Insights from Corporate Responsibility Leaders:

AccountAbility speaks to CEOs, CSOs and Heads of NGOs
Introduction  ................................................................. 1

Jeff Swartz
CEO of Timberland  ................................................... 2

Carol Atwood
Entrepreneur and AccountAbility Advisory Council Member  .... 4

Rob Cameron
CEO of Fairtrade International  ................................. 7

Bob Langert
Vice President of Sustainability at McDonald’s Corporation  .... 10

Caroline Roan
Vice President of Corporate Responsibility and Reputation at
Pfizer Inc. and President of the Pfizer Foundation  ............... 13

About AccountAbility

AccountAbility is a leading global organization providing innovative solutions to the most critical challenges in corporate responsibility and sustainable development. Since 1995 we have been helping corporations, non-profits and governments embed ethical, environmental, social, and governance accountability into their organizational DNA. Our unique value proposition brings together leading-edge research, widely-recognized standards and strategic advisory services to deliver practical solutions for our clients.
Introduction

Corporate responsibility and sustainable development evolve due to the initiatives of bold, forward-thinking and passionate leaders. These leaders—CEOs, CSOs, Heads of NGOs, Social Entrepreneurs, and Researchers—are changing the way we think about business.

AccountAbility interviews influential corporate responsibility leaders about their insights, experiences, and the lessons they learned. This publication shares highlights from our conversations with five international leaders:

- **Jeff Swartz**, CEO of Timberland, on how his company created an online stakeholder engagement platform
- **Carol Atwood**, entrepreneur and AccountAbility Advisory Council Member, on how the movie *Avatar* presents a lesson in the changing nature of stakeholder engagement
- **Rob Cameron**, CEO of Fairtrade International, on how Fairtrade is achieving success for both companies and producers
- **Bob Langert**, Vice President of Sustainability at McDonald's Corporation, on the importance of listening to critics and engaging them in problem-solving
- **Caroline Roan**, Vice President of Corporate Responsibility and Reputation at Pfizer Inc. and President of the Pfizer Foundation, on why corporate responsibility activities are integral to building brand and reputation

To read the full interviews, visit our website: [www.accountability.org](http://www.accountability.org)
Jeff Swartz
Timberland CEO

Jeff Swartz wears many hats. In addition to his signature Boston Red Sox cap, he’s a self-described “third generation entrepreneur” at the helm of Timberland, maker of the iconic yellow boot and other outdoor wear; a “Prophet CEO” who blends capitalism with activism on the belief that “profit and purpose belong together”; and a social media enthusiast who actively shares his opinions on sustainability and accountability on Twitter.

AccountAbility: Timberland is among a handful of companies shifting to a quarterly sustainability reporting cycle—what was the rationale behind this enhanced transparency? Has your experience matched your aspirations?

Jeff Swartz: We made the shift to quarterly reporting in large part as a result of our stakeholders; as they became more sophisticated in their understanding of sustainability issues, they also started demanding greater information about our CSR initiatives. We talk a lot about being transparent and accountable, and quarterly reporting was an opportunity for us to put our money where our mouth was, by providing more accessible, relevant and timely information about how we’re measuring up in our CSR efforts.

We also made the change in order to give our CSR performance the same importance as our financial performance; we report our financial results every 90 days, and as a company that’s committed to creating social and environmental value in addition to financial value, we felt it was an important “signal” to our stakeholders for us to treat our CSR results the same way, with the same frequency.

AA: Timberland also introduced quarterly stakeholder calls hosted by you, giving stakeholders rare access to a CEO. How does this input help Timberland with its sustainability strategy and practice?

JS: Hosting quarterly stakeholder calls focusing on critical issues for our company helps to reinforce the importance of the four pillars of our CSR strategy (energy, products, workplaces, community service). We purposefully invite speakers with
different opinions and target experts, employees, and other stakeholders to challenge and learn with us. We use the calls to discuss challenges we face as an individual company or as an industry, and we believe they can serve as a platform for both information sharing and improved strategy.

As for providing rare access to a CEO... my wife will tell you I’ll talk to anyone who will give me half an ear. As someone who’s been called a “CSR zealot,” NOT hosting these calls isn’t an option for me. The subject matter is something I take seriously and believe in passionately ... I’d stay on the line all day, if they’d let me.

