



**SUSTAINABILITY &  
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**SUSTAINABILITY & ENVIRONMENT  
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CROSS COMMITTEE POST-EVENT INSIGHTS**

# **NAVIGATING THE GREEN MAZE: CRAFTING TRANSPARENT SUSTAINABILITY NARRATIVES FOR IMPACT**

# CHECKLIST FOR THE TIME STARVED

- You must speak truth. Period.
- Create a narrative design for sustainability. Answer these three questions:
  - a. What is our intent?
  - b. What are we doing?
  - c. What progress are we making?
- Align the narratives across stakeholders while you create nuances for specific micro narratives, cultures and values.
- To Consumers: Don't start with the sustainability narrative. Instead, share on a small but impactful local initiative and be ready with that story. Because your other stakeholders may ask for it. Go small, go local, go where you have relationships
- To Investors: Everything is going to be evaluated as a whole – your impact materiality and your financial materiality. It's dynamic. What you say in your sustainability report is statutory in the eyes of many regulators
- Practical advice: First, separate your consumer and investor perspectives to be clear, and have different stakeholders review your work to ensure you're following compliance. Then, connect and coordinate the two narratives. Avoid having the

Editor: Joanne Flinn, Chairperson of the ESG Institute

Contributors: APCO Worldwide, DLA Piper, Procter & Gamble, TriOn & Co, Paia Consulting Pte Ltd

# 10 ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FROM AMCHAM ON SUSTAINABILITY NARRATIVES FOR CONSUMERS, COMPLIANCE AND INVESTORS

A big mindset shift in organizations over the last 3 years.

# 1

**Then:** In the past, brand managers were battling with their legal counsels while operations teams were concerned they were going to lose market share if they didn't tell a better story about the sustainability agenda. However, along the way, the truth of the story was lost.

**Now:** Today, the recognition is that you must speak truth. Period.

E.g. With changes in technology, data and activism, it's possible to suddenly have the transparency of your supply chain exposed. So you need to spend the time ensuring that your operations and your supplier are rock solid, as even the best organizations can be exposed

Accessibility. This is about language and structure.

# 2

On language: We are not scientists trying to tell a scientific story, yet we use scientific jargon (e.g. decarbonizing, net zero, etc.). The everyday person doesn't talk about the climate, they talk about the weather. Simplify your language and ensure your stakeholders can understand your language.

On structure: Think about your narrative design. Ask yourself these questions, "What is my intent? What are we doing? What progress are we making?"

Stakeholder Values

# 3

Research and understand cultural values when it comes to your consumers, government, and/or business. For example, if you are a government stakeholder, refrain from telling businesses what they are not doing well. Instead, remind businesses that 50% of the world's economy is dependent on depleting nature and nature based assets. That's what stakeholders respond to.

## Pragmatic wisdom developed from years of experience: Be clear in your narrative.

# 4

If you lead with sustainability in creating a narrative for your brand, good luck. Most of your consumers won't care. There are a few consumers who might care, but they're not big enough to drive your business. Focus on the superiority of your products for sales. First and foremost in terms of purchasing priorities, consumers care about the quality of the product. Ninth or 10<sup>th</sup> in line may be sustainability. While consumers care a lot about sustainability, but they won't buy you because of that.

**In everything you do as a leader**, check yourself. If you sell more, you must also be mindful to minimize your carbon footprint and not contribute to the problem. Be part of the solution. It's all part of a smart sustainability strategy.

Don't start the sustainability narrative with consumers. Be ready to share your story when stakeholders ask for it.

**Note:** From a value creation point of view, sustainability can generate value in more efficiency, in investability, in statutory reporting, in reducing risk profile, in future readiness, in market access and employee value.

## Narratives are a concise way of talking about something.

# 5

For example, in the world of issues management, the fundamental responses are, "We're facing an issue because of this. This is what we're doing, and we expect the outcome to be this." That's typically how you respond to a really difficult question.

With ESG and sustainability narratives, it comes down to these key questions:

1. What is the fundamental purpose of the organization and what does it stand for?
2. What is it trying to do?
3. How does that inform all the work being done for its operations?

The answers to these questions will feed your narrative and help you tell your story to your different audiences, whether it be investors, the government, communities, or anybody else.

Other points:

- Consistency is key, especially when it comes to communicating across different channels internally and externally.
- Be intentional and always include a human element in your micro-narratives and communications.
- Show progress rather than perfection.
- Don't look at consumers as the only stakeholder.

# 6

Sustainability governance goes beyond basic financial accounting. It's about ensuring that whoever is running the business is accountable and making sure that things are done right within the company, with the suppliers you work with, and with your trade partners.

As a company and individual product representatives, whatever you do impacts your brand, which is your most important asset. We sell that to take care of our reputation. At the end of the day, my job as a leader is to pass the brand on to the next leader in better condition than it was before.

## Narratives are not a single point.

# 7

Organizations oftentimes fall off track when they begin to think, "Okay, we get it. We understand the sentiment and that there is a concern about this particular issue. Therefore, we will respond in this way."

We need to be thoughtful when we're designing proper substance stories, or narratives that engage with people so that your reputation is protected and you can advance with your business. You need to be thinking about how you move from one particular point on a value driver through to engagement, while guiding it into a message drive as well.

