

Carbon Conversations

- Environmentally friendly tool at DuPont Denmark

A Case Study on using Carbon Conversations within an enterprise

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Summary

In early 2019 The Nutrition & Biosciences section of DuPont in Denmark commissioned The Surefoot Effect to train eight in house facilitators to hold Carbon Conversations groups. One year later in February and March 2020, The Surefoot Effect interviewed those available from the group of trained facilitators to determine the impact Carbon Conversations has had on the organization.

Three groups of the six-session workshops have been completed and one other group has been started in Brabrand (but has been temporarily postponed due to the pandemic).

It can be seen from the information gathered that getting started and using a new approach to discussing climate change and sustainability in the workplace had its challenges but also that the introduction of Carbon Conversations has brought some benefits and the approach and its outcomes are seen as being congruent with the values of DuPont Denmark.

Interviews with Carbon Conversations Facilitators at DuPont Denmark

A Carbon Conversations group is a facilitated group of people who meet in their community or work over a period of three to six months to explore and reduce their impact on the climate.

The purpose of this paper is to bring insight to the first experience and implementation of Carbon Conversations at DuPont Denmark. The company conducted the first set of Carbon Conversations as a pilot, and afterward actively promoted the Carbon Conversations to the rest of the organization, to spread this method into other places in the division.

Two qualitative telephone interviews with facilitators and one reply to questions by email shed light on the experience of Carbon Conversations frontrunners at DuPont. The following is an extract of the interviews, focusing on 1) the setup, 2) outcome, 3) challenges, and 4) transformative process.

The setup - Carbon Conversations conducted by the first Facilitators at DuPont

A group of eight members of staff at DuPont was trained as facilitators by The Surefoot Effect in Copenhagen in 2019. The eight participants came from three different sites of DuPont Nutrition & Biosciences in Denmark. Two out of the eight facilitators are no longer working at DuPont, and a third person is on parental leave.

In February 2020, two of the Carbon Conversations facilitators were each interviewed by The Surefoot Effect. The two interviewees are from DuPont Nutrition Biosciences ApS in Brabrand. The third interviewee, who works at the production site in Grindsted, chose to answer by email.

The facilitators at Brabrand explained how they completed the first series of the six sessions. This involved recruiting colleagues, preparing for each session, conducting and evaluating the completed series of workshops with input from the participants. Three facilitators worked together and added a seventh session to the scheduled six sessions. In this seventh session they did idea generation and further development of some of the ideas, and collected all the ideas into a catalogue. These sessions were all conducted in Danish.

The first group completed the seven sessions:

- The group met every other Tuesday between 9 - 11 am. in the workplace.
- There were either two or three facilitators present at the sessions.
- The group consisted of eight participants (in case of absence, the facilitators recruited additional people to substitute. Based on feedback from the invitees the facilitators added a few additional participants to ensure the continuity of the sessions).
- In between the Carbon Conversations sessions, the facilitators met to organize the work-sharing and gather additional material for the DuPont and Danish contexts (additional to the handbook 'In Time for Tomorrow? The Carbon Conversations Handbook' and a set of games about the four areas - energy, travel, food, and consumption/waste - provided by The Surefoot Effect).

The group at Grindsted went through the planned six sessions, with 4 - 8 people at each session with two facilitators present. These sessions were also conducted in the daytime during work hours, in the workplace, and the group met every 2 - 3 weeks.

In February 2020, the facilitators at Brabrand started a second group with 10 new participants. These sessions are conducted in English, whereas the first group did the sessions in Danish. One facilitator at Grindsted stated that Carbon Conversations has started constructive discussions on what actions to take within the company and at home, the participants were very positive and they could have benefitted from spending more time at the sessions. The interviewee also appreciated the skills gained as a facilitator. However, due to the time spent the facilitator does not wish to continue: *“It took too much time away from my other assignments. I though still want to be part of our environmental group and the 4-5 meetings we hold a year.”*

Outcome

The company as well as interviewees were already interested and engaged in environmentally friendly activities before taking on board the Carbon Conversations, which has functioned as a new tool among different initiatives for lowering the carbon footprint. It has been mentioned that the effect is *“the sum of activities”*, Carbon Conversations is one element of several environmentally friendly activities, and has sped up processes in certain areas. However, the setup of Carbon Conversations workshops, and for the company this unusual way of running meetings and handling topics, has brought in **new ways of viewing climate challenges**. The sessions have illuminated the complexity of climate change challenges, and that there is not always one answer, one action, to solve the challenges. (Read more about this in the paragraph ‘Transformative process’).

