Charting a Sustainable Future: Roadmap to Corporate Social Sustainability in Singapore

Summary

Commissioned by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, Verian's research on Corporate Social Sustainability provides a comprehensive roadmap for businesses in Singapore to achieve sustainable, inclusive, and equitable growth. In this research, we explored the current landscape of corporate sustainability by adopting a multi-phased, interdisciplinary approach which involved extensive desk-scans, social listening, quantitative surveys, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. We further identified policy implications and sustainable solutions through ideation workshops and discrete choice experiments.

The research employed the **ABCDE** framework – Aware, Balanced, Convinced, Decide, Execute – to build stakeholder trust and facilitate the adoption of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices. Key findings reveal that there are high **A**wareness and support for ESG among managers and the general population, and that a **B**alanced approach is needed to meet consumer and employee expectations. Furthermore, a **C**onvincing business case for sustainability requires informed **D**ecision-making facilitated by government support, as well as effective **E**xecution strategies involving partnerships and stakeholder engagement. Using the ABCDE framework, we pinpoint best practices to the successful adoption of Corporate Social Sustainability.

Our findings highlight the importance of mental health in social sustainability, the critical role of government in providing funding and training, and the potential for businesses to drive significant positive change. Our research positions Singapore as a leader in Corporate Social Sustainability, offering actionable insights for businesses to navigate ESG complexities and achieve long-term growth and profitability.

Guiding Businesses Toward Sustainable, Inclusive, And Equitable Growth With Enhanced Social Impact

	Pre-Implementation			During Implementation	
	A Aware	**B** Balanced	**C** Convinced	**D** Decide	**E** Execute
Framework	**Aware** of what stakeholders want.	**Balanced** in approaching the needs of stakeholders.	**Convinced** of the business case and need for sustainability.	**Decide** on next steps through education, consultation and funding.	**Execute** and monitor the strategies to improve sustainability.
Key highlights	• Promote societal benefit alongside financial success. • Advance Sustainable Social Practices in Mental Health, Diversity, and Inclusive Hiring.	• ESG practices foster sustainability in business. • Consumers value responsible companies and pay more for sustainability. • Employees seek flexibility and growth in social sustainability practices.	• Focus on future-proofing, talent attraction and retention, brand building, and anticipating multinational collaborations. • Requires commitment from company leadership, industry, and government.	• Focus on funding/grants and senior management buy-in. • Lack of commitment is the primary challenge by managers.	• Engage in corporate partnerships. • Collaborate with existing organisations. • Take measured steps. • Track and communicate impact. • Prioritise mental health metrics.

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Detailed Findings

Introduction

In Singapore's current economic landscape, corporate sustainability has become a central focus for businesses which are seeking to balance profitability with social and environmental responsibilities. At our 'Decoding Trust' conference in Singapore on the 26th of July 2024, Verian presented its latest research in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, shedding light on how businesses can navigate this complex terrain to achieve sustainable, inclusive, and equitable growth. This detailed study outlines a multi-phase approach to understanding and implementing effective sustainability practices, providing a comprehensive roadmap for corporate entities.

Methodology

Our research incorporated interdisciplinary methods to uncover subtleties and nuances in corporate sustainability practices:

Phase 1: Distilling the Landscape and Understanding Perspectives

- We begin by understanding corporate sustainability through a meticulous distillation of the existing landscape. Our team embarked on a thorough desk-scan and employed social listening to capture the current sentiments and trends related to Corporate Social Sustainability (CSS). This foundational work was enriched by quantitative surveys targeting two critical groups: 300 managers across various industries and 1,000 people from the general population. These surveys aimed to gather a wide array of perspectives on the importance and implementation of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices.
- To deepen these insights, we conducted 10 in-depth interviews with key organisations. These qualitative interviews provided rich, nuanced understandings of the motivations, challenges, and practical implications of adopting sustainable practices. This combination of quantitative and qualitative methods ensured a robust and comprehensive grasp of the current state of corporate sustainability in Singapore.

Phase 2: Exploring Policy Implications and Sustainable Next Steps

- Building on the insights gained from the first phase, we moved to explore the policy implications and identify sustainable next steps for businesses. This phase featured an ideation workshop that brought together business leaders from 30 local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and government-linked stakeholders to collaboratively brainstorm potential policies and strategies. This change management workshop adopted the Burke-Litwin's model of organisation development and was pivotal in tailoring the recommendations to the specific needs and context of the Singaporean market.
- A significant component of this phase was the use of Discrete Choice Experiments (DCE) where participants were presented with hypothetical scenarios to simulate and capture their real-life decision-making behaviours. By involving 219 local SMEs, the DCE provided

detailed insights into the preferences and trade-offs businesses might consider when implementing sustainability initiatives. This innovative approach allowed Verian to overcome the limitations of self-reported data, offering a more accurate picture of corporate priorities and challenges.

