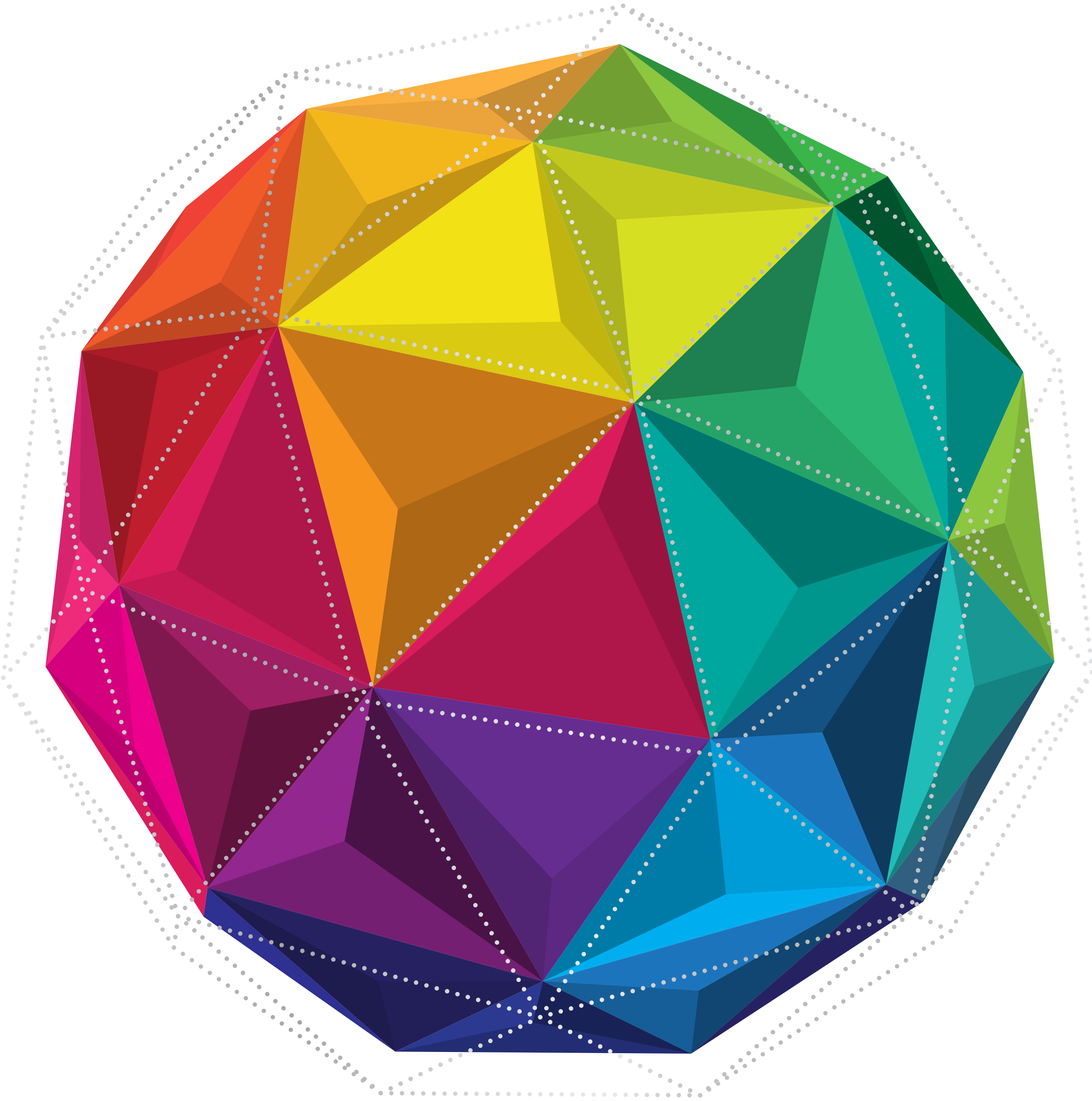
SustainAbility

Orchestrating Change

Catalyzing the Next Generation of Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainability



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Contents

Executive Summary

- *Orchestrating Change* assesses the evolving landscape of multi-stakeholder sustainability collaborations and hones in on key challenges and opportunities for realizing their promise.
- Exploring expert perspectives and the growing universe of multi-stakeholder initiatives, the report affirms that collaboration has become a central focus for global companies and other organizations pursuing transformative change.
- At the same time, given the scope of the challenges and the inherent difficulties of collaboration, there is no guarantee that existing efforts will deliver the desired impact.
- With this in mind, the report offers a vision of what the next generation of collaboration for sustainability could look like, and how would-be collaborators can help bring it about.

