

Chapter I

WHY WE NEED THAT GREEN LADDER



Do you want to make your workplace more sustainable but feel unsure where to start?

Do you want to get ahead in your career and develop a reputation as a dynamic, creative achiever?

Would you like to help your company save money, boost profits and improve its brand?

Would you like to know how to persuade colleagues that sustainability is good for business?

If you answered 'yes' to any of the questions above, you are not alone. All over the world, people are looking for answers. Their numbers are growing as more become concerned about climate change, the unsustainable use of resources and social injustice. Yet only 1 in 10 people feel they have the training or knowledge they need to make their company or organisation more sustainable.¹

However, many individuals *have* used their power to make their company more sustainable, while getting ahead in their careers too. You may be one of them. Yet these success stories are often 'under the radar', and valuable advice can be couched in jargon that makes it hard to understand or apply to your own situation.

Not any more. In plain English, and with case studies and examples, *Climb the Green Ladder* will give you the tools to make your company and career more sustainable *and* successful.

You may already have made great inroads in bringing sustainability into your workplace, or you may feel frustrated and unsure where to start. Whatever your level or industry, and whether you'd like to transform your entire company or just get colleagues recycling, this book will show you how to maximise your impact.

Corporations and governments are made up of individuals. Those individuals have the power to change an organisation from within. Don't believe us? This book is filled with stories of people who have done just that. Freya Williams helped Ogilvy & Mather launch a green consulting arm (see box **A new way of working**). Dr Victoria Hands from the London School of Economics and Political Science started by getting her university recycling, before rolling out recycling programmes at every

London university. At The Phelps Group, Kristen Thomas' idea to swap disposable lunch dishes for reusable ones started a green tidal wave that led to her company becoming the largest private solar power installation in Santa Monica.

Climate change and the global financial crisis of 2008 have shown we need to find a new way to do business. We *must* think differently to survive and thrive, and that means thinking sustainably. Businesses are like battleships. They take time to change direction but, when they do, they bring enormous power with them. *You* can harness it to make sure that businesses are using their power to meet the demands of a changing world and a changing climate.

We already have the technology and knowledge to solve many of these challenges. By thinking sustainably, we can harness our extraordinary imagination and expertise to implement solutions. If we all work to tackle the issues that we can influence, the challenges can be conquered together.

It can be demanding to get colleagues on board and to show them why thinking sustainably is good for business. Yet the right approach can get them on your side. Simple things like taking photos to show colleagues exactly how much waste your department throws away will *engage* them in your recycling initiative. Working out the money you'd save on materials and transport costs by designing products more efficiently demonstrates the *business case* for sustainability. Understanding which strategies work will allow you to bring about incredible changes that benefit the 'bottom line', the environment, communities and your career.

Climb the Green Ladder will reveal these key sustainability strategies, bringing them to life with the stories of people who have made change happen. This will help you apply the same principles in your workplace.

The key principles are: **mindset**, **business case**, **engagement**, **communication**, **collaboration** and **culture**. Each will be discussed in its own chapter:

- Get the mindset
- Make the business case
- Get your colleagues on side
- Have two-way conversations

- Work together
- Make it part of the culture

First, though, this chapter will put sustainability in context, to explain why tackling issues like climate change and social injustice are crucial for business, society and the planet's survival. The purpose of this book is not to explain climate change and why it is happening. You probably know that. Its purpose is to help you help companies change their behaviour, and innovate, so business isn't contributing to the problems but solving them.

Next, it will give you a summary of why green is good for business and how sustainability can future-proof your career, before diving into more detail in the rest of the book.



A new way of working

Freya Williams came back from maternity leave to her job at Ogilvy & Mather determined to make a difference:

'I am a strategic planner at a global ad agency in New York so you might ask, "What has sustainability got to do with my job?" But having time out made me realise I didn't want to go back to business as usual. I had two choices: stay home and "live green" or use the position and access I have to multinational corporations to change them from the inside. I chose the latter!

'I spoke to my planning director about setting up a sustainability practice which could speak to consumers, clients and employees about the need to go green, and help clients understand how to move their sustainability agenda forward.

'I started by speaking to the head of procurement who gave me a load of old invoices. I added up the amount spent on things like paper and bottled water. We spent a huge amount on paper; I knew we could cut it in half by printing double-sided and being less wasteful. I helped ensure that every employee received a reusable (SIGG) water bottle, and that we used "green" cleaning and paper products in our bathrooms. I also spoke to my COO about switching to renewable energy. He agreed and we now purchase 100% renewable energy through our local utility. With it being a creative agency, it was easy to do a fun campaign to engage employees. And that was just the start!

