



BSR Conference 2009
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Internal Communications: Making the Case for CSR's Value

Breakout Session Summary
Thursday, October 22, 2009 | 9:45 a.m.–noon

Speakers

- » **Christopher Corpuel**, Vice President, Sustainability, Hilton Hotels Corporation
- » **Silvia Garrigo**, Manager of Global Issues and Policy, Chevron
- » **Kevin Moss**, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, BT Americas Inc.
- » **Eric Olson**, Senior Vice President, Advisory Services, BSR (moderator)

Highlights

- » There are no silver bullets for gaining senior-level support for sustainability programs, but by understanding the operating pressures and personal interests of a company's senior executives, sustainability leaders can tailor their messages to gain support for their programs.
- » Effective communications make employees feel empowered to contribute to the sustainability agenda—and define a clear path for their roles.
- » Effective communications about the business case involves using terms that resonate with company leaders; in many cases, this means connecting sustainability programs to the opportunity for more money.

Memorable Quotes

"Strategic CSR communication is not just about the content, it's about the context."—Silvia Garrigo, Chevron

"I'm often asked, 'How can we get employees excited about sustainability?' I tend to think that employees are already excited, and that our job is really to allow them to get involved."—Kevin Moss, BT Americas Inc.

"We need to make [a set of measurable business performance indicators for] sustainability. ... It could be the greatest program ever, but if it doesn't tie to performance, it's not going to continue."—Christopher Corpuel, Hilton Hotels Corporation

Overview

The working session began with brief remarks from all panelists, followed by smaller group discussions focused on the three aspects of internal corporate social responsibility (CSR) communications: communicating with senior management, engaging all employees in CSR practices, and positioning sustainability as a driver for business success.

Before she approaches Chevron leadership about a new sustainability program, Garrigo said she needs to thoroughly understand the context in which company leaders operate. Ultimately, Garrigo believes her core function is helping leaders understand how sustainability can be operationalized—and how these programs help Chevron avoid risk and add business value.



Knowing her audience and selecting terms that resonate with them helps Garrigo tailor her communications for the most impact.

During the breakout session, one participant said his team maps out profiles of each of the company's senior leaders, and then develops strategies for building senior-level relationships before reaching out to them for support. Another participant's sustainability team modeled its strategy for building senior-level support after existing successful cross-functional initiatives at their company, such as Six Sigma.

Moss sees three phases of engaging company employees in sustainability. First, the company's senior leaders need to take a vocal position in support of sustainability efforts. For example, BT's former chairman publicly supported the company's new government policies to address climate change. This set the tone for all employees. Second, Moss said companies need to create a management infrastructure that empowers employees to participate in sustainability. Moss explained that even programs as seemingly simple as in-house recycling can have an impact. Although office waste makes up a very small portion of BT's total consumption of resources, recycling programs give employees a direct way to make a tangible contribution to BT's overall sustainability agenda. Third, Moss said sustainability leaders need to "strategically harness" employee engagement efforts to ensure maximum impact. Companies should consider programs that match employee engagement programs with strategic sustainability objectives, for instance, by encouraging employees working in data centers to investigate new technology to manage energy use.

Hilton's Corpuel said it has been important for him to frame sustainability as a way to improve business performance. Sustainability programs must be directly connected to the company's strengths. At Hilton, Corpuel is continually challenged to make a case for how sustainability improves hospitality. "No one tells me that solar panels are an important part of travel," he said. Because of this, Corpuel doesn't frame his sustainability discussions in environmental or social terms. Instead, he ties the outcomes of sustainability programs to credible internal metrics of business performance. A customer profile survey, for example, could reveal how important environmental protection is to Hilton customers, which helps support his case that good environmental programs directly contribute to customer satisfaction. Corpuel also ties sustainability programs to other "traditional" business metrics such as energy costs, employee morale, and talent attraction. The argument that sustainability is the right thing to do is not always enough.

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