



MARCH 12-14, 2025 | DELOITTE UNIVERSITY

2025 Chief Sustainability Officer Summit

Executive Summary

Deloitte Greenhouse®

Statement of Purpose

The Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) Summit brought together 37 CSOs from organizations across industries to build community, learn new skills, and explore fresh ideas.

Throughout the 3 days, participants explored new ways to engage other leaders at their organization, connect sustainability to business operations and culture to increase resiliency, and navigate an ambiguous and ever-changing environment.

During the Summit, the group focused on addressing the core question:

How can Sustainability executives maximize their impact across their organizations and in the world?

2025 Summit Agenda

WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 12

ACT I. YOUR ORGANIZATION: CATALYZING CULTURAL CHANGE

Learn about the decision science behind creating a cultural change

Start: 4 pm CT

- **Welcome:** Hear brief opening remarks and an overview of the Summit's objectives
- **Keynote:** Listen as Paul Polman, former CEO of Unilever, highlights how to inspire cultural change and challenge orthodoxies
- **Industry Breakouts:** Explore pressing challenges and cultural orthodoxies in industry groups
- **Dinner:** Over a seated dinner, connect with peers and build connections across industries

THURSDAY,
MARCH 13

ACT II. YOUR CXO PEERS: SHARING SUSTAINABILITY SCOPE

Explore how the rest of your organization can support a more sustainable future

- **Keynote:** Get inspired on how to collaborate with others to reach new heights in your sustainability progress
- **Expanding CXO Sustainability Scope:** Explore how to successfully embed sustainability across your org
- **Cross-Industry Breakouts:** Work in small groups to workshop a specific challenge from one of your peers
- **Lunch**

ACT III. YOUR ACTIONS: ENABLING ACCOUNTABILITY

Define management systems to enable accountability and embed sustainability in your organization

- **Developing Systems to Drive Action:** Hear insights on leveraging management systems to drive change and create accountability organically
- **Industry Breakouts:** In industry groups, discuss how to apply new insights towards accomplishing your goals
- **Closing Plenary and Departures**

Formal programming ends at 4 pm CT

- **Informal Peer Dinner** *(Optional)*

FRIDAY,
MARCH 14

ACT IV. SOLUTIONS & OFFERINGS

- **Solutioning Sessions** *(Optional)*

Sessions end at 12 pm CT

2025 CSO Summit Agenda

ACT I. YOUR ORGANIZATION: *Creating Cultural Change*



Paul Polman (Former CEO Of Unilever, Investor, Philanthropist, Co-author Of Net Positive) and Alex Liftman (Global Environmental Executive, Bank of America) discussed the importance of putting people at the center of your transformation narrative.

ACT II. YOUR CXO PEERS: *Sharing Sustainability Scope*



Dr. Ellen Ochoa (Engineer, Astronaut, & 11th Director of the Johnson Space Center) highlighted the importance of engaging across disciplines to achieve new heights and set the right tone from the top.

ACT III. YOUR ACTIONS: *Enabling Accountability*



Steve Goldbach (Deloitte Sustainability Practice Leader) and Amelia Deluca (Chief Sustainability Officer, Delta) shared about management systems and how to apply them to affect cultural and organizational change.

ACT IV. Solutions & Offerings

(Optional programming) Participants connected with Deloitte subject matter advisors to better understand how Deloitte is innovating around key sustainability challenges.

The 2025 CSO cohort had several key insights from the session:

- 1 Relationships Matter:** Creating and cultivating authentic relationships can help advance sustainability goals. By investing time into cultivating authentic relationships with key stakeholders (including CEOs, CXOs, BU Leaders, etc.), CSOs can identify new champions and strengthen existing ties through empathy, intentionality, and true partnership. The core of the CSO role is connecting people and ideas to demonstrate the value of embedded sustainability.
- 2 Peer Power:** Sustainability goals cannot be achieved in isolation; they should include collaborative efforts and partnerships across individuals, organizations, and sectors. Tapping into your peer network can help solve problems, navigate new challenges, and stay inspired. Using shared resources and expertise with a “coalition mindset” can drive meaningful progress toward a future that benefits all.
- 3 Own the Narrative:** As Chief Sustainability Officer, it is critical to also take on the title of Chief Storytelling Officer; honing your skills in crafting and conveying compelling narratives that can resonate across diverse stakeholders. By understanding and speaking the unique language of each business unit – whether through data-driven insights, costs of inaction, customer-centric success stories, or visionary future scenarios – you can effectively align and inspire the organization towards a unified strategic vision.
- 4 The Future is Now:** Turning challenges into opportunities should include setting audacious goals that inspire courageous action and innovative thinking. By reframing obstacles as catalysts for growth, you can adopt a future-focused mindset that emphasizes creative problem-solving. This involves envisioning where you want to be, identifying the necessary resources and steps, and reverse engineering your path to success, ensuring that every decision aligns with long-term objectives. How might we make now a great time to focus on sustainability?