‘All companies are moving in this direction. They need agencies to work with them to communicate their messages authentically, so embracing sustainability ourselves and launching OgilvyEarth has enabled us to better serve our existing clients and even win new ones.

‘Sustainability is also great for your career: it makes you stand out in your organisation. But the best thing is I am helping to make a difference. I always wanted to find more meaning in my work, and having a child encouraged me to elevate my priorities.’



THE NEED FOR ACTION: PUTTING SUSTAINABILITY IN CONTEXT

The planet is in peril. The decadent use of fossil fuels has pumped vast amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, gases that were laid down in the Earth over millennia. This has wildly upset the balance of the Earth's atmosphere and is slowly but surely leading to the warming of the planet. A few degrees doesn't sound like much but it is significant. The warming is not spread evenly across the globe; some places will change by only a fraction of a degree, others will change by several.

However, even a fraction of a degree can make a difference. The world's ecosystems exist in delicate balance. For example, small but prolonged rises in sea temperature cause coral colonies to expel the food-producing algae on which they depend. This process is known as bleaching. Many cannot recover and, as coral is crucial to much sea life, this is having a devastating effect on global fish populations. Overfishing is also decimating global fish stocks. When you consider that 2.6 billion people, or nearly 40% of the world's population, rely on fish as a major source of protein, this is alarming,² and this is only one of many examples of how the changing climate is putting us all in danger.

Small changes caused by an increase in greenhouse gases lead to further warming effects. One of these is the melting of the ice caps. As they shrink, there is less white mass to reflect the sun's heat from the Earth and so the planet heats further. These effects are called positive feedback loops. Scientists are worried that these loops will cause the planet to reach a tipping point where several systems combine to create runaway climate change that cannot be controlled.³

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that climate change poses a severe threat to water, food and land.⁴ It predicted the spread of disease; that millions will be affected by drought, famine and extreme weather; that there will be vast numbers of environmental refugees; and that the biggest impact will be on the poorest people on the planet. We will also lose an estimated one-third of all species by the end of the century.

Even if we stop putting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere today, it is too late to prevent the world warming. We are already feeling the effects of a changed climate, and events are accelerating even faster than scientists predicted.

THE SOLUTION: LEARN TO CHANGE

IPCC scientists agree that limiting global temperature rises to 1–2°C won't stop far-reaching and dramatic effects. However, life on Earth would still be possible, albeit with significant species and habitat loss. Higher temperatures of 4–5°C are likely to prompt much more extreme weather. Droughts, fires and floods will lead to serious food shortages and mass extinction, while rising sea levels will submerge cities like London, New York and Shanghai.

If we carry on with 'business as usual', we're heading for a 4–5°C rise. However, if we change our behaviour, we have a much better chance of limiting increases to 1–2°C. We just have to take on the challenge.

RESOURCES AT RISK

Unfortunately, climate change isn't the only problem the planet faces. Even climate sceptics can't deny we are living beyond the means of the Earth.

Historically, businesses have exploited resources to make profit. Any social or environmental fallout was deemed to be an unfortunate by-product. Some businesses tried to mitigate negative outcomes by engaging in philanthropy or corporate social responsibility programmes, but this tended to be a luxury that fell by the wayside when profits were under pressure.

Now, in the 21st century, as pressure on resources mounts, there is an increasing realisation that the Earth's balance sheet just doesn't add up.

The plunder for profit approach might work for a few more years, but it can't carry on indefinitely. Environments, resources, societies and species have been damaged or destroyed, and there may not be any way to replace them. This will leave businesses and people struggling to survive. With only one planet Earth, we need to start using our resources responsibly.

PEOPLE IN PERIL

A third problem is one of social justice. Access to the world's resources is not spread equally between nations, or between people within those nations. In fact, 20% of the population in developed nations consume 86% of the world's resources.⁵ The US, Japan, Germany, Canada, France, Italy and the UK – that's less than 12% of the world's population – consume 43% of fossil fuel production, 64% of paper and 55% of all aluminium, copper, lead, nickel and tin.⁶

Wealth is also unevenly distributed. The richest 20% of the world's population receive nearly 50 times the average income of the poorest 20%.⁷ At the same time, the *poorest* 20% of the population receive 1.5% of world income.⁸ That is less than \$1 a day. Almost half of the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day.⁹ The average American is 61 times richer than the average Tanzanian,¹⁰ and more than 850 million people, including one in three children under five, are in a vicious cycle of malnutrition.¹¹

Much of this injustice could be alleviated by changes in the way we do business. This includes ensuring that farmers and producers are paid a fair, living wage, and that responsibility is taken for products and processes to protect workers' rights and reduce or eliminate pollution that damages communities and ecosystems.

