

What could managers of organisations do and/or not do to help to solve the world's problems?

‘In recent years business increasingly has been viewed as a major cause of social, environmental and economic problems’ (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Anderson (2009) argues that business and industry is ‘the biggest culprit in this massive mistreatment of the earth by humankind, and the resulting decline of the biosphere’. ‘Capitalism is an unparalleled vehicle for meeting human needs, improving efficiency, creating jobs, and building wealth. But a narrow conception of capitalism has prevented business from harnessing its full potential to meet society’s broader challenges (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Einstein however said, ‘we cannot solve our problems with the thinking we used to create them’. The United Nations (2021) argues that ‘it is clear that business as usual is not good enough’. This essay therefore will focus on what can be done by managers of organisations to solve the world’s problems.

Currently businesses ‘continue to view value creation narrowly, optimizing short-term financial performance in a bubble while missing the most important customer needs and ignoring the broader influences that determine their longer-term success’ (Porter and Kramer, 2011). But an important question that needs to be asked is – can organisations change? Friedman (1970) argued that the sole responsibility of business is to make a profit ‘while confirming to their basic rules of the society, both those embodied in law and those embodied in ethical custom’. However, as Friedman (1970) suggests businesses must conform to the ‘basic rules of the society’ therefore there is opportunity here for laws and consumer expectations to reinforce and change businesses approach to the world’s problems. We saw that in May 2021 a court in The Hague ordered oil firm Royal Dutch Shell to cut its carbon emissions, and ruled that Shell is responsible for emissions from its customers and suppliers. They also confirmed that ‘Shell’s activities constituted a threat to the “right to life” and “undisturbed family life” as set out in the European Convention on Human Rights’ (Vetter, 2021). Managers must change their practices now to develop a greener economy, which perhaps ‘will require a new global social contract’ and ‘global remodelling of economy and society towards sustainability’ (WBGU, 2011).

Businesses could benefit from helping to solve the world’s problems. Corporate shared value ‘which involves creating economic value in a way that *also* creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges’ (Porter and Kramer, 2011). It is coined as ‘a new way to achieve economic success (Porter and Kramer, 2011). This next section of the essay will focus on the following three ways to create corporate shared value (Porter and Kramer, 2011) and how they can help to solve the world’s problems.

- 1) By reconvening products and markets
- 2) By redefining productivity in the value chain
- 3) By enabling local cluster development

Managers could reconvene their products and markets to help solve the world’s problems. Businesses should ask themselves ‘is our product good for our customers?’ (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Intel and IBM for example ‘are both devising ways to help utilities harness digital intelligence in order to economize on power usage’ (Porter and Kramer, 2011).

The demand for these products and services are growing (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Businesses therefore could develop new products and services that help solve these issues whilst growing market share. Microplastics for example are a sustainability issue, and ‘plastic

fibres from textiles have been indicated as a major source of this type of contaminant, entering the oceans via wastewater' (Carney Almroth et al., 2017). From every laundry wash, microfibre from synthetic textiles enters the water system. LANGBRETT a German outdoor clothing brand, have therefore created a product, the 'Guppyfriend' which collects these microfibre when washing, preventing them from entering the water system. This helps reduce the problem of when the microfibre are in the environment they amass toxins and then they can end up in the food chain causing problems for humans and animals (Guppyfriend, 2021).

In the same area of concern, Patagonia, the outdoor clothing company funded a research project to see the environmental impact of their clothing, in terms of microfibre on the environment (Lant et al., 2020). They found that 'we and other makers of polyester and nylon textiles likely contribute a significant portion of microfiber pollution to the ocean' (Patagonia, 2021). 'Based on an estimate of consumers across the world laundering 100,000 Patagonia jackets each year, the amount of fibres being released into public waterways is equivalent to the amount of plastic in up to 11,900 grocery bags' (Hartline et al., 2016). Disappointingly however, Patagonia has made arguably no real changes based on the outcome of the reports. They promote that they are investigating the issue further, supporting scientists to 'gain a better understanding' and 'communicating proactively with our customers and the broader public' (Patagonia, 2021).

One example where a business has stopped selling a product after asking themselves 'is our product good for our customers?' is the Australian based social enterprise Thankyou. It has stopped production of its founding product which was bottled water because 'it could no longer justify the environmental harm caused by selling it in a developed country such as Australia' (Readfern, 2020). Other businesses could learn from Thankyou, and consider whether they should continue to produce certain goods or services.

