

Is it time to 'really' put Sustainability on your SME Board Agenda

Sustainability, CSR, ESG, whatever term you choose, it appears to be the hot topic of companies, the media, celebrities, the Prince of Wales and in school rooms up and down the country. For companies we have a responsibility to be thinking about it to help combat climate change, but also because it makes commercial and financial sense to do so.

FTSE and Corporate groups are now committed to 'Corporate Sustainability', with C-suite directors leading buy-in from the top which ensures that true engagement will disseminate throughout their businesses.

Strategic group sustainability leaders are often in situ, supported by siloed teams of sustainability officers responsible for certain drivers or in-functional channels. Most companies are now accepting the need to be more sustainable in some way, but not all are realising the full ROI opportunities.

From a recruiting viewpoint, over the last 10-15 years, we have witnessed a change of attitude and acceptance in the importance of sustainability. Memories now of the past tacit mention from operations or HR, about needing to split-off environmental responsibilities from a HSE remit are in the past. The 'fluffy' language used made it seem like a minor consideration at that time by many, not one that can play a part in every functional and strategic decision to improve a company and affect its top and bottom lines.

The need to keep on top of legal compliance and standards has evolved immeasurably over the last few years to ultimately become 'greener'. Whether this has been through very visible shifts, such as energy usage to incorporate more renewable sources, or through changes in an end-to-end supply chain vetting international labour practises, third-party suppliers and procurement policies, or making operational efficiencies to cut costs and wasteful practises, etc. A change of focus has occurred. We have seen these changes affect recruitment too, over time people being sought with the desired 'tag-on' appreciation of sustainability issues, seen in wide-ranging job briefs, across Technical, Supply Chain, Procurement, Communications, HR, Health and Safety, Commercial, Operations and for Board leaders etc.

In the Chemical industry, we have seen such constant improvements occurring including reduction of carbon emissions, single use plastics, polymers, wastewater, unrecyclable or non-reclaimed materials, hazardous waste, reducing CO2 miles.

People are now more conscious about working more sustainably in their day jobs (and acceptance is gradually occurring). Sustainability should be taken seriously and rank alongside Health and Safety in its own right, embedded in everything a company is about.

Moreover, CSR should also be the positive catalyst to commercial growth, driving innovative product positioning to achieve a premium 'sustainable' brand.

The key take away for this is that we are seeing ambitious, leading-edge SME's, seeking sustainability leaders from blue chip companies to transfer best practice and lead a value-added company function, and add a new CSR Board presence.

By investing in sustainability, risks can be turned into tangible commercial and financial opportunities, besides producing diverse intangible benefits to their businesses. By being committed to a sustainable future, company leaders have 'stolen a competitive march on the market' by producing premium products or services that this generation of consumers now demand.

Companies are starting to try and capture and analyse these hidden financial benefits, across all their cross-functional teams. As examples, their employees are working with the same shared aims of their company by making it more agile and sustainably aware, resulting in a more profitable company, with sustainable succession planning and ability to meet Stakeholders' aims. Their innovative, competitive commercial products will be meeting current and future customer demands, they are securing better supplier-partnerships, or internally reaping more loyalty and engagement by 'proud' employees and ultimately externally attracting Investor interest for continued growth. That is why we believe that now is the time; let's push for a sustainable future and bring in great talent to drive this Agenda before it becomes too late.

For further details please contact
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