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Chapter 1: The Current World

Our planet and its people are in peril.

As Earth's population expands and urbanizes, rapidly depleting our natural resources, the climate is changing, the gaps in access to resources are widening – and it's up to us to fix it.

Sustainability is far more than a business buzzword – organizations and individuals globally are taking charge of building healthier, more resilient environments and societies for future generations.

In new research, GetSmarter sets out to explore what the shift towards sustainability means for future-focused businesses and professionals.

Chapter 2: What Is Sustainability and How Is It Measured?

So, what is sustainability and how should we think about it?

Sustainability means different things to different people.

The United Nations has traditionally defined it as the ability to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.*

In 2015, the UN laid down its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs), acting as a blueprint for peace and prosperity in all member states.

For most nations, SDGs have become the main criteria by which sustainability agendas are measured.

Meanwhile, in the corporate world, these goals have been translated into standardized Environmental, Social, and Governance (or ESG) categories, used for measuring and reporting sustainability outcomes.

Most businesses have typically focused on their environmental impact, with climate change, energy, air, water, and waste among the top sustainability factors they report on.

Chapter 3: GetSmarter Research and Findings

However, our research suggests a new emphasis on social equality – in fact, it's now the biggest ESG priority for most organizations.

Globally, companies are reevaluating the ethics of their labor practices, and issues of diversity and inclusion have gained importance.

And while individuals generally link 'sustainability' with basic environmental outcomes, ask them which goals are the most urgent, and the picture shifts: Both climate action and social drivers like ending poverty and hunger jump up the priority list, along with a third critical factor: *education*.

Across the board, quality education and upskilling is considered critical for inspiring collective action.

Chapter 4: How to Build a Better World

So, what does this mean for you and your organization?

First, investment in business sustainability practices has had the trickle-down effect of driving upskilling demand among professionals.

Sustainability skills have become a daily consideration for nearly half of all professionals, rapidly hybridizing existing functions, and propelling careers in surprising ways.

'Green' initiatives are sprouting new career paths, and the majority of people are actively seeking upskilling opportunities to make a positive contribution.

Second, businesses must be ready to adapt.

In this age of uncertainty, weaving sustainability into an organization's DNA can build its resilience, enhance innovation, and grow its competitive advantage.

And finally, individuals are driving the corporate agenda, and organizations should listen:

Sustainability has become a frontline tool for boosting loyalty, improving employee retention, and winning new customers.

The bottom line? Sustainability is a multifaceted, ever-changing challenge and opportunity. And it will take close collaboration between individuals, companies, and broader society to meet this head-on.