"To Change Everything, We Need Everyone"

In the last several years, it has become an article of faith that multi-stakeholder collaboration—especially among business, government and civil society—is essential to advancing sustainability.

The idea itself is hardly a new one. The report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, which first codified the notion of sustainable development, calls over and over for a new level of institutional cooperation to act on its recommendations. And, in that spirit, partnerships and collaborations among the public, private and civil sectors have long been a hallmark of the field.

More recently, as sustainability has gone mainstream, more people have come to understand and grapple with the fundamental complexity and interconnectedness of its related challenges. This has underscored the need for transformative change, and collaboration has been seen as that much more essential. As a result, sustainability-focused collaborations are rapidly expanding in number, ambition and type, and many organizations feel an increasing imperative to engage with and contribute to an ever-expanding array of them. And with the recent arrival of the UN's ambitious new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris agreement on climate change, demand for and expectations of such collaboration are rising still more.

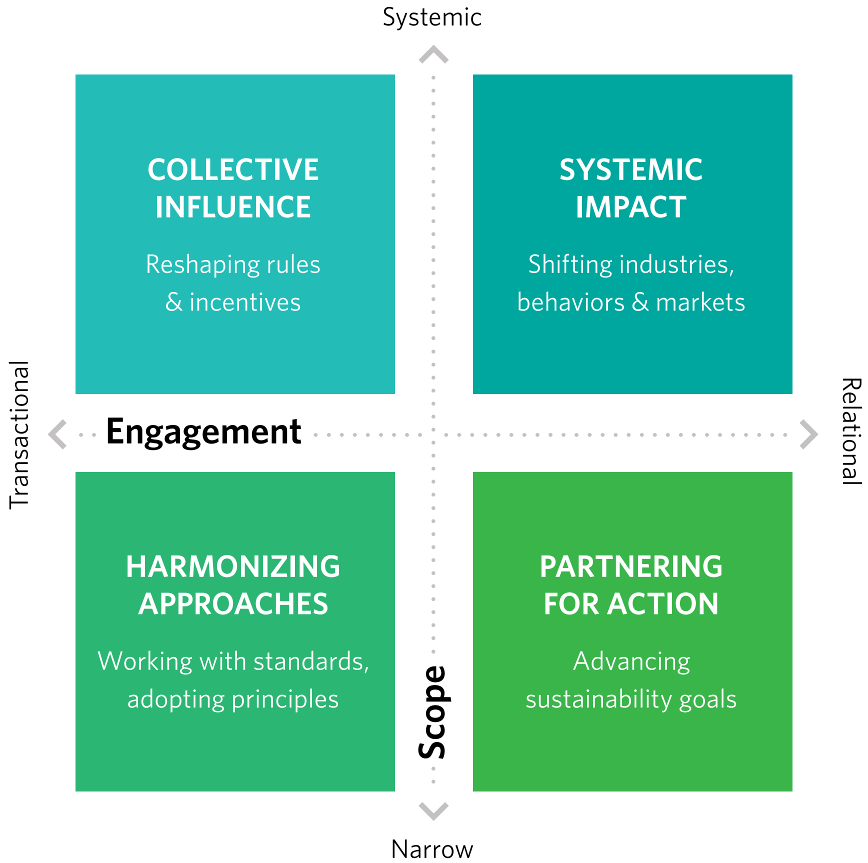
A favorite slogan of climate change activists in 2014-15 captures the current mood: *To change everything, we need everyone.*

But collaboration has many inherent challenges, so as we ask more from it, how can we make sure it delivers at the speed and scale necessary? And as new models and opportunities for collaboration increase, how should organizations—especially global companies, which face growing pressure to drive transformation of economic, social and environmental systems—prioritize and manage them, in order the ensure optimal return on collaborative investment?