In answer to what was the best part of being a facilitator for Carbon Conversations, some of the answers were:

“To use my personal passion with others”

“It gives me more energy, even it has been hard work”

“It’s incredible rewarding to bring new thoughts to people”

“The response has so far been solely positive”

“I feel we are creating a movement.”

After running the planned six sessions, the facilitators at one site created a seventh session to make an **idea catalogue**. The catalogue points out possible solutions derived from the Carbon

Conversations participants' ideas. The catalogue was also created to follow up on the management's expectations of a specific outcome.

A **sustainability group** has been formed since starting the Carbon Conversations. This group works with initiatives like **solar panels on the site, use of ceramic cups instead of disposable cups, and letting the grass grow** in certain areas to enhance the biodiversity.

Using Carbon Conversation as tool in harmony with the company's set of values and the actions it takes, can be a driving force and positive experience for members of staff:

"I am glad that the company is now taking it [Carbon Conversations] into the whole organisation. It is based on the support of the three sponsors, three leading units in the company. In the big 'helicopter view' many companies have a noble set of values. To me, it is important that the set of values is being converted in reality. I am proud of being a part of DuPont which is taking action."

Indirectly, Carbon Conversations are also **affecting employees who have not been participating** at any of the sessions: *"Suggestions on environmentally friendly activities from people in DuPont who haven't even been participating in the workshop."*

Employees have heard about the workshops via colleagues, intranet, and morning meetings where the facilitators have been presented.

Challenges

The Carbon Conversations material and preparation

It has required a great deal of preparation to get familiar with the material, and to seek out further information. One of the interviewees pointed out issues concerning the preparation:

"It would have been useful to have been through all the sessions before being a facilitator myself, and earlier clarity about my exact role as well as for the managers' expectations."

The time spent has exceeded expectations: *"I'm not sure I would have joined, if I knew how much time it would take from the beginning. But on the other hand it's worth it. I'm proud of what we do, and it's a pleasure to see what is coming out of the sessions."*

There is expressed a wish to have material based on global information, not solely British conditions. It has been pointed out that it would be good to have materials which are being

updated regularly. *From Surefoot:* it is indeed regrettable that the materials do not yet exist in the Danish language and adapted to the Danish context. Currently the materials have been adapted in France, Switzerland (both French and German languages), the Netherlands, Lithuania and Spain. The materials developed will always be out of date, as the situation with regard to climate change is moving very quickly. We in the UK encourage people to obtain and share current facts from reputable sources on the internet to keep current. However, the main impact of the approach is not the technical data, but the discussions that arise, the emotions evoked, innovative ideas for change, and the confidence to make changes for the better whilst working in a supportive group experience. We understand that DuPont is a technical and science based company with focus on data and concrete facts. It is acknowledged that it takes time to integrate the Carbon Conversations method balancing data and facts with and thoughts and feelings.

Variation in the group dynamic

The facilitators at the site which has started running a second group have noticed that the group dynamic in the second group is much different from the first group. Participants in the first group were very engaged and open. The composition of personalities within the group has been noticed as an important factor of group dynamic and in the discussions. The facilitators have to bring out more examples and drive the conversation more in the second group. There is though only collected experience from a single session with this group, which has just started. It will be interesting to follow-up at the end of the sessions, as well as collecting experiences from future groups.

It was mentioned in the interviews that one factor that might be influencing the participants at first, can be linked to how Carbon Conversations are setup. For a majority this form is an unusual way of taking part of the company's meetings and other activities. Please see the next subsection.

Introducing the Carbon Conversations as a new element

At one site, the interviewees have mentioned that it has been challenging to recruit participants to the first group. They have informed colleagues by email, intranet and posters. It has been much easier to recruit participants for the second group. It is believed that hearing about Carbon Conversations from the first participants has increased the interest. The first group consisted of eight participants. The facilitators took in 10 people for the second group due to high demand, and could not include everyone who showed interest. *From Surefoot:* this echoes our experience that

most people really crave quality time and space to address issues which are important to them, supported by a group.

Many people in DuPont have a background in science, for example as an engineer or an academic. It has been noticed that that setup of circle discussions and to face climate change from a perspective of feelings, thoughts and experiences rather than solely fact-based natural science, has been a hurdle for several of the participants. It has been mentioned that introverted participants have found it particularly difficult. Furthermore, it can bring up discomfort to get into the unknown and therefore requires some time to adjust to the new setup. As with Carbon Conversations groups around the world, there was an over-representation of women, not representative of the organization's demographic.

