

July 2024: Unravelling Sustainability

Thursday 11 July 2024 Teknion showroom

Core Team:

Harsha Kotak, WOD; Joanna Knight, WOD

Collective Members:

Ella Fathi, IOR Group; Rebecca Poll / Harriet Jacobs, Grimshaw; Asif Din, Perkins & Will; May Fawzy, MF Studio / BIID; Lucy Bagshaw, TP Bennett; Emily King / Magda Iwanska, BDP; Gurvinder Khurana, M Moser; Sameeha Joshi, Peldon Rose; Astrid Hugo, Gensler; Ana Rita Martins / Deepak Parmar, MCM; Nigel Tresise, Align; Jennie GreenWalker, MAA Architects; Dom Pegram, Salt & Pegram; Phil Towle / Alex Webb, The Furniture Practice; Anja Schellenbauer, John Robertson Architects; Fiona Edwards, JPA Workspaces; Sarah Audsley, Knight Frank; Alison Grant, c HLW; Joanne Sanger, Woodalls; Claire Owens / Ruth Marsh, Sheppard Robson; Lydia Randall, BDG A+D; Sam Allen, M Moser; Deborah Allen, DouglasJane Studio; Jenna Monteith / Ilaria Baldini, Unispace; Mathew Freeman, Freeman Studio; Joe Croft / Zoe Glander, Overbury; Valerio D'Angelantonio, Make Architects; Robert Atkinson, Interior Architects; Roseanna Hart, Cast Interiors; Laura Wardrope, JLL; Caroline Pontifex, Savills;

Supporters: Teknion; Shaw Contract; Steelcase; Sedus UK; Solus Ceramics; Milliken; Lavoro; AllSfär; Orluna LED; Workplace Insight; Works Magazine; Design Insider.

Purpose:

A 'think tank' group committed to acting as a collective within the workplace design community to identify developments and 'best practice' relating to sustainability. This report highlights some of the points raised during the discussion.

Discussion Topic: EPDs

EPDs – Environmental Product Declarations – can be confusing for many workplace designers. During this meeting, SDC hoped to help 'demystify' these product documents and respond to some of the frequently asked questions and misunderstandings.

The group also aimed to highlight some of the positives and negatives.



Thoughts and opinions on EPDs:

EPDs do provide an independently verified document providing a range of environmental impact data.	If a product has an EPD, it does not necessarily mean that it's 'good'.
It is possible to compare certain factors but only if each document uses the same methodology and are measured to the same stages.	EPDs only verify the key component materials – typically only the top 3.
A1-A3 measurements – i.e. material extraction to the factory gate – provide more accurate and factual information. Beyond A3, the data is based upon assumptions.	The databases used to create EPDs are not extensive and often do not include many material types used, within furniture for example. Often 'nearest' alternatives are used (potentially reducing the accuracy).
In most instances, it is not possible to compare products between manufacturers.	Typically LCAs (Life Cycle Analyses) might be only be +/- 20% accurate for a product.
The process required to produce EPDs provides and promotes a greater focus and understanding of environmental impact of a company's product and helps manufacturers look for process and material improvements.	EPDs are currently expensive to produce and restricts availability to high value products and larger manufacturers. In addition, arguably, this expense potentially suppresses innovation – as a new product will require a new EPD.
EPDs can help clients (occupiers) to appreciate the carbon impact of their projects.	EPDs should be used as part of a carbon reduction process – not simply a means to gain points for building certifications to show directional value of carbon rather than absolute values.

Additional points raised:

Would LCAs (i.e. not independently verified) be acceptable? Most members of the group stated this would be acceptable but believed that others e.g. cost consultants, would not find these acceptable. In addition, building certifications award an additional point for EPDs that are third party verified.

Circularity statements should be based on stated criteria and include named disposal / recycling routes. Recyclability, particularly for fixtures such as flooring and partitions, is dependent upon installation techniques.



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SDC member, Mathew Freeman, hosted the next session: “Do you think we use our purchasing power effectively to support new and emerging innovative companies?” “Should we do more?”

All agreed that they want to positively support new companies and investigate new materials. There were concerns about proven history and traceability within the supply chain.

We can limit the potential ‘risk’ of using smaller companies by clearly defining an area of involvement and perhaps only specifying within one particular part of a project.

Discussions about the use of the TOMS matrix as a mechanism of measuring social value – “it has its limitations but is driving some change”.

There were concerns about the focus on locality by some clients. “We should be focussed on supporting all types of social enterprise, in the UK and overseas”.

“As designers we should always be willing to listen and learn. We also have the ‘power’ to link / network people.”



OTHER ACTIVITIES:

SD Magazine:

As part of its mission is to work collaboratively to share knowledge and ‘best practice’ to inspire and influence the workplace design sector, SDC has launched a digital publication. The ambition is to provide a platform for views, opinions, and projects within the office workplace sector.

SD Academy:

SDC is launching the first of a series of online courses specifically designed for designers working within the workplace environment.

SDC Forum and Awards:

The second forum and awards was held on 25th April 2024: an interactive event for workplace designers, manufacturers, and suppliers to share knowledge and learn about efforts towards greater sustainability.

FOOTNOTE:

The Sustainable Design Collective meets every two months. Each meeting addresses different initiatives designed to tackle the impact on our environment. A summary document will be published after each meeting which is hosted on the Sustainable Design Collective’s web site – an example of knowledge sharing.

We welcome comment and contributions from the office design sector.