

Global C-suite Series  
25th Edition  
The CEO Study



# In their own words

How CEOs are forging  
paths to sustainability

We are, quite literally,  
in the eleventh hour of  
climate change.

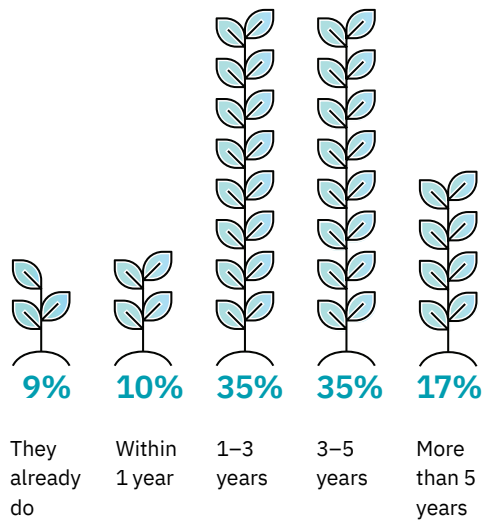
As noted naturalist Sir David Attenborough  
said at the COP26 UN Climate Conference:

“We are . . . the greatest problem solvers to  
have ever existed on Earth. If working apart,  
we are a force powerful enough to destabilize  
our planet, surely working together we are  
powerful enough to save it.”<sup>1</sup>

No one knows this better than chief executives of  
large global organizations. In the IBM Institute for  
Business Value’s (IBV) latest research with CEOs,  
they shared with us their greatest challenges over the  
next several years. Many of the challenges that fill the  
headlines—supply chain success in uncertain times,  
changing workforce demands, and more—didn’t  
make the final cut. They’re important, of course,  
but were not cited as the top challenge.

CEOs reserved the top spot for sustainability—so much  
so that in 2022, sustainability was ranked as a CEO top  
priority 37% more frequently than in our 2021 study.<sup>2</sup>  
Urgency of action was a key theme.

CEOs were clear that while making sustainability  
a priority is good for the world, it’s also good for  
business. More than 80% say sustainability  
investments will drive better business results in  
the next five years.<sup>3</sup>



**Expecting results**

More than 80% of CEOs say sustainability investments  
will drive better business results in the next 5 years.