Within a group it is important to give space to the individual, to different interests: *"It is very different what people get engaged in. For some it is electricity consumption, for others it is food waste. Not all subjects interest everybody. But it is clear, it is a complex matter."*

It has been pointed out that the three sites of DuPont cover different work areas. It can be challenging for the production site or an office with lots of travel activities to find the right time to conduct the meetings and provide a continuously flow.

Transformative process

Network creation, having likeminded people working together, and supporting each other as facilitators have been crucial to the success of running the Carbon Conversations. As one interviewee expresses: *"We have a great dynamic in the facilitator group [three facilitators] in Brabrand. I have two super engaged partners. We can lift each other up when it gets very challenging."*

With the formation of a second Carbon Conversations group and creation of an extra session at one site, it seems that there has been a stronger inclination to continue Carbon Conversations where the facilitators have had a strong core group.

It is clear that there have at times been frustrations on the journey from recruiting people, to running the sessions as facilitators the very first time, to getting to know the material, to uncertainty in some aspects of the roles. Partly in response to the challenges, the facilitators

created an extra session to provide the company with an idea catalogue with suggestions of sustainable activities. They have created a work-paper and done some research to adapt to Danish conditions. All these activities are beneficial to future Carbon Conversations and can support climate friendly activities in the company.

Despite of the initial discomfort of sharing points of view in a new constellation and setup of meetings in the company, it seems the interviewees have taken in the new way of inviting participants to discussion, and thereby together with the participants have found new ways to face and to begin tackling climate change. The facilitators have initially also themselves felt frustrated with the new setup: *“I was very frustrated to start with. I want to receive facts, deal with that, find solutions and implement these. But in the process of Carbon Conversations it became clear how it is a complex matter.”*

With capacity to handle and continue through the challenges, they have overcome their initial discomfort. For example to the question ‘if the Carbon Conversations have affected their communication with others about carbon footprint and climate change’ one responded: *“Absolutely. I am much more prepared to take on discussions. From the handbook, I especially enjoyed and learned from the section about psychology. I’m a biologist, and psychology is not at all my professional area.”*

and the other facilitator explained:

“One doesn’t necessarily have the right answer. Through the conversations, calmly opening up the discussion of the issues, it becomes clear that it is a complex matter. I work with IT, now I’m looking into how we can make an effort in the IT department.”

From Surefoot: one of our most frequently reported outcomes from Carbon Conversations is that people say they have found new ways to discuss this (and other) hard topics with people. Being able to accept the complexity of an issue and that there isn’t always one right answer helps everyone move forward to finding solutions.

Reflections

At The Surefoot Effect, we appreciate the valuable insights from the first Carbon Conversations at DuPont. As the interviews have shown, it has required investment from the company to allocate

resources/time to their members of staff, both for the training of facilitators and their preparation time, and for participants to take part in the sessions in work hours. It was emphasized in the training that preparation for the two facilitators should take at least as long as each two hour session, and possibly more depending on the facilitators' level of comfort. Facilitators noted it took them longer to prepare than they had expected. Furthermore, we note the interviewees are highly dedicated people who have been able to successfully navigate through unexpected challenges and support each other to embrace the Carbon Conversation format to engage members in the organization. Our experience is that the preparation for the very first group takes more time and energy than running the following groups. The detailed planning and the additional materials created by the facilitators, which was not part of the Carbon Conversations normal delivery, for the first six sessions can be used in the following workshops, and by other facilitators on other sites of the company. The facilitators in Brabrand have shared all of their work, preparations etc. with the facilitators in Copenhagen and Grindsted so that they did not have to reinvent it.

The interviews have illustrated elements that have supported the success of running the first set of Carbon Conversations:

- The company has allocated time to members of staff to become facilitators and to run the sessions, and to colleagues to participate during work hours.
- The interest and attitude towards environmentally friendly activities already existed at the company and was an important topic for the interviewed facilitators before the startup of Carbon Conversations.
- The facilitators worked diligently through challenges, greatly supported by other facilitators.
- Being connected to the company's goals and ambition of taking action has supported the process.
- Further inquiry in to how the facilitators across the company can strengthen and support each other would be helpful, as well as measures to compensate for people leaving the organization or leaving for a period of time.

- It is worth taking into consideration if and how facilitator groups in DuPont and other companies could benefit from building a network to share experiences about Carbon Conversations for keeping the momentum and continuing the great efforts.