AA: Timberland launched the Voices of Challenge online stakeholder engagement platform, harnessing the power of social media for enhanced accountability. What are the challenges, benefits, and lessons of this new form of online engagement?

JS: Voices of Challenge gives us an opportunity to interact with more stakeholders in new ways, to learn, engage and ultimately enhance our CSR agenda from ideas that are presented or discussed. The benefits of the platform have been our ability to scale and broaden the conversation and also to have a two-way dialogue with thought leaders, practitioners, NGOs, investors, students, and even consumers.

We’ve been challenged by the typical things that social media presents—real time engagement, possible dominance on the site by one stakeholder over another, and the general nature of an open forum.

AA: How do you work beyond the boundaries of your own company, collaborating with other companies, NGOs, government, and others in collective action to promote broader systemic change toward a more sustainable economy?

JS: I don’t care how powerful or passionate they are—no one entity or organization can impact sustainable change as effectively as a group of entities or organizations. Collaborations bring greater leverage, a greater diversity of ideas and solutions, more resources ... our experience as part of the Outdoor Industry Association Eco-working Group is one example, and there are other groups and efforts like that in which we’ve been able to influence greater change as part of a larger effort than we’d be able to alone.
Carol Atwood’s career embodies the convergence of characteristics and principles governing non-profit and profit organizations: social entrepreneurship. Her chosen strategy: use business, finance, and media to leverage opportunities for making a positive difference. As a member of AccountAbility’s Advisory Council, she provides strategic guidance and facilitates AccountAbility’s mission of advancing corporate responsibility and sustainability by increasing the impact of its standards, shaping a leading research agenda, and delivering transformative service solutions. Carol Atwood founded Spartacus Media Enterprises to increase the flow of capital to media and education for social change. She is a recipient of many awards, including “NYC Entrepreneur of the Year” award, which was sponsored by NASDAQ, Kaufmann Foundation, and Ernst and Young.

AccountAbility: You’ve participated in many cross-sector and public-private partnerships. What key qualities do you look for in partnership initiatives? And what warning signs alert you to possible problems—particularly when multiple parties are involved?

Carol Atwood: We are living in a world in which cross-sector and public-private partnerships have become essential to all stakeholders’ core missions. Whether on a global, country or local level, the world has transformed in such a way that the old boundaries of ‘siloed sectors’ have become blurred. In fact, many discrete sectors are converging with others and are in the process of re-forming in ways that have not yet been determined. Plus, we now live in a world where perhaps we may never truly reform in any permanent sense. The new rules appear to be that change is iterative, requiring flexibility to adapt with every new seismic shift in world populations (such as the current so called Arab Spring) or technology (the latest kind of social media tools).

AA: Can you give us a tangible example?

CA: Here’s a well-known illustration, from the silver screen, on the need for cross-sector partnerships. I have been focusing so much of my time lately on the levers that allow better stakeholder engagement, to ensure marginalized people and environments of the world are empowered to build sustainable communities (financially, socially and environmentally). That’s why I would like to frame my thoughts using the struggles, opportunities, and lessons portrayed in the movie Avatar.
Avatar is a metaphor for the changing landscape I described, and how it affects:

- who is considered a stakeholder
- the need for everyone to recognize cross-sector partnerships are not just as additive to their core missions, but now are essential to their success; and
- the rules of engagement, which affect the voices of those who were once perceived to be disenfranchised and therefore not involved. Now they have a voice, through advocates, governments, new rules of law, social media, smart phones, and other emerging disruptive technologies.

AA: So how does this relate to Avatar?

CA: Well, in the film, you have a classic struggle of those who live on the land, love the land, and assume that they will forever be formally or informally deeded that land. They are the blue-skinned humanoids that represent all indigenous people in our world. Their world is called Pandora.

You also have other actors: the mining corporation, called RDA, which is extracting a valuable mineral called “unobutanium,” and is shown as not acknowledging the interests of anyone but the shareholders. So they represent, in our world, all corporations, and their perception (in a traditional sense) as beholden only to those who have provided funding.

Then you have the government’s military, which in Avatar upholds the corporation’s view of the world—meaning it listens only to the shareholder. In our real world, governments often play this role, too, as the US has with its oil interests in the Middle East. Politicians see their positions jeopardized if their constituents’ consumption desires are threatened.