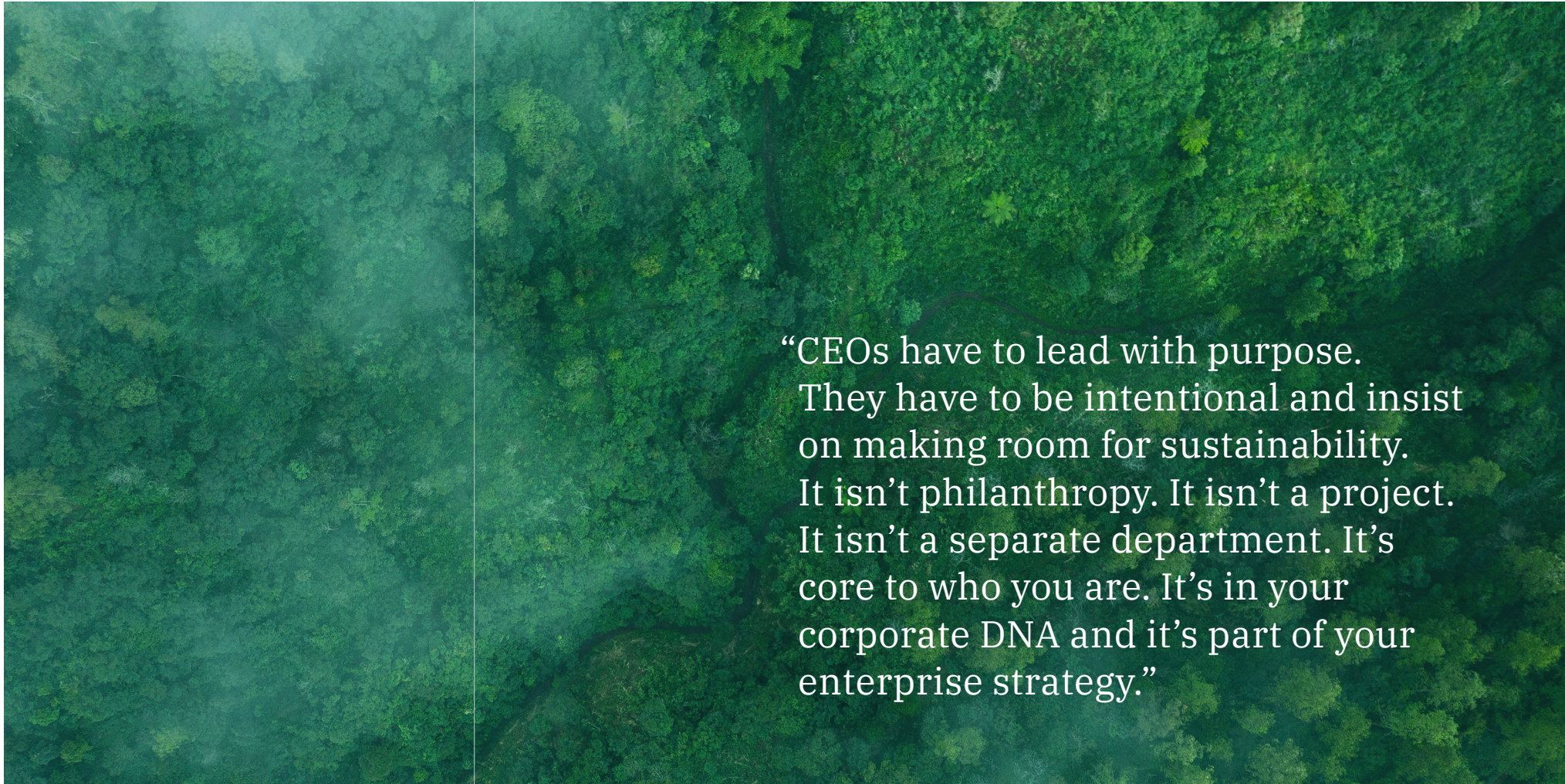
The IBM Institute for Business Value, in cooperation  
with Oxford Economics, interviewed 3,000 CEOs  
from 40+ countries and 28 industries as part of the  
25th edition of the IBM C-suite Study series. These  
conversations focused on executives’ perspectives  
on leadership and business; their changing roles and  
responsibilities; and sustainability, including how  
they are addressing challenges, what they see as  
opportunities, and their visions for the future.



Hear the CEOs in their own words:  
<https://ibm.co/ceo-sustainability>

Our latest CEO study, titled “Own your impact: Practical pathways to transformational sustainability,” is based on research with 3,000 CEOs from around the world. It offers rich insights and perspectives into how CEOs are acting on sustainability goals as part of a larger purpose-driven strategy. In the pages that follow, we share more of what CEOs told us *in their own words*.

Think of it as a virtual roundtable of sorts, in which participants explain how they’re moving from ambition to action to bake sustainability into their business and their ecosystems.



“CEOs have to lead with purpose. They have to be intentional and insist on making room for sustainability. It isn’t philanthropy. It isn’t a project. It isn’t a separate department. It’s core to who you are. It’s in your corporate DNA and it’s part of your enterprise strategy.”

**Sheri Hinish**

Global Sustainability Services Lead  
IBM Consulting

Do you believe organizations can achieve sustainability solo? Or is systems change required?

“We are being very proactive in publishing our 2030 targets. But when you talk about sustainability, it’s not just what ATCO can do, it’s not just what the government can do, it’s not just what our consumers are going to do.

If we’re going to hit net zero targets for 2050, no individual business or government can really solve that on their own.

