

Sustainability is Not Just Protecting Value - It is About Creating Value

Companies indicate there is a high degree and variety of innovation with respect to corporate responsibility initiatives in different industries at this time. In general, the fundamental shift in corporate thinking currently underway is a shift from perceiving corporate responsibility as a cost centre to embracing sustainable practices as a significant and still largely untapped source of value generation. The 'save today, pay later' approach is increasingly recognized as an unsustainable and expensive strategy when it comes to the cost of operational restructuring down the road (for example re-fitting a facility or cleaning up environmental damage) or the costs of rebuilding a corporate reputation or regaining stakeholder trust. This shift in thinking is driving companies to innovate on a global level, to set standards for international practices, and to stay ahead in the global competitive arena. The implication is that government action need not focus solely on negative or punitive approaches, but indeed may find the greatest receptivity and maximized impact through influencing positive approaches.

Need to Broaden the Context Beyond Business

There is also general agreement amongst companies that if the goal is ultimately to accelerate private sector focus and attention on all elements of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental), then the issue of corporate responsibility needs to be considered within a much broader context than the current debate. There is a sense that the onus is being placed squarely on business without considering the roles, responsibilities, required actions, and positive incentives that could be undertaken by other actors in Canada and worldwide. Companies interviewed were generally enthusiastic and committed to managing corporate sustainability, providing that other actors also undertook the necessary challenging steps to support the constructive advancement of the corporate sustainability agenda.

Unilateral Canadian Legislation is Not Appropriate at Present Time

While there was strong mixed feelings among Canadian companies about the possible benefits or likelihood of further related legislation in the longer term (and whether this would perhaps well-serve Canadian corporate interests and maximize human development impacts, depending on implementation and timing) these same companies feel strongly that neither the present time nor the present types of legislation being considered are appropriate. Further legislation would no doubt act as a catalyst for further corporate sustainability, but not in a way that allowed Canadian companies to maximize their positive impacts across social, environmental, and economic realms. For example, unnecessarily high standards might act as a deterrent or cause loss of contracts / low success rates due to uncompetitive (when viewed narrowly by buyers) bids. This would reduce Canadian trade and investment and corresponding shared economic, social, and environmental benefits – including corporate Canada's leadership brand of transferring standards and enhancing local capacity (versus the approach of a foreign company). A