and there was a lot of academics and people that were quite familiar with the set up so I think it really depends on the outlook of your local partner and how much money they're willing to give towards sponsorship of the actual event so we don't have too much say over what we expect, we just want it to be sufficient, you know. And obviously for catering…I've never had to organise a catering myself for these events but I assume they'd ask, you know, dietary requirements and helal or vegetarian. I've hoped there is a bit of environmental concern along the way.

I: Have you heard about that, that there's actually environmental concern or you just suppose there is?

K: No, I don't even suppose, I'm just hoping. I mean it's hard because, you know we've been flying our manager out to so many places this year. When you think that it's all for sustainability and it's kind of a double edged sword. But then if you want to make the contact with people it seems to be more effective to go face-to-face and you know, have those kind of meetings rather than over the internet or over the phone or, you know…So..

I: And what's your opinion about videoconferencing or Second Life or some new technologies that give you the opportunity for convenings but in the same time people don't have to fly and meet in the same place physically.

K: I think it's a great idea. I think as long as you have the technology that can support it to make it work smoothly, I think there's no reason why it shouldn't work. I mean it's obviously nice to shake someone's hand and look in their eye and say, you know, nice to meet you, but it's not practical sometimes, especially with time difference and money and also if you're going to be environmentally friendly, you shouldn't really be flying all over the place. You know, I just think it's worth exploring it a bit further.

I: But do you think that the Standards Department could actually use it because maybe face-to-face meetings and consultations are of more value than just video-conferencing of Second Life meetings?

K: Yeah, I think it depends what events you're talking about. We've got a Technical Committee[9] that has people from Hong Kong, you know Europe, America, all over the place, so if it's something like that the people already know each other or know who each other is so I think video conferencing will be fine. Obviously for things like the revision where you're trying to get 30 people in the room to have an understanding of something, and then have group discussions and then feedback, I think that's completely different. I'm not sure how that would actually work online. Because you can't be very fluid in a way I suppose, you have to be structured in how it works and less ad hoc if you're online than if you're in a room full of people and being able to say: *Right,*

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[9] The Technical Committee is supervising the AA1000AS Revision process

actually this is what we're going to do and tailor it to the expectations or how things are working but yeah, for certain things I think Standards could use it. Yeah.

I: And if there's a database of yeah, let's say sustainable venues and sustainable catering and sustainable steps of the whole process for organizing an event, do you think that the Standards Team will be willing to use it and do you think it's feasible for all kinds of events that you might organise in the future.

K: Yes! Yeah. I don't see why not. I think… I went to a training session held by Sd3 this week and I was talking to the girl who was organizing it and she said it was a nightmare trying to organise it with sustainable, ethical, ecologically friendly materials. You know they printed out, they gave you USB stick for every participant with all the documents on.

I: Oh, these environmental-friendly USBs?

K: Well, I don't know if it was environmentally-friendly USB stick…oh there are?

I: Yes, there are.

K: Maybe it was. But you know things like recycled paper and vegetable inks and, you know, where do you source them from? And you have to know well in advance where to get them because you can't leave it until the last minute. You can't just go to the local shop and buy a quick packet of pens or something, you know. So I think it'll be really useful and I think, especially for events. And you know there's some kind of green tent. Sort of…

I: Yeah?

K: Yes, some kind of conference place where you can go to but I think maybe for business people is a bit hippy. So you have to be careful where you're holding it.

I: Yes, it depends a lot on the type of the event and the delegates.

K: Yeah, yeah. But I think, I think definitely things for, say for food and you know - supplies, you know your paper and your kind of materials you need for the actual event, I think that'll be really handy. And obviously if you got an office somewhere or a venue that has solar panels and high-tech kind of heating and things like that it'll, it all counts towards… your efforts I think. So I think it'll be great.
I: Ok, I think that these are my questions. Do you have anything else to add?
K: No, except that we've got a long way to go.
I: Thank you very much!

Interview with Josephine Walford, Community Advisor at AccountAbility (Transcript)

I: Interviewer (Raya Ubenova)
J: Josephine Walford

I: Ok, it's recording now. So, can you tell me about the events that you are planning to organise in the future and how do you imagine these events will come up?