So, in Avatar, on Pandora, you have the consumers of unobutanium helping to drive the support that the government provides to the company, RDA, and its worldview of who are the primary stakeholders whose needs should be represented.

Then you have the advocates. In the movie, a character named Grace Augustine heads up the “Avatar Program.” It’s similar, in our world, to the not-for-profit and advocacy sectors that support local lands and indigenous peoples affected by corporate interests.

To return to your question: In this classic worldview, the possible multi-stakeholder problems you refer to play out in Avatar. This world view of capitalism has been on shaky ground for some time, and the efficacy of it—with the deep recession and the acceleration of social media, smart phones and other world forces resulting from these two factors—has left us in a place of troubled uncertainty.
In the new world order, corporations, governments, not-for-profits, indigenous people—they all need each other for their core mission to work.

AA: What does all of this have to do with cross sector and public-private partnerships? What are the key qualities for choosing partnerships?

CA: In a different world than we live in now, a new world, shareholders are not the only stakeholder or partner. In the new world order, corporations, governments, not-for-profits, indigenous people—they all need each other for their core mission to work. And those who don’t have powerful voices in the mix in any substantive way—well, those are the people who are now suddenly front and center, bringing down governments in a week. They’re demanding to be part of the process, of building products, creating their own goods and services and trading amongst themselves, thus leaving the traditional capitalist frameworks behind.

In the new world order, the themes that played out in Avatar—with the struggles among the rights of indigenous people, the corporations, the government, the military, and those who consume the corporation’s products—acknowledge that all of the players are stakeholders. It suggests that for stakeholders to achieve ultimate success, engagement amongst them must take place.
Rob Cameron is CEO of Fairtrade International, the central body that sets Fairtrade standards, develops global strategy, supports producers, and promotes trade justice around the world. Fairtrade is the most widely-recognized ethical label in the world, according to a comprehensive study of 17,000 consumers in 24 countries. More than 80 percent of consumers recognize the Fairtrade Mark in the UK, Ireland, Switzerland, Netherlands, Austria and Finland. Despite a difficult economic climate, Fairtrade sales have grown consistently, in the process strengthening local producers and improving the lives of millions of people in the developing world. Prior to taking on the leadership role at Fairtrade in 2007, Rob was the owner and executive chairman of Flag, an international sustainability and CSR communication firm. In addition, he has served with many organizations in the CR arena, most notably as a UK Prince of Wales' Ambassador for Corporate Responsibility.

AccountAbility: What is Fair Trade? What is Fairtrade?

Rob Cameron: The term Fair Trade is used to refer to a concept and a broader movement which seeks to provide producers a fairer trade deal. The most widely recognized definition of Fair Trade was created by an informal association of the four main Fair Trade networks (Fairtrade International, World Fair Trade Organization, Network of European World Shops and European Fair Trade Association).

The term Fairtrade is used to describe the certification and labeling system governed by Fairtrade International. Fairtrade offers farmers and workers in developing countries a better deal and the opportunity to improve their lives and plan for their future. Consumers can identify goods that have met Fairtrade Standards via the international FAIRTRADE Certification Mark, an independent product label.

A product with the FAIRTRADE Mark means independent certification against the Fairtrade Standards at each step of the supply chain. An independent certification company FLO-CERT certifies all Fairtrade producer organizations. FLO-CERT or the national labeling initiatives (Fairtrade organizations in consumer countries) certify the trading companies.

AA: What are some of the problems Fairtrade seeks to address?

RC: Not all trade is fair. Farmers and workers at the beginning of the chain don’t always get a fair share of the benefits of trade. Fairtrade enables consumers to put this right.
For a product to be labeled with the FAIRTRADE Certification Mark, certain standards must be met which cover areas such as pricing, financing, contracts, labor rights, environment, and democracy.

There are two distinct sets of Fairtrade Standards, which address different types of disadvantaged producers. One set of standards applies to smallholders that are working together in co-operatives or other organizations with a democratic structure. The other set applies to workers, whose employers pay decent wages, guarantee the right to join trade unions, ensure health and safety standards and provide adequate housing where relevant.

