

IT Greening - An Inner Journey

Neethi Ashok

Note: The brief write up below is based partly on telephonic conversation and email communication with Ms. Neethi Ashok, who accepted a critical responsibility of working out a major project for the Australia Division of a global corporation unit CSC].

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Journal Representative:

You are one of the few top female technical professionals, an Indian, in the Australia Unit of CSC. You were specially selected to take charge of the 'Greening Project'. Though you have had no experience in the domain you completed the Project on time - to the appreciation of everyone there. What are your perceptions about the experience of taking charge of ISO 14001 implementation?

Neethi Ashok:

I may start like President Obama giving his victory speech; but no; I am not in politics or this is not about winning an election nor as big as a presidential election. Yet, this is a victory for those in CSC who had this vision and those who worked towards achieving it. This is a moment we love to live. So I wrote a travelogue based on our journey, a small trail within the big map of CSC, which I have forwarded in the email.

Dear Sir:

When an opportunity to assist the CSC Data centres ISO accreditation project came along, I probably trusted my intuition to make a choice rather than going by the logical side of analysing the pros and cons. That was the inner response. A strong feeling - that this is something exciting and possible for me - came up in mind almost instantaneously.

Obviously there were other opposing internal dialogues such as, "Who are you? What do you know about it? Who else is going to be involved, how do you go about it? How can you manage with existing workload? Would you really get your own self to do this?"

These kind of interrogations from within me were balanced by yet another set of inner voices like "How another colleague who sits across the desk would do the same? Or how would someone else in CSC would do the same? If the path to reach there is same for anyone, why can't you do it? What are you concerned about?"

The first step: Preparing the Mind

Asking these questions myself was kind of my first step. Sometimes it is better to ask these questions to one's own self before other people ask the same. Perhaps, everyone does similar self-questioning listen to that inner voice when making a choice - a serious choice, the results of which can have far reaching implications.

Then I took the next step. There could be confusions and conflicts or doubts about the next step. Because the next step involves the interface with other individuals. However, I called the Au ESL, Anthony Ogilvie to get a preliminary understanding of what is required and how much work is involved and what has been already initiated etc. He was very positive and by about 15 minutes of conversation, I had my answer emerging within me and was ready to volunteer for this project.

Nervous, but doubtless

After a couple of days, I received a voicemail from our Director, Danny Willmott. asking me to meet him at his office. I was nervous, but had no doubt about what I wanted to convey. Danny provided me a briefing about his expectations and offered all his support for the work. When I returned from that meeting I informed my manager and he quickly made arrangements within the team so that I can focus on the new job. I changed my signature profile to remove the database consultant title.

From earlier experiences I have learnt that if you say you are a technical consultant, even colleagues who don't know you, will talk to you as if you are a born with your title. I was amused that they may even question you if you ask anything other than technical information related to our work. Also it was good not to carry the baggage of an established title myself and merge into the current role I am willing to play. It was early December, the festive time of the year. Generally, people feel good and plan about holidays etc. around this time.

But with a formidable task in hand, I was not absorbed in that mood. I started my small steps to learn about ISO 14001 requirements. Then I had a meeting with our environmental consultant, Charlotte Scallon who gave further insights and areas that I need to focus upon. We made our first trip to the Data Centre, making notes about anything and everything we can think of - that would have an 'environmental impact'. Charlotte had already done some ground work and we reviewed her list of things and updated some areas based on our visit. Also it was important to meet the key people like

Data Centre managers who have hands on experience and knowledge about the centre operations.

After the holidays, when we were back the first thing we did was to make a draft project plan with a view to complete the audit in April-May time frame. Since the auditors are generally very busy, we had to make some assumptions and book the dates. We contacted the auditing company [LRQA] to organize the external audit and subsequently sent out our plan of action to all the data centre managers. There were some discussions about the dates as no one is given a clear picture of the requirements and so on. Hence it was difficult to get an agreement if we will be ready by that time.



A kick off meeting and presentation was organized in February to give an overview of ISO 14001 to everyone. Since this standard is written for more polluting industries and the applicable environmental laws are not the same for different states and territories, it was important to get everyone understand about the stringent requirements at the

initial stages itself. Also we had a project plan that was still in the draft stage. As some great soul said, we needed to have a plan even though most of the times things won't work according to the plan. Every week I had a meeting with the environment consultant; we discussed about the things we are doing and what input we need from Data centre managers. We had many meetings with Data centre managers, internal auditors, and other stake holders.

