

11.3_C

Part 3

Turning now to the effect of environmental issues on business ... of course, a major concern is the problem of global warming.^[1] If it's as serious as some people think, then it is likely to have a great many implications for business. So how serious a problem is it?

First of all, there is no question that the Earth is heating up. Average temperatures are rising, the polar ice caps are melting, the habitats of wildlife are changing and so on. But the question is: is global warming the result of human activity? There are those who claim that it is nothing to do with humankind; it's the result of natural phenomena such as sunspots or volcano activity. But I'm afraid that just isn't true. It's quite clear that global warming has been the direct result of human activity since the Industrial Revolution. Most of the research has concluded that it's the burning of fossil fuels that is the principal cause. The evidence for this lies in the fact that burning fossil fuels gives off carbon dioxide and there is a clear, positive correlation between the increase in the presence of CO₂ in the atmosphere and the rise in the Earth's temperature. And industrial emissions of CO₂ have played a major part in the CO₂ increase. All of this information can be read in the IPCC's special report in 2018 (I'll give you the reference later if you're interested). So, although companies may find it difficult to take action, in my view, if business is part of the cause, then business should be a part of the solution to climate change.^[2] Business must play a key role in trying to improve a dangerous situation – dangerous for the entire human race.

What's more, there are other threats to the environment from aspects such as air and plastic pollution, waste and so on, many of which are the direct results of business activities. As everyone is aware, emissions from industry are often toxic and can damage both human and animal health, as well as the environment generally. Waste disposal is becoming an evermore serious problem, especially plastic waste.^[3] The amount of plastic in the sea and the air is a serious worry. Attitudes to waste need to change radically.

When we look at environmental concerns such as these, the question is: how are we going to manage these problems? What strategies need to be put into place to help control CO₂ emissions, pollution and waste disposal? To some degree, as I've said, business must take some responsibility for what is happening and must do something about it. This means ultimately that business is likely to bear many of the costs of the changes that are necessary.^[4]

On the other hand, rather than being a threat, perhaps we should think about whether environmental issues actually offer business something positive, too. Can business actually benefit from the steps which will be needed? We could argue that possible environmental solutions offer many business opportunities. For example, environment consultants can use their knowledge to advise companies; companies can develop environmental initiatives which appeal to consumers and boost sales; some measures, such as recycling, may actually result in lower business costs and so on.^[5]

Now I'm going to set you a task which will involve investigating some of the points I've raised. I want you to do some research into whether business might be able to benefit from the changes which are going to be necessary with respect to the environmental issues I've mentioned, that is, global warming, plastic pollution and waste disposal. I want you to focus, firstly, on some of the new plans, methods and technologies for dealing with environmental problems. Then I'd like you to think about whether these methods and plans to save the environment represent opportunities for business or whether they will mainly affect business in a negative way, that is, act as threats.^[6]