

Climate Change & Sustainability, What can be done?

Lessons from the corporate world



Ezrah Schraven is the global sustainability consultant for a company called FUGRO which is a geo-technical engineering firm. They map the surface of our planet and are the industry leaders in their field.

Introduction

My goal of this talk today is twofold:

- 1) to bring across what is at the heart of the matter, when we are discussing climate change,
- 2) to share with you a pragmatic / practical approach that can be used to implement action or support communities in making a change.

1. The heart of the matter #1

Everything discussed in this presentation relates to the global crisis of climate change and its impact. It is often quite difficult to imagine what the impact of a global crisis might be. When we talk about climate change, this can be a pretty abstract concept. It can be difficult to understand just how big and impactful this crisis is that is unfolding.



<https://facte.ru/nature/kak-obrazuetsya-tsunami>

In this photo you see a small wave, it represents Covid-19 and its impact. Everybody on this call has been affected by Covid-19.

Pandemics have often been discussed, but now that we are experiencing one, we come to find out what the meaning of a global pandemic truly is. But, behind the small wave you see a much, much larger wave coming towards us. This wave represents the size and impact of Climate Change. Climate change will have a profound impact on every living thing on this planet. It is much, much bigger than Covid-19. This is why you hear more and more people talk about it. Climate Change is the biggest environmental crisis this planet has seen in modern history. Climate change is happening because of the CO₂ that we emit into the air when we drive a car, fly, when we consume electricity or burn our stove. CO₂ is emitted into the air when products are produced, and goods are being transported. The impact will be more and more visible every year going forward, and science can give us insight in where this is going.⁶

Behind the climate change wave you see another swell emerging. One that represents the loss of biodiversity. When you hear about species disappearing, you are hearing about the biodiversity crisis. This is caused by human activities, climate change, pesticides, overfishing, etc. The impact of loss of biodiversity on the wellbeing of the planet and humankind is expected to be profound. To refer back to the last presentation by Rich Gomez; it is in diversity that you find sustainability.

To stop climate change, and the loss of biodiversity, our behavior and our way of life

⁶ For more information see IPCC (international Panel for Climate Change): <https://www.ipcc.ch>

need to change. Therefore, the key message of this presentation is: Earth is not here for us to consume. Nature is not a consumption product, we are an integral part of it. We can live on our planet and exist by the grace of a delicate balance. It is crucial that humankind comes to this understanding, so that we may change the way we treat our planet.

This can be challenging! You will find that often people seek to fulfill their short-term needs. Long term consequences often come second in decision making, especially if consequences are not immediate or direct (however gruesome these may be) An additional challenge is that the magnitude of the concept of climate change can be quite overwhelming, to the point where it leaves you feeling powerless. When you realize the impact it has, you simply don't know what you could possibly do to change it. We will talk more about that later.

In this presentation I will share with you some practical but crucial handles the business is using. Hopefully these same handles can provide insights or support to our audience today as well.

What can we do?

Climate change and the loss of biodiversity seem so big in impact that it is difficult to imagine how one person can make a change. It can be a little overwhelming. These steps will help you get a grip on what every person and community is doing, the role they play and how they can play their part in mitigating climate change.

- Awareness of climate change & environment
- Self-reflection (responsibility)
- Personal impact assessment (what is my impact)
- What can I do? (mitigation of your impact)
- Control & monitoring (double check whether your intervention is working, and improve where possible)
- Transparency & disclosure – because this creates accountability and credibility. You need both accountability and credibility so you can help others.

- Supportive engagement with stakeholders (No one has all the answers. Everyone is searching, go search together, help each other out)

These steps can be used by organisations, corporations, individuals, communities – to identify their part, their responsibility and to make a change.

Everybody has a part to play



<https://www.montessorivices.com/earth-puzzle>

Everybody on the planet has a part to play. Everybody carries responsibility. I will talk about corporations today, and how they are approaching the challenge of climate

change. But in this presentation you will come across governments, law makers, non-governmental organizations, science and scientists as well.

