

Interview series.

Leaders making a difference, 2025



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Virginie Le Barbu is on a mission to convert as many people as possible into sustainability champions to accelerate the adoption of more sustainable business models and practices. Here Virginie shares her expertise and insights, discussing the role of the technology industry to drive global sustainability initiatives that will help ensure a more sustainable future.

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What influenced your decision to build a career in sustainability?

In 2015, during a period of reflection on my career, I started a deep self-awareness journey that has been, and still is, an amazing discovery experience. The first two years brought me back to my authentic woman leadership and helped me to assess how to leverage my strengths to achieve my goals. It has been an eye opener and made me realise the whole frame of the Gender Equity as well as of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) challenges minorities can face in their working environment. In 2019 this discovery journey brought me to join the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) network. This experience expanded my horizons while understanding the critical role private sector plays in solving the sustainability challenges that we are facing. It then became clear that I wanted to play a role in helping the private sector to do better and go faster in driving their sustainability agenda. In January 2021, eager to drive long-term change, I decided to pursue an MBA in sustainability management in parallel with my daily job. Regardless of this dual commitment and alongside the global pandemic, I completed my MBA in 15 months. Simultaneously, I've been offered the opportunity to build a channel community around sustainability from scratch. This community - called Lenovo 360 Circle - aims to accelerate the transformation our industry needs to become more sustainable, while focusing on our downstream ecosystem.



I firmly believe that collaboration is the key enabler of achieving lasting impact and sustainable transformation.



How would you describe your transition into a leadership role? What key experiences or moments have shaped your path toward greater responsibility and leadership?

My leadership journey was a natural progression. I am convinced that you meet people for a reason. A pivotal moment came during a Mobilising Leadership course at International Institute for Management Development (IMD) where it became apparent to me that I naturally took on a leadership role within the group. Initially, I felt uneasy, worrying I was dominating too much. Yet, my peers embraced and appreciated my initiatives. A conversation with the group coach shifted my perspective profoundly – he told me “You can’t fight who you are. Embrace it and recognise that you are here to transform”, and that’s what I have been doing ever since. This became my guiding principle.

Throughout my career, I’ve consistently held roles where creativity and entrepreneurship were key to succeed. My appetite for learning and for staying up to date with leadership, combined with my ability to continually self-reflect, has played a key role in my development. Over the past few years, I have become increasingly aware of the power of my passion to inspire others, my natural ability to act as a “human bridge” in onboarding new stakeholders, and my resilience in overcoming challenges. I believe we all possess a unique superpower, and mine lies in my innate talent for connecting people, uniting them around a shared purpose, and leading them effectively toward success. I firmly believe that collaboration is the key enabler of achieving lasting impact and sustainable transformation.



When considering organisational transformations, what core values do you believe leaders should embody to cultivate a company culture that can adapt to and thrive in an ever-evolving landscape?

When discussing transformations, it's essential to recognise that they begin with leadership. Leaders must embody the core values needed to foster a company culture that adapts and thrives in a rapidly changing landscape. For me, transformative leadership is fundamentally about leading by example, especially when it comes to sustainable values and empowering your employees to make sure that they are part of the of the journey. It is very important for companies to embed sustainability as a core value ensuring that from top to bottom and bottom to top everybody is embracing it, so that its truly leveraged and positioned at every decision-making process across the organisation.



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It's also about building culture rooted in openness and trust. Any company and industry should know its impact at an environmental and social level. This honesty and authenticity build trust. No company has completed the full journey towards sustainability - perfection doesn't exist in this space. We are all on a learning path, and we must all learn from each other, break down barriers and silos, and collaborate across organisations to share accountability and develop more sustainable practices together. I'm hopeful as I see a positive shift currently happening in the private sector where you have a new type of emerging leadership – one that is inspirational, transformative, and people-centric. These leaders embrace change and understand that adaptability is essential for businesses committed to sustainability. Businesses are trying to accelerate the transformation, and those leaders will have an important role to play.





As part of the IT industry, you are at the forefront of technological advancements and innovation, driving efforts to create a more sustainable future. Could you share your perspective on the current landscape?