J: So, in the membership area because we've got our members spread globally, it's a challenge for us to organise events that are inclusive because obviously if they are in person and people have to travel there are costs involved, carbon inputs and all the rest of it plus the time so we tend to try to organise quite a lot events virtually. So, do you want me to sort of run through the details of the webinars? Is that useful?

I: Yes, just briefly is possible.

J: Ok, so for example we host learning events each month which are webinars so that everybody could log on from their computer with a telephone, can hear the audio and can actually see for example a PowerPoint presentation or video linked to somebody who's speaking so it just kind of increases the level of interaction but still, you know, as I say, it can be done from sort of wherever everybody is remotely. So that's sort of one of the ways we've tried to get around the problem of being a global organization and having these sort of meetings and learning events. And then we see a lot of value in networking, understanding our current research and those things which are always, you know, ideal to do in person so we're looking to try and overcome that challenge.

I: And about the webinars, you've already organised one or two, right?

J: We've got about 6 set up but we haven't done any yet. So the first one's on April 24th which is 2 weeks today I think, or 2 weeks tomorrow. And then they're gonna be monthly. So, they're set up but we haven't actually run any yet. So that's how, as I said, we do some of our events virtually but also increasingly pushing forward and trying to piggyback of the presence of different teams in various locations. So, for example if the RC team is in South America for a launch we will try to organise some kind of either networking or learning events in person on the ground around that. We're still, I mean, I think, in terms of sort of types of events and how that might work, I think it's gonna be a bit of case by case, you know, decisions. I think, I mean for example, we may try and, I may speak to the RC team and say: 'Can we invite our members to the event?' So, that's how they're going and that's a learning activity. Sometimes it's by invitation only so they may not be able to be invited, you know, it's like exclusive. So then we have to ask the question: 'Well, is it

feasible to do a networking event on the side of it so do we have enough people who'd be interested in coming'…you know, to actually do a second event while they are there as well. So, it's a bit of 'wait and see' in terms of how these events will work out so we're open to ideas. If you guys have any at all about how we might be able to maximize the presence of our teams in various locations.

I: Well, so one of my next questions would've been if there was a database with let's say sustainable venues and sustainable catering and sustainable steps of how to organise an event, would you use it? But actually because you're not organizing so many face-to-face events where people are gathering together, I guess this question is out of the way.

J: Uhm, yeah, I mean, I can probably give you an answer. I think that for example the AccountAbility Forum in October there's gonna be, well, you know, all about organizing and there's probably gonna be some membership side meetings. Also the other thing that might be relevant is we organise the AGM once a year – The Annual General Meeting where everybody's invited to come here and also things like our Board meetings and our Council meetings which are alternatively physical and virtual. So, I think that it'd be a great idea, it'll be really, really cool of we had, you know, a way of organizing sustainable events. I think these things are often going to be, you know, decisions will be impacted partly obviously by the usual things, so: cost, convenience. However, I think it's quite important that if we can, we try and do things in this way, especially given the nature of the work that we do, and what we try to represent, I think, that's quite important. Does that sort of give you a bit of an answer? I think I would say, you know, as long as it wasn't ridiculously more expensive, because we do have budgets, obviously we're a not-for-profit organization, you know there's not money flying around. So that's gonna be one key consideration. But I think a bit over the odds, you know people, I would certainly, as long as it was reasonable, looked to organise events in that way and then the other thing is just convenience.

I: Well, basically my research so far shows that it's even cheaper if you organise properly an event in sustainable steps. But of course this depends a lot. For example, if you're choosing a sustainable venue, right now, I think it's not possible to get sponsorship or at least it's more difficult because the value of sustainable venues is going high. But otherwise if you're using let's say, sustainable food, catering, you're just trying to recycle everything and you have the right connections, I think it's, it's cheaper or at least there are some events organisers claiming that. But it all depends on the particular event.

J: Yeah, that makes sense. So for example, sustainable venue, you mentioned the Brewery and also the…

I: Hilton Chain of hotels

J: …and the wine place[10] , so what do they have specifically that makes them sustainable venues?

I: Well, they are trying to, for example the Brewery is trying to be BS8901 consistent. This is the standard for sustainable events management and they are trying to recycle everything, they have composting places. They are trying to serve let's say sugar and milk and all these things in bulk and not in different separate sachets. So, yeah it's more orientated towards recycling and saving energy because they are trying to open up their spaces and rooms to get more natural light and they are totally changing their electricity systems.