The Evolving Universe of Collaboration for Sustainability

To answer these questions, *Orchestrating Change* explores the evolving context and practice of collaboration for sustainability. It identifies key factors—like the gradually shifting balance between individualist and cooperative values, changes in expectations and roles for key institutions, increasing orientation to system dynamics, and others—that explain why collaboration is becoming more and more central.

Figure 1.
Collaborative Modes – Engagement vs. Scope



From there, we examine nearly 200 examples of multi-stakeholder, business-involved collaboration, mapping a series of typologies (for example, the four distinct modes defined by engagement versus scope, in Figure 1) and citing several key trends in how the overall universe of collaboration is evolving (Figure 2). Taking all this into account, we perceive that a new normal—one that favors increasingly ambitious, outcome-oriented initiatives built by unique or even unlikely groups of partners—is gradually emerging.

Figure 2.
Corporate Engagement and Collaboration – Traditional vs. Emerging Norms

Traditional	Emerging
Aggregate impact – sum of individual company actions	'Gestalt' – collective impact, whole greater than sum of parts
Delivering business value, meeting sustainability goals	Delivering business and societal value, meeting needs
Efficiency – focus on operations, products & services	Innovation – addressing barriers and shifting the pitch
Hierarchical, traditional stakeholder engagement	Relational, solutions-focused engagement
Usual suspects	Unlikely alliances

Key Challenges

As the universe of collaboration for sustainability expands and matures, and especially as key companies and other organizations are pressured to create or join more and more initiatives, it is useful to keep sight of the many challenges that collaboration presents, and that raise questions about how far and how fast it can ultimately take us.

In particular, as we seek to scale the overall impact of collaboration, there is a need to balance growth in the total number of initiatives against the scope and potential impact that any one can have. In both cases, there are challenges around the capacity of individual organizations, either to participate effectively in a large number of disparate relationships and initiatives, or to cope with the added ambition and complexity of specific ones.

There is also a critical question of pace. Effective collaboration takes time—time to build trust, time to understand the nuances, time to develop meaningful solutions and time to implement. But with the clock ticking for urgent action on key issues, and given the fast-moving, volatile circumstances in which we're working, time isn't on our side. Is it possible to accelerate individual collaborative processes to drive faster payoff, or are there other ways to square their essential slowness with the urgency of the issues they need to address?

Finally, we know that all organizations, but especially companies, are driven to collaborate when there is a strong business case for doing so. We also know that in order to truly advance sustainability, we must increasingly work to re-engineer large-scale economic and market systems—essentially, to realign and/or create a stronger business case. What potential is there for respecting and leveraging the short-term, varied interests of different collaborators while still utilizing collaboration to help reach the tipping point toward long-term sustainability?

We encourage a new generation of collaboration that is more aligned, diverse, fluid, networked, far-reaching and temporary.

Towards the Next Generation

In order to better realize its promise and bring sustainability more rapidly to scale, we encourage a new generation of collaboration that is more aligned, diverse, fluid, networked, far-reaching and temporary. The following summarizes each of these six guiding principles, along with key strategies and actions for would-be collaborators to apply them.

Aligned

Embrace collective goals and large-scale frameworks for collaboration, so that dispersed or disconnected initiatives can contribute to accomplishing big things.

Collaborations must continue to look beyond incremental change and towards large-scale progress on critical issues. While some efforts can and should expand to address more of a given system, others must continue to focus relatively narrowly (because some systems are too big, and collaboration loves specificity). But in order to translate the specific to the systemic, they should seek increasing alignment with global priorities and meta-collaborations such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to catalyze and steer wide-ranging efforts to deliver clear, large-scale outcomes.

Key Strategies & Actions:

- Ensure new or evolving collaborations fill gaps and do not unnecessarily compete with one another.
- Understand the role of specific initiatives in relation to large-scale frameworks such as the SDGs.
- Adopt common metrics and commit to transparency to aid coordination with others.
- Take care to understand initiatives' larger context and align them with other efforts and circumstances that will shape their long-term success.

