



Michael Townsend

I don't know about you, but I find it depressingly frustrating when I open the cupboard, pull out a packet, use the contents, then go through my now automatic thought process of deciding what to do with the residual packaging; wondering if I can reuse or recycle it, only to find that overused label 'Sorry, not yet recyclable' staring right back at me. Surely, with all the great work, materials and technologies out there, I muse, all this stuff should be recyclable by now, shouldn't it? OK, so this is a minor personal frustration, but it is perhaps also indicative of the wider issues we are experiencing, as we make our fitful transition towards becoming a more sustainable world.

Progress towards the low carbon economy is too slow, the CBI tells us. The ongoing programme of UN climate change talks appears to deliver very little in the way of firm and absolute agreements for action. Then there is the obvious gulf between rhetoric and reality with the policies and strategies emerging from the coalition Government in UK. (Did you see the recently published new 'vision' for mainstreaming sustainable development? I thought I had got hold of the wrong document to start with. I digress slightly.)

These experiences all serve to raise some fundamental questions: Are we going far enough, are we going fast enough, do we really mean it? And yet, as we all know, there are beacons of light out there, some innovative businesses doing great work, each year improving their sustainability impacts and delivering great business results as well. But there are still many companies operating in business-as-usual mode. And even the most proactive of companies will not necessarily have all the bases covered yet; they will have areas for improvement as well as

Is the transition towards more sustainable business going far, and fast, enough?

impressive strengths. So, how far have we really come; how far have we got to go?

The Global Research Project has so far provided some fascinating insights into a range of practices and innovations where businesses have embraced sustainability principles to good effect. It is heartening to see companies drastically reduce waste, energy and carbon, deliver up to 40% reduction in operational costs and, in some cases, remodel their businesses to align with the principles of a circular economy. And there is more to come in the next few months with the North American case studies now under way.

While the detailed case study approach provides useful learning within the narrow context of each specific company we look at, we also need to get a better understanding of the overall topography of the sustainable business landscape; we need to look wide as well as deep in formulating our picture of the transition towards sustainable business practice. We are therefore instigating a major global survey of integrated sustainable business, to evaluate what is happening, the priorities and issues affecting businesses and to help organisations develop an understanding of how far they have already come and where they could go next on their journey towards becoming more sustainable.

Do we need another survey? On one level, perhaps not; there are already a number of surveys out there, each providing something useful for companies engaging with the sustainability agenda. But there is an opportunity to go further, to move beyond high-level views and perceptions, to engage with a more holistic sustainable business agenda, digging deeper into the busi-

ness case, the real issues and challenges involved, based on objective assessments of achievement and practice, benchmarked against robust models for what 'good' could look like in absolute terms.

In short we have developed a survey to deliver comprehensive data and learning based on a robust framework for integrated sustainable business.

The survey will be undertaken in businesses across several countries during the next few months and will be conducted in association with our project partners to maximise our reach and uptake.

If your organisation is interested in taking part, email survey@earthshinesolutions.com. All submissions will be made online and will be treated in strictest confidence. Participants will of course receive a free copy of the survey report, in recognition of their valuable support.

We hope you will join us and help develop a comprehensive evaluation of where we are and just how far we have got to go.

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Best practice: recyclable packaging