J: So they would be having solar panels

I: Yes

J: Just because, I mean, I would have thought that, and I'm sure you've already looked into it, but it'll be quite interesting to find out how close any venue could get to be a sustainable venue easily. So for example, take our office what steps could we take quite easily, so if we were hosting a sustainable event and we wanted to do it here, what steps would we have to take to call it a sustainable venue. So for example, if everything from the entire event was recycled, everything was bought in bulk so you don't have the kind of separate boxes. If we would have all energy efficient light bulbs… I mean, you know, what are the steps which then means we can call it… It might be especially worthwhile thinking about why all sustainable venues are quite a lot more expensive. So even if it's not here but let's say if we find a venue somewhere there's lots of bright, airy spacious venues. If we find something like that what steps do we have to take so then be able to market it as: 'Hey, we're running a sustainable event in a sustainable venue'. Because things like the Brewery serving up a sustainable food, or as you say, you can just get a sustainable caterer and do that yourself. So it's like what are they offering above and beyond what can be done in any venue…if that makes sense.

I: Yes, it makes sense definitely. Well, basically even the event's organisers and event organization companies, can't say for sure what exactly a sustainable event is because there are different steps that could go wrong or that are impossible to do and if they are organizing an event and let's say they recycle or they have things in bulk, they say: Well, yeah, our event is sustainable, but in the same time they are not mentioning the other parts that are not really sustainable. They are still arguing what exactly a sustainable event is but yeah I get your point during the whole system for sustainable events I will try to make something like easy steps or as easy as possible steps that AccountAbility can take in order to organise an event. Obviously some of the events like the MFA convenings or the AA1000 consultations are not really possible to be organised in a totally sustainable way because people have to fly and even if you offset afterwards, you know the damage is done.

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[10] The interviewee refers to Vinopolis, London, UK

J: The only other thing I've to say is just following from what you've just discussed but if you're producing some kind of guide for AccountAbility for example…it could be like for example, if you log on to the BBC Green website, they have *ways how you could protect the environment,* easy ways, medium ways and hard ways. So you can perhaps do the guide as: *can you please do these easy things to make your event…*It's basically how sustainable the event is, not that it is or it isn't from what I can understand. Please make sure everything is recycled. It's very easy to do. These are the easy steps. Then if you've got the time and you think it's important and relevant, these are the steps which are perhaps a bit harder and then if you want to go for that and say *We've got the most sustainable event we could manage,* this is what you can go for.

I: That's a very good idea.

J: Because that way, you know, I think everybody here should be doing the easy things. Getting sustainable fish for lunch or whatever it is, I mean that's basic. But if you had a guide which says: these are the easy things, these are, you know if you wanna have a bit of an impact and these are…but it'll take some time. And then people can think about their event: ok, how much impact is it gonna have on the environment, or you know, how important is it for the people who are coming, how impressed they're going to be and all those questions and they can decide.

I: And this is easy for evaluation afterwards, you can say: well, yeah, I sticked to the middle column and I did half of the things in a sustainable way and the other half, you know, normally, and this provides some kind of evaluation.

J: I think yeah, that's absolutely right and I think what it does is make people not just feel great that they've done two things but actually feel: ok, good they've done two but they are aware they've missed out six things they could have done. So if you can give like the optimum sustainable event so maybe you know using a sustainable venue, that'll be interesting to see exactly what that breaks down, what that translated into meaning. I think that'll be really good if people can almost have a menu: I'll pick these but whatever they don't pick they are aware they could've done them.

I: That's great idea. Thank you so much.

Appendix 4

Survey Analysis

Sustainable Events Management System for AccountAbility

1. Personal information

The survey was conducted anonymously in order to reflect the real opinion of the respondents. However, they were given the possibility to leave their name if they wish. Six people (accounting for about 25%) stated their name. 41% of the respondents stated they are involved with organizing events for AccountAbility

2. How do you feel about the following statement: 'There is a coherent events management system at AccountAbility.'?

It wasn't surprising that most of the respondents mildly or strongly disagreed with this statement. Only eight percent strongly agreed there is a