This has to be a major collaborative effort amongst all of the constituents.

It’s like anything else:  
You set your targets,  
you set your key KPIs,  
you set your objectives,  
and you work through them.”

**Marshall  
Wilmot**

President, Retail and CDO  
ATCO

“Does the business community—not just individual entities—have a particular responsibility? Yes, without any doubt. Every business community should take responsibility for sustainability. Because sustainability includes three main aspects: economic, ecological, and social sustainable development. The business community is a very powerful force, shaping these three aspects.

In economics, for example, business is at the heart of the social economy. In terms of ecology, many environmental pollution problems are caused by commerce and industry. The same is true of the social aspect; whether it is more employment opportunities or the improvement of social problems, they require business logic to solve. Therefore, from these three aspects, the business community has the ability, the obligation, and the responsibility to be an important backbone of sustainability.

Sustainability itself is a matter for all human beings and an unshirkable responsibility of all. . . On the other hand, **the role of a single group, a single force, whether it is business, government, society, or individual is always limited. Only through the efforts of many parties can the world achieve sustainability.”**

### Wu Jing

Deputy General Manager of Sinochem  
Information Technology Co., Ltd.  
China

### Felipe Nascimento

CEO of MAPFRE Seguros,  
the Brazilian business  
of a Spanish multinational  
insurance company

**“Small acts, when they multiply by millions of people, can transform the world.**

We know that we cannot—nor do we—do all this on our own.

**But we understand that the time has come to walk more than ever towards the future, with responsibility and trust.”**

### Sheri Hinish

Global Sustainability  
Services Lead  
IBM Consulting

“We need to have a common vision.

We need to move together because we’re at a real inflection point right now. **What lies ahead isn’t something that one single organization can solve.**

**These are complex, interconnected problems.”**

Share what your organization is doing right now to help improve sustainability.

“Sustainability has been a part of our DNA since Desjardins was founded in 1900. More recently, we’ve strengthened our commitment to sustainability through concrete actions.

From 2017 to 2020, we developed our first plan for a stronger impact on sustainability and climate change. We were looking at it internally: our processes and policies, our buildings, and how transportation was being handled within Desjardins. We looked at reducing our carbon footprint with our own activities. In our 2021 to 2024 plan, we want to influence people. Along with our own activities, we will progressively integrate the carbon footprint of all our clients and members—to try and reduce the carbon footprint of the whole package Desjardins has to offer.

For example, we selected 100 of our top suppliers and started an engagement campaign to work with each of them to reduce our supply chain carbon footprint based on clear metrics. Second, we integrated ESG criteria in every aspect of our business, including financing projects for big businesses. **Since 2018, we have refused a significant number of requests from companies who have asked us for financing. We’ve said ‘no’ to activities where we weren’t sure that the ESG criteria were really integrated:** governance issues, climate change issues, health or social acceptability issues.

In 2020 and 2021, I created a committee that reports directly to the management committee, with a vice president from each of our business units. They meet regularly and must champion ESG criteria in each of their operations and give us proactive solutions for their market and industry. This working group is embedded in our governance.

Lastly, I introduced a change to our bonus programs this year for the 58,000 employees and the management committee. They now have a percentage of their bonus that is totally connected to ESG criteria, which will provide a strong financial incentive for everyone at Desjardins to contribute to our sustainability objectives.”

**Guy Cormier**

Chair of the Board, President,  
and CEO of Desjardins Group

“I was very proud of our company coming out with our ESG program in January, putting our money where our mouth is, setting some targets, and getting everybody focused in the right direction. I’m proud to be with a company that is willing to do that.

We divested ourselves of our fossil fuel power generation, which was a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas contributions. We’ve been reinvesting some of that into renewable resources. We’ve been doing some very interesting hydrogen piloting in Australia as well as in Canada.