2. A bit of history

Climate Change is on the news a lot, and in conversation. It seems almost like a recent thing! But that is not the case. Climate Change has been ignored and neglected for far too long by the large audience. It shows you how LATE we are, in acting on this, how important it is that this is addressed.

1890s - Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius and the American scientist P. C. Chamberlain independently consider the problems that might be caused by CO₂ building up in the atmosphere. Both scientists realize that the burning of fossil fuels could lead to global warming, but neither suspects the process might already have begun.

1988 - The *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) is set up. It is a scientific and intergovernmental body under the United Nations, providing the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of knowledge regarding climate change and its potential environmental and socio-economic impacts.

1990 - The IPCC produces its first assessment report. In its first assessment report the IPCC concludes that humanity's emissions are adding to the atmosphere's natural component of greenhouse gases. It underlines the importance of climate change as a challenge requiring international cooperation to tackle its consequences. The report therefore plays a decisive role in paving the way for the creation of the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC).
2014 - The IPCC's fifth assessment report is released. The report provides an overview of the state of knowledge concerning the science of climate change. The report refers to the "clear and growing" human influence on the climate, warning that if left unchecked, climate change will increase the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impact on people and ecosystems.⁷



<https://www.offshorewind.biz/2020/12/08/fugro-hits-ijmuiden-ver-trifecta/>

3. Where are we now?

I will spend a little more time on these last few points. Because these points are directly resulting into changes that will impact people in your communities.

December 2015 - *Paris Agreement* is adopted: The *Paris Agreement* on fighting climate change is the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. The objective of the agreement is to maintain the increase in global temperatures well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, whilst

⁷ Source: Interactive timeline: a guide to climate change negotiations | European Parliament (europa.eu); Shell and Exxon's secret 1980s climate change warnings | Climate change | *The Guardian*

making efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees.

12 December 2019 - EU to become climate neutral by 2050: EU leaders agree to make the EU climate neutral by 2050 during a European Council meeting in Brussels.

7 October 2020 - *European Climate Law*:

The European Parliament approves the Climate Law to make the EU and all member states climate neutral by 2050. It sets a more ambitious 2030 emissions reduction target to 60%.⁸ This means, that companies like the one I work for, have to become climate neutral by 2050 if they want to exist and do business in Europe. But this is also true for cities and countries. It means that we have to change the way we do business, deliver services, heat our buildings, the way we produce our food and transport ourselves.

4. Together towards a more sustainable future

For a business the first question is – ok we need to change. But what, and how? And how much? To figure what we needed to change, and how, and how much – we took the following steps:

1. The first step was awareness. Everyone in the organization (especially management) needs to be aware of Climate Change, on the cause of climate change, the impact it has and will have on the planet.
2. Once we are aware of Climate Change, we need to self-reflect and recognize that we have a responsibility, and therefore we have an active role to play.
3. In order to take responsibility for your part, you need to understand what your part, in this case your footprint, looks like. We assessed what our impact is. By for example measuring our CO₂ footprint, but also the waste we generate, the plastics we use, our impact on biodiversity. We found out that 80% of our

⁸ Source: [Interactive timeline: a guide to climate change negotiations | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](https://www.npr.org/2021/04/22/988051091/biden-makes-new-pledge-for-u-s-greenhouse-gas-emissions-a-50-cut?t=1620053174749); <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/22/988051091/biden-makes-new-pledge-for-u-s-greenhouse-gas-emissions-a-50-cut?t=1620053174749>

CO2 emissions are generated by our vessel fleet.

4. Now that we know what our impact is, and which actions have the biggest footprint, we are able to make a plan to reduce that impact.

5. We set targets and we monitor whether our interventions and changes indeed reduce our footprint. And if not, we adjust them until they do.

6. We are transparent about the measurements, the numbers and disclose these. This creates accountability and credibility. AND very important: this transparency allows for other to help us, and it allows us to help others.