We must be careful however that in solving some of the world's problems on sustainability, we are not leading to further issues. For example, the shift away from manufacturing and extractive industries in the UK within the 20th century caused and has continued to cause social issues in communities who depended on those industries for employment (TUC and Allen, 2008). Doncaster, in South Yorkshire for example was known for the coal and mining industries in the 1980s. After the closure of the coal mines and other industries, there was a heavy increase in unemployment and poverty. New jobs have been created in sales and leisure, however 'not enough to curb the relative deprivation of the borough'. 'Doncaster is still one of the most socially deprived areas of the UK, with a significantly lower GDP rate than the regional average' (Thorleifsson, 2015).

Businesses could redefine productivity in the value chain. 'Numerous societal issues, such as natural resource and water use, health and safety, working conditions and equal treatment in the workplace (Porter and Kramer, 2011) affects the value chain. Previously managers may have considered that improving environmental credibility and performance might have increased costs for a business. Today however 'there is a growing consensus that major improvements in environmental performance can often be achieved with better technology at nominal incremental cost and can even yield net cost savings through enhanced resource utilisation, process efficiency and quality' (Porter and Kramer, 2011). If we consider for example the four principles of sustainability, one business that has created corporate shared value through efficient resource use and procurement is Interface Corporation. 'Interface's reduced-face-weight carpet, with lower pile height and higher density is beautiful, more

durable and saves twice as much embodied energy as is needed to run the factory that makes it' (Hawken, Lovins and Lovins, 1999).

'Opportunities to create shared value arise because societal problems can create economic costs in the firm's value chain' (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Olam International, a major food and agri-business company reduced their processing and shipping costs by 25% by reconsidering labour productivity. Previously they shipped cashew nuts from Africa to Asia to be processed by 'productive Asian workers' (Porter and Kramer, 2011). They made the decision to open local to the farm processing plants and trained workers in Africa, creating majority female employment in rural areas. This reduced carbon emissions for the business, but also the aforementioned cost saving.

Thirdly in order to solve the world's problems, businesses could create a 'green' business cluster. 'No company is self-contained. The success of every company is affected by the supporting companies and infrastructure around it' (Porter and Kramer, 2011). One example of a cluster is the technology industry in Silicon Valley in California, USA. A cluster can be defined as 'a geographical concentration of interconnected economic and innovative activities in a particular field' (Davies, 2013). 'Many of these clusters are hybridised, involving actors from public, private and civil society sectors' (Davies, 2013).

There are many argued benefits for clustering, for example accessing external economies of scale, higher employment growth, greater expansion rates, strengthened trading relationships and local knowledge spill overs (Davies, 2013). However, some argue that the impact and benefit of clustering is dependent on which industry they are operating in. (McDonald et al., 2007; Gordon and McCann, 2000).

One example of a green cluster is the International Cleantech Network (ICN) which is a mega-cluster which contains within it 10 clusters, representing over 8,000 stakeholders internationally (Davies, 2013). Its focus is within the cleantech industry, which includes 'technologies that cut emissions, improve the environment, and reduce the consumption of natural resources and encompasses various sectors such as circular economy, clean energy, and smart cities' (Seedstars, 2019). 'ICN clusters are typically based on a triple-helix structure, meaning that their membership consists of companies (primarily SMEs), public authorities, and research institutions' (ICN, 2021).

How will clusters help managers solve the world's problems? 'The presence of strong clusters within one industry will often indirectly spur cluster creation in other, non-related industries in the same geographical region' (Davies, 2013).

Outside of corporate shared value, businesses could strive towards circular economy business models. The Ellen Mc MacArthur Foundation (2021) defines circular economy as 'based on the principles of designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems'. This 'would not only bring savings of hundreds of billions of US dollars to the EU alone, but also significantly reduce the negative impact on the natural environment' (Lewandowski, 2016). A challenge of this, however, is that there are very few studies on circular business model frameworks (Lewandowski, 2016) compared with existing business practices.

A main concept of the circular economy is of material loops which is the idea that 'products, their components/and or materials can be cascaded (in case of biological nutrients), and

reused/redistributed, remanufactured/refurbished, or recycled (in case of technical nutrients), which requires prior collecting back from the consumer and reverse logistics' (Lewandowski, 2016).

