

CEO DECISION-MAKING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

A PRIMER



Network for
Business Sustainability
South Africa

CEOs can play a crucial role in embedding sustainability into the strategies and day-to-day decisions of their organisations. This primer describes what helps shift their decision-making around sustainability and how corporate change agents can support this process.

About this research

This primer is based on a review of prior research on CEO decision-making, combined with practical experiences and insights gleaned from interviews with 84 CEOs, board members, and sustainability executives from a range of global companies. For related resources, please see the end of this primer.

What shapes CEO decision-making?

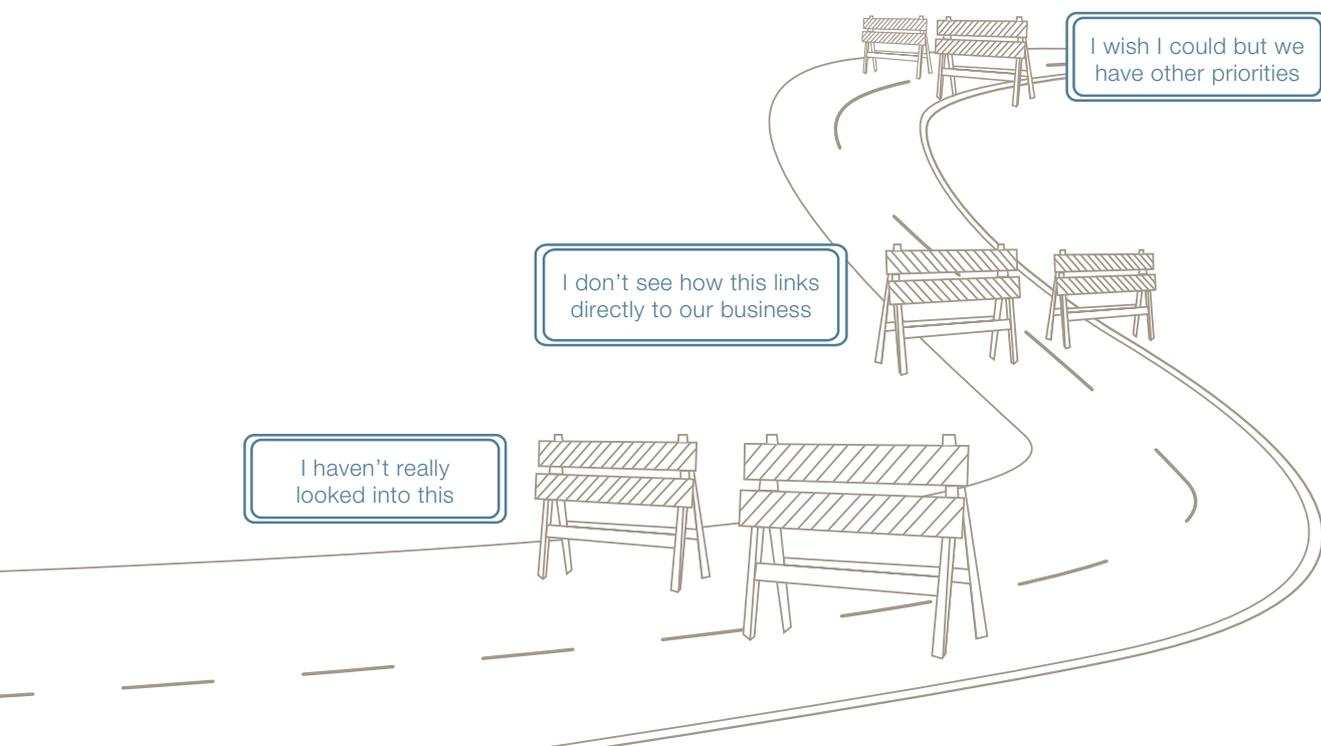
Personal readiness. CEOs' professional experiences and connections, personal experiences and connections, and the degree to which they are broad scanners of information all shape their readiness to accept that environmental and social factors should be factored into their decision-making.

The internal and external context. CEOs pointed to both the internal and external contexts of the business as key constraints on their decision-making.

A 'gut check.' CEOs mentioned three other factors that guided their decision-making. They talked about needing to demonstrate performance, wanting to be seen as a good steward of the company, and leaving a personal legacy.

What are the key barriers that prevent CEOs from prioritising sustainability?

Three answers surfaced repeatedly in discussions with CEOs.



How can change agents support their CEOs?

Change agents can try these tactics to support their CEOs and catalyse better decision-making around sustainability.



Help them create strong business cases



Create opportunities for them to experience the issues first-hand



Help them learn from influential peers



Let the business 'fail small'



Create opportunities for them to make public commitments



Create opportunities for them to receive recognition for this work



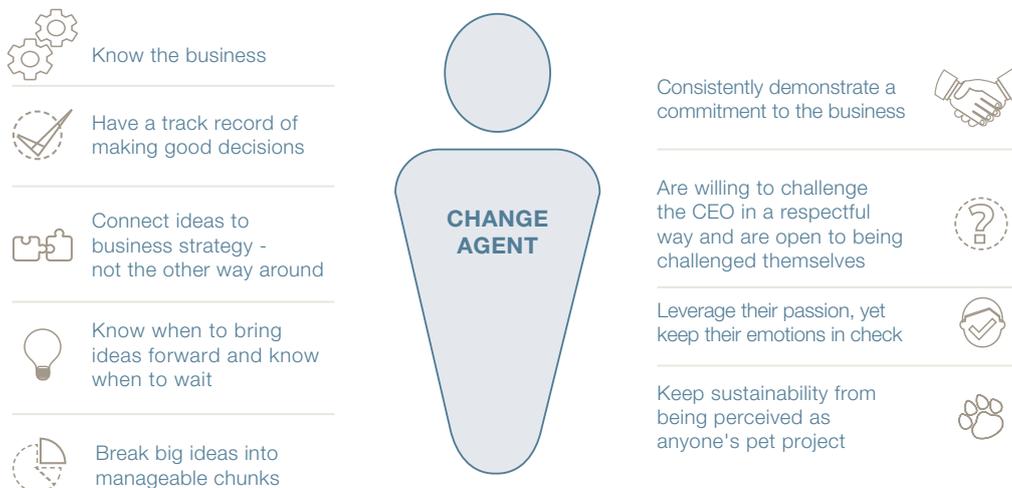
Help board members be better sustainability advocates



Leverage the interests of key customers

How can you prepare yourself to be a more effective sustainability change agent?

Research revealed a number of characteristics of effective sustainability change agents. By reflecting on these characteristics, sustainability change agents may be able to bolster their own effectiveness.



What next?

In addition to this primer, the [comprehensive report](#), [executive guide](#), and worksheets ([Supporting Your CEO](#) and [Being an Effective Change Agent](#)) synthesise lessons on this topic from the direct experience of our participants. We hope that their stories and our tools will help sustainability change agents in applying these findings in their own companies, and ultimately, catalyse better sustainability decision-making.