

## Guest Editorial

# The Business of Sustainability

Johnson Matthey Plc, along with many similar companies and institutions, have found that sustainability can and should form the basis for their business of the future. These companies are setting aggressive targets for reducing the resources consumed in producing a unit of product, and finding these targets achievable when the whole workforce is engaged in addressing the issues.

It starts with simple resource efficiency: turning items off when not in use, conserving energy and heat, and reducing waste to landfill. Then it moves into designing new products that perform just as well as (or indeed better than) the ones they replace, but need less resources to produce: production efficiency. Waste products from a particular process become the raw materials for another process. The near term target is not zero consumption, but experience shows us that it can be much nearer to zero than anyone contemplated (1).

The pure business motivation for a sustainability effort is therefore cost control. Using less resource to make the same product saves money. But experience tells us that this is not the biggest benefit to a sustainability initiative. The biggest benefit is that sustainability has the potential to engage and motivate every employee, to harvest ideas and changing behaviours, and to give employees another reason to value their work for the company. Everyone agrees that this activity is helping the planet and is what the responsible company should be doing, and success makes employees proud of the company they work for.

## Fundamental Role of Science

Science, of course, has a fundamental role in this process. It is scientists that can find the solutions to the big questions by using innovation to redesign existing products and processes, as well as bringing to market novel solutions that utilise resources in a much more efficient manner. But science needs funding and

direction, and this is where business can be motivated to step in. Good businesses know that they want to be first to market with these solutions. The funding required will not be insignificant, but the business drivers are in place and the benefits to the successful company will be substantial. The early engagement of customers is an essential, but sometimes overlooked, step in this process. A good business puts its scientists close to its customers and provides the resources and direction for the science.

When employees and customers are all engaged in sustainability at work, a partnership between business and government can then deliver the necessary fiscal or regulatory action to drive the process further.

Feeding 9 billion people (2) whilst reducing dependence on non-renewable resources sounds an impossible task. But I believe that science, and in particular chemistry, has the potential to achieve such a feat. I believe that we do have time, as long as we get on with addressing the problems and start to take meaningful action now. Think of what we have achieved in our lifetimes, and how much more can be achieved in the next ten or twenty years dedicated to the task.

It starts with business and sustainability is good business.

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## References

1. "2016 Annual Report & Accounts: Sustainable Technologies for Today and for the Future", Johnson Matthey Plc, London, UK, 2016, p. 25
2. UN News Centre, 'World Population Projected to Reach 9.6 Billion by 2050 – UN Report', 13th June, 2013: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45165#.WBdbrRvcuUI> (Accessed on 31st October 2016)