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Alexandria, Virginia

SHRMTM

SOCIETY FOR HUMAN
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

2008 Executive Roundtable Symposium on Sustainability and Human Resource Management Strategy

Executive Summary



Background

Context

The SHRM 2008 Executive Roundtable Symposium on Sustainability and Human Resource Management Strategy was held on May 29, 2008, at the Hotel Monaco in Alexandria, Virginia. It brought together knowledgeable and passionate sustainability and HR management experts from around the world. This group included HR practitioners, leaders in the field of sustainability, consultants, academics and senior members of SHRM's staff.

The group examined the impact of sustainability on the business world in general and on the HR profession in particular. The participants also looked at the role of HR professionals in participating in or, in some cases, leading organizational sustainability efforts. In addition, this Symposium generated an extensive number of ideas and steps that SHRM can take to better equip HR professionals, support the HR profession and assist the business community in the area of sustainability.

Symposium Purpose

The purpose of this Symposium was to:

- Understand how sustainability is influencing the HR profession.
- Understand how HR might influence sustainability and, through it, corporate strategy and specifically understand what role(s) HR could/should play in terms of sustainability.
- Determine what steps SHRM can take to support HR professionals in playing a significant role in sustainability efforts and prioritize the various actions that could be taken.

Symposium Structure

The Symposium was structured as follows:

- Participants provided introductions, described their backgrounds and shared their personal interest in and passion for sustainability.
- Participants discussed how sustainability is influencing the HR profession and how HR might influence sustainability and, through it, corporate strategy.
- Participants then divided into four breakout groups to explore and report back on whether HR should own sustainability, and if not, what function(s) should take the lead on the issue of sustainability and, alternatively, what functions should *not* own or lead sustainability initiatives. The breakout groups also focused on the role(s) that HR should play in terms of sustainability.
- In a separate discussion, the breakout groups developed suggestions for the potential steps that SHRM can play in supporting HR professionals in sustainability-related efforts. Specifically, the breakout groups were asked to look at SHRM's role in regard to partnerships, content and tools, public policy and networking.
- Participants then shared their key takeaways from the Symposium.

This report follows the general structure of the Symposium, providing an executive summary of the entire Symposium and summaries of each separate discussion.

Symposium Participants

Facilitator	Executive Roundtable Symposium Participants		SHRM Staff
<p>Deb Cohen, Ph.D., SPHR Chief Knowledge Officer SHRM</p>	<p>Teresa Bailey, MBA Vice President, Human Resources Caribbean Transportation Services</p>	<p>Gerlinde Herrmann, CHRP, GPHR Founder and President The Herrmann Group, Ltd.</p>	<p>Sue Meisinger, SPHR President and CEO (from 1987 to June 2008)</p>
	<p>Rita Bennett Senior Vice President, Global Strategy and Talent Management, Aperian Global and Director-at-Large, SHRM Board of Directors</p>	<p>Mark Hough, JD, MBA, MPA Senior Corporate Counsel SAS Institute, Inc.</p>	<p>China Gorman Chief Operating Officer</p>
	<p>Hank Cauley President Innovative Environmental Technologies, Inc.</p>	<p>Grace G. Lee, MBA, MS, SPHR Vice President of Human Resources Control Components, Inc.</p>	<p>Brian Glade, SPHR, GPHR Vice President, International Programs</p>
	<p>Rajeev Dubey, MBA President, Human Resources and Corporate Services Mahindra & Mahindra</p>	<p>Kellie McElhaney, Ph.D. Professor, Haas School of Business University of California, Berkeley</p>	<p>Steve Miranda, SPHR, GPHR Chief HR & Strategic Planning Officer</p>
	<p>Tony Frost CEO Sirocco Strategy Management</p>	<p>Jill Smart, MBA Chief Human Resources Officer Accenture</p>	<p>Frank Scanlan Director, Internal Communications</p>
	<p>Bradley Googins, Ph.D. Executive Director Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship</p>	<p>Nathan Smith, MEM Practice Leader Project Performance Corporation</p>	<p>Steve Williams, Ph.D., SPHR Director, Research</p>
	<p>Dan Henkle, MBA Senior Vice President of Global Responsibility Gap Inc.</p>	<p>Patrick Solomon, MBA Senior Vice President Global Support Services CARE USA</p>	<p>Jennifer Schramm, M. Phil. Manager, Workplace Trends & Forecasting</p>
		<p>Melissa Tritter, MA Consultant Sustainable Business Strategies</p>	

