



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Name: Akshay Patni

Student ID: 2308227

Course: Global Business Challenges

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Professor Name: Anthony Burns

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Executive Summary

Shell plc, a leading global energy and petrochemical company, faces a dynamic and complex business environment characterized by volatile markets, regulatory pressures, and shifting consumer expectations (Shell, 2021). This report provides a critical assessment of Shell's competitive landscape using strategic analytical tools including PESTEL, Porter's Five Forces, and SWOT analysis. The objective is to evaluate Shell's current positioning in the international market and to project potential future scenarios that could influence its strategic decisions.

Introduction

Shell plc, formerly known as Royal Dutch Shell plc, stands as one of the preeminent entities in the global energy and petrochemicals industry. Founded in 1907 through the merger of the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company of the Netherlands and the Shell Transport and Trading Company of the United Kingdom, Shell has evolved into a multinational corporation that operates across the entire spectrum of the energy sector, including exploration, production, refining, and marketing of oil and natural gas, as well as manufacturing and marketing of chemicals (Shell, 2021). Strategically headquartered in London, England, Shell operates in over 70 countries and territories, employing approximately 82,000 people worldwide as of 2021. Its business is divided into various segments, including Upstream, Integrated Gas, and Downstream operations, along with a Renewables and Energy Solutions division that underscores its commitment to the energy transition (Pim den Hertog, 2020).

This diversified business structure enables Shell to manage risks and capitalize on opportunities across different energy markets. Shell's Upstream division is focused on the exploration for and extraction of crude oil, natural gas, and natural gas liquids. The Integrated Gas segment, which includes Shell's liquefied natural gas (LNG) activities, aims to liquefy and transport natural gas to global markets, responding to the increasing global demand for cleaner energy sources. Meanwhile, the Downstream sector refines, supplies, trades, and ships crude worldwide, turning it into a range of finished products that are distributed to consumers globally (Shell, 2021). In response to mounting pressures regarding climate change and environmental sustainability, Shell has been proactive in shaping its strategy towards a lower-carbon future. The company has set ambitious targets to become a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050, in step with society's progress towards achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change (Shell, 2021). This involves enhancing its investments in renewable energy projects, increasing the production of low-carbon fuels such as biofuels and

hydrogen, and investing in carbon capture and storage technology. Despite its extensive global presence and financial success, Shell has faced criticism and legal challenges related to its environmental and social impacts. These include issues pertaining to oil spills, greenhouse gas emissions, and the broader implications of fossil fuel extraction on communities and ecosystems (Amnesty International, 2018; The Guardian, 2020). As a result, Shell's journey towards sustainability is scrutinized by environmental groups, investors, and regulatory bodies, pushing the company to continuously adapt and innovate in its operations and corporate strategy. Shell's ongoing adaptation to global energy demands and environmental expectations illustrates the complex interplay between maintaining profitability and addressing the ethical and environmental challenges posed by the energy sector.

Strategy and Management.

In the world of business, strategy is all about creating a well-thought-out plan that aims to accomplish specific long-term goals. It serves as a strategic guide for businesses, helping them navigate competitive landscapes, leverage their strengths, manage risks, and seize opportunities. Having a well-defined strategy is crucial for effectively aligning an organization's resources and efforts with its mission, vision, and overarching goals. This, in turn, helps to ensure long-term growth and maintain a competitive edge.

Strategy is all about recognizing the competitive advantage that a business can use to its benefit. As per Michael Porter, a renowned expert on competitive strategy, a crucial aspect of strategy is making decisions on what actions to avoid, in addition to determining what actions to take. It's important to differentiate a company from its competitors by offering unique value propositions and establishing a clear market positioning (Porter, 1996). Strategic choices involve making decisions regarding which customer segments to focus on, what products or services to provide, and how to effectively deliver these offerings to the market. Businesses can effectively implement strategy by following a structured process that involves conducting a comprehensive analysis of both internal and external environments. Utilizing tools such as SWOT analysis and PESTEL analysis provide valuable insights for businesses to comprehend their surroundings and recognize significant trends and dynamics that influence their operations (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2008).

