

Gimme some green

1 Warmer

a. Briefly discuss these questions. Give reasons for your answers.

- What are companies doing to work towards sustainability?
- What changes are needed in markets to really help protect the environment? Think about the following industries:
 - Housing
 - Food / Agriculture
 - Transportation
 - Fashion

2 Key words

a. Choose the key words that match the definitions. Check your answers and your understanding of how the words are used by using them to complete the example sentence immediately after each definition. Then read the complete article to see how the key words are used in context.

backtrack menace minority pledge status quo tipping point
drivers lobby overdue regulation strident upend

1. late, not done when needed

I have worked for the same salary for three years. I feel a raise is long

_____.

2. the point in time when a change or effect cannot be prevented

In terms of global warming, we have already reached the _____.

3. something that can cause harm

Industrial pollution is a(n) _____ to public health.

4. to affect something radically drastically

The results of the study completely _____ the traditional understanding we have of how we are affected by our natural environment.

5. the present condition

Our mission is to challenge _____ and question how things are being done.

6. a formal promise, especially one to give money

He gave a(n) _____ of 10,000 US dollars to their campaign.

7. to try to persuade the government or another official group that something should or should not happen or should be changed

Small businesses want to _____ for tax cuts.

8. to withdraw or stop supporting something, or to say that you did not mean something you said

Regretfully, the company want to _____ on their promise to reduce carbon emissions.

9. forceful or expressed in a way that does not try to avoid upsetting people

She has always been a(n) _____ defender of the environment.

10. something that makes other things develop or grow stronger

Inflation is one of the biggest _____ of markets.

11. the act of controlling something

There are pros and cons to government _____, but I am still in favour of a free market.

12. a smaller part or number

Only a(n) _____ of people do not view climate change as a threat.

Companies are finally reforming their sustainability policies

AN OVERDUE PUSH TO RESHAPE MARKETS, NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL COMPANIES, IS UNDER WAY AT LAST

PILITA CLARK

- 1 Is corporate sustainability as we know it finally over? Are traditional green business strategies failing to the point that they are doing more harm than good?
- 2 Perhaps not entirely. But the growing number of sustainable business leaders calling for a rethink of these measures suggests a tipping point is at hand.
- 3 For those of us who have never thought it likely that businesses and the markets that shape them would be enough to fix the gathering menace of climate change, this realisation is overdue.
- 4 But it's not trivial. There may not be enough time to upend capitalism but there is plenty of time for companies to push for markets to be reformed in ways that drive faster climate action.
- 5 So it has been a relief to see a rising recognition that the status quo is not working.
- 6 Or as Lindsay Hooper and Paul Gilding from the venerable Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership put it in a paper this month, "it is time we questioned the founding ideas and dominant approaches in the corporate sustainability movement".
- 7 The Cambridge university-based institute is a prominent voice in corporate greenery, thanks in part to the backing it has had for most of its 36-year history from its royal conservationist patron, King Charles III.
- 8 But as Hooper and Gilding point out, despite years of green corporate pledges, and mushrooming clean tech investments, "the sustainability crisis is deepening".
- 9 Worse, businesses and their sustainability advisers may be adding to the problem by giving a false impression of progress that is delaying "required radical changes to markets and the policies that frame them".
- 10 The pair say companies should go beyond setting targets for cutting their own carbon footprints and start lobbying for sweeping, long-term rules that reshape entire markets.
- 11 For a start, this approach should lower the competitive risks that green business pioneers often face.
- 12 Another big advantage has been laid bare this year by the slew of green corporate U-turns, from Shell's weakening of climate targets to Volvo's delayed deadline for selling only fully electric cars.
- 13 Such backtracking underlines the fact that sustainability measures are still often seen as discretionary moves, taken by personally committed leaders and easily undone when times are tough.
- 14 As another sustainability veteran, John Elkington, wrote last month: "We must become less dependent on the goodwill and good citizenship of individual business leaders, both of which can be fragile foundations for sustained commitment."
- 15 Elkington knows of what he speaks. He coined corporate sustainability ideas such as "triple bottom line" reporting to measure social and environmental, as well as financial, performance. But as he wrote last month, sustainability can no longer be only about transforming businesses. "Increasingly, too, it must be about transforming markets."
- 16 A more strident case for the perils of relying on green-minded leaders has come from Jonathon Porritt, a sustainability campaigner who has spent years advising large companies, including Unilever.
- 17 The consumer goods giant has dismayed green activists by rolling back targets on measures such as plastic use and recycling following last year's appointment of a new CEO, Hein Schumacher.

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- 18 His approach marks a sharp break with that of former Unilever bosses like Paul Polman, who memorably told investors who didn't approve of his sustainability efforts "don't put your money in our company".
- 19 For Porritt, "Unilever's fall from grace reveals the deep flaws in that whole concept of corporate sustainability as a primary driver of more sustainable ways of creating and distributing wealth."
- 20 So will much change? Maybe. Talk of the need for greater regulation was in the air at last week's New York Climate Week, as it would be.
- 21 Jes Munk Hansen, chief executive of the Danish insulation maker, Rockwool, told one event that regulators could slash the sizeable carbon emissions from buildings by setting tougher standards.
- 22 Government rules had helped to drive the shift away from incandescent light bulbs to more energy efficient lights, said Hansen, a former executive at the Osram lighting group.
- 23 As he told me later, "It would help the green transition greatly if building regulators used more tools such as higher energy efficiency standards."
- 24 He is right. Regulators and governments could do more, and some firms are pushing them to do so. But these companies are still in a minority. A lot more must join them if corporate sustainability is ever going to create a more sustainable world.

