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# Corporate Sustainability: Why Companies Should Embrace Sustainability

- It is important for big and small businesses to embrace sustainability because more and more customers and investors are assessing them by how they are impacting the environment**
- When it comes to sustainability practices, we need to have an open-minded learning approach and keep exploring new ways of being sustainable**
- Sustainability has evolved from what we used to know as CSR – it encompasses everything we touch and everyone we come into contact with**

Sustainability may seem like a recent buzzword, but it has been around for a long time. If we look back at traditional business models, sustainability efforts were incorporated, without being branded as such, into the corporate social responsibility banner or as corporate sustainability (usually environmental) efforts. However, today, sustainability is a much bigger idea. One of the more common understandings of sustainability is that it is about ensuring resources are continuously viable and how we can take care of them. From a business perspective embracing sustainability is becoming more urgent because people are beginning to observe and track how companies are impacting the environment. So it really is time for organisations to take sustainability seriously and make it an integral element of conducting business.

The United Nations, via its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has done an amazing job of defining 17 interlinked areas that together form a blueprint for a sustainable future for all. However, not every business can or should try to achieve all 17 SDGs. What is paramount is the acknowledgement that their actions have an impact on the environment, people and

the economy. From there they can identify areas in which they best connect and align with the SDGs, subsequently focusing on reducing and/or improving their impact in those areas. It is a learning curve and gradual process for everybody and we need to keep an open mind and continue to explore new ways of being sustainable, such as by applying new technologies that help save resources, identifying ways to work more efficiently or achieving end-to-end transparency across the supply chain.

## **Simple steps to create a sustainability mind-set in a company**

A good starting point for businesses to embrace sustainability is by taking a close internal look at their operations. This includes steps such as making sure that employees have a voice in terms of how operations are being managed, that migrant workers are treated well, that there is access to resources for helping increase efficiency, and that employees themselves make suggestions and are empowered to incorporate more sustainable practices in the company's day-to-day operations.

Sustainability has evolved into a very comprehensive concept and encompasses everything we touch and everyone we come in contact with during our business activity, from employees to suppliers and from customers to communities. It therefore makes a lot of sense to create a dedicated role within the company to focus on corporate sustainability and to ensure efforts are coordinated and integrated. The role of 'sustainability officer' could be filled by an existing employee who is given adequate resources and support to attend training programmes and acquire the relevant knowledge about how to implement sustainable practices. The next step should be a 'sustainability audit' to assess how exactly the business impacts the environment, stakeholders, vendors, customers and the communities it operates in. Subsequently, an ongoing tracking and evaluation process must be set up to equip the sustainability officer with the right data to advise the various departments, educate and encourage employees, suppliers and partners, and produce reports to document sustainability efforts.

## 4 WAYS TO START

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In order to be successful in the long term, companies need to shift towards a sustainable-centric approach to doing business. Here are four ways to start and questions to ask:

**Evaluating the business and operations model.** Is our business and its activities sustainable? Can we operate with fewer resources? Can we identify ways of operating without adversely impacting the environment or the community we are operating within? Always ask these questions when reviewing your business and see if there is anything that you can do to make a positive difference.

**Tracking the business's impact on the environment** to monitor improvements made over a period of time. It could be as simple as tracking the amount of paper that is used or the amount of electricity or water that is consumed. These utilities can be easily tracked through monthly bills. It's a start.

**Manage resources effectively.** A good start is to assess which business unit or department needs what resources and prioritise accordingly. This ensures resources are allocated to areas that will optimise their usage while avoiding wastage by other departments.

**Recycling and waste management.** Identify waste that can be reused or recycled and create specific waste management channels. Even for non-industrial/office-based businesses, this is an area worth exploring and it's easy to implement. For example, the disposal of batteries, which may be considered a small matter, but small things do add up. A company with 100 employees where each employee throws one battery into the general waste pile every month, would burden the environment with 1,200 potentially mercury leaking batteries per year. Collecting batteries is easy and they can be disposed through a separate waste channel with other electronic and digital waste.

### Shifting attitudes

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries went into lockdowns leading to a reduction in human as well as industrial and commercial activities. In this period, we saw that nature has the ability to bounce back, with clearer skies and water ways due to reduced pollution, and in some areas, animals returning to their natural habitats. This phenomenon helped to restore our faith and made us believe again that if we can change our behaviour, nature will be able to reset and repair itself. This is our chance to rethink how we must take care not just of our precious resources but the entire planet as well as ourselves, and to evaluate how we treat each other and – from a business perspective, how we treat the people who work for us.

In a nutshell, sustainability is not just a series of measures or guidelines. It's a mindset and a way of doing business which needs to be instilled, practiced and improved over time. Besides being 'the right thing to do', it does also come with tangible benefits, including financial benefits, e.g. through energy saving measures, optimised waste management and recycling. In addition, sustainable practices enhance brand reputation and customer loyalty which is good for business. Investors also love companies with strong sustainability scores. There is a growing global trend of investors pledging to integrate and prioritise ESG factors into their decision-making, believing such integration can reduce risk and increase returns. 