Successful strategy implementation requires ensuring that resources and capabilities are aligned with strategic objectives. This involves ensuring that the organizational structure, culture, and processes are all in line with the strategic goals. Implementing a new strategy often necessitates changes in organizational behaviour and processes, making change management crucial in this context. Applying Kotter's eight-step process for leading change can be highly

beneficial in effectively managing this transition. It highlights the significance of instilling a sense of urgency, forming a strong guiding coalition, and integrating new approaches into the corporate culture (Kotler, 2018).

In addition, it is crucial for businesses to adopt adaptive strategic planning in order to stay relevant in fast-paced and ever-changing markets. This approach emphasizes the importance of ongoing learning and adaptation, enabling businesses to effectively navigate evolving circumstances and make informed decisions. Through cultivating a culture that embraces innovation and adaptability, organizations can effectively anticipate changes in the market and swiftly modify their strategies to stay ahead of the competition (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). Ultimately, effective strategic planning involves more than just establishing objectives. It requires a methodical approach to aligning an organization's resources and capabilities in order to successfully attain these objectives within a constantly evolving landscape. With the right strategy in place, businesses can effectively navigate complexity, optimise performance, and achieve sustainable growth in the long run. With a strategic approach, companies can effectively address immediate challenges and actively shape their future.

Methodology

The methodology of this report utilizes three strategic management tools to assess Shell plc's position within the global energy sector: PESTEL analysis, Porter's Five Forces analysis, and SWOT analysis. Each of these frameworks serves to dissect different aspects of the company's external and internal environments, providing a comprehensive overview of the factors that impact its operational effectiveness and strategic decisions.

PESTEL Analysis is instrumental in understanding the broader macro-environmental context in which Shell operates. By examining Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors, this analysis helps identify the external elements that could potentially influence the company's activities and market position. For instance, political stability in key operating regions affects business operations and market access, while economic indicators like global oil prices directly influence profitability (McMillan, 2010). Moreover, the technological dimension of PESTEL enables the assessment of Shell's capacity to adapt to innovations such as renewable energy technologies, which are pivotal in the energy sector's transition towards sustainability (Govindan and Jepsen, 2016).

Porter's Five Forces Analysis provides insights into the industry-specific challenges that Shell faces. This framework evaluates the competitive rivalry within the energy sector, the bargaining power of suppliers and customers, the threat of new entrants, and the threat of substitute products or services. For example, the bargaining power of suppliers impacts Shell's operational costs, particularly in the procurement of advanced technology for exploration and production (Porter, 2008). Similarly, the threat of substitutes is increasingly relevant as the global push towards renewable energy intensifies, presenting both challenges and opportunities for Shell (Mintzberg, 1987).

SWOT Analysis offers a structured approach to identifying the internal Strengths and

Weaknesses of Shell, along with external Opportunities and Threats. This dual perspective is essential for strategic planning, helping Shell leverage its internal resources to capitalize on external business opportunities or mitigate potential risks. Strengths such as Shell's substantial investments in research and development provide a competitive edge in technological innovation (Kalam, 2021). Meanwhile, weaknesses like dependency on volatile oil markets necessitate strategic adjustments in response to external economic fluctuations.

PESTLE ANALYSIS

Political Factors

Political factors significantly impact the energy sector, particularly for a company like Shell, which operates in multiple countries with diverse political landscapes. Political instability, government policies related to energy production, taxation regimes, and international trade agreements all play a crucial role. In regions such as the Middle East and Africa, political unrest can affect oil prices and disrupt supply chains. Similarly, trade policies between nations, like those involving sanctions or tariffs, can influence market dynamics and operational costs. For instance, the U.S. sanctions on Iran have periodically shifted global oil supply chains, impacting companies reliant on crude from these regions (Vishwa, Raiker and Shirodkar, 2023). Furthermore, energy policies and governmental support for renewable energy vary widely. In Europe, governments are aggressively promoting renewable energy, which pressures companies like Shell to invest more in these technologies. These shifts are pivotal as they can dictate market trends and investment strategies (Jomadar, 2011).