Insights from Creating Cultural Change with Paul Polman

Redefining Corporate Responsibility: Companies should shift their thinking from Corporate Social Responsibility, which often focuses on being “less bad” rather than good, to Responsible Social Corporations; taking full responsibility for their impacts on the world around them.

Enabling Personal Transformation to Affect Change: To change a company, you may need to change yourself first; how might you help those around you reflect and evolve personally before transforming the organization?

Putting People at the Center: As the Chief Storytelling Officer, keeping people at the center of your narrative and focusing on common human values is critical in building alignment. Keep in mind the ABCs of leadership as you build your story: adapt, bridge, collaborate.

Engaging Talent and Consumers: Don’t underestimate the impact employees and consumers can have in driving change. Companies should align with their values to attract talent and maintain and grow their customer base.

Collaborating for Change: In addressing the most complex sustainability issues, many of the tools already exist. The focus should be on building alignment internally and developing collaborative partnerships externally across industry and ecosystem.



Paul Polman

Former CEO of Unilever, Investor, Philanthropist, Co-Author of *Net Positive*

“The more things change, the more opportunity is created.”

Setting Tone from the Top with Ellen Ochoa

Orchestrating Stakeholders: Regardless of if you are in space or on Earth, effective teaming, collaboration, and understanding different viewpoints remains critical. Creating more natural change requires you to involve stakeholders deeply in the process so they can see their voice reflected and connect the mission or purpose that drives everyone. You often have to move from a soloist to an orchestra mindset.

Balancing Polarities: In transforming as an organization, you are constantly balancing a variety of polarities (e.g., tried and true and new approaches). You are not choosing between but recognizing both can be true and are needed. If you haven't considered the negatives of both ends of the spectrum then you may not be in the right spot yet.

Staying Grounded: Effectively leading NASA across multiple administrations required focusing on building core capabilities, ensuring resilience and continuity while demonstrating concrete benefits. Although the target (e.g., landing on the Moon or Mars, etc.) for NASA might change, the required capabilities and the overarching mission stay constant.

Forward Filling: Instead of "back-filling" positions in succession planning, there is an opportunity to hire for the future of the role in question. Consider what skills the role might need in 3 years from now and how to hire for the future you want to build rather than the world you live in.



Dr. Ellen Ochoa

Engineer, Inventor, Former NASA Astronaut, & 11th Director of the Johnson Space Center

"You are doing tough, serious work; it's important to keep your sense of humor. If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right."

Industry Breakout Insights



Consumer

How can you tell the story of sustainability while managing the shifting landscape of sustainability regulation and navigating change in public support?



Energy, Resources, & Industrials

How can you make sustainability opportunity considerations, such as emissions and waste, an integral part of your organization's culture and ways of working?



Financial Services

How can you balance offering the right products and managing risks while focusing on bringing mitigation, resiliency, and adaptation to life through the value chain?



Life Sciences & Health Care

How can you frame the value of sustainability to demonstrate its potential impact in both financial value and value to patients and providers?



Technology, Media, & Telecommunications

How can we embed the value of sustainability across our business teams and hire a team who can flex as needs change?



Cross-Industry Breakouts: What We Heard from Attendees

Some CSOs felt that...

1 There is a need to **shape a new narrative around sustainability** and to take control of the story being told. A core part of this to bring back to CEOs is to **emphasize value creation opportunities** from sustainability.

2 It's important to **balance messaging sustainability from the "heart" and from the "head"**. There is a need to balance leading with the emotional appeal that often convinces people (heart) and rational arguments that there is value in sustainability efforts (head) **to support our goals**.

3 One challenge is to encourage and **inspire leaders to genuinely care about climate-related risks**, rather than just completing reporting exercises. There is an opportunity area to explore pivoting these conversations towards the opportunities change presents to **drive business value**.

4 Compliance mandates can sometimes **distract from the work** of making companies more sustainable. This dynamic can be made more constructive by making it a "virtue of necessity," where CSOs can **use the mandate to have value-oriented conversations** with company leaders.

5 Many climate **risks are hard to quantify and longer-term** than the typical payback period (3 years). **Addressing these risks often requires coordinated action** from multiple actors, which can be challenging.

6 It's clear that meeting **sustainability goals requires a lot of stakeholder engagement** and community building. **Bringing together stakeholders to drive action** across time horizons will come from deeper collaboration.

Deloitte Team Contacts

Below are the Deloitte facilitators and leaders that supported the Summit. The underlined names include contact information.



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