

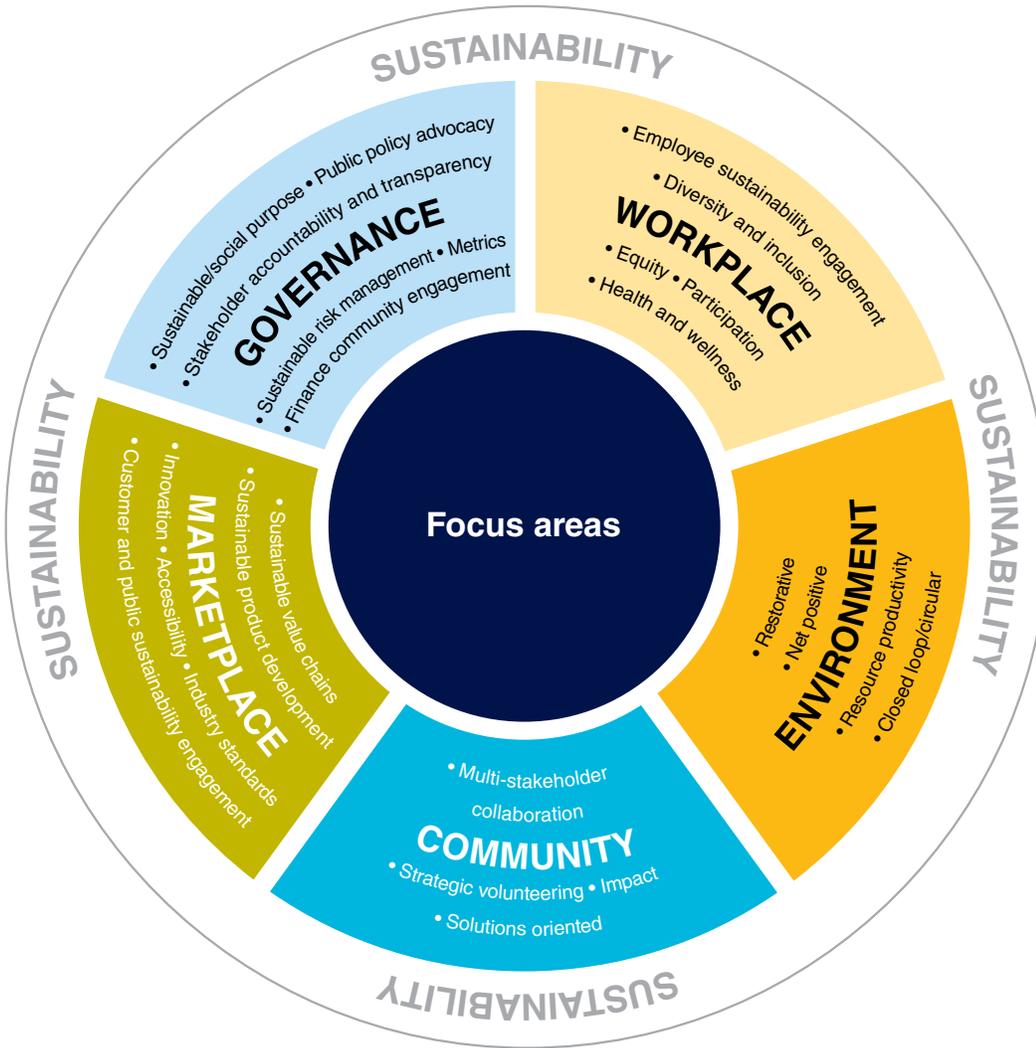


INSIGHT BRIEFING 4

# Next-Generation Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Jobs.

**Issue:** Approximately five years after implementing operational sustainability programs, many corporate responsibility and sustainability practitioners realize they need to evolve their job descriptions, departments, and their relationships with internal and external stakeholders to achieve greater business and societal results.

**Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability Institute**



**About the Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability Institute**

The Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability Institute was established by The Conference Board of Canada in 2016 after an extensive consultation revealed the need for a professional body to help practitioners excel in their roles. The Institute brings together business, industry, government, academia, and civil society as partners to envision a sustainable future and identify corporate responsibility and sustainability challenges and

opportunities. We offer independent research and thought leadership that support collaboration, knowledge transfer, innovation, monitoring, and evaluation of contemporary corporate responsibility and sustainability issues. Our collaborative program of research, education, information dissemination, and engagement accelerates and scales next-generation practices in corporate responsibility and sustainability in Canada.

