



Paul Polman KBE

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## Imagining ethical business

**Paul Polman KBE, the former Chief Executive of global consumer goods company Unilever, has given a public lecture at Northumbria University, Newcastle, challenging corporate heads to step-up and take an ethical lead. During his visit to Northumbria, Mr Polman also conducted a Masterclass for the University's MBA students.**

The lecture, *Capitalism's Reinvention*, explored how the [United Nation Sustainable Development Goals](#) can drive a new market, where purpose delivers profit and business plays a key role in tackling runaway climate change and global poverty. Delivered on behalf of Northumbria and the North

East Initiative of Business Ethics (NIBE), the lecture attracted leading business figures, academics, students and members of the public.

Mr Polman, who has strong links with Northumbria, retired as Chief Executive of Unilever after a decade of challenging business norms. He then co-founded [Imagine](#) as a foundation for what he has described as “heroic chief executives willing to move outside the comfort zone and take personal risks.” In a powerful call-to-action, Mr Polman used the public lecture to argue that we cannot wait for governments to face the connected challenges of climate crisis and extreme poverty. Instead he said the rest of us have to step-up, especially the heads of big business who wield significant private power.

Ron Beadle, Professor in Organisation and Business Ethics at Northumbria, said: “Together with NIBE we run an annual series of free business ethics events, and having this public lecture by Paul Polman here at the University was a stand-out highlight of the year. His Masterclass session for our MBA students was equally insightful and an valuable learning experience.”

Unilever is a genuine global company, with 2.5 billion customers worldwide. Its brands range from Persil, Lynx, Comfort and Domestos, to Toni & Guy, Ben & Jerry’s and many others. Under Mr Polman’s leadership, Unilever doubled its share price at the same time as shifting its agenda towards sustainability and global development.

Northumbria has worked closely with Unilever through collaborative research on areas such as sustainable packaging, and through student internships and placements. [Responsible Business](#) is a key research theme at Northumbria’s Newcastle Business School.

For more information on Northumbria and future public lectures please visit: [www.northumbria.ac.uk/events](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/events)

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