Fifteen years ago, digitalisation was a separate business concept. Now it's not. This is not about sustainable based narratives. This is about business or organizational narratives that reflect your contribution to a better environment, better social conditions and better governance.

Align in terms of values from consumers to yourself, your suppliers, your partners, and your entire ecosystem. Be grounded and founded upon that set of principles. That can help translate into a narrative that threads across stakeholders consistently.

# 8

When the topic at hand is bigger and heavier, find a fun and easy part to it.

For example: Go small, go local, go where you have relationships. Because as much as you're trying to align the global and regional business, there's always difficulty. But if I go out to a manufacturing plant of ours and engage with the community around the plant, we can build a good relationship with the people around us. We can do small but impactful things like plant trees and it can be celebrated. It's positive and positive news like that, wherever it spreads, is good.

Precision of activity systems and small stories that matter to a specific community still works.

Note: From a compliance/risk perspective: the go small proposition will likely not create the kind of drama for corporates that happens when they say we're saving the planet. But it's never going to be wrong to collect plastic on a beach or plant a tree. While those things aren't likely to save the planet, they are easier to prove.

Think about it this way. If someone asks you to prove your narrative, it's simpler to show that a team went to a beach and cleaned up. This is a fact. Saving the planet is an intention and it's harder to prove you are acting on that intention, particularly when some parts of the business may be doing things that consume nature-based assets.

Go small and make your messaging making narrative. Go local, because it's unlikely to be untrue.

# 9

Any sophisticated business with a supply chain and a significant market that's bringing in primary resources for production is using a supply chain of factories that's generating some product. Those products in Asia or beyond are constantly being subjected to an ever changing compliance framework, whether it's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), or Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), or the German supply chain act, or the Australian modern slavery rules. It is an ever changing, developing and maturing framework of complex ESG regulation.

The reality is every single day your supply chain and your distribution chain are changing at the same time and are changing every single day. So the truth is, full compliance at any point in time is complex and practically impossible.

Practically speaking, it's not possible to have compliance resources that are so omniscient that you can look at every single thing that you're doing at every part of the globe at any point of the day and are keeping track of that.

Given compliance complexity, keep your consumer and investor narratives clean, simple and aligned.

# 10

Context for investors and statutory statements: Investors should appreciate the concept of *dynamic materiality*. It's no longer about just impact materiality or financial materiality as they are all interlinked. At some point in time, they will affect each other. And the way the EU regulations are structured from a jurisdictional perspective is going to drag the rest of the world behind them.

From a multi-stakeholder engagement standpoint, you can't take an approach that says, "okay, because you are an investor, I'm only going to talk to you about numbers," or "because you are some NGO, I'm only going to tell you about what we are doing from a social contract perspective."

Because increasingly, everything is going to be evaluated as a whole.

So, whether it's International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB), or Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) reporting, clients will begin to think about how you connect the narrative. The narrative needs to stay consistent with quantitative nuances to satisfy investors.

Practical advice: First, separate the narrative to be clear. What are the reporting compliance requirements and what are their narratives? Have different people look at this first. Do this to ensure compliance and then connect and coordinate the narratives. And don't forget - don't have the same people working on both things because if they mix it up, the lawyers will call.





As we face the challenges of the climate crisis, business is waking up to the need to move from extractive to regenerative ways of doing business. This requires a transformation of leadership, business models and assets where impact creates new forms of value.

## ACCELERATE SUSTAINABLE VALUE

We believe today's leaders can generate momentum and impact toward a greener, fairer future. We exist to **enable founders** who want to **make a difference** and **executives** who want to **leave a legacy**, as we believe **the world we live in tomorrow is in the hands of today's leaders**.

We empower and equip leaders to drive results while accelerating progress towards a greener, cooler and more equitable future. We bridge the awareness-knowledge gap, enable alignment, and build action and accountability.

We accelerate impact by equipping leaders with the tools, diagnostics and roadmaps to identify where they are and what action to take next on the path to a sustainable future.

- (1) Bridging the awareness – knowledge gap as a Certified ESG Professional  
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For business leaders who know that action today is more affordable than action tomorrow, that ESG investments made now will pay dividends in the future.

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Thank you to:

**AmCham Sustainability & Environment Committee Co-Chairs**

Sally Tan, Senior Managing Director, Head of Client Solutions, Savills Singapore  
Susanna Hasenoehrl, Senior Vice President and Head of Sustainability, SAP Asia Pacific and Japan  
Marshall Lee, Head of Climate & Sustainability, Marsh McLennan

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Casline Chu, Managing Director, South East Asia, Kellanova

**Panelists and Moderator from 'Navigating the Green Maze: Crafting Transparent Sustainability Narratives for Impact' (AmChamSG Event on May 29, 2024)**

Ian Rumsby, Chief Client Officer, APCO Worldwide  
Mauric Burke, Partner, Head of Investigations, Asia, DLA Piper  
Clint Navales, Vice President, Communications, Procter & Gamble  
Marion Ang, Co-Founder and ESG Lead, TriOn & Co  
Dawn Ng, Senior Consultant, Paia Consulting Pte Ltd

**For more information, contact:**

Jessica Cho (Ms.)  
Director, External Affairs  
AmCham Singapore  
E: [jcho@amcham.com.sg](mailto:jcho@amcham.com.sg)

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