



11 FEB 2019 RESEARCH & IDEAS

The Business of Saving the Planet

by Sean Silverthorne

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The biggest challenge facing today's business leaders? Putting their operations in harmony with the environment. Read the latest research around building sustainability into business processes and management practices.



"The fact that the benefits of addressing the problem of climate change almost certainly outweigh the costs ... does not make concerted global action to address the problem easy." —Climate Change in 2018: Implications for Business

If there is one positive that the debate over climate change has brought over the last two decades, it is that business is becoming fully engaged on the issue. Firms may not have the answers or even the will to make changes toward sustainable practices, but they can't do nothing. Stakeholders, shareholders, customers, advocacy groups and their own employees are demanding businesses take action. Even business managers who retain doubts about climate change must nevertheless account for the possibility in their risk planning.

At Harvard Business School, which studies these issues through its Business and Environment Initiative, professors specializing in domains such as customer service, finance, operations, and business history are coming together to explore the many facets of how sustainability and business management might mix. Here is a sample of that work with implications for managers.

The Background: A Good Place to Start

Climate Change in 2018: Implications for Business (pdf)

This background note provides general information about climate change and its implications for business.

Working Knowledge Stories on the Business of Environmental Sustainability

Should a Pension Fund Try to Change the World?

In a recent statement from the Business Roundtable, 200 powerful CEOs said corporations should widen their missions beyond just maximizing profits for shareholders.

These Entrepreneurs Take a Pragmatic Approach to Solving Social Problems

Using business to create social change has been at the center of many entrepreneurial efforts by Harvard Business School alumni. Howard Stevenson discusses their pragmatic approaches to overcoming long odds.

Consumers Blame Business for Global Health Problems. Can Business Become the Solution?

Millions of people have been harmed by cigarettes, defective merchandise, pollution, addiction and other business by-products. Now, some pioneering companies are exploring healthier ways to operate.

How Companies Can Increase Market Rewards for Sustainability Efforts

There is a connection between public sentiment about a company and how the market rewards its corporate social performance. Is your company undervalued?

How a Coal Polluter Became a Renewable Energy Leader

Enel, Italy's state-owned power company, was one of Europe's largest coal-users and polluters. Now it is recognized as a leader in renewable energy services.

Smart Cities are Complicated and Costly: Here's How to Build Them

When governments take on a smart city project, it's often the private sector that's left to execute the vision—sometimes at the expense of good public policy.

Green Businesses Are Incredibly Difficult to Make Profitable. Try It Anyway

Making a business successful is a challenge in itself, but making a green business profitable is an even harder journey.

What's the Best Administrative Approach to Climate Change?

James Heskett's readers point to examples of complex environmental problems conquered through multinational cooperation. Can those serve as roadmaps for overcoming global warming?

Should US Companies Still Care About the Paris Climate Change Agreement?

America has withdrawn from the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change. Should business leaders care?

Should Industry Competitors Cooperate More to Solve World Problems?

If industry competitors collaborated more, pressing global problems could start to be addressed. Is that even possible in a market economy?

Research Papers

How Transparency into Internal and External Responsibility Initiatives Influences Consumer Choice

Three studies examined how firms can use transparency into social and environmental responsibility initiatives to differentiate themselves in the consumer market.

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If industry competitors collaborated more, pressing global problems could start to be addressed. Is that even possible in a market economy?

Making the Business Case for Environmental Sustainability

A business case can be made for acting in an environmentally sustainable way, defined as acting in any way that reduce a firm's environmental footprint.

Understanding and Overcoming Roadblocks to Environmental Sustainability. Past Roads and Future Prospects

Historians, scholars, and business professionals debate barriers and opportunities for business and environmental sustainability at a Harvard Business School research gathering.

Corporate Sustainability: A Strategy?

Between 2012 and 2017, companies within most industries adopted an increasingly similar set of sustainability practices. This study examines the interplay between common and strategic practices.

Relative Performance Transparency: Effects on Sustainable Choices

We study how transparency into the levels and changes of relative sustainability performance affects consumer choices.

Sustainability and Green Business in Latin America During Globalization Waves

Capitalism has created much wealth, but at the cost of massive ecological destruction. This has been particularly severe in Latin America over the past century. Yet the last three decades have also seen a wave of businesses across sectors ranging from beauty to eco-tourism aimed at greater sustainability.

[Image: WangAnQi]

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