7. The last step, but not the least – is supportive engagement with stakeholders. Because no one on the planet has all the answers. We are all searching – and we need to hold each-others hand, and figure this out together.

These steps allowed us to measure. Measuring your impact is incredibly important, because it allows you to set targets and assess whether you are making improvements, and it allows you to help others. This year FUGRO has set itself a target to be Net Zero CO2 emissions for 2035. That means, that as a company we are putting everything in place to be fully functioning in 2035 whilst bringing down our CO2 emission as close to zero as possible. And we want to be transparent about our progress. Therefore FUGRO reports its CO2 emissions through a *Customer Data Platform* (CDP).



<https://imgur.com/zifiR>

Pushing corporations

- As a corporation we receive questions from our clients, shareholders, financial investors, legislators and rating agencies.
- These questions trigger action: it triggers self-analysis, research about impact, mitigation and best practice.
- All these pushes motivate a corporation to answer these questions. And in the case of climate change, that means that many corporations may have to reinvent themselves.

These are for-profit businesses that analyze the sustainability performance of corporations. That means they access every bit of information they can find about a company (from the annual report, to news items and court files) – and use this information to make an assessment on two things: transparency and sustainability. They will check whether a company monitors its CO2 emissions, whether the measurements are externally audited, whether they are aware of their impact on biodiversity, what programs they have in place to safeguard human rights, whether there have been any controversies, court cases or news reports on ill behavior, etc.

The rating agencies then create a sustainability ranking and sell this data to financial investors, who rely on this data for their decision making. The profitability of the rating agencies is directly tied to the reliability of their data. Therefore the accuracy of the ranking is their product, and thoroughness / accuracy is their goal.

Every company on the stock market is rated by these benchmarks, whether they like it or not. The place they get on this ranking ultimately impacts their ability to do business and thus it impacts their profitability. Therefore the ranking agencies (unintentionally) motivate businesses to become more sustainable. If a business is proactive, it will pay attention to these rankings and use it as an assessment pointing out the areas in which they need to improve their performance.

A global structure is emerging

That sounds easier than it is! How is one supposed to figure out one's CO2 footprint or climate-change-risk-profile? And how is one supposed to know whether the changes implemented are making a difference?

There is help; a global structure is emerging. This structure is shaped by initiatives, which are created by, for example, the UN and Non-Governmental Organizations. These initiatives create definitions, structure, check and balances. These have become and are becoming a standard, safeguarding quality and accuracy of information. This system is all about transparency and accountability.

Companies actively have to approach these organisations to be rated and have their performance analysed or accredited. And although it is voluntary, more and more companies receive questions on their performance (by clients, for example), forcing them to go through and embrace this trajectory in order to stay in business!!

These organisations are strict, thorough and unforgiving. And that helps the corporations in their learning curve. It ensures high quality and accuracy of the data reported and disclosed. The result of engaging with these organisations is that your corporation becomes more transparent and that it understands its own weaknesses and strengths. Once you know your weaknesses and strengths you can improve. These initiatives like CDP, TCFD and SBTi therefore drive constructive improvement. A corporation, a city or government can approach these initiatives if they seek transparency & disclosure.

You can:

- Report your CO2 emissions through CDP, formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project, is a not-for-profit charity that runs the global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states and regions to manage their environmental impacts. Over the past 20 years CDP has created a system that has resulted in unparalleled engagement on environmental issues worldwide.

- Have your targets approved by the SBTi, Science Based Target initiative. The SBTi is a partnership between CDP, the United Nations Global Compact, World Resources Institute (WRI) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The SBTi call to action is one of the We Mean Business Coalition commitments. Find out more on sciencebasedtargets.org

- Approach TCFD (Task Force on Climate Related Financial Disclosures) to proof your risk analysis, etc. TCFD is engaged in helping companies implement the recommendations and promoting advancements in the availability and quality of climate-related disclosure.