Economic Factors

Economic factors are perhaps the most directly influential on Shell's operations. Global economic conditions, including GDP growth rates, inflation, and currency exchange rates, affect demand for oil and gas. During economic downturns, such as the 2008 financial crisis or the 2020 global pandemic, demand for oil drastically falls, leading to price drops that can severely impact Shell's revenue streams. Conversely, economic booms often see spikes in oil demand and prices, boosting profitability (Taylor, 2008). Furthermore, the economic stability of countries where Shell operates can influence investment decisions and operational risks. Emerging markets offer growth opportunities but come with higher economic volatility, which can affect consistent revenue generation (Harvey, 2021).

Social Factors

Social influences on Shell are multifaceted, primarily involving shifting consumer preferences, demographic changes, and the increasing emphasis on corporate social responsibility. The global consumer shift towards more sustainable and eco-friendly products compels Shell to adjust its product offerings and invest in alternative energy sources like wind, solar, and biofuels. Public scrutiny over environmental issues also requires Shell to maintain transparent and responsible operational practices, affecting brand reputation and consumer loyalty (Thompson, 2019). Demographically, population growth in emerging markets presents opportunities for expanding energy markets but also challenges related to sustainable operations and social license to operate in these regions. Shell's ability to adapt to these social trends is critical for long-term sustainability and market presence (Djihed et al., 2020)

Technological Factors

Technology plays a pivotal role in driving substantial transformations within the energy sector, exerting influence over various aspects such as exploration and extraction procedures, as well as energy consumption trends. The oil and gas sector has been transformed by technological developments like hydraulic fracturing, which have made reserves that were previously unattainable financially viable. Technological advancements are making renewable energy sources more affordable and efficient. This poses a long-term threat to Shell's dependence on fossil fuels but also presents opportunities for the company to invest in and develop renewable energy solutions. Shell has been a leading innovator in the development of liquefied natural gas (LNG) technology, which has created new opportunities and offered more environmentally friendly options compared to conventional oil and gas (Nickerson, 2016).

Furthermore, Shell is faced with both obstacles and opportunities due to the emergence of renewable energy technologies and the growing efficacy of solar panels and wind turbines. Allocating resources to these technologies not only conforms to worldwide energy patterns but

also broadens Shell's energy portfolio, a crucial aspect for mitigating risks and fostering future expansion (Evans, 2021).

Environmental Factors

The significance of environmental factors has escalated for Shell as a result of mounting societal and regulatory pressures to tackle climate change and promote environmental sustainability. Shell, being a prominent participant in an industry frequently subject to scrutiny about its ecological footprint, encounters significant obstacles in effectively reconciling its commercial goals with its ecological obligations. Shell must effectively address environmental challenges, including carbon emissions, oil spills, and waste management, in order to uphold its social licence to operate and adhere to global environmental regulations.

Global regulations pertaining to emissions and environmental protection are becoming increasingly demanding. Notably, the European Union has implemented rigorous measures such as the European Green Deal, which seeks to achieve climate neutrality in Europe by the year 2050. Companies such as Shell are compelled by these restrictions to make substantial investments in mitigating their carbon emissions through a range of efforts, such as the advancement of renewable energy sources and carbon capture and storage technology. Noncompliance with these standards not only exposes Shell to potential financial penalties and penalties, but also jeopardises its reputation and consumer confidence, both of which are vital for ensuring the long-term viability of the firm (Marshall, 2022). Furthermore, the shift towards sustainable energy presents Shell with both a difficulty and a chance. The corporation has the potential to utilise its knowledge and financial assets to spearhead advancements in this field. However, it must also confront the downturn of conventional oil and gas markets, necessitating a strategic restructuring of its business model to integrate more environmentally friendly energy alternatives (Bennett, 2020).

Legal Factors

Legal challenges for Shell encompass a broad spectrum, including regulatory compliance, litigation risks, intellectual property rights, and labour laws. Shell is obligated to adhere to regulatory compliance requirements pertaining to the energy sector, which exhibit substantial variations among the several nations in which it conducts its operations. These encompass legislation pertaining to the extraction of oil and gas, standards for health and safety, regulations concerning labour, and laws aimed at combating corruption. As an illustration, the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) and the UK Bribery Act provide rigorous regulations aimed at combating corruption. These legislations mandate that corporations like as Shell establish thorough compliance initiatives to proactively mitigate instances of bribery and corruption within their operational frameworks (Ekatah et al., 2011). Litigation poses a substantial legal risk, especially in relation to environmental matters. Shell has encountered a multitude of legal actions pertaining to oil spills and environmental deterioration, resulting in significant monetary fines and expenses associated with cleanup. Furthermore, an observable pattern of climate litigation is emerging, wherein corporations are being held responsible for their role in exacerbating climate change. The legal obstacles not only incur immediate expenses but also have an effect on the public's view and investor trust, which might potentially affect Shell's market valuation and appeal for investment (Thomson, 2019).