Applying the ABCDE Framework to drive Corporate Social Sustainability

At the core of Verian's findings is the **ABCDE** framework, designed to build stakeholder trust and facilitate the adoption of corporate social sustainability. The framework encompasses the following steps:

Aware: Understanding what stakeholders want

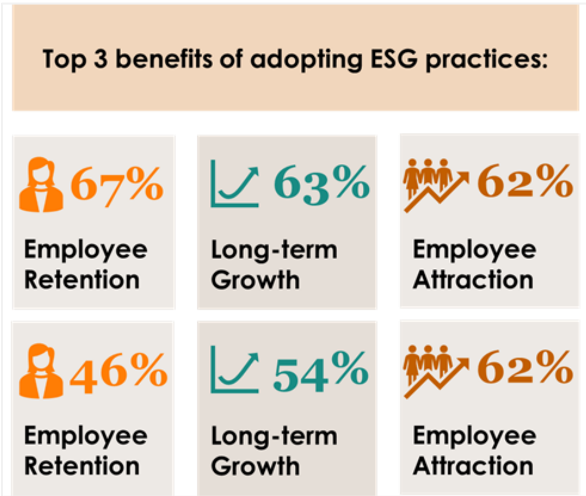
Our research found that both managers and the general population are increasingly aware of the importance of ESG practices. Among managers, 91% highlighted the significance of these practices, with key desired outcomes including societal benefits and profitability. For the general population, 88% echoed similar sentiments, emphasising the need for companies to do good for society while achieving financial success. This awareness is critical for building a strong foundation for corporate sustainability initiatives.

Balanced: Approaching stakeholder needs with equilibrium

A balanced approach is essential in addressing stakeholder needs equitably. Our research showed that 86% of consumers prioritise purchasing from responsible companies and are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products, with some willing to pay up to 40% more. However, barriers such as higher costs and the prioritisation of other product qualities were noted. For employees, flexibility and professional growth were identified as top priorities in social sustainability practices. This balance between ethical practices and stakeholder expectations ensures that businesses can meet diverse needs effectively.

Convinced: Demonstrating the compelling business case for sustainability

Convincing businesses of the tangible benefits of ESG practices is crucial for widespread adoption. Verian's findings demonstrated that employee retention (67%), long-term growth (63%), and employee attraction (62%) are the top benefits of adopting ESG practices. These advantages provide a compelling business case for sustainability, helping to overcome resistance and drive commitment from senior management. In addition, consumer support for responsible companies, reflected in their willingness to pay more, further strengthens this business case.

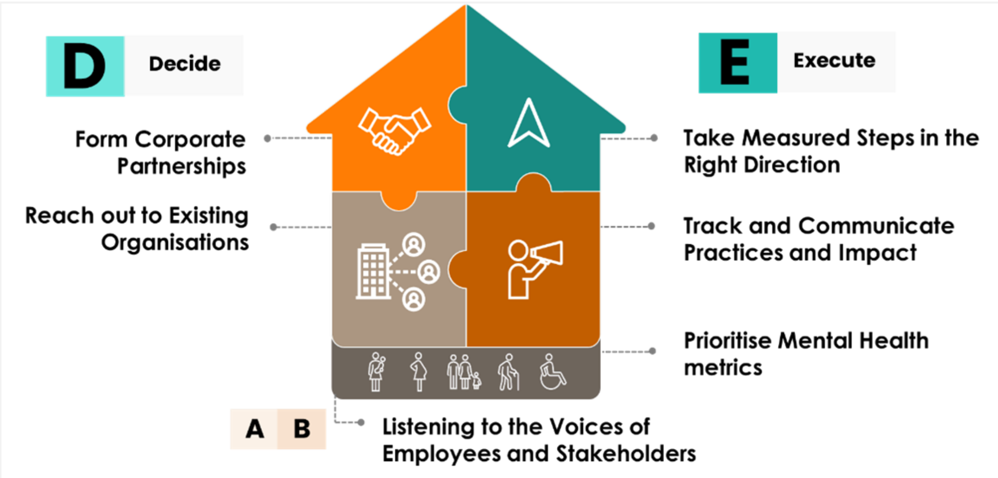


Decide: Making informed decisions through education, consultation, and funding

Informed decision-making through education, consultation, and funding is essential for advancing ESG practices. Managers identified several key initiatives as particularly helpful for companies, including government funding/grants (42%), leadership buy-in (42%), and government training programmes (36%). These elements are crucial for creating an enabling environment where businesses can confidently take the necessary steps toward sustainability. At the same time, having clarity on goals and outcomes internally, as well as awareness of available information, are vital for making informed decisions.

Execute: Implementing and monitoring strategies to improve sustainability

Effective execution of sustainability strategies involves several key actions. Verian's research highlighted the importance of forming strategic corporate partnerships, engaging existing organisations, listening to stakeholders, and tracking and communicating the impact of sustainability practices. Regular monitoring and transparent communication are essential for sustaining momentum and ensuring that the implemented strategies yield desired outcomes. Furthermore, prioritising mental health metrics as part of social sustainability emphasises the holistic nature of these efforts.



Conclusion

Verian's comprehensive research provides a clear and actionable roadmap for businesses in Singapore to achieve sustainable growth. By aligning stakeholder needs, demonstrating the business case for ESG, and navigating challenges through strategic partnerships and clear communication, companies can build a future where profitability and social responsibility coexist harmoniously. The adoption of a journey on corporate social sustainably not only transform business, but more importantly our society, to become more inclusive and equitable. We hope that these findings can serve as a critical guide for businesses striving to make a meaningful impact, positioning Singapore as a global leader in sustainability.

Contact us

Please feel free to contact us at VerianSEAMarketing@veriangroup.com if you have any questions.

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