

I TOLD YOU SO!

Behaviour change is the key to climate change



Jes Rutter, Managing Director, JPR Solutions

I have been banging the drum for years about how changing behaviour is key to climate change, and how the potential for energy and carbon savings from behaviour change is at least as much as from technological changes. I feel absolutely no pleasure in saying I told you so, I was right all along, but it's true and the evidence is now plain for all to see and being widely reported.

I have been working with ESTA, the Energy Services Technology Association, for the last 18 months to develop case studies of where very positive results have been achieved as a result of implementing energy behaviour programmes so that these can be used as evidence to encourage others. There are some very striking cases of great programmes that have worked. In one example, delivered by JRP, savings of 8.9% were made following a £30k behaviour change programme, the same savings as a £480k new factory LED lighting scheme for the same client. We have also been lobbying Government to acknowledge the role of behaviour change programmes and incentivise organisations to implement them. It has been a frustratingly slow journey with, I'm sorry to say, little to show for the effort.

What we are all seeing right now is a real life case study on how the changes in our behaviours as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic are having really profound positive impacts on our world; reduced use of fossil fuels, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, improved air quality, wildlife thriving, clean water, dolphins swimming in the Ganges and the canals of Venice, and the colours of our skies.

Although Covid-19 is most likely the biggest global crisis since the Second World War, it is still dwarfed in the long term by climate change. The world will never be the same again after Covid-19 but what are we learning and what opportunities can we capitalise on?



There have been some painful and costly adjustments required by individuals and organisations to achieve the positive environmental impacts we are seeing. Sporting events, exhibitions, conferences, holidays, concerts, parties, social gatherings, shopping trips have all been cancelled. These cancellations have led to reduced travel, reduced production, less catering, less heating and lighting, less air conditioning and overall, less consumption etc, etc. In this mix, one significant element is transport which alone represents almost a quarter of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions¹ and is the main cause of air pollution in cities. Before Covid-19, the transport sector had not seen the same gradual decline in emissions as other sectors.

This crisis has shown us that clearer skies and breathable air can be achieved very fast if concrete action is taken to reduce burning of fossil fuels but the global carbon emission reductions that the Covid-19 lockdowns are causing need to be repeated each and every year to prevent a 2 degree temperature rise.

One thing is certain however, individuals and organisations will not voluntarily and willingly repeat the pain of the last 6 weeks in the pursuit of the long term climate change goal.

Globally, concern about the environment and pollution is growing (see Figure 1) and according to a 2019 survey² of more than 4,000 UK residents, 70% said they were concerned about climate change. In the past, however, survey results like these have not translated into real action. Too many people still buy unsustainable food, fly frequently and don't take the meaningful daily actions

1 https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/transport_en

2 The survey was conducted by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) as part of its Energy and Climate Public Attitudes Tracker. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/426733/united-kingdom-uk-concern-about-climate-change/>

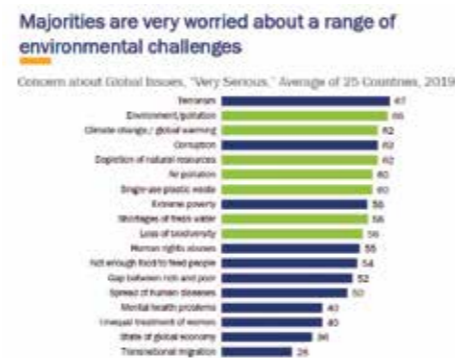


Figure 1

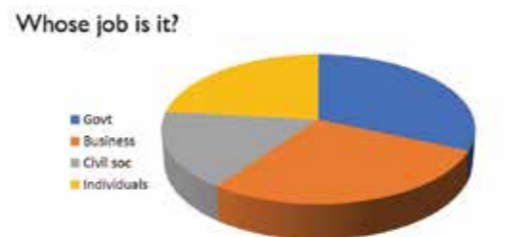


Figure 2

that help to reduce their environmental impact. Barriers such as ease, availability and current lifestyle trends mean that sustainable living has been more of an aspiration. In fact, Figure 2 shows clearly that individuals are looking for Government, businesses and civil society to resolve the climate change crisis.

The UK Government has indeed made strong commitments to reducing greenhouse gases by passing laws to achieve Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and businesses are coming under ever increasing pressure to manage and reduce their emissions to meet this target. But we know that 50% of the opportunity to reduce energy consumption is being missed due to organisations focussing solely on technical opportunities. Behaviour change represents 50% of the global Net Zero opportunity but is rarely implemented.

It is encouraging to see that many organisations now have Net Zero on their radar as a business objective. Some even claim to have achieved Net Zero.

A major flaw in this is the way that organisations are currently being measured against Net Zero targets. How can it be right, for example, that the FIFA World Cup organisation can claim that they will deliver carbon-neutrality for the

2022 World Cup in Qatar? FIFA and the State of Qatar have pledged to "measure, mitigate and offset" all emissions related to the design and construction of facilities and match-day events. But what about all those millions of air miles that will be racked up for spectators to go to games and the thousands of air-conditioned hotel rooms? Of course it could be claimed that FIFA have no control over 'Scope 3' emissions but this is a spurious argument as they can certainly influence the behaviour of the football fans by making different choices. For example, why hold such an event in a country where the average daytime temperatures exceed 50°C that necessitates all stadia to be air conditioned?