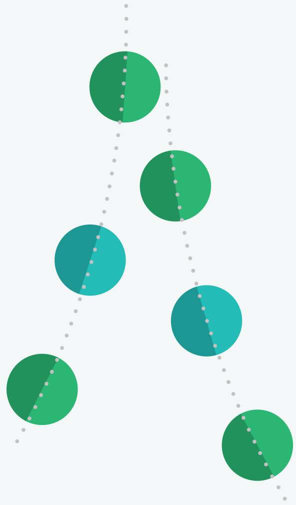
Diverse

Adopt new and different models of collaboration, or even multiple approaches to a given challenge.

Even as collaborations strive to be more effective, we mustn't develop too narrow a view of what models work best, where or how they should focus, or who should initiate and lead them. Rather, there is benefit in increasing diversity—e.g. narrow and broad initiatives, shallow and deep styles of engagement, stable platforms and disruptors, distinct efforts led by business, government and others. There is also need to ensure more effective coverage of key challenges. For many organizations, this will mean taking a portfolio approach, combining a range of different styles and focus areas for collaboration in order to expand learning and reach, and effectively manage risk.

Key Strategies & Actions:

- Embrace and experiment with multiple styles of collaboration within and across individual areas or challenges.
- Ensure adequate coverage of key issues.
- Develop and regularly review a portfolio of initiatives to balance diverse priorities and approaches, and to effectively manage risk and resources.
- Appoint a dedicated leader or a center of excellence to grow and manage the portfolio over time.



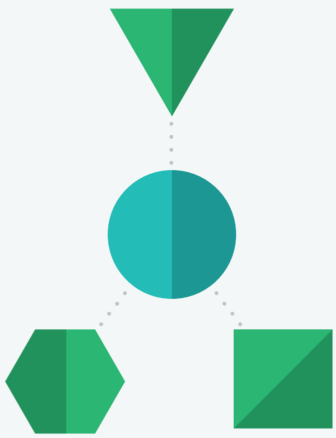
Fluid

Keep collaboration dynamic, experimental and adaptive.

To combat the danger that growing ambition and diversity will lead to further proliferation and eventually stagnation of initiatives, collaboration must also be increasingly fluid. Both small-scale partnerships and multi-stakeholder initiatives should be encouraged to rapidly form, to adapt and re-adapt to the changing rhythms of their purpose and participants, and when necessary, to swiftly dissolve and re-direct their accumulated energy elsewhere. To challenge the metaphor of this report's title, we suggest there should be less *orchestration*, which denotes thorough planning and a high degree of control, and more *jazz*, with its characteristic improvisation and openness, and often surprising coherence.

Key Strategies & Actions:

- Emphasize collaboration skills such as relationship building, continuous communication and brainstorming, as well as innovation tactics like rapid iteration and freedom to fail.
- Promote governance models and other mechanisms that enable continual assessment and rapid evolution of strategy.
- Ease the early match-making process by 'speed dating' potential partners and/or by sending clear signals about your goals and where you're prepared to collaborate to achieve them.
- Stay focused on outcomes and be prepared to redirect or dissolve initiatives to better apply effort elsewhere.



Networked

Leverage networks to enable more rapid scaling and impact of new collaborations.

To combine the advantages and mitigate the challenges of greater alignment, diversity and fluidity, and particularly to create more joined-up thinking and speed the process of building effective efforts, collaboration must be increasingly networked. In practice, this means that collaborative efforts, particularly in a given industry or issue area, must be mutually aware and transparent, and key collaborators should provide connective tissue within and among different initiatives. There is also a particularly vital role to be played by trade associations and other meta-collaborations, which provide shared platforms on which to more quickly build and link together diverse initiatives.

Key Strategies & Actions:

- Maintain open lines of communication between related or potentially complementary initiatives.
- Share and apply accumulated knowledge, experience and tools, and tap third parties to capture learning and intelligence from across an even broader landscape of collaboration.
- Exploit existing relationships, governance, tools and other advantages offered by shared platforms like trade associations and meta-collaborations.

Transformative

Design and prioritize initiatives with the greatest potential to create tipping points.

