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Policy Brief

Leading the Pack or Lagging Behind: A Foresight Study on Environmental Sustainability and Canada's Competitiveness

The Big Questions

What are the implications for Canadian competitiveness in a changing world that is placing increasing emphasis on the quality of the environment? Where are the opportunities? What are the challenges?

Why these Questions are Important

Concern about the quality and sustainability of the natural environment is rising due to changing values, rising incomes, and increasing knowledge about growing environmental problems. This trend is expected to continue, while the competitiveness of the Canadian economy will continue to be an important policy concern.

Environmental considerations are reflected in new and evolving determinants of competitiveness:

- the images of organizations and jurisdictions;
- access to key resources whose continued availability is uncertain;
- energy efficiency;
- liability for environmental damage; and
- knowledge about how to reduce environmental impacts.

Environmental challenges are increasingly driving innovation and investment decisions.

Canadian businesses, governments, and NGOs are operating in an increasingly complex environment with:

- changing consumer and investor expectations;
- persistent technological change;
- overlapping international, national and local regulations, standards and norms; and
- growing pressure to innovate and adapt.

Globalization, the application of information and communication technologies, increased specialization, and increasing collaboration are changing the rules.

Economic and social actors are increasingly networked, increasingly able to have global impacts, and need to operate ever more quickly.

Values are changing, citizens are expressing them in their consumption and lifestyle decisions, and firms and NGOs are responding. Supply chains, investors, consumers, and governments are seeking and demanding improved information on environmental impacts; business models, value propositions and portfolios are evolving in response.

More generally, concepts, tools and laws are being developed to reconcile environmental sustainability, competitiveness, and prosperity, but much remains to be discovered, invented, learned, improved, and implemented. So, for example, most commonly used indicators of competitiveness give little attention to environmental sustainability.

How we're Contributing to the Dialogue

A foresight study led by Policy Horizons Canada is exploring plausible futures for Canada over the next 10 to 15 years in the area of the environment and the economy, with a particular emphasis on the future of Canada's competitiveness.

The exercise is exploring questions such as:

- Does the shifting landscape present opportunities for Canadians?
- What key factors will influence competitiveness in Canada?
- What new information sources and indicators are needed to monitor Canada's performance and support decisions?

With the active participation of experts from governmental and other organizations, the exercise is identifying the key factors driving change, mapping out principal actors, looking for potential surprises, exploring plausible futures in the form of scenarios, and identifying key emerging policy issues for analysis and research.

Sources

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