

Moving Towards Energy Sufficiency

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Today, we'll discuss energy sufficiency, its definitions, and how to incorporate it into your life. By the end of this track, you'll know why it's such a valuable concept and how small changes make a big difference. We'll also cover how to navigate some of the challenges linked to the topic.

Let's get started.

We're all too aware of the climate crisis, and it's easy to feel powerless in response to such enormous global events. Similarly, it's understandable to feel a lack of control regarding utilities and fuel consumption. In April 2022, the cost of energy bills [increased by 54%](#) in the UK. It's easy to feel exhausted by the cost of living and changes happening on a large scale. It's no wonder we sometimes switch off when hearing about energy distribution.

Stay with us, though, as there have been some developments in the industry that could offer motivation and reassurance.

You've probably heard the term *energy efficiency*, but energy sufficiency is a lesser-known phrase. According to utilities company [Engie](#), '*efficiency* aims to improve energy services on a technological level.' On the other hand, '*sufficiency* is based on reducing the demand for energy.'

The goal of energy sufficiency is for everyone to access the energy they need. It ensures everyone gets their fair share. It considers how our energy usage can have minimal environmental impact. Energy sufficiency is a matter of restructuring how we consume energy, individually and collectively.

Engie uses the following example: If you replace an incandescent lightbulb with an LED, that's *efficiency*. If you turn a light off in a room you're not currently using, that's *sufficiency*.

Similarly, energy efficiency is sourcing a tumble dryer with a high energy rating. Energy sufficiency is drying your washing outside if possible.

Efficiency would be buying something new. In contrast, sufficiency would be using something you already own or borrowing something from a friend.

In his book [The Logic of Sufficiency](#), Thomas Princen explains, 'sufficiency is not about denial, not about sacrifice or doing without. Rather, when resource depletion and overconsumption are real, sufficiency is about doing well.' His work outlines that 'today's environmental challenges—at once global, technological, and commercial—require new behaviors, new institutions, and new principles.' Sufficiency is a shift away from conventional ways of thinking.

A world where everyone has as much energy as they need to thrive, but no one is using excessive amounts? That's an energy-sufficient world. It doesn't mean using the bare minimum. Sufficiency focuses on using what we need to flourish.

Princen uses *sufficiency* to highlight 'a sense of *enough-ness* and *too muchness*.' Currently, energy is not distributed equitably. Many people do not have access to enough, and others use excessive amounts. [There are global disparities in energy usage, and some corporations can undoubtedly play the most considerable part by using less.](#)

Sufficiency doesn't mean going without or struggling. However, part of the reason we're in the current climate situation is because of a willingness to use far more energy than is necessary. How many businesses use vast amounts of energy without any justification? Where are buildings being heated or lit unnecessarily? Where might there be energy wastage on an enormous scale?

Energy sufficiency has the potential to be a significant part of our journey toward a more sustainable world and a brighter future for everyone.

You might be thinking, "That all sounds great, but what can I do as just one person with limited power?" And your question is entirely justified. Broader systemic changes are needed. But that doesn't mean individuals don't have a role to play. The first step is raising awareness of energy efficiency and being conscious of the bigger picture. As a consumer, you can decide where your money goes and speak to others about encouraging companies to alter their practices.

The second is making small changes in your own life to contribute to a greener future. In doing so, you can also save money.

There are three main types of [energy sufficiency](#) that everyone, from individuals to major corporations, can employ to make fundamental changes.

Dimensional sufficiency

This involves ensuring the right equipment is used for any task. For example, a bus might be a commuting option preferable to a car, but is it the most effective method? A tram journey makes more sense if traffic is heavy and a bus is likely to come to a standstill in a busy area.

Sufficiency of use

This is about how equipment is used. Turn electrical equipment off rather than leave it on standby. Is the air conditioning left switched on in an empty office? Are unused rooms lit or

windows left open when the heating's on? Do you have the option to dry your washing outside? Perhaps an international business trip could be replaced by a video call. Hybrid working might mean commuting twice a week rather than five times. By being more aware of our energy consumption, we can significantly reduce use without much effort.

Collaborative sufficiency

This requires us to work together and share resources. For example, if you need to get to work but want to reduce emissions, could you share a car with someone else?

A [paper](#) by Steve Sorrell et al. provides a note of caution that people often fail to keep up with their good intentions.

'First, people may save money that they can spend on other goods and services that require energy to provide. Second, people may feel they have 'done her bit' for the environment and can spend time and money on more energy-intensive goods and activities. Third, people may save time that they can spend on other activities that require energy to participate in.'

These effects, what researchers label *spillovers* and *rebounds*, are important to think about. Energy consumption might be shifted elsewhere, but usage levels might not actually lessen overall. Measuring the impact of your changes and maintaining the benefits requires some planning. This is not designed to discourage but rather provide motivation to prioritise preparation and reflection.

Remember, sufficiency isn't about making life difficult or causing anybody to go without. The following factors are some crucial elements to consider.

Accessibility

One of the most important things to note is that everyone has different needs. It might feel easy to suggest everyone walks to work, but that conversation excludes a disabled person who needs their car to get around. Individuals with disabilities are often entirely left out of the discussion around sustainability. The key to sufficiency is to remember that it's not about restricting everyone's use. It's about ensuring that we consider everyone's energy *needs*, whatever they may be.

Safety is a factor to consider when discussing commuting. As Holly Kearn highlights in her [Forbes](#) article, women frequently face harassment on public transport. The conversation about sufficiency is more complex than promoting eco-friendly choices above all else. Sufficiency deals with what is appropriate and necessary.

Cost

A discussion about energy *efficiency* is often a conversation about spending money. There can be substantial upfront costs to buying a more energy-efficient household appliance, for example. Conversely, energy *sufficiency* looks at what we already own and how we already live.

It can look to the past for guidance, where sustainable practices were used even if no one labelled them as such. Similarly, reducing and reusing have been vital to many people's lives for a long time, whether for practical or financial reasons. Drying washing outside on a hot day isn't necessarily done to tackle climate change. It might just be the quickest and most cost-effective option. Regardless, it represents energy sufficiency. The same can be said for cycling in the most bicycle-friendly cities in the world. Sometimes, driving just isn't convenient. Examples such as these might save time as well as money.

Regarding sufficiency, people who already have or use less aren't expected to sacrifice the most to combat climate change. Remember Thomas Princen's definition? Sufficiency looks at proportionate responses and "enoughness". It advocates for systemic change and a fundamental cultural shift.

Heating four unused office blocks to 30 degrees Celsius during summer is very different from using a reasonable amount of energy to warm your apartment. If you usually drive an hour for a Summer staycation, the expectation isn't that you stay at home instead. But if you take three domestic flights per week for your job, that's a different scale of energy usage.

If you're interested in moving towards energy sufficiency, take a look at the energy that you use in your day-to-day life and ask yourself how much of it you really *need*. Do you need to use your car as often as you do? (The answer here might be yes!). Are there ways that you could share the energy burden with others so that you all meet your needs without as much waste?

You are not expected to overhaul your entire life, but a few simple changes can save you time and money and ultimately shape the planet's future.