And if you look at the retail side, people are looking for value. They always have, and they always will. So it’s important that affordability is taken into account. Today, we provide our customers an ability to purchase green energy, but green energy is at a premium. The biggest question will be: what are people willing to pay in order to ensure that we’re able to continue to build out our infrastructure to support that? We’ve invested in some solar projects in Alberta and, and some renewable projects in Australia, and you’ll see us continue to put focus on that energy transition.

Not every investment that we’re going to make in sustainability will necessarily pay off, and we recognize that. Some are going to be successful; others aren’t. We make sure that we’re addressing all of the stakeholders. **We have to be pragmatic; we have to have a pragmatic and affordable roadmap. It can’t be done while sacrificing key elements like safety, reliability, and affordability that our customers rely on.”**

**Marshall  
Wilmot**

President, Retail and CDO  
ATCO

“We’ve set an internal agenda, actions to reduce our climate impact. We want to meet the goals we’ve set for the year 2030 in a way that consumes less energy, while sourcing the majority of the energy we use from renewable sources.

We also have some specific goals for energy savings.

In Colombia, we’re investing heavily in fiber optic to replace copper cabling; fiber optics use seven times less energy than copper technology. So ultimately, that is now clearly having an impact on the overall carbon footprint. We now have that fully in place.

We now have credits linked to sustainability indicators, one of which is energy reduction. Currently some 67% of our energy is already from renewable sources and clearly we have to continue in that vein.

And **we treat this as a business issue. More than simply telling people about our progress, we have a responsible business plan. So, when we told the shareholders, we told them via a comprehensive report as we would regarding other business issues.**

It’s a process of continuous improvement. It’s never complete; it doesn’t have an endpoint. Instead, things come back to us in a virtuous circle.”

**Fabián  
Hernández**

CEO  
Movistar Colombia

“We are committed to developing new solutions with ESG aspects and helping our clients in the transition to a more sustainable portfolio focused on promoting renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and social and inclusive businesses.

Within the scope of our activities, we have been working to migrate our energy matrix to renewable energy sources. We already consume energy generated by solar plants and our goal is to reach 90% in the supply of energy from renewable sources.

We believe that sustainability brings business benefits. We have one of the largest portfolios of sustainable businesses in the National Financial System, with growth of 19.1% in 12 months, which corresponds to 37.1% of the total classified loan portfolio of the Banco do Brasil.

Our performance in agribusiness is increasingly strong, with a 54% share of the Brazilian market. Half of our agribusiness portfolio comprises sustainable credit lines, with incentives for low-carbon agriculture and no-till, among others.

We are convinced that through sustainable business it is possible to combine profitability with the generation of value for customers, society and the environment.”



**Fausto  
Ribiero**

CEO  
Banco do Brasil

**Guy  
Cormier**

Chair of the Board, President,  
and CEO of Desjardins Group

“I dream of the day when we will put as much attention and importance on the quarterly ESG criteria and the quarterly environmental results as we do for earnings and GDP.”

**Andy  
Katz-Mayfield**

Cofounder and  
CEO of Harry's

“In some cases, you have to take a leap of faith. **In some cases, you have to do things that maybe aren't going to pay off in two years, but instead in five or 10 years.**”



## It's time to move beyond ambition to action

One key theme appeared in all of our CEO interviews—these leaders and their organizations have moved from ambition to action. Good intentions are not enough, and these executives are committed to making sustainability a reality. Find out more about their approaches, explore the four distinct CEO groups that emerged from our research, and find action guides in our report: “Own your impact: Practical pathways to transformational sustainability.”



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At IBM, we collaborate with our clients, bringing together business insight, advanced research, and technology to give them a distinct advantage in today's rapidly changing environment.

## Notes and sources

- 1 <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/climate-change/cop26-climate-change-summit-top-quotes-7602912/>
- 2 “Own your impact: Practical pathways to transformational sustainability.” IBM Institute for Business Value. <https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/en-us/c-suite-study/ceo>
- 3 Ibid.



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