## Introduction

The role of the sustainability practitioner is changing in important and fundamental ways. The role shifts, job descriptions evolve, and skills change as organizations transition from an operational to a strategic sustainability focus. This is driven by the internal and external maturation of corporate responsibility and sustainability, the growing recognition of the business case, and the realization that future business prosperity requires external partnerships to succeed. To secure the business and societal benefits, and future-proof the organization, the emerging corporate responsibility practitioner role becomes more strategic, enterprise wide, and external.

## Evolving Job Descriptions

Jobs are dynamic and they change over time to meet the priorities and requirements of the organization. Thus, job descriptions should be reviewed regularly to ensure that job duties are still applicable. As companies advance along the maturity continuum of sustainability and corporate responsibility, they evolve from a compliance and operational model to a senior-level, strategic, and external collaboration focus. Table 1 describes some of the typical role shifts between old and new job descriptions of corporate responsibility and sustainability practitioners.

It is important to note that the steps outlined in Table 1 are illustrative and not definitive. In reality, the shifts often have middle transitional steps not included in the table. As organizations evolve along the sustainability path, roles often include “both-and” rather than discrete “either-or” mandates, as suggested by the table.

**Table 1**  
**Job Description Shifts for Next-Generation CSR Roles**

From	To
Developing project-based, annual, and tactical initiatives.	Developing a medium- to long-term sustainability strategy, including goals and targets.
Focusing internally on improving the social and environmental impacts of the company’s operations; pursuing measures within the company’s direct control.	Improving the company’s value chain and external operating environment through collaborations with suppliers, customers, competitors, governments, NGOs, and others; tackling impacts that the company can influence.
Providing sustainability information to customers on request.	Developing customer engagement tools and initiatives to improve customer sustainability performance and add value to business segments.
Creating and maintaining a network of external stakeholders for dialogue purposes; coordinating sustainability partnerships.	Conducting proactive, multi-stakeholder collaborations to advance shared sustainability goals and projects.
Pursuing internal innovation projects funded with internal resources.	Pursuing external innovations with competitors, research institutes, start-ups, suppliers, etc., and leveraging external funds (e.g., government, customer, and supplier-funded).
Embedding sustainability in operations.	Embedding sustainability at the enterprise level and into functional, business unit, and departmental level strategies and mandates.

Table 1 (cont'd)

**Job Description Shifts for Next-Generation CSR Roles**

From	To
Engaging operational employees.	Engaging the board, executives, and senior leaders.
Doing the work.	Supporting others to do the work.
Implementing low-hanging fruit.	Advancing innovation to address sustainability barriers.
Pursuing occasional pilot projects that advance sustainability innovation.	Managing an intentional sustainability innovation portfolio.
Designing first-generation sustainability metrics.	Developing science-based and context-based metrics and natural, social, and human capital accounting systems.
Monitoring governmental and regulatory developments and communications with government on a project-specific basis.	Collaborating with government to advance the company's sustainability and financial performance in ways that benefit society.
Taking an internal role most of the time.	Collaborating significantly with customers, suppliers, competitors, and other stakeholders.

Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Strandberg Consulting.

## Next-Generation Responsibilities

Organizations may wish to consider some of the following five responsibilities when updating corporate responsibility and sustainability practitioners' job descriptions.

### 1. Strategy Development, Implementation, and Performance Monitoring.

Lead the development and coordinate the implementation of the company's enterprise-wide sustainability strategy. Assess trends, risks, opportunities, and best practices; consult internal and external stakeholders; determine strategic direction; coordinate and implement a corporate-wide plan; and design programs and budgets to achieve sustainability goals. Contribute sustainability expertise and insights to leader strategy discussions and collaborate with corporate leaders for commitment, buy-in, and implementation of the sustainability strategy.

### 2. Internal Integration and Capacity Development.

Act as senior champion for enterprise-wide sustainability. Provide strategic leadership and expert knowledge in embedding sustainability across the company. Design and implement an ongoing best-practice employee engagement or empowerment program to embed sustainability in the culture. Motivate employees; realize cost avoidance/savings; and advance the company's social purpose. Lead and coordinate a multi-faceted education and training program that ensures all employees are knowledgeable about sustainability and how it applies to their department, function, and role. Support the integration of sustainability into the company's leadership development programs for the next generation of leaders. Initiate and lead the company's cross-functional committee(s) to advance sustainability across the company and build internal sustainability, ownership, and capacity. Help leaders and all major departments to integrate sustainability into

their functions, business plans, operations, and internal/external communications. Provide expert sustainability advice to departments, based on research and analysis of trends, risks, impacts, opportunities, and leading practices within and outside the industry in Canada and internationally. Support the leadership team in understanding and interpreting emerging trends and expectations, including “bringing the outside in” to the organization via stakeholder panels and expert insight.