To scale overall impact without encouraging unrestrained growth in the number or complexity of initiatives, we must further prioritize initiatives focused on the most far-reaching, transformative interventions—e.g. establishing and enforcing a global price on carbon, empowering vulnerable populations, redesigning business and broader economic models—which will in turn lead to other widespread changes. These efforts more than others require long-term vision and substantial political will, as well as unique leadership, but are worthwhile because they represent the best that we hope (and need) for collaboration to deliver.

Key Strategies & Actions:

- Use tools like futures analysis or scenario-planning to consider evolving trends and the circumstances required for both your organization and the system as a whole to thrive over the long term.
- Engage and listen deeply to the interests and concerns of a broad range of stakeholders.
- Set far-reaching goals and advocate; shine light on the barriers to your own and broader progress.
- Design and prioritize collaborative efforts that are built around a long-term, positive vision of the future and that foster progressive, far-reaching change to achieve it.

Temporary

Ensure collaboration is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

For companies and other organizations committed to sustainable development, collaboration is quickly becoming business as usual. However, no individual or organization can collaborate infinitely, particularly in the highly complex and engaged forms explored in this report. Additionally, to the extent we rely on these supplementary arrangements to create 'patches' to our underlying economic and political order, the overall system remains fragile and the fewer resources we have to draw on as new challenges arise. Instead, we must ensure that collaboration is deployed primarily for the purpose of permanently embedding sustainability into our global operating system, in turn allowing greater reliance on self-determination and markets, rather than on ongoing collaboration, in order to truly drive impact at scale.

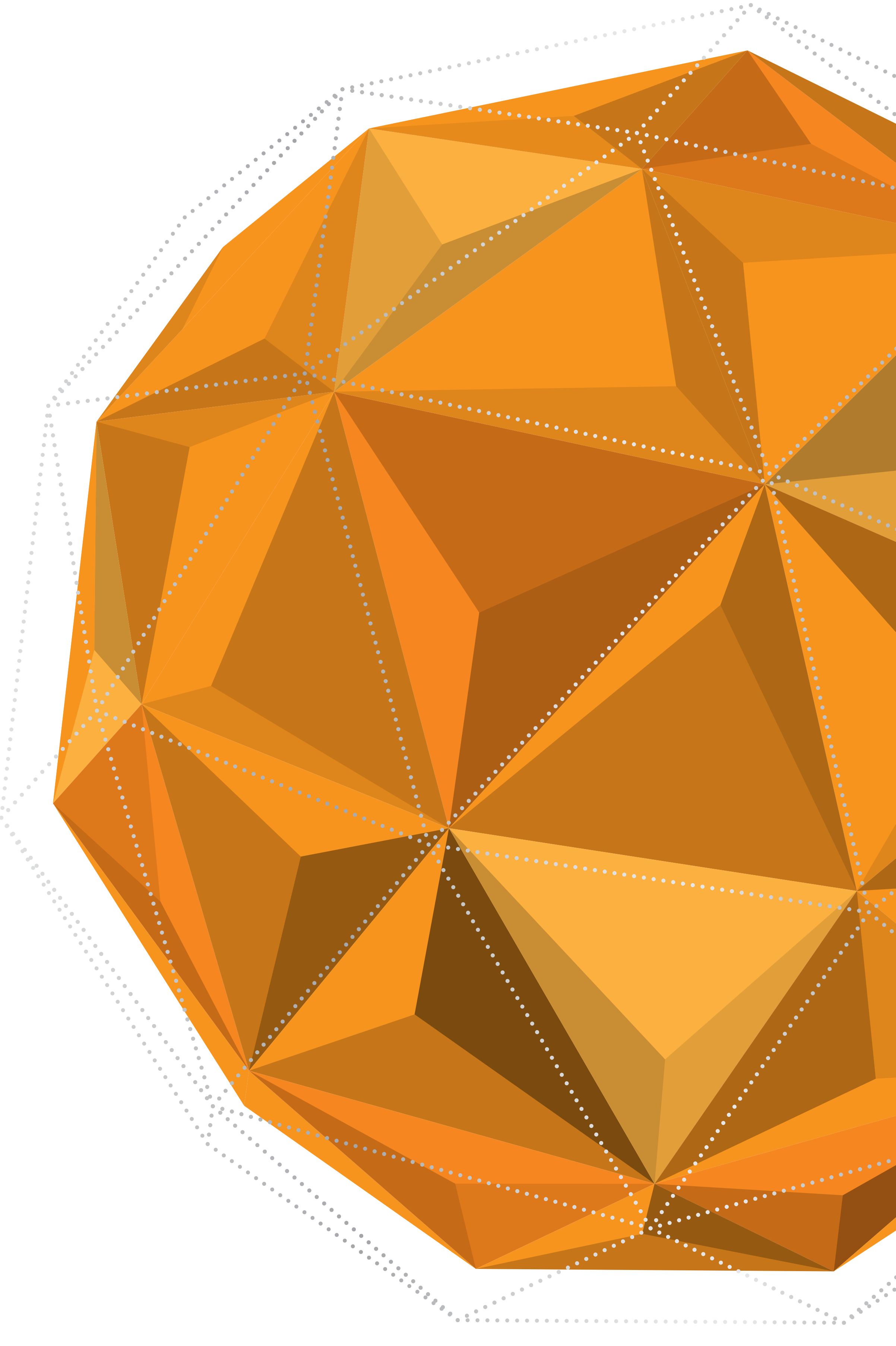
Key Strategies & Actions:

- Embrace planned obsolescence—i.e. design collaborative initiatives to achieve clear goals and then disband, rather than going on indefinitely.
- Apply collaboration primarily as a means to permanently embed sustainability into business models, policies and markets, which will ultimately drive impact at scale.

For us, this research confirms that collaboration holds great potential for tackling our most significant global needs and issues; that efforts to date have achieved limited but meaningful progress, yet are quickly evolving toward higher ambition and impact; and that with the right understanding and focus by key parties, a new, even more impactful generation of collaborations will soon emerge. SustainAbility is tremendously excited about this potential, and even more so for the wider future it can create.

As ever, we welcome feedback and further thoughts in response to this report, and we look forward to partnering with others to apply and further evolve its ideas.

1 Introduction



Introduction

The Chorus for Collaboration

In the field of sustainability, collaboration has come center stage—both as a tool for achieving specific objectives and as a grand strategy for delivering sustainability at scale. At conferences, in articles and books, in corporate reports and elsewhere, seemingly everyone is calling for, and touting the promise of, collaboration.

We have done a fair share of this calling and touting ourselves. In 2012-13, SustainAbility and GlobeScan led a project called *The Regeneration Roadmap*,[1] which sought to review progress on sustainable development in the two decades since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and to articulate a renewed agenda, particularly for business, to accelerate and scale progress in the decade ahead. Among its conclusions was that *collaboration*—in concert with greater *leadership* and enhanced *trust*—was a critical enabler of essentially every other strategy or tool it recommended.

Collaboration is noble, essential and exciting. Collaboration is also very hard. Even in the best cases, it can be slow, difficult and expensive. The risk of failure is high. Partners may begin certain that their interests are aligned, only to stumble when hidden interests or other roadblocks emerge, often well into the process. In worse cases, even modest collaborations can get bogged down in minutiae or make accountability too diffuse, creating only the illusion of meaningful, coordinated action.

Another challenge is that collaboration, as a term, is infinitely elastic. It is used to refer to such a wide variety of activities that it can be difficult to make very much sense of it at all, much less to embrace it as an urgent prescription for driving large-scale change.

In this light, it is easy to suggest that much of the present emphasis on collaboration verges on hype—another bout of swollen rhetoric around a feel-good buzzword that, like many before it, is really much more complicated than it sounds. It's easy to see how this happens. After all, nearly any undertaking could, in theory, be made more credible or more impactful through collaboration, so the idea gets endorsed over and over again, and thus the chorus grows.

The potential pitfalls of this scenario are underscored by what Paul Ellingstad and Charmian Love have called the phenomenon of 'collaboration-washing', in which companies increasingly talk the talk, but don't necessarily walk the walk, of collaboration.[2] We have seen a version of this in our own work, finding that, regardless of how the topic is raised, nearly everyone has a collaboration story to tell. It's not that each one of these stories isn't interesting—they are—but there can be a tendency to over-claim their larger significance. So, we can forgive anyone looking at this space with a certain amount of skepticism.