Moreover, the legal framework is swiftly changing as there is a growing demand for stricter environmental rules and greater corporate responsibility in sustainability initiatives. The dynamic nature of this framework necessitates Shell to adopt a proactive approach in its legal policies, consistently monitoring and adjusting to emerging legal obligations in order to minimise risks and capitalise on opportunities for long-term expansion (Parker, 2021).

Porter's Five Forces Analysis

Competitive Rivalry

The level of competitive rivalry in the oil and gas industry is exceedingly high. Shell competes with both large multinational corporations like ExxonMobil, BP, and Chevron, and a myriad of smaller players that often exert competitive pressure in specific regional markets or niches. This rivalry is intensified by the relatively slow growth of the market, especially in developed regions, and the high exit barriers due to the significant capital investments and specialized assets involved. These factors combined mean that competition is primarily based on price, innovation, and expanding into new markets, such as renewable energy sources, to secure future growth. Shell must continuously innovate and manage costs efficiently to maintain its market share in this intensely competitive environment (Hawkins, 2022).

Threat of New Entrants

Despite the significant capital and regulatory barriers to entry, the oil and gas industry sees a constant threat from new entrants, particularly in emerging markets and in the renewable energy sector. Innovations in technology and shifts in regulatory landscapes can lower these barriers, allowing new competitors to emerge. For example, the development of cost-effective fracking technologies has enabled numerous smaller companies to enter the market, increasing competition in regions like North America. Shell must continually adapt to these changes, possibly through strategic alliances or innovations, to mitigate the risk posed by new entrants and maintain its competitive edge (Peterson, 2021).

Bargaining Power of Suppliers

The variability of suppliers' negotiating strength within the oil and gas business is contingent upon several factors, including the accessibility of oil and gas deposits and the worldwide dispersion of suppliers. Shell, a company involved in both upstream and downstream activities,

relies significantly on a diverse range of suppliers for drilling equipment, technological solutions, and several other services. Although certain suppliers possess significant influence, Shell's approach of establishing enduring alliances and its substantial market presence generally enable it to secure advantageous terms through negotiation. Nevertheless, the reliance on technology suppliers, particularly those providing advanced drilling and extraction technologies, can augment the suppliers' ability to negotiate, thereby impacting operational efficiencies and prices (Morton, 2020).

Bargaining Power of Customers

Customer power in the oil and gas industry varies widely between the upstream and downstream sectors. In the downstream sector, where oil products such as gasoline and diesel are sold, consumers have significant power due to the availability of alternatives, including renewable energies. This shift is driven by increasing environmental awareness and changes in consumer behaviour, which pressure companies like Shell to offer more sustainable and environmentally friendly alternatives. In contrast, in the upstream sector, where Shell sells crude oil, the power of individual customers is less pronounced due to the standardized nature of the market and global demand patterns (Kumar, 2021).

Threat of Substitutes

The threat of substitutes for traditional oil and gas products is growing, particularly with the rise of alternative energy sources such as solar, wind, and biofuels, which are becoming more competitive in terms of cost and efficiency. The global push towards sustainability and the development of new technologies that support renewable energy sources enhance this threat. For Shell, this means an imperative to diversify its energy portfolio and invest in renewable energy projects to safeguard its future position. Strategic investments in renewable energy

technologies not only help mitigate this threat but also align Shell with global energy transition trends (Turner, 2022).