Fairtrade Standards also cover terms of trade. Most products have a Fairtrade Price, which is the minimum that must be paid to the producers. This price aims to ensure that producers can cover their average costs of sustainable production and acts as a safety net for farmers at times when world markets fall below a sustainable level. Without this, farmers are completely at the mercy of the market.

Producers also get an additional sum, the Fairtrade Premium, which goes into a communal fund for workers and farmer to improve social, economic and environmental conditions. Such funds are typically invested in education and healthcare, farm improvements to increase yield and quality, or processing facilities to increase income.


RC: Both. We’ve seen great success in markets where there are awareness-raising campaigns among consumers, for example through the Fairtrade Towns campaign (fairtradetowns.org), and then the major retailers are brought on board. A number of retailers have made important commitments to Fairtrade. For example, 100 percent of the bananas sold in Sainsbury’s are Fairtrade certified. Both UK and Germany have reported that supermarkets are expanding the range of Fairtrade products within their own-brand product portfolios.
AA: What are the major challenges for Fairtrade going forward?

RC: Climate change and workers rights are the two big issues for us.

Farmers are often overlooked in the current climate change policy frameworks. For example, climate change has wiped out nearly half of the 10 million coffee trees the members of the Fairtrade Mzuzu Coffee Planters Cooperative Union in Malawi have planted since 2003. Elsewhere, some Fairtrade producers have experienced as much as a 28 percent yield reduction due to climate change. To vulnerable farmers, climate change is a reality that threatens their livelihood. Fairtrade is therefore calling upon world leaders, at COP17 [17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change] and beyond, to prioritize policies geared to agriculture dependent communities.

In regard to workers rights, despite our rigorous standards and certification system, we know that workers can face many barriers, some subtle, some overt, to enjoying quality work conditions and to forming or joining a union, even in Fairtrade. That's why we've launched a major program to deepen Fairtrade's impact for workers and hired laborers.

Beyond these issues, the challenge of course, is always to take Fairtrade to scale. We've had very good growth since our beginnings, and now we want Fairtrade to reach millions more farmers and workers to transform the way trade is done.
Bob Langert
Vice President, Sustainability, McDonald's Corporation

Bob Langert joined McDonald's in 1983, beginning his career as a logistics specialist before moving into corporate responsibility. What began 23 years ago as a short-term assignment on a project team tasked with removing CFLs (chlorofluorocarbons) from the company’s packaging gradually expanded into his current role as head of McDonald’s entire global CR effort. Along the way Bob has worked with Greenpeace, WWF, the Environmental Defense Fund, Conservation International, and legendary animal rights activist, Dr. Temple Grandin.

AccountAbility: Describe McDonald’s CR journey. Where have you come from? Where are you headed?

Bob Langert: If I had to put it into a headline, I’d say we’re migrating from corporate social responsibility to sustainability. We’re moving away from CSR terminology as something that’s too narrowly perceived both within McDonald’s and externally as dealing with social issues and philanthropy.

The future is sustainability defined as the core of what we do. It is about our core business and how we intersect with society. It's the idea of creating shared value. Sustainability isn't just about doing the right thing. It's also about doing something that's going to benefit our company. There's no need to be bashful about creating value because that's what's going to make our work sustainable and bring value to society at the same time.

AA: Is “mainstreaming” sustainability more difficult for a company like McDonald’s with a franchise business model?

BL: Yes and no. In some companies decrees come down from on high and everybody gets on board pretty quickly. But that's not how our system works. Eighty-five percent of our system is made up of independent owner operators, true entrepreneurs.
It can be difficult to rally this many people. However, the reward for it is phenomenal. If you define sustainability as truly embedding it in your organization so that people want to do it, as we get our system and suppliers and staff people and owner/operators educated and aware, sustainability gets locked in. People are doing it because they see the value for their business, and for connecting with customers.

McDonald's serves more than 60 million people a day. If we can get our 1.7 million people engaged, we’re going to be able to mainstream sustainability in a big way.

**AA:** You talk about economic impact as a neglected pillar of sustainability, how so?

**BL:** For most employees, the true measure of sustainability is that the company they work for stays in business, and they can keep their jobs and they can sustain their families. However, in most of the CR initiatives I see, or the CR frameworks that are out there—"people, planet, profit" or "ethics, environment, economics"—it seems that keeping the company in business, providing jobs, and paying taxes is an afterthought.