Participant Perspective

Sue Meisinger welcomed the participants and set the stage for the discussion by outlining SHRM's current efforts to develop a sustainability strategy that involved SHRM's own efforts both to become a sustainable organization and to provide leadership and resources to assist its members in leading sustainability efforts in their organizations. Participants then introduced themselves and explained why they are passionate about the subject of sustainability. Among the key themes from participants were:

- *Sustainability isn't just a nice thing to do; it makes good business sense.* For many organizations, sustainability is a business strategy. How companies approach sustainability can affect a company's brand and its bottom line.
- *Sustainability is a huge factor in recruiting and engaging employees.* Workers today want purpose and meaning in their work; younger workers, in particular, know a great deal about sustainability. Amidst a talent shortage, individuals are looking for employers that "get it" and care about sustainability. Thus, an organization's approach to sustainability will make a difference in its ability to attract, engage and retain employees.
- *Sustainability presents a huge opportunity for HR.* Symposium participants see sustainability as an issue at the intersection of business and HR, presenting an opportunity for HR to provide strategic leadership in this area.
- *On the whole, the HR profession is unprepared.* While this represents an opportunity for HR, many HR professionals, like many other business professionals grappling with this relatively new business challenge, do not yet possess the kinds of knowledge, skills or tools they will need to lead in this area. Helping prepare the profession to lead in this area is therefore also an opportunity for SHRM.

Key Symposium Themes

Participants agreed that in spite of its importance, the issue of sustainability is often not getting the leadership that is needed within many organizations. But because sustainability is fundamentally a people issue—affecting a company's internal brand and affecting recruiting, engagement and retention—it is an issue that must matter deeply to HR professionals. This presents an opportunity for HR to lead by creating a compelling business case to ensure that sustainability is on the corporate agenda and that organizations have strategies and plans in place. While HR does not necessarily have to be the owner of sustainability, it has a critical role to play in driving the culture change required for organizations to make sustainability a priority. The participants felt that this also creates a significant opportunity for SHRM to take the lead in equipping the HR profession to do what needs to be done, and SHRM is committed to leading in this area. The Symposium discussion focused on these issues and attempted to answer the question of how SHRM can lead in sustainability.

Below are the main themes of this discussion.

In the business community, sustainability lacks leadership.

Many organizations are claiming that they are engaged in sustainability-focused activities. However, on the whole, participants felt that most profit-driven senior executives still see sustainability as a “nice to do” versus a “need to do.” In many instances, no one has made a clear or compelling business case for sustainability. Participants were in agreement that sustainability is not a one-time organizational initiative. It is a way of thinking, acting and operating, and it must permeate the fabric of an organization.

Sustainability is very much an HR issue, though it's not necessary that HR “own” sustainability.

Sustainability is a people issue. It affects company's culture and behavior. It affects the messaging that companies use in recruiting, how companies engage and retain employees, how they train employees and how they interact with customers, as well as their brand and value proposition. For these and other

reasons, HR must be deeply involved in any organization's sustainability activities. Many participants see the absence of leadership around sustainability as creating a void and believe that the HR profession should seize the opportunity to demonstrate leadership on this critical strategic interest. If sustainability is not on an organization's agenda, HR must make the case to elevate sustainability as a priority. However, Symposium participants don't find it essential that HR act as the organizational owner of sustainability on an ongoing basis. Regardless of whether HR is the owner, HR will help develop guidelines and set strategies, develop training programs, lead employee communications and be involved in establishing metrics for sustainability.

Many HR professionals are not yet ready to lead on sustainability.

While sustainability is a natural fit for HR and presents an opportunity for HR professionals to demonstrate leadership, many in the profession are not yet ready to seize this mantle. They lack knowledge around sustainability, the ability to formulate a compelling business case and tools and resources to change an organization's culture.

SHRM has a key role to play in equipping the HR profession to lead in this area.

There is no singular resource where HR professionals can go to learn about sustainability and how it affects HR. This provides a tremendous opportunity for SHRM—an opportunity to fill the existing void and to become the “go-to” source for sustainability information for HR professionals (as SHRM is on so many other topics).