Korhonen, Honkasalo and Seppälä (2018) argue that the circular economy is a 'promising concept' because it 'has been able to attract the business community to sustainable development work'. The benefit for businesses is that 'if you extract a resource from nature and work hard for it to become a product or service that has an economic value, you use this value many times, not only once'. IKEA, for example have begun a 'buy back' scheme where customers can sell their used furniture back to IKEA (IKEA, 2021). Lena Pripp-Kovac, chief sustainability officer of IKEA has said that their 'goal is to give products and materials a longer life through the four circular loops: reuse, refurbishment, remanufacturing, and, as a last option, recycling' (Circular, 2020). This helps reduce the world's issue of waste, as in the UK around 1.6m tonnes of furniture and bulky waste is incinerated or sent to landfill each year (Edie, 2015). IKEA give customers a voucher in exchange for their returned furniture, thus encouraging customer loyalty, and sales for IKEA. Genovese, Acquaye, Figueroa and Koh (2017) argue that 'circular economy pushes the frontiers of environmental sustainability by emphasising the idea of transforming products in such a way that there are workable relationships between ecological systems and economic growth'.

Another process that managers could adopt to solve the world's problems in Biomimicry which 'involves learning from and emulating biological forms, processes, and ecosystems tested by the environment and refined through evolution' (Benyus, 2013). Benyus (2002) highlight that 'the process of biomimicry will do two things:

1. enable humans to avail themselves of some really novel technologies and
2. provide these really novel technologies in an inherently sustainable way'.

'Biological designs are, for instance, resilient, adaptable, multifunctional, regenerative, and generally zero-waste. When deeply informed by biology, design thinking shifts away from an anthropocentric model and considers product life cycles and earth system limitations' (Kennedy et al., 2015). Biomimicry has the 'potential to yield sustainable outcomes when practiced in a deep, thoughtful way' (Kennedy et al., 2015). In agreement a careful approach to Biomimicry, Marshall and Lozeva (2009) argue that Biomimicry 'needs more than a little tweaking' for it to be sustainable and therefore solve some of the world's issues. Managers of organisations may be keen to implement as 'when tackled appropriately, it offers opportunities for lowering costs and generating additional revenues, and it enables companies to create new businesses to achieve competitive advantage' (Kennedy et al., 2015).

Biomimicry could be used by managers to help solve the world's issues, such as food waste. A number of plants have been found to have 'built-in defence mechanisms to fight off fungal attacks' (Ask Nature, 2021). These plants release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) to alert the plants near, which then will release their VOCs (Ninkovic, Rensing, Dahlin and Markovic, 2019). This can be used within the food industry to prevent food waste. This could help solve the problem of food waste within primary production, where it is estimated to be 3.6 million tonnes a year, or 7.2% of all food harvested (Bajzelj, McManus and Parry, 2019). It has been found furthermore that applying oregano essential oils 'decreased fungal development by 95%' which prevents food waste in the growing stage also (Lambert, Skandamis, Coote and Nychas, 2001). In 2018, around 9.5 million tonnes of food waste were created in the UK from households, hospitality and food service (Parry, Harris, Fisher and

Forbes, 2020). Integrating therefore plant-derived VOCs into food packaging is being trialled to reduce this issue to reduce fungus growing in consumer's fridges after purchase. If managers across the food industry were to share these processes, businesses could play a large role in reducing food waste.

Marshall and Lozeva (2009) however criticise biomimicry. They suggest 'that the term is just a new label for all sorts of established practices'. They argue that perhaps 'biomimicry could indeed be a profitable way to render nature's secrets available for human use, but it is a tool with as much capacity for environmental harm as for eco-friendliness' (Marshall and Lozeva, 2009). Birkeland (2008) raises the issue that Biomimicry applied to building technology 'could perpetuate the current tendency to substitute nature with resource intensive and often unnecessary production lieu of passive solutions'. An example of this would be 'instead of designing a space that allows for natural ventilation with thoughtful placement of windows and vents, but rather adding a fan based on an efficient natural design to ventilate a space. Even if it is more efficient than a normal fan, it is unnecessary if smart free passive design is possible' (Littlegreenseed, 2012). Marshall and Lozeva (2009) do however argue that perhaps biomimicry may bridge both technocentrism (values centred on technology) and ecocentrism (values centred on ecology) 'since it involves the creation of technology that values nature' (Marshall and Lozeva, 2009). They highlight that biomimicry 'does not value nature intrinsically but instrumentally as a resource'.