Profit shouldn’t be a dirty word. It’s the key component of making something sustainable.

**AA:** What initiatives are you most proud of?

**BL:** I’m most proud of things that we do that have a multiplier effect of changing things.

Our work with the Environmental Defense Fund changed packaging for our industry, with more unbleached fiber, more recycled content, reduced waste, less packaging.

We did the same with animal welfare working with Dr. Temple Grandin who had these blue sky ideas about how animals should be treated within the supply chain. It’s been a long journey, but we’ve incorporated her animal welfare standards and audits into McDonald’s system globally, in 500 facilities around the world. We’ve basically made a standard operating procedure for the animal agricultural industry, and for the fast food industry to look at animal welfare not as a peripheral issue, but as part of doing business.
Let me give you one more example.

A few years ago activists from Greenpeace showed up in our restaurants in the UK dressed in chicken suits to call attention to excessive soya farming in Brazil, and how it was destroying the Amazon rainforest. We were caught completely by surprise because we don’t get involved in buying soya. Our suppliers do. It’s an upstream ingredient. Soya is largely exported from Brazil to European markets for animal feed. It feeds the chickens that we use to make McNuggets.

The reality is McDonald’s purchased through our suppliers, maybe one-half of one percent of soya. It wasn’t a matter of us being a huge user. It was more a case of using McDonald’s to draw attention to an issue. And Greenpeace drew our attention.

We quickly verified that the report was accurate, that there were legitimate issues of increased soya farming causing rainforest destruction. And within just one day, our leadership said, “We don’t want to be part of that. That’s not who we are. And we’re not going to buy things that destroy the rainforest.”

So, we called up Greenpeace and said, “We agree with you. So, now what do you want to do about it? You can’t just be targeting McDonald’s alone. This is a larger issue.” Working with Greenpeace we recruited other retailers. We got suppliers involved, traders in Brazil, other NGOs. And believe it or not, within three months, a moratorium was announced on those practices and that moratorium has stuck.

When you’re part of making something happen that all parties are happy with, and you make an improvement like that that sticks, you feel good. When McDonald’s does something, the ripple effect can be tremendous.
Caroline Roan
Vice President of Corporate Responsibility and Reputation at Pfizer Inc.; President of the Pfizer Foundation

Caroline Roan proudly wears “two hats” at Pfizer—one hat for the company and one for the corporate foundation. She began her corporate responsibility journey focusing on behavioral health, first at Yale University’s Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, then at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as a member of the Foundation’s Community Health Team. From there Caroline moved into the corporate world at Pfizer, starting out in philanthropy, and subsequently broadening her professional portfolio to encompass corporate reputation, corporate advertising, and corporate responsibility (CR). She currently serves on the Conference Board’s Corporate Contributions Council and the Lincoln Center Corporate Fund’s Leadership Committee. Caroline has an undergraduate degree in sociology and anthropology from Earlham College and an M.P.A. from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

AccountAbility: It’s interesting to see how Pfizer has decided to link Reputation, Brand, and Corporate Responsibility. Tell us the rationale for that.

Caroline Roan: When we think of Corporate Responsibility at Pfizer, we think of it as the “How” in how we do business. Nothing influences our reputation more than how we do our business. So putting our corporate reputation efforts together with corporate responsibility seemed a natural extension of this concept.

Brand is the “What” we do. Our corporate brand builds from our core business and product areas and their value proposition and potential for differentiation in the marketplace. In contrast, reputation is the sum total of all of our stakeholders’ individual perceptions based on how we operate, interact and communicate as a company. After all, the expectations of stakeholders are what ultimately drive reputation. In short, we create our brand but earn our reputation.
One of our challenges is that the corporate brand is less recognized than our product brands. When you think of Pfizer, you think of a house of brands, rather than a branded house. Now that’s fine. We want people to think of our products, because the heart of what we do is discovering, developing and bringing to market new medicines. But, that poses challenges—and opportunities—for us as we try to tell the Pfizer business story.

AA: What do you see as the biggest CR-related reputational challenges for the industry today? How are you handling these at Pfizer?