SHRM's large and active base of members provides the opportunity for SHRM to take a leadership role in putting sustainability on the corporate agenda, and SHRM's expertise in aggregating, creating and disseminating information makes this an ideal fit for SHRM. Specific areas where participants see SHRM as adding value include providing information; providing members the tools and education to equip

them to make a business case; facilitating networking (through conferences) and sharing of best practices; offering organizational diagnostic tools; and forging partnerships with leading sustainability organizations. Participants advised SHRM to leverage existing resources to the greatest extent possible and to focus on the most strategic opportunities.

How Is Sustainability Influencing the HR Profession?

Participants were asked to comment on the question “How is sustainability influencing the HR profession?” The discussion based on their responses to this question is summarized below.

Before looking at how sustainability affects HR, first look at sustainability's impact on the business.

Tony Frost suggested that the right starting point in examining the effect of sustainability is to focus not on the impact on HR, but on the impact on the business. In general, how the business community is approaching sustainability can be seen in reviewing a company's annual reports. The vast majority of an annual report is devoted to the company's business results, with a separate mention of the firm's sustainability initiatives. How sustainability is treated by most organizations shows that it is not yet integrated into all business activities.

Companies need to assess where they currently stand in terms of sustainability, suggested Mr. Frost, and then define where they want to go. Rita Bennett agreed, commenting that sustainability starts with the business. Ultimately, businesses must answer to multiple stakeholders, including clients and shareholders.

“Sustainability starts with the business ... the CEO and board have to make it a priority.”

Rita Bennett

To become a business priority, there must be a business case for sustainability.

Several participants commented that senior business leaders view making a profit as their primary responsibility. Therefore, for sustainability to get on the corporate agenda and become a priority, there must be a compelling business case.

Rajeev Dubey explained that most business leaders in India still see sustainability as something that “feels good” and “is nice to do,” but it is not seen as critical to the business. (While this comment was focused on Indian business leaders, other participants felt that

the sentiments applied to business leaders around the globe, including the United States.)

“Sustainability is still largely seen as ‘nice to do’ and is not yet in the domain of most serious business people.”

Rajeev Dubey

Making such a business case is possible. Melissa Tritter explained the concept of the “Triple Bottom Line,” which encompasses the *profit* objective shared by all firms while incorporating bottom lines in the areas of *people* and *planet*.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a “business imperative” at Grace Lee's company. It became an imperative to ensure that the company operates as a good citizen not only with its internal practices but also with the business practices that govern suppliers and partners. The case for CSR is vital from the perspective of the shareholders and the executives at the company, thus making CSR a corporate priority.

At SAS, Mark Hough explained, the business case for CSR revolves around recruitment.

“At SAS, we see CSR as just making good business sense. But a key part of why we practice CSR is to attract people.”

Mark Hough

For sustainability/CSR to take hold in an organization, it must be “woven into the fabric.”

Bradley Googins compared the sustainability wave to the quality movement of a few decades ago. For organizations to truly become quality organizations, quality “had to be driven into the organization.” Quality wasn't a standalone project or a department, it permeated the entire company. He believed this would eventually also be the case with sustainability.

Rajeev Dubey agreed that sustainability must permeate the organization—and must therefore not be viewed solely as the domain of HR. He said, “The moment you position this as something that is owned by HR, the operational side (which is the bulk of the organization) takes a back seat. Sustainability must reside with the business leaders.”

Because sustainability must be woven into an organization's fabric, it is very much an HR issue.

Participants were in strong agreement that sustainability is fundamentally a people issue and, therefore, an HR issue. As a result, HR professionals must play a significant role in developing the business case for sustainability, creating the organizational culture and leading their organization's sustainability efforts.

“HR plays a role in connecting people to responsible business practices.”

Grace Lee

Sustainability will affect the HR profession in multiple ways.

Participants are already seeing sustainability affect the HR profession and envision multiple ways that sustainability will make an impact on HR going forward.

- *A changing employee contract.* People today care more about the planet and about corporate citizenship. They want their work to have purpose and meaning, and they want to work in organizations that are purpose-driven and value sustainability.

“Sustainability is part of bigger issues. People are asking, ‘What type of society do we want to live in?’ People want meaning. [...] They want to marry their head and their heart.”

Bradley Googins

This emphasis on meaning affects HR professionals in communicating this trend to management and in working to create an organizational culture that appeals to those who are seeking more meaning in their work.

- *Recruiting.* Sustainability will have a huge impact on recruiting. Gerlinde Herrmann described how knowledgeable young employees are about sustainability and how much they care about it.

“Young people know a lot about more about CSR than prior generations and they look for evidence of it in potential employers.”