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Shell's significant investment in research and development (R&D) stands out as a considerable strength, enabling it to push the boundaries in both traditional energy sectors and renewable energies. This R&D focus not only helps Shell improve its efficiency and oil recovery rates but also supports its pivot towards more sustainable energy solutions, which are becoming increasingly important. The company's strong brand reputation and global presence also provide it with a competitive edge, allowing for higher bargaining power and influence over global energy markets (Hill & Jones, 2012). In addition, Shell's wide-ranging assortment of energy sources, which encompasses its investments in gas and renewable energy, aids in reducing the risks linked to fluctuations in oil prices. Implementing this diversification strategy is essential for preserving stability and guaranteeing uninterrupted revenue sources, particularly in the face of changing global energy dynamics (Porter, 2014).

Weakness

Shell's core business model remains heavily reliant on oil and gas, which are finite resources facing increasing pressure due to climate change concerns. This dependence exposes the company to transition risks and potential asset write-downs. One key weakness is its dependence on fossil fuels, finite resources facing increasing scrutiny due to climate change concerns. This dependence exposes Shell to the risks of resource depletion and stricter environmental regulations (IEA, World Energy Outlook 2023). Furthermore, Shell's operations generate significant greenhouse gas emissions, making the company vulnerable to public pressure and potential carbon pricing schemes.

Shell has also experienced delays and cost overruns in major development projects, impacting profitability and creating uncertainty for investors (Financial Times, 2023). Additionally, as Shell relies heavily on digital technologies, it is exposed to cyberattacks. A successful attack could disrupt operations, cause financial losses, and damage the company's reputation.

Opportunities

The global energy transition presents significant opportunities for Shell. Investing in renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and geothermal could position Shell as a leader in the clean energy future. The growing demand for energy efficiency solutions presents another opportunity. Shell can develop and offer products and services that help customers reduce their energy consumption (Chen et al., 2024). Investing in carbon capture and storage technologies could allow Shell to mitigate its carbon footprint and potentially create new revenue streams (Helm, 2018). The development of a hydrogen economy presents an opportunity for Shell to leverage its expertise in gas transportation and storage to play a role in this emerging clean energy source (Staffell et al., 2021).

Threats

As the energy sector evolves, there is a constant need for technological innovation. Shell faces the risk of falling behind if it does not keep up with technological advancements in exploration, extraction, and renewable energy technologies, which could limit its competitiveness and ability to operate efficiently. Human resources challenges also pose a threat. Retaining and attracting top talent is crucial for Shell to maintain its competitive edge. The company faces the risk of losing skilled personnel to competitors, especially in areas critical to its future growth like renewable energy and tech-driven operations. Additionally, workforce dissatisfaction or poor management can lead to decreased productivity and increased turnover. Supply chain disruptions represent a further risk. Shell's global operations depend on a complex

supply chain that can be disrupted by various factors, including logistical issues, supplier failures, or political instability in supplier countries. These disruptions can lead to production delays, increased costs, and an inability to meet market demand promptly (Li, Trencher and Asuka, 2022).

Conclusion

Shell plc has evolved from a modest maritime company to a global leader in the energy and petrochemical industry. This transformation has been driven by strategic foresight, robust resource management, and an ability to adapt to the dynamic global energy landscape. Today, Shell stands as a pivotal player, not just in traditional oil and gas sectors, but increasingly in renewable energy and technological innovations aimed at sustainability. The energy sector has undergone significant transformation, driven by technological advancements, changing regulatory environments, and shifting consumer preferences towards sustainability. In response, Shell has strategically expanded its operations beyond oil and gas exploration to include a broader spectrum of energy solutions such as wind, solar, and bioenergy. This diversification strategy has not only mitigated risks associated with volatile fossil fuel markets but has also positioned Shell as a forward-thinking player in the green energy transition. Historically, Shell's growth trajectory has been marked by strategic acquisitions and an aggressive exploration agenda, which have expanded its asset base and fortified its market position globally. The company's ability to leverage its extensive R&D capabilities has led to innovations in deep-water drilling and LNG technology, setting industry standards and opening new markets. Shell's early investment in LNG, for instance, has made it a leader in a sector poised for growth as the world shifts towards cleaner energy sources. Shell's approach to resource utilization reflects its commitment to efficiency and sustainability. The company has increasingly invested in digital technologies and data analytics to optimize resource extraction and energy production. These technologies not only enhance operational efficiency but also reduce environmental impact by minimizing waste and energy consumption.