CR: Access and pricing, and safety of medicines remain key issues facing the industry and Pfizer. In terms of access to medicines, we are engaged in research partnerships to develop medicines for diseases like malaria, HIV, and neglected tropical diseases. Our approach has been two-pronged. First, we invest in projects from a commercial perspective like the advance market commitment with GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization) and second, from a philanthropic commitment to improve access to medicine. It’s our view that it will take both approaches to be successful in providing access to medicines in developing countries.

On the safety side we continue to work to address the transparency of our clinical trials to ensure that product information and the risk profile of our medicines is clearly understood by patients and physicians. Many of the results of our clinical trials are available on the U.S. Government website so patients can go and look at those results directly.

AA: It’s no secret the industry is in a state of flux. Nearly all the major companies have questions about pipeline and future earnings. Where should CR be at this time—in the front seat or the backseat?

CR: I may be overly optimistic but I think if we really begin to integrate corporate responsibility into our business strategy, then we can and should be in the front seat despite earnings pressures. In order to make this happen, we need to move beyond thinking of CR as a “nice to have” and rather look at how we grow markets and our business within a responsibility framework.

AA: Are there things that a healthcare company like Pfizer needs to do from a CR perspective that have little bearing on Reputation and Brand?

CR: There is a lot of convergence between CR activities and the issues that affect our reputation. Our corporate responsibility efforts are motivated by a business rationale that goes beyond a desire to improve our corporate reputation. As a publicly traded multinational company, some of our CR efforts, such as corporate and financial governance, workplace labor practices and environmental sustainability, are central to protecting our license to operate. Also, it’s simply what is expected of a successful business and a responsible company. Although they don’t create much of a distinctive brand or reputational halo, there is certainly a rationale from a business perspective for doing them. CR activities such as research and development support for neglected tropical diseases, and public health
programs in developing countries, also help protect our license to operate. Those activities can have not only a reputational impact among certain stakeholder groups, but help develop new markets as well. The reality, however, is that they don’t necessarily have a short-term business value.

In emerging markets, if you’ve been there a long time and have been doing the right work with the right stakeholders and are seen to be helping address the government’s pressing social priorities, it’s more likely that you’re going to have better relationships and more trust. And if people trust you, they are more likely to engage with you in a productive dialogue that can help benefit the business.

In the end, you can’t overpromise. Corporate responsibility is not a short-term quarter-by-quarter return. It’s a long-term investment in building credibility and trust among stakeholder groups that matter to the business.
AccountAbility helps its clients and members improve business performance and build sustainable, competitive advantage by:

- Increasing revenue
- Mitigating risks
- Engaging stakeholders
- Reducing costs
- Facilitating innovation
- Enhancing reputation

Research

The AccountAbility Institute focuses on applied research that provides businesses, NGOs and government agencies with:

- **Innovative tools** to improve an organization’s sustainable development performance
- **Vital data and knowledge** to stay ahead of fast-emerging and evolving trends
- **Critical insights** to anticipate next generation opportunities and threats
- **Information and guidance** to shape the design of policy
- **Benchmarking** of good practices

Our research spans multiple topics and issues, including responsible competitiveness, governance, organizational design, stakeholder engagement, partnerships and alliances, supply chain management and “base of the pyramid” strategies.

Standards

AccountAbility’s AA1000 series are principles-based standards that help organizations become more accountable, responsible and sustainable.

**The AA1000 AccountAbility Principles Standard (AA1000APS)** provides a framework to identify, prioritise and respond to sustainability challenges. It is built upon the principles of materiality, inclusivity and responsiveness.

**The AA1000 Assurance Standard (AA1000AS)** provides a methodology for assurance practitioners to evaluate the nature and extent to which an organization adheres to the AccountAbility Principles.

**The AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (AA1000SES)** provides a framework to help ensure stakeholder engagement processes are robust and effective.

Services

AccountAbility’s Advisory Services team works with clients in the areas of:

**Strategy and Governance:** We develop the strategy, processes, people and system elements to provide strategic direction, improve performance and achieve business objectives.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** We assist companies in mapping, assessing, engaging and monitoring their stakeholder universe.

**CR Reporting:** We help companies develop the strategy, structure and content for CR Reporting.

**Performance Management Systems:** We work with clients to develop processes to measure, manage and monitor CR performance.

**Program Management:** We apply our expertise at the program level to plan, execute and manage complex, multi-dimensional CR initiatives.
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