SUSTAINABILITY AS A SOLUTION

Sustainability addresses all these challenges, but what does 'sustainability' actually mean? To be sustainable, an action must be able to continue, or be sustained, indefinitely. For this to be possible, you have to consider the social, environmental and economic dimensions of every action (see Figure 1.1).

The *social dimension* means the human element of your actions, issues such as health, wellbeing and social expectations. The *environmental*

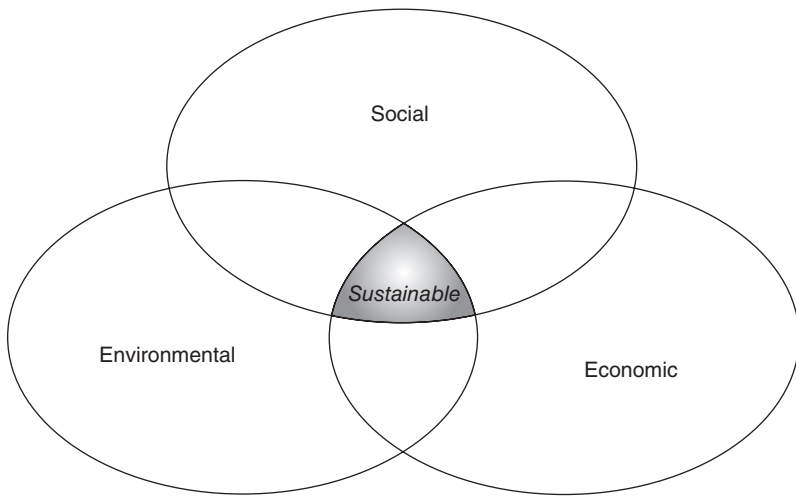


Figure 1.1. The three dimensions of sustainability

dimension means making sure your behaviour doesn't have a negative impact on the ability of natural resources and ecosystems to sustain themselves. The *economic dimension* means the technological and financial systems and issues that underpin most political and business thinking to ensure an action is financially viable in the long term.

People and organisations sometimes use the term 'sustainable' when a business activity is sustainable *in one area*, such as being financially sustainable, when the activity is not socially or environmentally sustainable. Using the term in this context is misleading because the three dimensions of sustainability are like the legs of a stool. Allow one to suffer and it will fall over. An action cannot continue indefinitely if the resources, finance or ability of people to perform that action are compromised by the process.

Similar Idea, Different Jargon

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the name often given to socially responsible thinking in business. It can also be called corporate citizenship, or corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSER).

Traditionally, CSR tended to focus more on social issues such as workers' rights or charitable activities, and was considered a discrete part of business that didn't impact on day-to-day operations. Although CSR and CSER are integral to sustainability, and are often used interchangeably with the term, their scope can be more limited.

CLIMB THE GREEN LADDER

The scale of the issues means it is easy to feel overwhelmed. However, you don't have to tackle them alone.

Changing attitudes and moving towards new ways of doing business takes time, patience and knowledge, but, with the right strategies and tools, you can shift your work and your company towards more sustainable practices. You may have already changed your lifestyle to reflect your concern about climate change, resource constraints and social injustice. By bringing those values to work, you can *Climb the Green Ladder* and work towards a brighter future.

Try adopting a *sustainability mindset*: an open, optimistic and practical mindset that incorporates the social, environmental and economic impacts into all of your thinking. This means seeing a bigger picture and taking your values to work each day. Just as you learned to speak the business language of budgeting and time management, so sustainability can become part of your, and your company's, everyday thinking.



A green revolution

'I'd been recycling at home, so I thought, "We should be doing this in the office!'" explains Mark Parker, commercial director the UK-based Aztec Event Services. The idea kick-started a green revolution that has revamped company practices and saved money too.

'I brought in an auditing company called Go Green which advises small businesses, like our 30-person company. Together, we worked out a strategy for things like switching from bottled water to chilled tap water and fitting a device to plugs so anything that's left on standby gets automatically turned off. Simple things like that helped us reduce our electricity consumption by 15% in just six months.

‘Our CO₂ footprint was calculated and we found the biggest carbon emitter was our fleet of vans. So we converted to biofuel straight away.