When the world returns to a new normality it is likely that fewer people will be required to commute into central office locations³ with obvious implications for travel and transport and related emissions but none of this will save the human race by itself!

The world's focus currently is very much on surviving the next few months and none of us knows how our future will be re-shaped as a consequence of Covid-19. There will undoubtedly be unintended but nevertheless positive environmental impacts but, unless there are dramatic behaviour changes and significant lessons learned in the aftermath of this crisis, the journey towards climate disaster will continue.

The world will never be the same again after Covid-19. The challenge is to make sure that the positive impacts are not lost or forgotten because we simply cannot go back to the destructive and carbon-emitting business as usual.

So, with all this evidence of how people and their behaviour is crucial in tackling the climate crisis, can I stop banging my head against a wall? The harsh reality is that behaviour change at the level required to tackle the climate change crisis is hard and will not be voluntary. We need the Government to acknowledge the significant role of behaviour change in tackling climate change and start legislating and incentivising organisations and individuals.

3 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/mar/13/covid-19-could-cause-permanent-shift-towards-home-working>

CARBON NEUTRAL VS CARBON NEGATIVE: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Valpy Fitzgerald, Director of Green Markets at renewable energy provider, Opus Energy

As the conversation around sustainability develops past the point of the hypothetical, we now find ourselves at a decisive moment for the future of our planet. The UK Government has legislated to become carbon neutral by 2050, and has already begun working on policies that will enable that to happen – such as the proposed ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles.

At the same time, businesses are becoming increasingly aware of the need to act now to reduce their total carbon output. According to the Carbon Trust, companies with fewer than 250 employees account for almost 20% of the UK's total carbon emissions – meaning that their role in the fight against climate change is a vital one.

With so many sustainability terms being used, it can be hard to know what's relevant and what's not. So, we've broken down the jargon around some of the most commonly used terms, and shared some advice on how businesses can become more ambitious in their sustainability targets.

CARBON NEUTRAL

To achieve carbon neutrality means that your carbon emissions – that is, the carbon emitted by your day-to-day operations, such as manufacturing, travelling and so on - are effectively cancelled out.

This is achieved by balancing your carbon emissions with techniques such as carbon offsetting – which involves calculating your carbon emissions and investing in schemes which are certified as removing a certain amount of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Depending on the partner you choose to work with, the schemes will vary, but tree planting is a common one. This is because trees naturally absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, helping to reduce the volume of the greenhouse gas. Or carbon offsetting can be done by simply not emitting carbon at all – for example, choosing to cycle instead of drive.

You might also hear people using the term net zero or zero carbon – these all mean the same thing. For example, if you used 100% renewable energy to power your business and used carbon offsetting to ensure your net operations and supply chain were carbon free, you could call yourself a "zero carbon" business.

CARBON NEGATIVE OR CLIMATE POSITIVE

Carbon negative – also confusingly referred to as climate positive – goes one step further than carbon neutrality, aiming to remove more carbon from the atmosphere than you emit.

For example, Drax – Opus Energy's parent company – announced their goal to become carbon

negative by 2030. They're doing this by using innovative technology to remove carbon from the air, meaning they will end up with less overall

carbon emissions than they started with.

Again, carbon negative has a number of other terms associated with it, but it is the ultimate goal for businesses of all sizes.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

It is undoubtedly a step in the right direction for businesses and organisations to commit to a carbon reduction plan, but it's also important to look at the bigger picture and take the next step to reduce the overall emissions in the environment. While cutting down on air travel, using LED bulbs and switching to electric vehicles is to be applauded, industry leaders and governments now need to shift their focus to removing the amount of carbon that's already in the atmosphere. This is because proactively working to ensure no more emissions are released won't stop or slow down the impact that carbon dioxide and other greenhouses gases are having on the earth; not unless we couple it up with removing the existing emissions, and collectively work to become carbon negative.

And this isn't just a job for big business and corporations. As recycling has been adopted universally, going the extra mile to reduce the greenhouse gases in the environment needs to become a way of life for all businesses. Those looking to achieve carbon negative should first reduce their emissions by investing in energy-efficient technologies and energy storage, and potentially generating their own renewable energy. Choosing a 100% renewable energy supplier is also essential. Any remaining emissions can then be offset. While this may seem like a huge investment, particularly for smaller businesses, there are numerous benefits to be gained, from helping to save money and improving overall efficiency, to attracting and retaining top talent and improving customer loyalty.

With the right negative emissions policy, companies can do much more, collectively removing millions of tonnes of emissions from the atmosphere each year. But there's no one-size-fits all solution; every business will be at a different stage in their journey, so it's important to focus on what's right for you. www.opusenergy.com