I fully agree, technology plays a pivotal role in driving sustainability progress. Technology can enable innovative solutions, optimise resource efficiency, and empower data-driven decision-making. All contributing to a more sustainable future. And when thinking about technology and sustainability I do foresee two clear aspects – innovation and data.

On the innovation side, adopting decarbonisation and circular economy principles is a key driver in integrating lasting inclusive and breakthrough technological innovations into our value chain. The optimisation of product life cycle management - including the design and the use phases - are priorities today. We are also seeing modularity emerge as a competitive advantage. E-waste is one of the fastest-growing waste streams globally, and managing it effectively is critical. It's encouraging to see investments and progress being made in eco-design, recycling, and refurbishment, for example.

On the data front, we are generating more information than ever before, yet the reality is that only a small fraction of it is being utilised. As an industry, it is crucial that we empower individuals and organisations to make smarter decisions and leverage this data more effectively. Ensuring access to high-quality data is essential. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can play a pivotal role in accelerating the journey toward sustainability, particularly by aiding in the design of mitigation scenarios and enabling quicker adaptation to new sustainable practices and innovative technologies. AI can also provide faster access to knowledge, bring efficiency, and drive optimisation and innovation. That said, it will be vital to mitigate the environmental and social impact of AI to fully harness its potential in accelerating both our individual and collective sustainability journeys. A key shift is happening right now, and we must help businesses make the right decisions.

All this drives new types of partnerships and collaboration throughout the ecosystem. The cards are being reshuffled, and it's fascinating to not just be a spectator but an active participant in the transformation taking place.



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Could you elaborate on the key barriers and challenges that the IT industry is currently facing?

Data! This is not just a challenge for our industry; we all face significant issues related to the accessibility, accuracy, and comparability of ESG data. A lack of clarity and global alignment in how ESG terms are defined and used, creates confusion and complexity, making it difficult to compare data sets effectively. This poses a major challenge for optimising procurement decisions around sustainability and promoting sustainable consumption practices in the market.

Another barrier is that sustainability is often perceived as a cost driver rather than a direct contributor to business growth. This misconception arises from the upfront investments required for sustainable practices, technologies, and compliance. Yet, when approached strategically, sustainability delivers long-term value by improving efficiency, driving innovation, or enhancing brand reputation. Another significant barrier is the lack of expertise, knowledge, and resources within organisations, especially for the ones who are starting their sustainability journey. Too many companies still struggle to navigate sustainability frameworks, access expertise, or allocate sufficient funding. This gap undermines their ability to implement effective strategies to drive their sustainability efforts.

Lastly, there remains a lack of awareness around sustainability. And we know that when people don't understand something, they often fear or ignore it, leading to resistance to change. It's time to demystify sustainability, emphasise its importance, and recognise that everyone has a role to play.



It must be encouraging to witness the growing impact of sustainability in shaping both your industry and daily working practices. How would you say these efforts contribute to building a resilient business capable to withstand industry volatility?

Ten years ago, sustainability was barely on the radar, but now we see dedicated sustainability roles across all areas of business. It's no longer just about KPIs; it's become integral to everyday operations. Compliance and regulations have played a crucial role in building resilience, ensuring we are well-positioned for continued growth. Investment keeps growing and we're in a strong position to keep advancing. We just need to accelerate.



By uniting efforts, sharing resources, and innovating boldly, we can create a sustainable future that benefits businesses, communities, and our planet.



And finally, what are the top three key drivers for your industry?

My top three drivers for the industry are collaboration, ESG data, and breakthrough innovation. Collaboration across the ecosystem – and even cross-industry or with academia – is essential to tackle complex challenges and drive meaningful progress. ESG data is critical for setting measurable goals and integrating sustainability into core business performance metrics, ensuring accountability and resilience. Finally, accelerating the development of breakthrough innovations – whether tools, technologies, or new business models – will unlock the potential for sustainable growth and transformative impact. Let's focus and invest together to drive meaningful change. I'm convinced that by uniting efforts, sharing resources, and innovating boldly, we can create a sustainable future that benefits businesses, communities, and our planet.

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