

# Sustainability as Good Business Practice

**SUBMITTED BY:** Knowledge@Wharton Summer Educator

**SUBJECT(S):** Management

**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 9, 10, 11, 12

## ☰ OVERVIEW:

In today's world, business and industry are becoming more conscientious about the production of goods and services. In this lesson, students will learn about sustainability as a common symbol of good business practice. Students will also explore why and how the business world has come to embrace this focus, and think about how the general public looks at this issue, as well as discuss how entrepreneurs are addressing the issue of sustainability. This topic further demonstrates that business practices are fundamentally rooted in values and beliefs.

## ☰ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, V. Ethics And Social Responsibility

## ☰ RELATED ARTICLES:

- “The Role of Business in ‘the Biggest Issue We Face as a Planet’”
- “The Global Climate Strike and How Business Is Responding in the Face of Activism”
- “Fashionista Environmentalists Shop ‘Recommerce’ Instead of the Mall”
- “Exploring the Balance Between Business and the Environment”
- “Educator Toolkit: Sustainability and Recommerce”
- “Climate Change Causes a Crisis in the Coffee Market”
- “Catching Up with Plastic-Straw Crusader Milo Cress”

**Common Core Standard(s):**

- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Determine a central idea of a text and provide an objective summary of the text
- CCR Standard for Reading Informational Text: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text
- CCR Standard for Writing: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

**Objectives/Purposes:**

- Students will understand the term sustainability and be able to use it correctly.
- Students will understand why sustainability has become an important element in doing good business.
- Students will be able to analyze business processes that threaten or respect sustainability.
- Students will understand that a connection exists between business practices and social values, whether they are possessed by the leaders themselves or the general public who can hold companies accountable.

**Other Resources/Materials:**

- Internet access
- Projector system
- Use KWL Chart Here: [Handout](#)
- YouTube Sustainability video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5NiTN0chj0>
- Wikipedia on Sustainability: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability>
- Knowledge@Wharton Article (a good way to give a historic perspective of then and now; this was the thinking at the start of the 2010 decade) “Fashion or Strategy? Why Firms Are Jumping on the Sustainability Bandwagon”

**Activities:**

- 1) Begin by giving every student a KWL chart to map the development of their understanding of the term “sustainability.” (*5 mins*)
  - You might want to explain the purpose of the KWL chart if your students are unfamiliar with it. Basically, the chart captures what the students think they know about a concept in the first column (K column), and progresses to capturing the questions students have about the subject prior to engaging in the learning phase (W column). After the instructional activity, students record what they have learned in the L column. This information can lead to further writing or talking about the misconceptions students have, or how the new information impacts their current thinking.
- 2) Inform students that today’s class will focus on understanding the meaning of the term sustainability. It is a term that is being used a lot in the business community, so it is important that we understand what people mean when they use it.
- 3) Beginning with the first column of the chart (K), ask students to write down what they think “sustainability” means and anything else they think is related to this issue. Have students share their ideas while you write the students’ responses on an overhead version of the KWL chart. (*5 mins*)
- 4) Ask students to think about why sustainability is talked about so much in the business world. What is its relevance to the business community?
- 5) Direct students to complete the “W” column, listing everything they might want to know about sustainability. Record some of these as students share their thoughts.
- 6) Show the YouTube video on sustainability. (*2 mins*)
- 7) Discuss with students what they learned from the video in terms of their earlier understanding of the term “sustainability.” Direct the conversation back to why they think the issue of “sustainability” is important to the business world.
  - Where did this interest come from?
  - Can they think of any examples of a company’s behavior that does not demonstrate good stewardship of our natural resources — hence, are not practitioners of sustainable methods of production. (*10 mins*)

8) Many businesses are also thinking entrepreneurially to improve the sustainability of our planet and to eliminate problems like food waste. Have students read the transcript and/or watch the WGYP video [This Tech Makes Sure that One Bad Apple Doesn't Spoil the Bunch](#). Instruct them to underline and make notes about the points they find important, curious, or conflicting (anything that might cause a reaction, really). The interview addresses biotech innovation, and is an interesting and quick overview of combining science and innovation to solve problems. (15 mins)

9) Have students discuss what they have learned about sustainability as a function of doing business today. Consider using any of the following questions to guide the discussion.

- What benefits do you think emerge from businesses incorporating a sustainability focus? You can think of this question on the side of either businesses or the public. Encourage students to think beyond the examples given.
- What are some of the challenges faced by companies in following a sustainability ethos?
- What are the consequences for companies who do not embrace this mindset? Do you really think people reject companies because they don't consider sustainability a priority? Do you think the general consumer really cares about this issue? Explain your rationale.
- The article talks about people from your generation being especially conscientious when it comes to environmental issues. Based on your personal experience (knowledge of your peers), do you agree with this statement? What is the evidence for your opinion?
- What about the costs of adhering to a strict practice of sustainable production? How far do you think companies follow this practice? How do we really know what companies are doing? Who is keeping track of this information? What if companies are simply responsible for adopting this stance on their own?

10) Exit Writing: Give students the last five minutes of class to complete the final row of the KWL chart (section L). Have them write down the most compelling ideas that emerged from this exercise. You may collect this as a way to assess students' individual takeaways from the exercise. (If you are using it as an assessment, don't fill in the L column on the overhead chart, as you will want students to complete this section based on their own takeaways.)

**Tying It All Together:** In wrapping up this exercise, emphasize the link between companies' actions and their values and beliefs. Whether they emanate from the business leaders themselves or the consumers they hope to satisfy, values and beliefs play a significant role in the ways in which businesses conduct themselves.

**Practice Outside of the Classroom:** Encourage students to search for companies that profess a commitment to sustainable production practices. In what ways does this manifest into real actions and practices? Have them read the K@W article for an older perspective. Have things changed? If so, how? Do they note a specific commitment to some locations over others (i.e., more careful in the U.S. and its territories than perhaps foreign countries)? Perhaps students can do a show-and-tell of what they found. If they need some food for thought, they can check out these WGYP articles/podcasts on [Guayakí](#) and [Impossible Foods](#).