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UN-Global Compact -
Accenture CEO Study 2013:
Sustainable business and the
pace of change

Hello, I'm James Murray, Editor of Business Green and the host for this, the first in Accenture's series of podcasts looking at the United Nations Global Compact – Accenture CEO Study for 2013. This tri-annual study explores the views of business leaders around the world on the past, present and the future of corporate sustainability and the role that businesses and CEOs themselves can play over the next decade in helping to harness sustainability as a transformative force in a global economy.

I'm joined today by Georg Kell, Executive Director of the United Nations Global Compact and also Peter Lacy, Managing Director for Strategy and Sustainability, Accenture in Asia Pacific. Georg, this is the third CEO study by the Global Compact and Accenture on sustainable business. In the context of this study, how do you define the term sustainability?

It's the long term delivery of value by the business in financial, environmental, social and ethical terms. This is the simplest definition we have and it's quite sophisticated when you look into the blueprint for sustainability leadership where all four dimensions are actually laid out in greater detail

Thanks, Georg. And, Peter, did the CEOs that you speak to share that definition of sustainability? What do you think it means to them?

So I think as Georg said, there is an emerging convergence around the language and the meaning of sustainability globally. So I think if you go back 5 to 10 years, you might have seen a number

of different interpretations and actually I think there's consistency about sustainability encompassing environmental, social and governance issues. And I think the kinds of issues that CEOs cover when we talk to them in the one-to-one's and what we see in the survey, is that those broadly reflect the 10 principles of the UN Global Compact. What I would say is that by industry and sometimes by geography, they tend to be much more focused at the individual company level, at the individual CEO level on specific sets of issues. So, pharma looking at access to healthcare, industrials looking at the issue of resource efficiency and so on and so forth. So I think it is also, as well as being convergence globally, there's a very clear focus and lens of different CEOs by different geographies and industries.

Georg, this study is conducted every three years, what are the particular areas of focus this year?

The study will continue to assess the CEO perspectives. This time around I think there's a record number of participants, as a matter of fact, but what makes this year's study special is it will have a much deeper look into the role of key stakeholders such as governments, investors and consumer's and explore how they influence the CEO's approach on corporate sustainability. So it will shine some very fresh light from these perspectives. Moreover, the study will also ensure that sustainability goes beyond environmental issues. It also includes social and governance issues and connects thereby to corporate governance affairs themselves to ensure sustainability

and explore how it actually is handled at the leadership level and at corporate governance level. And from a UN perspective, I should add that the study will also shine a very important light on the role of business in the post 2015 development agenda and its new insights on collaboration and how business is willing to team up with other partners in tackling tough dilemmas and how this affects sustainability concept. So three new perspectives of the study.

And, Peter, from your conversations with CEOs so far, what's changed since 2010?

I think that the pace of change has been one of the key themes from the survey and from the interviews with CEOs right across the world. And I think that what we're seeing is the emergence of a two-speed world on sustainability. I think on the one hand we're seeing real innovators making huge progress, driving disruptive innovation and products and services that tackle directly a range of sustainability issues, whether it's resource efficiency or clean energy or whether or not it's providing access to finance or products in the base of the pyramid markets. And there are real innovators and many of those are innovating because they're able to link their innovation to the top line, to growth and to profitability and to value creation. I think there's another set of companies that even though they are committed to sustainability, I think are struggling to align that with business success. And, so, they are to some extent reaching a plateau where they are finding it difficult without clear market incentives from governments, from consumers and customers, from

investors, to continue to advance at the same speed. And, so, there's a gap opening up and I think one of the conclusions is that actually we do need to see more done to provide the enabling market context to drive transformational sustainability in line with what CEOs themselves report to be the kind of needs we have for sustainability globally.

Well, Peter Lacy and Georg Kell, thank you once again for speaking with us today and thanks also to those of you listening. If you'd like more information related to the topics we talked about in this podcast, please visit [accenture.com/ungestudy](https://www.accenture.com/ungestudy). Please also join our ongoing conversation about sustainability, business and policy by following us on Twitter [@actsustainably](https://twitter.com/actsustainably) and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/accenturesustainabilityservices. And, of course, don't forget to keep up-to-date on all the latest Green Business news and analysis at [businessgreen.com](https://www.businessgreen.com).

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