

## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? SUSTAINABILITY

Some words just grow and grow. Sustainability emerged from the field of ecology into the lexicon to denote systems that feed themselves. Now anything that lasts longer than 10 minutes is likely to attract the label. Like a lot of words that come loaded to the brim with positive value, it readily becomes a contested flag, between competing company strategies, for example. 'Sustainable' gets cheapened as an adjective when it is loosely used; eg, when tucked into the stream of a pitch for anyone selling anything, especially if there are doubts about costs, risks, impacts and the like. Even if people try to be pretty pure about the concept, it is likely to rouse thorny questions, such as where's the boundary for sustainability? What's sustainable in one domain – for example, renewable energy fuelling a home – may be at the expense of a wider non-sustainable system, such as the surrounding ecosystem. The comfort is that at least we now care enough about such things to measure, analyse and manage them with a thought for the interests of future generations.



This is common among family firms, which also often come to benefit from the virtuous cycle that can result from enhancing the communities that sustain them.

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