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Pilita Clark, 28 September, 2024.

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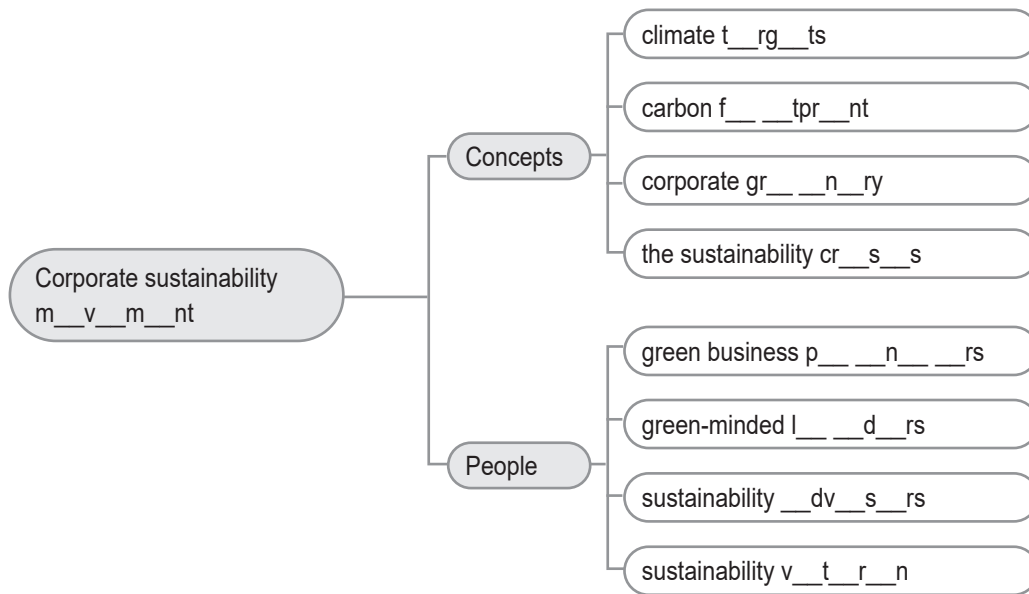
3 Understanding the article

a. Are the statements True or False according to the information in the article? Correct and rewrite any that are false.

1. The writer thinks the best solution for this crisis is to overthrow the current capitalist system.
2. Lindsay Hooper and Paul Gilding feel that the corporate world has really been questioning the dominant sustainability approaches.
3. Hooper and Gilding say that some businesses are making the problem worse by giving a false impression of progress.
4. What Hooper and Gilding think we really need are long-term rules that completely reshape entire markets and lower competitive risks for green business pioneers.
5. Both Shell and Volvo have recently backtracked on sustainability targets.
6. John Elkington believes that if real change can't come from systems, it must come from individuals.
7. Triple bottom line reporting refers to measuring social and environmental, as well as financial, performance.
8. A new CEO at Unilever has delivered greener results and has met plastic use and recycling targets.
9. Paul Polman, former Unilever boss, was famous for his sustainability efforts and wasn't out to please investors.
10. Jes Munk believes that it would not be fair to set tougher standards.

4 Business language – sustainability

- a. Write vowels to complete the phrases from the article. Then find and circle them in the article to check your answers.



- b. Complete the sentences with phrases from task a.

- The _____ is several decades old. We have several _____ to thank. For example, Sir David Attenborough who has been a strong voice for conservation.
- The idea of using a(n) _____ to measure the amount of greenhouse gases generated by individuals was developed by the advertising firm Ogilvy & Mather, who were working for BP.
- _____ are people who make business decisions that consider the wider environment we live in.
- One example of _____ is sustainable product design.
- _____ help their clients to become more socially and environmentally responsible in their operations.
- Both governments and businesses need to set ambitious _____ in order to respond to the _____.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Do you agree that businesses are making the problem worse by pretending to be greener than they really are? Why?
- Should regulators and governments have stronger regulations, so companies do more? What regulations would you like to see implemented first?
- Can consumers influence companies to become greener? How?

6 Wider business theme – greenwashing

a. Work through the steps of this task with a partner. You will then present your ideas and product suggestions to the rest of the group.

1. Read the tips about recognising greenwashing and discuss them with a partner. Try to think of any examples you can name for each tip.

Three tips: how to spot greenwashing

Greenwashing refers to the actions or activities that make people believe a business is doing more to protect the environment than it really is. Here are some tips on how to spot this kind of trickery.

Tip 1. Vague words and phrases like *sustainable*, *green*, *natural*, or *eco-friendly* could mean many different things. For example, natural doesn't always mean good. Several natural substances are very toxic to living things! Make sure to research and look into the details of these claims to find evidence that supports them.

Tip 2. Green imagery can give us the false impression that something is environmentally friendly. Even just using earth colours like brown, green and blue can deceive consumers. Once again, research is needed to determine if this is a true image of the company or just a marketing ploy.

Tip 3. Companies that don't provide information or proof of their green efforts on their labels or websites are most likely not that green. Expect full transparency. Third-party certification is the best way to know a company's level of actual environmental responsibility.

2. Choose an organisation that works in one of the following industries:

- Housing
- Food / Agriculture
- Transportation
- Fashion

3. Follow the tips to evaluate their level of corporate sustainability. Look for evidence on their website or product labels. Note down examples.
4. Report your findings.

Extension

Explore a sustainability certification (like LEED, B Corporation, Fair Trade, Green Seal, etc.).

Do you think certifications like these should be required to hold companies responsible?