### **3. External Stakeholder Engagement.**

Initiate, build, and coordinate strategic partnerships and collaborations with external stakeholders to advance the company’s sustainability vision and goals and a sustainable industry and society. Coordinate a cross-functional stakeholder engagement program to build strong and mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders. (Stakeholders include governments, customers, suppliers, investors/analysts, industry associations, competitors, academia, NGOs, media/social media, and others.) Review and monitor stakeholder relations and ensure leaders are aware of, and address, stakeholder issues, concerns, and perceptions as they relate to sustainability. Participate in national/international external boards/committees to advance sustainability within the company, industry, and society.

### **4. External Reporting, Communications, and Transparency.**

Manage publication of the company’s sustainability disclosures and assurance aligned to global best practices. Ensure the company has robust information systems for tracking, performance management, and reporting against the achievement of short- and long-term goals and targets—and performance over time. Develop metrics that enable the company to demonstrate best practice in performance monitoring, such as science-based and context-based metrics and natural, social, and human capital accounting systems.

### **5. Sustainability, Resilience, and Circular Innovation.**

Develop innovative measures to foster sustainability improvements that create sustainability and business value. Conceive and implement sustainability tests, pilot projects, and prototypes for learning and scaling across the company and externally. Create financing mechanisms that attract internal and external venture capital investments. Partner and collaborate with key stakeholders such as suppliers, customers, peers, start-ups, and research institutes to co-invent, co-invest, and co-create solutions. Develop strategies that advance the company as a circular business. Develop resiliency strategies that help the organization anticipate, absorb, accommodate, avert, or recover from—and otherwise survive—challenges. Support the company’s ability to respond to, and influence, changing conditions. Keep abreast of, recommend, test, and scale emerging technologies and applications that will improve the company’s sustainability and business prospects.

## Next-Generation Skills, Knowledge, Education, and Experience

Table 2 shows how the competency areas for corporate responsibility and sustainability jobs are evolving. Practitioners may wish to evaluate gaps in their skill sets to help their organizations advance down the sustainability path.

Table 2

### Competency Areas for Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Jobs

From	To
<b>Skills/Functional Knowledge</b>	
Basic understanding of environment and corporate responsibility.	Strategy development and enterprise-wide implementation of skills.
Research, analysis, problem-solving, communications, and project management.	Ability to influence and mobilize departments, executives, and senior leaders in addition to workforce; translation skills to enable integration of sustainability principles into all departments and functions.
Internal focus on influencing and mobilizing employees.	High degree of communications proficiency.
Verbal and written communication skills.	Change-management skills and a strong grasp of organizational culture change-strategies; knowledge of how to affect large-scale change in an organization internally, as well as externally.
Interpersonal and organizational skills.	Partnering and collaborating, along with influencing and listening skills.
A solid knowledge of the company and the company's industry.	<p>Knowledge of the company's value chain and external stakeholders; ability to build strong, mutually beneficial stakeholder relationships; political acumen.</p> <p>Knowledge of sustainability trends and best/next sustainability practices globally, and the changing role of business in society.</p> <p>Understanding of how to catalyze sustainability innovation in an organization.</p> <p>Skills in risk management and resiliency planning that include risk identification, mapping, and analysis; knowledge of strategies to address risks—including systemic risks; skills in resiliency planning and adaptation strategies.</p> <p>Skills in business planning, budget management, business casing, forecasting, trade-off analysis, financial accounting of sustainability investments, and venture finance.</p>
Proficiency in Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, and Word.	Proficiency in sustainability information systems, virtual collaboration tools, and social media.

Table 2 (cont'd)

**Competency Areas for Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Jobs**

From	To
<b>Education/Certification/Experience</b>	
Bachelor's or master's degree (preferably including environment, communications, and/or business/commerce).	Master's degree in business, sustainability management, or equivalent.
Progressive project and team management.	At least five years' experience in sustainability strategy development, implementation, and performance reporting/disclosure.
Experience in briefing and working with senior corporate leaders and management.	In-depth experience embedding sustainability in organizational culture and linking sustainability to financial performance.
Experience in managing external relationships.	Five years' experience proposing, initiating, and managing cross-functional internal and external partnerships and collaborations; building strong, mutually beneficial stakeholder relationships.
Proven self-starter with leadership qualities and capabilities.	Experience initiating and executing innovation processes that include business casing, venture financing, partnering, testing, prototyping, and scaling.  A strong understanding of the social and human elements of sustainability—community development; health and human/natural environments; and systems thinking.  A mix of government relations, marketing and sales, public affairs, communications, operations, facilities, community relations, human resources, procurement, risk management, finance, accounting, and investor relations experience is desirable.

Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Strandberg Consulting.

## Next-Generation Departments

Not only are corporate responsibility and sustainability jobs undergoing renewal, whole departments are transitioning their mandates for greater effectiveness. As organizations advance along the sustainability path, and go beyond managing only operational impacts under their direct control, they come to the realization that the entire sustainability team needs to upgrade its mandate to generate greater success and impact.

Leading organizations understand that if they are to become sustainable, their sustainability departments must focus their efforts on transformational, catalytic, capacity-building roles. These departments retool to become enablers more than doers, supporting others across the organization who are doing the work, typically in a cross-function or matrix fashion. The organizations undergo mandate renewal to reposition the sustainability team as experts at understanding the sustainability barriers faced by internal departments, business units, and external partners—and the strategies to overcome them.

## Director Roles

The director becomes responsible for stewarding the overall integration of sustainability across the organization and its relationships, supporting executives to integrate sustainability into their core functions and mandates. Sample responsibilities include:

- guiding the overall sustainability visioning process and embedding sustainability into the company's governing processes and strategic and business plans;
- supporting human resources to integrate sustainability in the employee experience and life cycle, including sustainability competency development and training;
- helping build the company's sustainability intelligence, data analysis, big data, risk management, trend analysis, sustainability forecasting, and back-casting capacity;
- collaborating with other sustainability leaders in peer organizations to advance transformational sustainability leadership in the industry.

## Reporting Structures

As corporate responsibility and sustainability practitioners transition to next-generation roles, reporting structures and relationships become increasingly important. Senior leader engagement and sustainability embedment can be accomplished at the director level through a high degree of influence and persistence with vice-presidents. However, to fully accomplish these objectives, organizations that are pursuing strategic and transformational sustainability include the corporate responsibility voice/role on the executive committee (i.e., as a VP). Otherwise, the sustainability agenda is not discussed or shared at the highest levels of the organization on a regular basis—as are other functions and business initiatives. In many corporate cultures, the VP title opens the door for collaboration, both internally and externally. It also opens the door to board reporting and engagement.

Another trend in organizations is to use the title “chief sustainability officer” to signal intent and commitment and facilitate strategic conversations.

“Sustainability is core to our business strategy at TELUS. In 2013, our CEO created a chief sustainability officer position to drive greater sustainability progress at our company. Supported by a passionate and action-oriented sustainability team, this executive role provides leadership for embedding sustainability internally across the organization and collaborating externally with stakeholders to maximize contributions to business results as well as the customer and shareholder value proposition.”

**Andrea Goertz**, Chief Communications and Sustainability Officer, TELUS

## What Next?

Here are some steps you can take to advance these ideas at your organization:

- Assess which of the “shifts” apply and discuss them with your leader and team;
- Review your skill set to determine whether new skills and experiences are needed to enable your success;
- Review your current job description and personal development plan to identify any necessary updates.

## Resources

### State of the Sustainability Profession

GreenBiz Group’s fourth *State of the Profession* report, produced in partnership with Weinreb Group Sustainability Recruiting, looks at the evolution of the sustainability executive and its unique role in industry. The report explores:

- where sustainability lives within an organization;
- how its leaders got there, and which projects and strategies they expect to be undertaking in the near future;
- what it will take to increase corporate focus on sustainability efforts;
- which career opportunities are available for sustainability professionals.

[www.greenbiz.com/report/state-profession-2016](http://www.greenbiz.com/report/state-profession-2016)

### Sustainability Competencies and Talent Management: The New Business Imperative

This publication is a global literature review of the five sustainability competencies that companies should add to their existing leadership competency models to position the firm for future success. It is equally relevant for the sustainability practitioner.

<http://corostrandberg.com/publication/sustainability-competencies-and-talent-management/>

### The Qualities of a Transformational Company

There is a new global standard for companies seeking to improve their social and environmental impact. The *Transformational Company Qualities Guide*, published by Canadian Business for Social Responsibility, is the definitive go-to resource, benchmark, and checklist on the essential requirements of leadership in sustainability and corporate social responsibility. This resource represents “next generation” practices in corporate responsibility and sustainability. Many of the shifts that sustainability practitioners will need to be successful are described in this guide.

<http://cbsr.ca/transformationalcompany/>

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March 2017

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