Overview

This report critically looks at the sustainability challenges modern businesses face in regards to specific key areas. Firstly, the Earth's diminishing resources, secondly, climate change and carbon impacts, and finally, social inequity.

"The earth cannot sustain the current rates of resource use…" (Blowfield, 2013). In terms of the Earth's diminishing resources, key themes such as overproduction of goods and the public's subsequent overconsumption have been addressed with reference to theory. Unsustainable production, and extraction of resources, has been underpinned by the example of oil giant Saudi Aramco through analysis of their business practices.

Climate change has been creating more and more of a significant impact in the recent century. As greenhouse emissions continue to increase, predominantly carbon levels, it has resulted in vast changes of weather patterns such as increase in sea levels, temperature rise, melting ice caps, glacial retreat and ocean acidification (NASA, 2016). Pressure has been constantly applied to businesses who create significant amounts of pollution, where "Arch Coal" has been addressed on how they have contributed towards the cause of climate change and their carbon impact.

Social inequity is the existence of unequal opportunities for different social statuses referring to people of different genders ages and ethnicities. From a corporate social responsibility standpoint business should ensure ethical treatment to all those effected providing social, economic and environmental benefits for all stakeholders. Challenge 3 will look at social inequity as a theory, providing a business example of poor practice, evaluating the associated impact and outcome.

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Challenge One

Diminishing Resources/Unsustainable Production and Consumption

The 'materials economy' is the process of production and consumption. According to Pinderhughes (2004) the stages of product creation are arranged chronologically as; extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal. Brown discusses how the concepts of "planned obsolescence" leading on to perceived obsolescence and "throwaway products" were introduced after World War II as a way of promoting economic growth and employment. "The faster things wore out and the sooner they could be thrown away, the faster the economy would grow…" (Brown 2001, 123-124. As cited by Pinderhughes 2004). Blowfield explains that after World War II GDP has "grown faster than at any time in the past…through falling commodity prices, coupled with greater resource usage…" (Blowfield, 2013. P265). These elements have contributed towards higher consumption, and therefore, higher disposal. Perceived obsolescence has developed more recently, however, as trends determine whether a product needs to be disposed of in order to purchase the newer model to fit in with social circles and popular culture. Electronics organisations release improved models of equipment frequently that, ultimately, carries out the same function. These newer and improved products are not necessarily intended to replace products that are at the end of their lifespan. Instead, organisations such as Apple release new laptops and mobile phones once or twice per year. This is reinforced in an overconsumption report headed by Friends of the earth Europe "significantly more people possess mobiles and change them more frequently to stay up-to-date with new technologies" (Friends of the earth, 2009, P25). This fuels unnecessary over-consumption of goods and subsequently increases their premature disposal through perceived obsolescence. The report announced also that *"The obsolete mobile stockpile in 2005 therefore weighed at least 56,000 tonnes and consisted of 7,900 tonnes copper, 178 tonnes silver, 17 tonnes gold, 7,4 tonnes palladium and 180 kg platinum. Less than one % of this material is recycled, due to low recycling rates for mobile phones."* This reinforces the idea that the overconsumption of mobile phones is one of potentially many more industries that contribute to vast environmental problems that pose business challenges.

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In terms of unsustainable production and the exploitation of the earth's diminishing resources, industries that operate using fossil fuels are contributing towards a linear system of production on a planet with finite resources; this system cannot operate indefinitely. Leonard (2010) "In the past three decades alone, one third of the planet's natural resource space has been consumed." (Leonard, 2010) Leonard continues to explain that to cater for the current level of consumption, it