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Lucky to be challenged

The challenges that we had were not unusual. When we do anything new we may encounter similar issues. Sometimes a few questions from someone will make you think better, yet, harder to find an answer. We were lucky to have those demanding questions in our meetings. Some people asked questions to get more

clarity about things as they feel they are a part of it and hence they don't want to fail this. For some others it is a part of the process like many other processes we have and hence they are sure that we will eventually get there. Overall CSC people I met or worked with in this project were professional and passionate about their area of expertise. So it was a privilege for me to work with them and appreciate their views.

There were times I found it hard to get going at the speed I wanted to. There were times I couldn't sleep because we haven't resolved an issue, there were times I felt frustrated as I am chasing up things and no one is responding. There were times I had to steer away from ISO 14001 to do some of my database admin tasks. There were times I wondered that I don't know what I don't know. Still the flow was always there to reach the final destination, almost like a soft music in the background. Anyone who came across me during those times would have heard something about CSC's environmental journey. I felt that I could not rest until I see the piece of paper declaring that our Data centres are ISO 14001 certified. And, of course, today I can have that rest.

My Learning

This work raised my personal awareness about the reality of whatever is called 'environmental impact' as well as the Data centre operations. (At home, now I use only green bags for grocery shopping and recycle all the items I can think of). I did a lot of research through internet while writing the EMS [Environmental Management System] manual for data centres and it definitely helped me to get a better understanding about the systems in place at other companies and some of the initiatives by our competitors.

**'... small is not only beautiful,
but might trigger great
vicissitudes of perception.'**

Perhaps I started as a novice and ended up as a beginner. There is so much to learn and now I think I understand the alphabets of EMS system well. There are some additional lessons that I learnt that one can only learn through similar experiences. The external audit was also another thing which gave all of us lot of insight and awareness. The audit itself was very

thorough and in depth. It took more time to complete than we anticipated. Auditor was a well experienced professional with a consulting mentality rather than an auditor attitude and merely questioning us. Overall it was more like a training session for all the participants. So we got a lot of helpful information out of it. As we all know ours is not a perfect system. But it will mature over the years. As long as we have a system in place to manage, we will be alright.

In the past, I had passed many technical certification exams. But helping an organization unit to get a certification was even more satisfying. I am thankful to CSC for giving me this opportunity. Danny Willmott gave his unreserved support and participated in many meetings in spite of his tight schedule as MCS director. An update was sent to him every week about how we are going so that he is fully aware of where we were. All the managers from Data centres were giving suggestions and directions and were very co-operative and helpful. In some meetings I heard people saying "I want to raise the profile of our Data centres and make them world class facilities." It shows the passion of CSC Data centre managers to make our operations really reference-able. Charlotte, the environment consultant, worked with me as an alter-ego. She was knowledgeable, patient, and was like a travel guide willing to help all the time. Also our internal auditors were very co-operative and approachable for any advice. Apart from CSC team, I am really grateful to my mentor and trainer Prasad Sundararajan who helped me to trust myself and see beyond what is visible. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you all.

Great steps only from small things

Of course, small is not only beautiful, but might trigger great vicissitudes of perception. In retrospect, it was just one small conversation that triggered this whole experience - working out a major project of a global corporation unit. Andy Blowers [Domain Manager, Marketing and Sales division, CSC] once explained 'IT Greening' and how the government regulations and requirements would change the IT business sector. He placed special emphasis on how other organizations would want Data centres to comply with environment regulations also that most new Federal government data centre business requires this accreditation. It reminds me that inspiration can come

in any form, anytime, and from anyone if we are open as well as receptive to that which enters through our openness.

Now, as we are certified, we can move on to the next level of understanding and operations. The certification only demands meeting the basic 17 requirements, but we are not limited to do more - if we can. There are amazing published facts on the web about environmental impacts in layman's language. For instance, one search in google is equivalent to 7gms of CO₂, it needs 238 litres of water to produce a cup of coffee at Star bucks Café, etc. May be one day we can also see some information like 'to store one byte of customer information in the Data centre, it costs so much energy and hence so much CO₂ emissions. When such understandable scientific information is available to wider CSC

communities, then, everyone would be a little bit more careful of what they do directly or indirectly and do their bit to protect and preserve the environment we all live in. At least that is my hope. Ours was only a very tiny step in the whole scheme of environmental and sustainability related programs. Still it will bring some benefits towards the cause.

Finally, I wish CSC's ISO 14001 certification may make our services more attractive to our clients. The community as well as government organizations may also recognize us as environmentally responsible company. I must say I felt very fortunate to be a part of something larger than myself.

Thank you, and wishing the Journal all success,

Neethi Ashok
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