- Understand how you contribute to or impact sustainable development, by learning more about the sustainable development goals.⁹ Going through these initiatives is a lot of work for corporations. But ultimately it helps you fully understand your business and its impact, and it allows you to improve. It is quite eye-opening to go through these thorough processes.

How?

Corporations, for better or for worse, chase their goals. The main goal is usually profitability. Due to the initiatives mentioned in the previous two slides, profitability is becoming tied in more and more closely with sustainability.

Achieving profitability, for a company like the one I work for, thus means achieving sustainability. Sustainability is no longer optional, due to everything mentioned in slide 8, 10 and 11. Sustainability is quickly becoming fundamental for many businesses to be profitable.

Corporations need to be pragmatic and practical to succeed. The corporate world is challenged, along with everyone else, to tackle climate change and minimize their impact. These are the steps corporations take, to identify impact, make a plan to reduce impact and ensure result.

⁹ For more information: sdgs.un.org/goals

These same steps may prove useful to individuals, communities, organisations or corporations to make improvements.

5. The heart of the matter #2

That brings us back to the heart of the matter. And hopefully this message resonates with you more now than it did at the start of the presentation.

Planet earth is not here for us to consume. Nature is not a consumption product, we are an integral part of it, we can live on this planet by the grace of a delicate balance. Individuals seek to fulfill their needs, consequences often come second in their decision making, especially if consequences are not immediate or direct (however gruesome these may be)

Everybody has a part to play.

We've touched on corporations, on governments, lawmakers, NGO's, international organizations, science and scientists.

There is an important role for religion, for religious and spiritual leaders and public figures:

You inspire, you guide, you help and support communities and individuals.

You have a stage which allows you to encourage and support change.

You are in a very important position when it comes to fighting climate change.



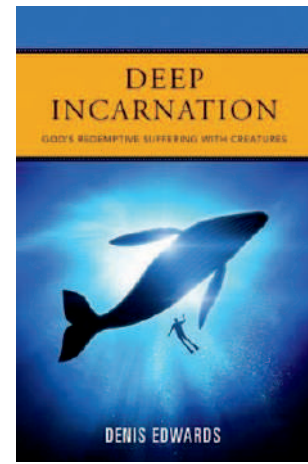
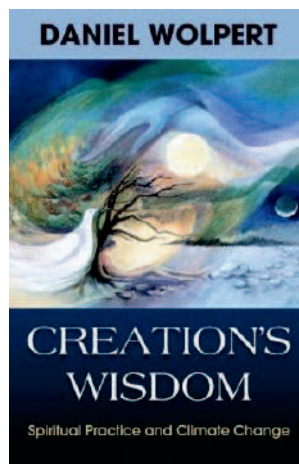
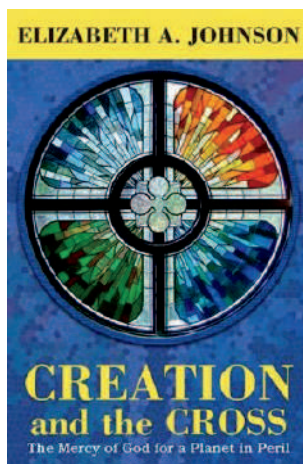
What can we do?

Hopefully the following points can be of use to you, or your community, the way it is to us in our path of change.

- Awareness of climate change & environment
- Self-reflection (responsibility)
- Personal impact assessment (what is my impact)
- What can I do? (mitigation of your impact)
- Control & monitoring (double check whether your intervention is working, and improve where possible)
- Transparency & disclosure – because this creates accountability and credibility. You need both accountability and credibility so you can help others.
- Supportive engagement with stakeholders (No one has all the answers. Everyone is searching, go search together, help each other out)

Climate change is too big for anyone to tackle on one's own. Industry, NGO's, IO's, religious leaders, and communities, all need to help each other.

We need to do this together.



(Books received from ORBIS BOOKS)