There is a coherent events management system at AccountAbility

- Strongly agree
- Mildly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mildly disagree
- Strongly disagree
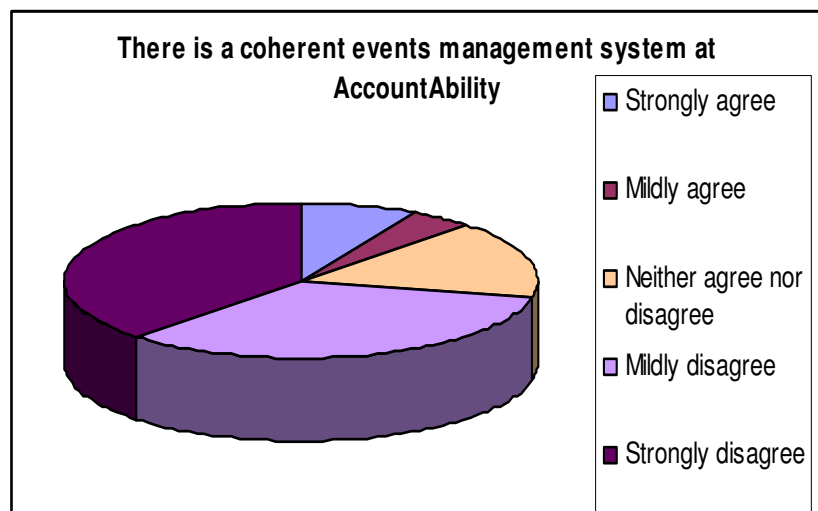
coherent events management in place. This gives an answer to one of the queries of this research.

3. How do you feel about the following statement: 'AccountAbility should definitely organise its events in a sustainable way'?
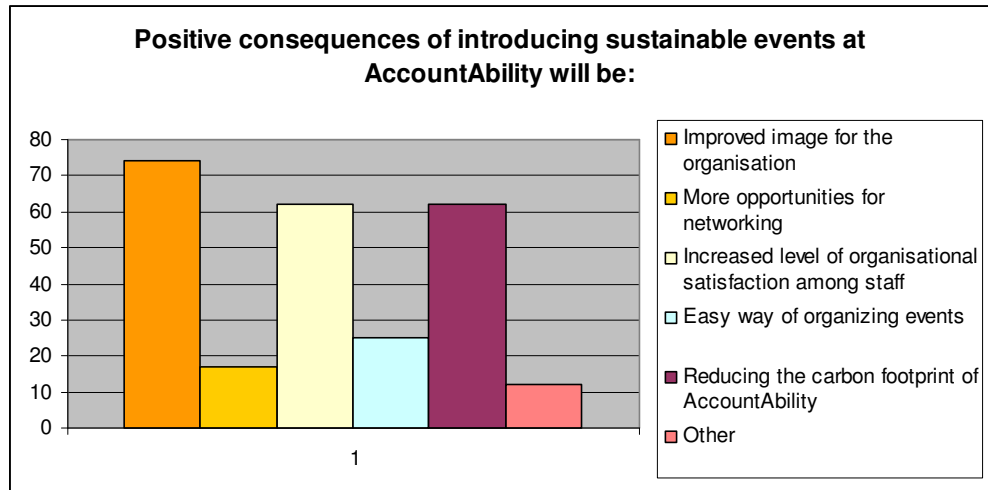
Most of the respondents (87%) stated they are

AccountAbility should definitely organise its events in a sustainable way

- Strongly agree
- Mildly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
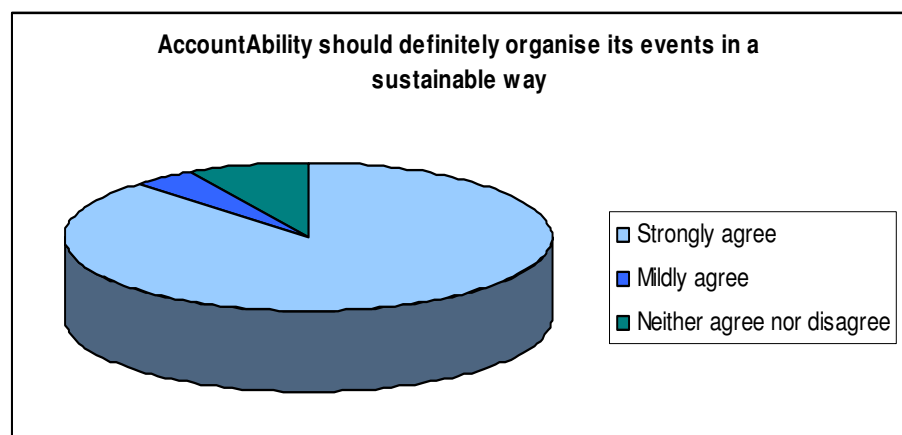
strongly in favour of a sustainable event organisation. None of them answered they disagree in some way which reflects the importance of the quick implementation of the system and implies that all employees are motivated to use it with the majority being strongly motivated.