Gerlinde Herrmann

Jill Smart confirmed the interest of job candidates, especially new college graduates, in the subject of sustainability. It may be difficult for many business leaders to comprehend how significant of a factor it is for so many people as they think about potential employers.

“Accenture hires nearly 60,000 people a year, and an overwhelming number of them ask about sustainability.”

Jill Smart

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- *Brand.* Sustainability will affect companies' brands, both externally and internally. Amidst a growing talent shortage, how companies discuss sustainability in the course of their recruiting efforts will play a significant role in how these companies are perceived.

Kellie McElhaney gave an example of how a representative of a highly regarded firm was unable to address a student's questions about the company's sustainability policies and practices at a recruiting event, not realizing how important this factor was to the students. The irony of the situation was that this particular firm was actually very active on

the sustainability front, but this commitment had yet to become fully integrated into their employer branding and campus recruiting efforts. In contrast, a major chemical company sent a team of executives to the same event, and they spoke eloquently and consistently about the firm's sustainability strategy. This presentation had an enormous favorable impact on the perception of this company among students, enabling the company to significantly exceed its recruiting goals.

These examples demonstrate the importance of a company's messaging in building its brand among potential employees. Creating consistent messaging for recruiting is a responsibility that falls largely on HR.

- *Engagement.* Dan Henkle, from Gap Inc., explained that the majority of the company's employees are Gen Y. They care about compensation, growth and career development as well as purpose and CSR. The company's mission and values must be considered an important factor in attracting and retaining these employees. And it is important to give these employees a way to act on their interests in promoting social and environmental responsibility. At Gap, they seek to find "ambassadors" for sustainability and for their culture and then leverage their influence within.

"Find employees who will be ambassadors [for CSR] and will influence their own organizations. Everyone in the company owns CSR, not just the CSR department."

Dan Henkle

Henkle offered an example of ambassadors taking initiative at Gap. Employees in the company's marketing department decided that the company used too much paper in stores. They led a plan to convert all paper used in stores to be 100% recycled. This was their own idea, born by tapping into the passion of employees. HR will need to have the flexibility to set policies and establish practices that harness employees' passion and energy for sustainability.

- *How people work.* As organizations seek to reduce their carbon footprint, it will force HR professionals to completely rethink how work takes place. For example, can more people work from home, thereby eliminating the energy needed for commuting? Can offices become paperless? Examining how and where people work is an important way that sustainability will affect HR.
- *Accountability and measurements.* Hank Cauley sees sustainability affecting the HR profession by pushing HR professionals to be better managers. HR professionals must be able to develop an internal business case for sustainability, incorporate sustainability into key performance indicators and create reporting mechanisms that hold the organization accountable.

"If sustainability measures are not among an organization's key performance indicators, it won't get done."

Hank Cauley

- *Training/leadership development.* The HR profession will also be affected by having to incorporate sustainability in organizational training and leadership development curricula.

How Might HR Influence Sustainability?

Participants were asked to reflect on how HR might influence sustainability.

There is much potential for HR to influence sustainability and, through it, corporate strategy.

Steve Williams cited research data indicating that within corporations there is no clear owner for sustainability.

"There is a big opportunity for HR because no one is owning sustainability."

Steve Williams

Participants agreed that HR can fill this void; sustainability presents a tremendous opportunity for the HR profession to demonstrate leadership on a critically important issue.

"The role of HR, and SHRM for that matter, is leadership. HR can play a key role in transforming companies and even industries."

Rita Bennett

There are precedents for HR demonstrating such leadership. Gerlinde Herrmann described how HR leaders from Canadian companies came together to lead creation and adoption of "responsible care" standards.

"This is a place where HR led the initiative, with no mandate to do so. HR just took it. This shows that HR can lead, and on sustainability, HR should lead."

Gerlinde Herrmann

Before the HR profession can really begin to influence sustainability, it needs to be equipped to lead.

Rita Bennett pointed out that many HR people do not have a good understanding of what CSR is and they do not see the potential leadership role of HR in sustainability. This makes them ill-equipped to influence sustainability strategies in a positive way. Hank Cauley believes that leading in the area of sustainability means that "HR needs to step up."

HR can help define what sustainability means in their organizations.

While there was disagreement among participants regarding a consistent set of terminology for sustainability, they commented that HR professionals can help define sustainability to fit in with their own organizational culture. Most participants had individual preferences around using either the term "sustainability" or "corporate social responsibility." Tony Frost prefers to use "CSI," which stands for corporate social investment; he believes that this shows the need for organizations to invest with an expected return. China Gorman questioned whether "survivability" might be more appropriate, while other participants felt that it doesn't really matter what companies call it—as long as they do it.