‘We also partnered with an advisor from Transport for London who helped us set up a travel plan. This included encouraging people to cycle more and putting speed limiters on the vans. This saves mileage and fuel, which cuts costs and ensures safer driving. We got 50% funding for laptops so we could work from home and be flexible. This improved everyone’s quality of life immensely, as it helped work fit in with family life. It’s a great example of the wider lifestyle benefits that sustainability can bring.

‘My colleagues embraced the ideas. It has taken time but, the more feedback we’ve given people, the more *they’ve* given back. In a year, we’ve reduced our carbon footprint by 20%, been nominated for the Go Green awards and been invited to communicate to other businesses how it can be done. It has also won us business and had a really positive response from local communities, industry and customers.’



DOING WELL WHILE DOING GOOD

Major businesses from Wal-Mart and Kraft to Hewlett Packard and Marks & Spencer have realised that embracing sustainability and taking a leadership role makes excellent business sense.

Increasing climate change regulation and customer expectations mean that being knowledgeable about these issues is crucial to survival. Meanwhile, scarce resources and new scenarios lead to new opportunities. However, you don’t have to take our word for it. Research by the Aberdeen Group found sustainability strategies reduce risk, increase brand loyalty and give companies a competitive advantage.¹² The survey of 4500 companies found that globalisation, increasing compliance requirements and supply cost pressures were driving companies towards improved sustainability and CSR. Key issues were the desire to be viewed as sustainability leaders; the rising cost of energy, supplies, material and transport; the search for competitive advantages and product differentiators; and growing pressure from customers.

Can sustainability really do all of these things? It can, and throughout *Climb the Green Ladder*, we’ll demonstrate exactly *how* it does, with examples from the people and companies who have seen these benefits in action.



Sustainable by design

The Hewlett Packard TouchSmart PC doesn't *look* green, with its sleek, touch-screen technology designed to tempt style-conscious consumers looking for cutting-edge gadgets. Yet because it was made with sustainability in mind, it's been designed to reduce PC energy use by up to 45%. It arrives in 100% recyclable packaging with more paper and less plastic foam for easier recycling and the machine itself uses 55% less metal and 37% less plastic than standard PCs and monitors.

Ken Bosley, the brand manager on the TouchSmart project, explains why adopting a sustainability mindset was crucial to the success of the project: 'By taking sustainability issues to heart, we were able to produce something that was a lot less material, and that used a lot less power and a lot less packaging. Each benefit just fed back into each other!'

The desire for a slender, sexy product increased consumer appeal. The reductions in material use, packaging materials and increased transport efficiencies proved good for the environment *and* the bottom line as costs were lower. Viewing the green goals as a team challenge meant that everyone was stimulated and motivated by the goal of creating a product with the greenest possible credentials.



STRENGTHENING THE BRAND

The brand reputation element of sustainability is vital for companies. A McKinsey survey found that 95% of CEOs said society now has higher expectations of business taking on public responsibilities than it did five years ago.¹³

Our own survey indicated that 9 out of 10 employees link brand reputation to environmental and social impacts.¹⁴ The negative press associated with poor corporate behaviour shows that mistreating workers and bad environmental management lead directly to reduced sales.

In a digital age with powerful nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and socially conscious consumers, companies are under increasing

scrutiny. Protecting their reputation is vital. Implementing strong sustainability and corporate responsibility policies is an effective way to do this.

‘The business and social environment is changing as climate concerns and resource constraints become more real to people,’ says Professor Tim Jackson of the University of Surrey. ‘There is much more pressure on organisations to take action. Organisations are also much more ready to make pledges because they feel the need to be *seen* to be doing something. This is a real force that individuals can harness to create change.’



Coffee beans and business opportunities

A good example of how sustainability helps companies to ‘do well while doing good’ is Kraft coffee and McDonalds. In 2003, Kraft started buying coffee beans from Rainforest Alliance certified farms. It now integrates millions of pounds of these beans into mass market brands such as Kenco (UK) and Yuban (US).

Kraft’s support accelerated a programme that brought 252,000 hectares under sustainable management practices and improved the lives of 1,260,000 farmers, workers and their families. The programme costs money, but it was shown to make good business sense when Kraft landed a major contract with McDonalds to sell certified sustainable coffee in outlets across Europe. It also increased sales and brand perception. Unit sales went up 15%, coffee sales went up 23% and 40% of customers said the Rainforest Alliance certification was important to them.

Kraft views sustainable coffee as an investment in brand equity and consumer loyalty because it helps assure the long-term consistency, quality and viability of its supplier farms.



ATTRACT AND KEEP TOP TALENT

Sustainability promotes employee engagement. Firms are facing such a strong demand for CSR from their employees that it has become a serious part of the competition for talent.¹⁵ Employers rank the biggest benefit

of CSR in the workplace as staff retention, followed by attracting talent and increasing motivation and engagement.

