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THE GREAT ACCELERATION

Sustainability has evolved from a 'nice to have' to a critical imperative for businesses the world over. Accenture's **Toby Siddall** talks to Criticaleye about why speed is of the essence when it comes to driving the green agenda



The clock is ticking on the sustainability targets that are being set by companies and governments, particularly when it comes to executing on Net Zero.

At Criticaleye's recent Sustainability Forum, we heard from **Toby Siddall**, Managing Director & Sustainability Lead for UK & Ireland at Accenture. He shared his thoughts on the importance of business leaders integrating climate, nature and community initiatives, ensuring that they are woven into improving performance, rather than existing as some kind of siloed set of initiatives.

Here are some key outtakes from the interview with **Toby**:

Broadly speaking, what are the most pressing concerns regarding businesses and sustainability?

Toby Siddall: We are moving too slowly. The truth is that in 2023, we are plateauing or going backwards on the SDG 2030 goals. We need global emissions to begin falling within one year, but we will sail through that. So, we need to pick up the pace.

The second thing on my mind is generative AI. It can feel like this topic is overtaking sustainability, but it's not. Technology and sustainability are inextricably linked and will drive some amazing opportunities.

The third thing is how to help businesses embed sustainability into everything they do. Organisations should go beyond lighthouse projects – many of which are still inspiring – and create more sustainable and flexible businesses. It is about building in the capabilities for resilience and growth.

“Your business is a sitting duck unless it is investing to innovate and extend access to more sustainable growth markets”

How central should ESG be in the strategic planning of senior leadership teams?

TS: Climate change is going to transform every industry and every business – whether we engage with it or not. Your business is a sitting duck unless it is investing to innovate and extend access to more sustainable growth markets and stay ahead of physical, transition and reputational risk.

There's also been an incredible wave of disclosures building up over the last five years, not just around carbon, but around nature. TNFD [Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures] is coming right up on the request list of our clients. They are asking us how they can optimise visibility and granularity of emissions, as well as for environmental and social data. And not just in their own organisation, but across their entire value chain. Leaders must consider how their corporate

strategy, their enterprise strategy and their ERP [Enterprise Resource Planning] needs a major overhaul.

ESG scores can too often be just a shareholder or Fund Manager's tool, but we also see businesses saying it's about more than that. It's about a credible story for customers and consumers, who are increasingly informed.

In what ways do you think technology can support the sustainability agenda?

TS: Technology and sustainability are inseparable. This is a twin transformation and the opportunity that technology is presenting us with to solve challenges has never been greater. We need to accelerate the sustainability agenda, so let's leverage the exponential development of technology.

Gen AI is a great example of the power of technology. For a while now, development of platforms to track Scope 3 through our global supply chains has been a bit of a holy grail, slowed down by data collection and questionnaires. Has Generative AI just solved this? Should we now focus purely on verification techniques?

I've already mentioned the complexity of hitting ERP programmes. Other ways in which technology is going to impact directly include: enabling the infrastructure for new multi-party collaborations; Data Management Capacity to revolutionise insight and visualisation from quantum to digital twins; the acceleration of R&D on physical, chemical and biological processes; transparency and traceability through tracking carbon back to specific batches of hard to abate commodities (steel, concrete, >



chemicals and crops); space tech scenario planning and predictability of physical risks globally and; of course, the reduction of emissions from the use of technology itself.

How important is cross-sector collaboration in driving sustainability goals?

TS: Collaboration is the new Moore's Law! You have to collaborate when the world around you is changing so fast, and we need to drive exponential increases in our progress. So, you need to make sure you're working flexibly for the interests of people in your supply chain, as well as for your technology partners and more. Collaboration also helps to pick up the pace of solving collective issues.

Many of the solutions we need might not have a business case when we look at traditional bi-lateral relationships; but increasing the ecosystems involved can find a new benefits frontier that drives return on investment for all.

We found 100 businesses globally that have a line of sight to just shy of 30 percent of global emissions when you look at their Scope 1, 2 and 3. This shows that there is an amazing opportunity to redesign how industries work. These businesses are enormously empowered to influence other businesses on their Scope 3 and so, coming back to this notion of partnerships and collaboration, it's almost a 'penny drop' moment in terms of the concentration of business that could do something that will have an impact on a global scale.

Do we need to change the way we go about promoting sustainability to consumers?

“It's time to consider approaches that are much more ingrained in local culture and tradition”

TS: I think we need to move beyond banging consumers over the head with the 'you've got to be more sustainable' line.

Accenture Song recently published the results of two years of ethnographic research on consumers around the world, called *Our Human Moment*. It revealed a 'Relevancy Gap' between the way that businesses and real people understand and approach sustainability. That gap is extremely wide: three in five people still don't relate strongly enough to the idea of living sustainability to change their behaviours, especially if it costs them. Instead, the research identifies six universal human values that already connect people with sustainable behaviour and could be more relevant to driving the adoption of sustainable products and services.

It's time to consider approaches that are much more ingrained in local culture and tradition. It's then up to business to think through how you sell what you need or

your alternative sustainable version and to think more carefully about some universal human values such as caring, belonging, empowerment and resourcefulness.

What are some key themes leaders should consider going forward?

TS: COP28 is going to be interesting. At the moment, the topics are all around adaptation and how we do it. I would like to see a little bit more focus on the actual decarbonisation elements of it.

I'd also like to see a continuation of the momentum on nature from COP15, in particular around agriculture.

When you look at the challenges within communities, local economies, international businesses, particularly behind animal agriculture, I think it needs a similar level of focus that we've seen on energy. ■

Read Accenture's *Our Human Moment* report via [Criticleye's website](#).

The Criticleye Sustainability Forum was held in Partnership with Accenture. If you're interested in joining our 2023 CEO Sustainability Retreat on 12-13 October, please click [here](#).



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