HR can demonstrate that sustainability is more than compliance.

Participants were in agreement that true corporate social responsibility entails far more than simply complying with laws. Legal compliance is just the lowest common denominator. Tony Frost said, "If you view compliance as the benchmark, that's a sad statement." He continued, "Great companies are way better than laws." Bradley Googins agreed, saying, "No company has ever complied itself to excellence."

By emphasizing the people dimensions of sustainability, HR can demonstrate that sustainability goes beyond the environment.

Participants observed that sustainability is not limited to being environmentally friendly; it encompasses far more. It includes subjects such as poverty, AIDS, water and other social issues. China Gorman also raised the question of whether diversity should be linked with and thought about as part of sustainability and corporate social responsibility, since diversity truly deals with the long-term talent management strategies that will enable organizations' future viability.

HR can develop a culture of sustainability that permeates the organization.

How organizations think about what sustainability means for them will vary based on a variety of factors. Global organizations will think of sustainability and CSR in global terms. But smaller, local organizations can also make sustainability a priority, with their efforts and activities focused locally. As a keeper of the organizational culture, HR can help develop sustainability strategies that will most effectively filter through the organization and will support organizational values.

"CSR will differ by size of company, business, location and situation."

Mark Hough

Breakout Groups' Discussion: HR's Role in Sustainability

Participants divided into four breakout groups. Each group discussed and reported back on the following questions:

- *Should HR own sustainability/CSR?*
- *If HR isn't the right owner, who should own it? Who shouldn't?*
- *Regardless of who owns sustainability, what role should HR play in terms of sustainability?*

Who Should Own Sustainability?

HR is not necessarily the "owner" of sustainability.

All four breakout groups came to the same conclusion: HR has the responsibility to make sure that sustainability is on the corporate agenda; if it isn't already on the agenda, HR needs to initiate the conversation. But HR doesn't necessarily need to be the official "owner" of sustainability.

"HR has the fiduciary responsibility to make sustainability an organizational priority, but HR doesn't necessarily have to be the owner."

Kellie McElhaney, reporting for her group

The factors that would influence whether HR might be the best owner include the following:

- *The organization's sustainability maturity.* For organizations that are not terribly mature in terms of sustainability, becoming more sustainable is a major transformation and change management initiative. Such a transformation might be best owned by another function. (Participants suggested the use of a diagnostic tool to help organizations assess their level of sustainability maturity.)
- *The perception of HR in the organization.* HR is regarded differently in different organizations. In organizations where HR is seen as strategic, credible and a partner in developing strategy, HR may be a good owner for sustainability. But in many organizations HR has not yet achieved that level of credibility and

therefore is probably not the best owner. If HR were to be the owner in such a situation, it could limit the effectiveness of sustainability-focused efforts.

"HR's role is to ensure communication, coordination and execution across the enterprise of sustainability efforts. Having a title or ownership of the initiative is less important."

Sue Meisinger

- *The size and capabilities of the HR organization.* In organizations with limited HR staffing or where key personnel lack strong leadership capabilities, HR would not be the most effective owner.

"We need to change the role of HR from transactional to transformational."

Grace Lee

Regardless of function, the owner of sustainability in the organization must be at the executive level.

Participants agreed that sustainability owner must be highly influential in the organization, must make sustainability a priority and must be a champion for it.

There are a few functions that definitely should not own sustainability.

Participants agreed that there are some functions that really should not take on ownership of sustainability for a variety of reasons. The two main functions discussed were Marketing/Communications (because of the risk of sustainability becoming fodder for spin) and Legal (because the mindset would likely focus only on compliance).

Even if HR doesn't own sustainability, HR has a key role to play.

There was consensus that even if HR is not the ultimate organizational owner for sustainability, HR must influence the organization's sustainability strat-

egy (since this strategy will directly affect the organization's people) and must play a key role in executing sustainability. (Kellie McElhaney offered that "CSR – HR = PR").

Participants commented that there is no specific checklist for what HR should do in terms of sustainability. They believed that HR's role will vary based on an organization's specific situation and felt that HR's role isn't necessarily to influence the strategy—it is to catalyze the strategy.

What Role Should HR Play?

Facilitating and orchestrating the sustainability conversation.