Many large companies say the business rationale for their CSR efforts is that they help to motivate, attract and retain staff. People want to work at a company whose values they share. Featuring in lists such as *The Sunday Times* Green List has become an important recruitment tool, as has appearing in sustainability indices such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and the FTSE4Good (see **Appendix 1: Who can help** for more details). These are crucial instruments for building reputation and trust with consumers and investors alike.

By providing the tools to make your organisation a force for good and by helping you to align company values with your own, *Climb the Green Ladder* will help you and your co-workers to feel engaged and involved.



Talent contest

Amy Hall, director of social consciousness at award-winning US ethical women's clothing company Eileen Fisher, believes strong values attract and retain staff: 'Our success demonstrates how strong principles strengthen employee engagement. We have over 800 employees, but we only have a 5.5% employee turnover rate, and we receive more than 10,000 resumés every year. We're certain this is a result of our value-driven stance.'



FUTURE-PROOF YOUR CAREER

Thinking sustainably is a smart career move. Helping your company save money, reduce environmental and social impacts, and gain a competitive edge, will help you meet targets and get promoted.

Being an innovator will raise your profile within the company and give you a reputation as a dynamic, creative achiever. It brings the positive attention of management and identifies you as a smart employee. The satisfaction of living your values and helping to make a difference will ramp up your motivation and make work more enjoyable (see box **Falling in love with work again**).



Falling in love with work again

‘Greening the mail and getting involved in sustainability has increased my passion for my job,’ says Lisa Landone, customer relations coordinator at the United States Postal Service (USPS). ‘Sometimes, if you do the same job for a long time, it becomes a job you do without purpose. But when you are able to take what is in your heart and find a way to bring it to your everyday work, people are more receptive and doors open to help you increase your passion. This makes life more fulfilling.’

Lisa didn’t work in sustainability, but she wanted to ensure the mailing community was engaged in the substantial green initiatives USPS had undertaken to reduce their impact. These included the use of soy inks on stamps, sustainable design on Priority Mail packaging and fleets that run partly on bio-diesel.

Lisa presented an idea to develop an employee and customer education programme to showcase USPS environmental initiatives. Management loved the idea and gave her the go-ahead. Now, thanks to Lisa and the Postal Customer Council, postal employees and business mailers across the US have been educated about USPS’s sustainable initiatives to help the mailing community ‘green’ its practices.

Originally concerned that her colleagues would see her as an environmental nut, Lisa found quite the opposite: ‘Management feels positively about my efforts because they recognise it as an important issue.’

Lisa is certain the initiative she demonstrated by thinking beyond her job title has increased her standing. It also led to a new role as a sustainability champion. She has now been asked to focus on sustainability issues and to investigate what the organisation can do to save energy, increase recycling and continue on its quest to be greener.



TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Business is facing a massive need to transform. Employees and executives must actively engage in the process. Those who believe the world will fix itself and that individuals play a small, insignificant role stand to be victims of our times rather than passionate leaders who can shape our shared future.

Gandhi said, ‘You have to be the change you want to see.’ Your power, energy, creativity, innovation and intelligence are powerful resources. If you *want* the change, you will find the solutions.

Your aim may be to achieve one small but meaningful act, such as getting fair trade coffee stocked in the office kitchen. You may want to transform your workplace more fundamentally, by reducing energy use across your supply chain or re-engineering your product to use more sustainable materials. However big or small your ambitions, the tools and strategies in *Climb the Green Ladder* will give you a comprehensive toolkit for action.

The solutions can be as individual as your thumbprint. There is no one ‘right’ way or formula for achieving sustainability, but what we have discovered is that all successful sustainability initiatives, however varied they may appear, are underpinned by the same themes.

We surveyed 430 people and interviewed over 80 experts, as well as inspirational people who had personally contributed to making their organisation more sustainable, from the inside out. During our research, almost everyone we interviewed, surveyed and encountered, and the literature we reviewed, returned to these same themes. We have distilled this knowledge and information into six themes:

- Get the mindset
- Make the business case
- Get your colleagues on side
- Have two-way conversations
- Work together
- Make it part of the culture.

Your influence may lead to the one lasting programme or idea that secures your company’s successful future. It can also play a vital part in

conserving the planet. Bringing your passions and beliefs into the office, and having the skills and knowledge to persuade your colleagues and management, can help elevate your status, advance your career and make you fall in love with your work.

So, are you ready to *Climb the Green Ladder*?