



# THE SUSTAINABILITY DELIVERY GAP

RESILIENCE - NET ZERO  
RISK - TRANSPARENCY  
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT  
COMMERCIAL OBJECTIVES  
CLIMATE - ENERGY

# This is a preview of our full report.

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Fifteen years ago, sustainability was an afterthought, buried at the bottom of board packs. Today, it sits in bold type on corporate homepages, wrapped in the language of ethics, resilience and impact. But the headlines hide a truth: whilst ambition is high, delivery is under pressure.

Our latest research put a few simple questions to our extensive network of sustainability leaders across Europe. The results show that many are expected to meet growing demands but are being held back from growing their resources.

The survey responses show a profession moving forward, not backing away. Sustainability is transitioning from broad vision statements to tangible, measurable action. Leaders highlighted resilience, risk, regulation and the commercial gains of getting it right. They also cautioned about fragmentation, fatigue, uncertainty and the risk of it becoming everyone's job but no one's responsibility.

## What Acre's research uncovered:

- **Commitment holds firm:** Despite economic uncertainty and political headwinds, over half of respondents kept their sustainability targets in the past year, and nearly a third raised them. For many, it is now as much about resilience and competitive edge as ethics.
- **Budgets and headcount feel the squeeze:** Around 40% saw growth in sustainability teams, but often in junior or generalist positions. Others are holding steady, opting to embed sustainability across broader business functions instead.
- **Leaner teams, smarter resourcing:** Most organisations are now tapping external expertise. Specialist consultancies, interim hires and data providers are closing technical gaps while lean in-house teams focus on strategy and engagement.
- **Integration is rising:** Sustainability responsibilities are increasingly built into roles across finance, procurement, operations, and risk. When done well, this strengthens ownership.

When done badly, it spreads accountability too thin. When done badly, it spreads accountability too thin.

- **Sharper, more grounded targets:** Leaders are moving from broad ambitions to science-based commitments, supported by stronger data and aligned to tightening reporting rules such as CSRD, CSDDD, and TNFD.

Our consultants see the same pattern across sectors from mining to finance: regulatory, investor and community pressure is rising, but so is innovation. Circular business models, cross-functional product teams, leaner group functions and ESG-driven investment decisions all point to a shift towards pragmatic, commercially minded sustainability.

The agenda is maturing, embedding itself into core strategy, with leaders expected to act as systems thinkers, bridge-builders and commercial strategists, not just technical specialists.

**“Sustainability is a long-term discipline.  
The urgency is only growing.”**

Survey Respondent

Our collective challenge is clear: expectations are rising, but resources are not always keeping pace. This is what we’re defining as a **‘Delivery Gap’** - how organisations choose to bridge it will define the next phase of corporate sustainability.

This teaser only scratches the surface. **In our full report, we share the detailed survey data, sector-specific insights, and practical examples of how sustainability leaders are adapting to do more with less.**

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