In order to make sustainability a priority in organizations, it must become part of the organizational culture. HR can begin to make this goal a reality by integrating sustainability into strategic planning discussions as well as everyday activities.

"HR's role is to be in the middle of conversations about the three Ps (profit, people and planet)."

Gerlinde Herrmann, reporting for her group

Developing corporate guidelines and strategy.

HR can lead and/or participate in the development of the organization's sustainability strategy. This can extend to developing policies.

Helping to secure funding to support sustainability.

In some organizations, incremental funding will be necessary, but in other organizations, it is simply a matter of using current resources differently. For example, making sustainability part of an organization's recruiting message doesn't require funding; it just requires focus and communication of the desired message(s) to those doing recruiting.

Identifying and disseminating resources and best practices to employees.

Some participants held the view that small companies lack the HR resources to be able to focus on sustainability. Others disagreed, arguing that size doesn't matter. They suggested that organizations can devote the same portion of resources to sustainability regardless of size. Bradley Googins posited that sustainability is a way of thinking and operating that is independent of size.

Developing training and education programs.

Much learning will be required across the organization on what sustainability/CSR is and what is expected of employees. HR will play a major role in developing and implementing this training.

Developing performance indicators, metrics and reports to track/measure progress.

Whether the owner is HR or another function, there must be one owner who is accountable for sustainability. That owner needs HR's assistance in developing metrics and reporting capabilities to measure the organization's success and in ensuring that the appropriate metrics are tracked and reviewed.

Weaving sustainability into all HR activities.

In addition to supporting sustainability across the corporation, HR professionals must embed sustainability throughout HR. This means including sustainability in the recruiting and training processes, as part of talent management and in internal employee communications.

"There are key areas of sustainability where HR must lead—areas of sustainability that are currently lagging. These include diversity, employee relations, labor relations, employee training and development, workplace conditions, health and wellness, work/life balance, pay equity, and job security—all areas that are solidly within HR's purview."

Frank Scanlan

What Can SHRM Do to Support HR Professionals in Their Sustainability Efforts?

Participants believe that SHRM can play a key role in equipping HR professionals to demonstrate leadership in sustainability. Specifically, SHRM can help educate members about sustainability and about crafting a compelling business case around it. SHRM can aggregate relevant content and provide tools. SHRM can facilitate networking, through conferences and online, and form partnerships with sustainability-focused organizations.

However, while each of these areas is a place where SHRM can add value, SHRM can't do everything. The organization must prioritize and focus. Participants suggested that perhaps the best starting point is to aggregate the information and tools that already exist. Afterwards, gaps can be identified and additional information and tools developed.

To answer the question of SHRM's role in supporting HR professionals in their sustainability efforts, participants once again divided into four breakout groups. Each group discussed and reported back regarding how SHRM can support HR professionals in terms of partnerships, content/information (including research), tools (including diagnostics), public policy and networking.

SHRM's Role: To Equip Practitioners to Develop Their Value Proposition

Commit to making sustainability a priority.

Even though this may not be the foremost issue on the minds of most SHRM members, Rita Bennett believes that SHRM needs to be out in front of this issue. This means investing now. She compared this situation to when SHRM decided to focus on global/international HR. At the time, only 1% of members were affected, yet SHRM knew this was the future and invested in it. SHRM should focus its efforts specifically on defining sustainability for HR.

Help HR professionals make the business case for sustainability.

SHRM can assist HR professionals by equipping them to present a compelling value proposition to their CEO. This entails providing tools, coaching and training. Dan Henkle emphasized that there is no "one-size-fits-all" value proposition; the right proposition is contextual and will vary by company, industry and situation. Many participants felt it was unlikely that a value proposition focused solely on being the right thing to do will be compelling. It should focus on risk mitigation or on an opportunity to increase revenue or strengthen an organization's brand.

"In a mission-driven organization, sustainability being 'the right thing to do' might work, but within corporations, 'the right thing to do' won't sell. You have to understand the drivers in your organization."

Patrick Solomon

Other techniques to compel organizations to take action include:

- *Understanding what competitors are doing.* Kellie McElhane described a meeting with the CEO of a major corporation, during which the CEO showed little interest in the subject of sustainability until shown data on what the company's direct competitors were doing—this prompted action.

"The value proposition for sustainability has to be closely linked with the bottom line."