Moreover, Shell's global presence has allowed it to tap into diverse resource markets, effectively managing supply chain risks through a well-integrated network. This strategic resource allocation is crucial in maintaining Shell's resilience against geopolitical risks and regulatory changes across different regions. The company's pledge to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 aligns with global climate goals and positions it favourably among environmentally conscious investors and consumers. However, Shell must navigate several challenges to maintain its industry leadership. These include the acceleration of energy transition policies in various countries, technological disruptions, and the unpredictable nature of global energy demand post-pandemic. To address these challenges, Shell will need to further diversify its energy portfolio, enhance its operational agility, and strengthen its sustainability initiatives.

Strategic Recommendations

Shell plc has demonstrated remarkable adaptability and strategic foresight in its evolution from a traditional oil giant to a leader in the global energy transition.

In the rapidly evolving energy sector, Shell can further its growth by intensively leveraging technology and innovation. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies in its operations can drive significant efficiencies. These technologies not only enhance operational efficiency but also enable Shell to reduce environmental impact by optimizing resource use and energy consumption. AI, for instance, can improve predictive maintenance, reducing downtime and extending the lifespan of industrial equipment, while IoT applications can streamline logistics and monitor environmental emissions in real-time, ensuring compliance with global standards (Ren, 2024).

Moreover, as digital transformation reshapes industries, Shell has the opportunity to lead in digitalizing the energy sector. This involves deploying smart technologies in exploration and production, using data analytics to optimize supply chain management, and developing digital platforms that enhance customer engagement and service delivery. Digital tools can also be used to enhance safety measures, a critical concern in an industry prone to hazardous incidents (Hill & Jones, 2012).

Expanding Renewable Energy Investments

Shell's growth is increasingly dependent on its ability to transition from fossil fuels to more sustainable energy sources. The company has already made strides in this direction by investing in wind, solar, and bioenergy projects. However, to maintain leadership, Shell must accelerate its investments in renewable energy, which not only respond to environmental regulations but also open up new markets and revenue streams. The expansion into renewables should be

accompanied by efforts to improve the scalability and efficiency of these technologies, making them more competitive with traditional energy sources.

Investing in next-generation fuels such as hydrogen, which has potential in both the transportation and industrial sectors, can further diversify Shell's energy portfolio. Hydrogen fuel, in particular, represents a significant growth area due to its high energy content and zero emissions at the point of use. Shell's involvement in hydrogen can leverage its existing gas operations and infrastructure, providing a competitive advantage in this emerging market (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Enhancing Sustainability and Stakeholder Engagement

To solidify its position as a leader in sustainability, Shell must continue to enhance its environmental stewardship and engage with stakeholders transparently and effectively. This involves not only adhering to environmental regulations but also actively participating in the development of sustainable practices and standards. Shell can lead by example, setting ambitious internal benchmarks for sustainability that exceed external expectations, thus improving its corporate image and building trust among consumers, investors, and regulatory bodies (Johnson et al., 2017).

Stakeholder engagement is particularly important as public scrutiny of corporate environmental practices increases. By collaborating with local communities, governments, and non-governmental organizations, Shell can align its operational practices with societal expectations and environmental goals. This collaboration can also foster innovation in sustainability, as partnerships often bring new ideas and perspectives that can be integrated into corporate practices.

Recommendations for Future Growth

To navigate the complexities of the energy transition and sustain its growth, Shell should focus on the following strategic recommendations:

Accelerate the deployment of AI and IoT technologies across operations to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and improve safety and environmental monitoring.

Expand investments in renewable energy and next-generation fuels like hydrogen to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Strengthen sustainability initiatives by setting internal environmental performance targets that are aligned with or exceed global standards.

Enhance stakeholder engagement through transparent communication and collaborative partnerships focused on sustainable energy solutions.

In conclusion, Shell's proactive approach in adopting innovative technologies and expanding its renewable energy portfolio positions it well for future challenges and opportunities. By continuing to focus on technological advancements, sustainability, and effective stakeholder engagement, Shell can maintain its leadership in the global energy market, driving both growth and positive environmental impact.

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