

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT...

Climate change

With the UN holding its summit on climate change from 2 December, leaders discuss what they're doing to protect the environment and ensure the sustainability of their businesses



NATSAI AUDREY CHIEZA
 Founder and director of Faber Futures (faberfutures.com),
 a biodesign studio and consultancy

Energy and transport tend to be the most commonly named and shared sectors as the biggest polluters in business. The fashion and textiles industry rarely gets a mention, yet it emits more CO₂ than the total produced by global air travel and shipping combined. Washing clothes is a

particular bite size, releasing 500,000 tonnes of microfibres into the ocean every year.

I've tried to address the problem by developing a biofabrication system for dyeing fabrics that uses natural dyes excreted by bacteria. It doesn't require synthetic chemicals and it uses 500 times less water than the

conventional process would consume. I've spent eight years on this, but I'm no scientist – I have an architecture degree.

The climate emergency requires radical solutions. If my story shows anything, it's that "cognitive diversity" – ie, hiring people with a variety of skills who think differently from you – is imperative. My company realised this when consulting firms in the biotech and fashion sectors. Collaborations between people who wouldn't normally interact can bring about real innovation and a mindset shift.

Too many firms are waiting for legislation to kick in – there are many such laggards in the fashion industry, for instance – but we all need a long-term innovation strategy. We're at a point where the climate crisis is starting to bite economically. Companies will soon start failing because of it.

Having said that, I am still optimistic. The latest generation of entrepreneurs have a visible sense of purpose in their work. They are embracing Silicon Valley's "move fast and break things" ethos in favour of rebuilding and rehabilitating.

It's not only about making materials less harmful to the environment. Firms should adopt an all-systems approach where sustainability touches all faces of the business model, from governance to growth strategies. Yes, it's a tough task, but it's not a restructuring. It's a state of mind and an investment strategy that will give any enterprise lasting resilience. natsai@audrey.co.uk

£42.6bn

The estimated annual turnover of the UK's low-carbon economy.

TARGET: NET ZERO

The environment is a hot topic, figuratively and literally. Green thinking, carbon footprint, biofuels, first in America and first use in plastic all hit the headlines in 2019. Businesses – biggest polluters – are key to hitting the goal set by the UK's Paris climate accord of hitting global warming to 1.5°C. Oxford, Nesta and Nesta have committed to net zero commitments by 2050 and UK firms will have to follow suit, given the stark commitment of the Climate Change Act 2009 to adopt the target of bringing all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. The results is expected to lower the number of "green-collar jobs" in the UK to two million.

The IOD has created an online hub packed with resources designed to help directors to support sustainable enterprises. Visit iod.com/sustainablebusiness to find out more.



ANGELA TERRY
 Founder of climate-action website One Home

'We need to battle the fear of hypocrisy'

Compared with the US and China, the UK has done well. In shutting coal-fired power stations and developing the world's largest offshore wind capacity, we've shown we can decarbonise and create jobs. Unilever, whose sustainable brands deliver three-quarters of the company's growth, has blown out of the water the idea that it's somehow a sacrifice for a business to go green.

Any firm that fails to adopt green tech such as electric cars will also fail to attract talent. I recently told an oil major that, back when I was a student, everyone wanted to work for it, but now millennials wouldn't touch it with a bargepole, as it's one of the bad guys.

We need to battle the fear of hypocrisy too. Business leaders have told me that they can't discuss climate change because they fly spare parts in from China. We all burn fossil fuels. If we all waited to be perfect, nothing would ever get done.

As a leader, you have all the power you need. Get boards involved. Set goals. Integrate them in performance reviews. Shell, for instance, is linking bonuses to carbon-reduction targets. If Shell can do that, anyone can. onehome.org.uk

• Angela Terry is a member of IoD South West



SHAUN MCCARTHY
 Co-founder and director of Action Sustainability

It was hard for me not to smirk when Ryanair recently declared itself the EU airline delivering the lowest CO₂ per passenger mile. After all, this is a company whose CEO once said: "The best thing to do with environmentalists is shoot them." It's clear that climate change is finally on the corporate agenda when even Ryanair can see marketing value in claiming to be "green".

There has to be a visible commitment to science-based targets from the top of your business. This needs to be

'There has to be a commitment from the top'

expressed whenever you talk with shareholders, customers and your team.

Equipping your firm with the right skills for a carbon-neutral future is also vital. Thousands of companies of charge with the Supply Chain Sustainability School that I chair, for instance.

Furthermore, what is it about using less energy that's going to cost you more? The sooner that firms get on the net-zero bus, the better. If you don't take climate change seriously now, you won't be in business for much longer. actionsustainability.com

• Shaun McCarthy OBE is a member of IoD South



DAVID ALPERT
 Co-founder and MD, the International Institute for Anti-Ageing (Iiaa)

'Business needs to put pressure on government'

Last summer I was 10 degrees from the North Pole. It's one of the most remote places in the world, yet the Arctic waterline was full of plastic – some from my own industry, cosmetics. It was a frightening sign that we have so little time to change things before it's too late.

At Iiaa we're passionate about seeking green solutions. In our bid to go plastic-free, we package products in cardboard cylinders or biodegradable pots. By 2022 all 60 cars in our fleet will be electric.

But even though adopting a green business model could offer a competitive edge, many firms will remain wasteful until the law makes it too costly and uncomfortable. Governments therefore need to drive change. The UK's plan to end the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2040 is a brilliant example of the opportunities: it will force car makers to switch to electric; the firm that gets the contract to supply Uber with electric cars will really clean up.

If the UK can lead the world in the creative industries, it could be a post-Brexit centre of excellence for green enterprise too. Business just needs to put pressure on government to achieve it. iiaa.eu

• David Alpert is a member of IoD London



CHRIS BIRCH
 Director of sustainability, Hilsom Moran

It was a no-brainer for us to get our office in Manchester certified under the Well standard – a measure of how a building can benefit its occupants' wellbeing. It has improved staff retention and helped us to win business too.

Should other firms adopt similar sustainability measures? I don't think they'll have a choice in the long term – half of the UK's local authorities have declared climate emergencies and will soon start to push companies to act. Those that comply quickly will be offered

'Sustainability isn't just a "nice to have"'

incentives such as grants for adopting green tech and practices. But, as we get closer to 2050, there'll be fewer carrots and more sticks.

Procurement functions will also become increasingly demanding of suppliers. If you're supplying a supermarket chain, for instance, you'll probably soon have to make declarations on sustainability as a result of your customer's zero-carbon commitments.

The recent statement by the Bank of England's governor, Mark Carney, that firms ignoring the climate crisis will be driven out of business is largely true. Sustainability isn't just a "nice to have"; it's going to be a legal requirement. hilsomoran.com