Managers of organisations furthermore could take into consideration their impact on the ecosystem into business making decisions. 'A minimum necessary condition for sustainability is the maintenance of the total natural capital stock at or above the current level' (Costanza and Daly, 1992). For example, through Corporate Ecosystem Valuation (CEV) or utilising an environmental profit and loss account (EP&L) (Capital Coalition, 2014). 'Corporate Ecosystem Valuation (CEV) can be defined as a process to make better-informed business decisions by explicitly valuing both ecosystem degradation and the benefits provided by ecosystem services' (WBCSD, 2011). The issue of depletion of natural resources could be reduced if managers of organisations implement CEV. Mondi, for example, a British multinational packaging and paper group specific water as a 'key ecosystem service dependency for its tree plantations in South Africa' (Griffiths, 2011) and they found that there was water scarcity. They utilised CEV and were 'able to understand the value of mapping water dependencies among major uses in the South African watershed' (Griffiths, 2011). The aim of this process is to improve the businesses performance in terms of social and environmental goals, but also financially (WBCSD, 2011). According to WBCSD (2011) the business case for adopting CEV is 'that it enables companies to improve decision making and thereby increase revenue, save costs and boost the value of their assets and potentially share prices'. Adopting these practices moreover could help organisations and their managers have first mover advantage prior to any legislation that may be introduced in the future on the topic of natural capital. If natural capital depletion tax for example were to be introduced.

Businesses should consider their energy usage levels and energy sources, and therefore reduce this to help solve the climate crisis through reducing their carbon emissions. Google for example has now had four years where their energy has been purchased from renewable energy sources. They are funding renewable energy projects for example Google have now an offshore wind project in the North Sea which helps powers a data centre in Belgium (Google, 2021a). They are also focusing on reducing energy usage within their data centres. Data centres contribute to 1% of the world's energy usage (Masanet et al., 2020). Google

however claim that through technological advancements they've been able to increase usage, while minimising energy usage increases (Google, 2021b). A study published in 2020 'showed that while the amount of computing done in global data centres increased by 550% between 2010 and 2018 the amount of energy consumer by data centres grew only by 6% during the same period' (Masanet et al., 2020). Furthermore Brewdog, the multinational brewery and pub chain have repositioned themselves as a sustainable beer company, and their UK electricity for their breweries and pubs is from wind power (Brewdog, 2021). Brewdog are going further in an attempt to reduce their environmental impact through using their spent grain, which is their biggest brewing by product to convert this into green gas (Brewdog, 2021). They are also attempting to build an anaerobic digester plant which will turn wastewater into clean water, green gas organic fertiliser and good grade CO₂, whilst they are also installing a CO₂ recovery system to capture the CO₂ produced during fermentation (Brewdog, 2021) to then use it to carbonate their beers, also adopting here some circular economy practices.

Managers should also consider the energy efficiency of their buildings. Buildings consume up to 40% of global energy usage (UNEP, 2019). Scotmas Group, a chemical company for example reduced their carbon emissions by 31% through improvements to their business premises such as upgraded windows, lowering ceilings, and installing solar panels (Zero Waste Scotland, 2021). Again, these changes to tackle climate change can also be cost saving for businesses. Johnson Controls for example retrofit the Empire State building for energy efficiency in 2012. They estimate that the project has cut 'energy costs by 38%, saving \$4.4m annually and reducing carbon emissions by 105,000 metric tons over 15 years' (Korngold, 2014).

As we can see there are endless ways businesses can help to solve the world's problems. We have seen consumers discontent with businesses, from Extinction Rebellion protestors smashing windows of HSBC offices in Canary Wharf (Reilly, 2021) to consumers who have stopped purchasing Oatly products because the business accepted a \$200 million investment from Blackstone (an investment company which has been linked to Amazon deforestation) (Grim, 2019). 'Not all societal problems can be solved through shared value solutions' (Porter and Kramer, 2011) however we have seen multiple ways managers can attempt to solve the world's problems. 'Shared value offers corporations the opportunity to utilize their skills, re- sources, and management capability to lead social progress in ways that even the best-intentioned governmental and social sector organizations can rarely match' (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Through adopting these practices, and changing how businesses operate, as Porter and Kramer (2011) argue 'businesses can earn the respect of society again'.

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