4. Positive consequences of the introduction of sustainable events management at AccountAbility

Positive consequences of introducing sustainable events at AccountAbility will be:

- Improved image for the organisation
- More opportunities for networking
- Increased level of organisational satisfaction among staff
- Easy way of organizing events
- Reducing the carbon footprint of AccountAbility
- Other
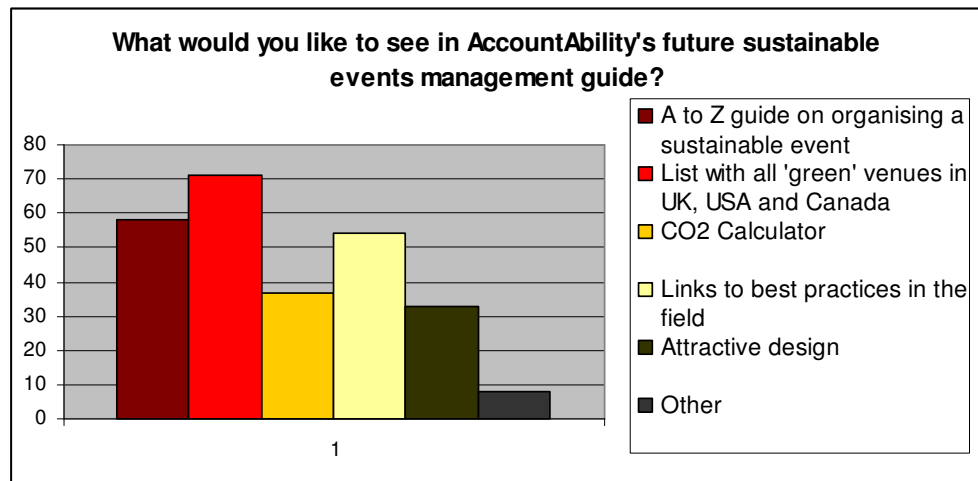
All respondents pointed at least two positive consequences with the average being three. This reflects the optimistic attitude of AccountAbility's employees towards the introduction of sustainable events management. The three most desired and expected consequences are thought to be improved organizational image, increased level of staff satisfaction and reducing the organizational carbon footprint.

When being asked what else AccountAbility would benefit from responsible events, respondents state cost savings, better planning and use of organizational resources, alignment of AccountAbility's practice and philosophy, becoming market leaders which would lead to competitive advantage, increased credibility and stronger influence on clients.

5. What would you like to see in AccountAbility's future sustainable events management system?

What would you like to see in AccountAbility's future sustainable events management guide?

- A to Z guide on organising a sustainable event
- List with all 'green' venues in UK, USA and Canada
- CO2 Calculator
- Links to best practices in the field
- Attractive design
- Other

When it comes to preferences of what should be included in AccountAbility's responsible events guide/system, people are mostly in favour of a database with 'green' venues, A to Z guide on how to organise a responsible event and best practices in the field. This implies that when being asked this question, people start imaging what they would need the most in order to pull up a sustainable meeting which once again demonstrates their positive attitude to this type of events and their willingness to use it in the future.

Other things people specify as important are good productions and links to sites and providers that inform about sustainable events. Here concerns have been expressed about the actual value of carbon offsetting and if this can be called sustainable and incorporated into events management

practices. The latter shows people still don't know what practices exactly to associate sustainable events with and therefore, an association with broader sustainability actions is drawn. This demonstrates the need for clear full explanation of the nature of responsible events.

Conclusion

The main finding of this survey is that the majority of AccountAbility's employees holds a positive attitude towards sustainable events organisation and are willing to implement it. Another important finding is the pointing of direction which the responsible events system should follow and what it should incorporate. This is important information which will be taken into account when setting up the Communication Plan.