Jill Smart

- *Putting "bad actors" at risk.* Hank Cauley described how activist organizations will target companies that are not behaving appropriately. When targeted, these "bad actors" are essentially putting their brand, their reputation and their

customers at risk. In these situations, companies view the business case for sustainability as one of risk mitigation.

Go global.

When asked about the scope of SHRM's sustainability activities, participants were in strong agreement that these efforts should be global from the outset

"As business goes global, so too does the HR profession. As we encourage HR to be in a leadership role in initiating, creating and implementing sustainability plans, they should necessarily consider the international dimensions of their organization's operations and sustainability."

– Brian Glade

Forge partnerships.

SHRM can assist members by forging partnerships with a wide range of different sustainability-focused organizations. Before doing so, SHRM should develop a set of criteria to vet potential partners based on the value of a partnership to SHRM.

Aggregate existing information.

Participants agreed that a great deal of content about sustainability already exists. Before SHRM goes about creating content from scratch, it should first investigate what is out there. According to the participants, what is lacking, particularly for HR professionals, is a well-organized repository of sustainability-focused information. SHRM could offer tremendous value by aggregating existing information and making it easily accessible to HR professionals. After existing information is collected, SHRM should identify existing gaps and consider options for filling those gaps, such as through conducting and publishing research. Of particular interest is gathering information on best practices and providing case studies. Some of the specific content areas participants expressed interest in were

a glossary with correct terminology, CSR podcasts, research showing how CSR affects retention/turnover, competitive benchmarks, and a list of expert speakers on the subject.

Provide tools to assist HR professionals in their sustainability efforts.

Participants mentioned the following tools for SHRM to consider developing and offering to members: a toolkit to assist members in developing a business case (including a customizable PowerPoint presentation); a diagnostic tool helping members assess their organization's sustainability capabilities and maturity; certification in the area of CSR; a tool to help jumpstart practitioners' efforts to create sustainability metrics; and a training curriculum.

Focus on providing leadership to the profession before getting involved in public policy activities around sustainability.

Participants held the common view that this is not yet the time for SHRM to pursue any public policies relating to sustainability, though this could change in the future as HR becomes more involved in this issue.

Facilitate networking opportunities.

Participants saw much value in networking. This could include in-person sustainability-focused networking opportunities at SHRM conferences and symposiums. Perhaps a track or workshop on sustainability could be added at large conferences; eventually, participants envision a SHRM sustainability conference. Also suggested were smaller, more intimate events: focused events for HR executives from 20 to 50 large companies, industry-focused networking events, and/or regional or state-level SHRM events focused on sustainability. In addition, SHRM may consider creating online networking opportunities, such as a new online area participants referred to as "My CSR Space," which could also include a blog as well as links to tools and information.

Conclusion

As the discussion drew to a close, participants reiterated the importance of sustainability to the world, the business community and the HR profession and their belief that SHRM can play a key role in equipping HR professionals to demonstrate leadership in sustainability. Specifically, SHRM can help educate HR professionals about sustainability and about crafting a compelling business case around it, aggregate relevant content and provide tools, facilitate networking (through conferences and online), and form partnerships with sustainability-focused organizations. By taking the lead on sustainability, HR in many organizations can move from being viewed as transactional to transformational.

"The consensus is that HR is at the center of sustainability because people are at the center."

Nathan Smith

Participants are optimistic about SHRM playing a role in the sustainability space and developing and offering tools and information to members. As SHRM assesses where to devote its efforts, participants provided the following advice.

Start with what already exists.

Dan Henkle advised looking at what content and resources already exist and to get started by leveraging that information and those resources.

Don't try to do it all.

Participants were in agreement that doing nothing is not an option for SHRM. Yet as SHRM decides what to do, it must keep in mind that the opportunities are immense and resources are limited. If SHRM tries to do everything, it will fail. The key is to focus and be strategic.

Keep this conversation going.

This diverse group of experts bonded quickly. Multiple participants were hopeful that this not be a one-time event but the first discussion in an ongoing conversation. Participants were interested in reconnecting in the future to share new ideas and to track progress.

"Today confirms the importance of SHRM going into this space and the importance of doing it in the right way. Now SHRM will have to figure out priorities and levers."

Sue Meisinger

This Symposium reinforced for SHRM the opportunity to make sustainability an organizational priority. Hank Cauley remarked that SHRM's large base makes it a critical organization in driving change around sustainability. As Steve Miranda stated, "This Symposium will be a starting point for SHRM."

PROJECT TEAM

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