The Opportunity (and Challenge)

But to dismiss collaboration as a mere buzzword would be a mistake. Sustainability-focused collaboration is as essential now as it was when this journey began, and we are excited to see so many real, innovative—possibly even transformative—examples emerging. Furthermore, we believe its current prominence says something important about how the overall sustainability agenda is evolving and accelerating. As researchers and consultants focused on the role of business in sustainability, we are particularly interested in what all this means for global companies and their stakeholders.

Whereas, historically, many companies have sought primarily to derive *competitive* advantage from their sustainability initiatives, we now see greater interest in what can be achieved, both for business and sustainability reasons, from companies working more intentionally together and with others—in many cases, by creating a productive union of competition and collaboration.

It also signals a welcome surge in ambition. Though sustainability has long been understood to be a 'systems' challenge, it is only very recently that a critical mass of business leaders has embraced it as such, and taken on the hard work of addressing it through, among other strategies, new and more ambitious forms of collaboration.

> Though sustainability has long been understood to be a 'systems' challenge it is only very recently that a critical mass of business leaders has embraced it as such.

At the same time, beneath all the exciting rhetoric and progress, there are challenging questions—for organizations and for sustainable development overall—about how the ultimate potential of collaboration can actually be met. Again, collaboration is challenging and carries real risks and costs. The bigger the goal, the bigger the task of coordinating all those who have a stake in it, and the bigger the incentive to shy away from issues and approaches that truly challenge the status quo.

Orchestrating Change

Recognizing both the promise and potential peril of the growing emphasis on collaboration in the sustainability community, and eager to deepen the related insight that arose from *The Regeneration Roadmap* in 2012-13, we began *Orchestrating Change* as a project to better understand how collaboration is evolving—and how it must evolve in the future—to more effectively support and accelerate the transition to a sustainable economy.

The result is this report, which at its heart addresses two questions:

1. How should companies make the most strategic choices about where and how to collaborate, and how can they maintain an optimal portfolio of collaborative efforts?

2. How can we collectively ensure that the collaborations that are undertaken will interact or combine in ways that have the greatest potential to deliver change at scale?

How should companies make the most strategic choices about where and how to collaborate, and how can they maintain an optimal portfolio of collaborative efforts?

To be clear, our goal isn't just to rehash advice on how to effectively organize and manage any one, or any particular type of, collaboration. Resources for this are already numerous, and generally consistent with one another (see the appendix beginning on page 58 for our own list of key success factors, as well as references to several others we like). Rather, we aim to evaluate the changing role and practice of collaboration overall, and the way in which large companies and the sustainability community as a whole can ensure maximum impact of the many existing and emerging collaborations we see today.

How can we collectively ensure that the collaborations that are undertaken will interact or combine in ways that have the greatest potential to deliver change at scale?

To that end, this report examines the current state of multi-stakeholder, sustainability-focused collaboration and hones in on a set of key challenges and opportunities for ensuring that the long-term potential of such collaboration can be met. It draws on extensive desk research and consultation with leading thinkers and practitioners in the field; analysis of a wide range of existing and emerging collaborative initiatives; results of GlobeScan/SustainAbility surveys of global sustainability experts in 2012 and 2014; as well as the ongoing curiosity and insight of SustainAbility's global team.

A Guide to the Report

Chapter 2 takes a closer look at the context and drivers for the surging interest in collaboration as well as what they say about the overall state of the sustainability field. In **Chapter 3**, we consider insights from our analysis of nearly 200 examples of multi-stakeholder initiatives either led by or directly involving global companies. **Chapter 4** identifies and discusses a series of challenges to ensuring adequate, ongoing impact from collaboration. Taking all of this into account, **Chapter 5** offers a vision of what the next generation of collaboration for sustainability must look like, including steps that business leaders can take to help bring it about. In addition, interspersed throughout and complementing the discussion in these chapters are side-panels highlighting the results of two GlobeScan/SustainAbility surveys on collaboration. Finally, **Chapter 6** offers closing thoughts and a call to action to make the next generation of collaboration a reality.

2 Context

Context

The recent explosion of collaboration rhetoric and action has happened relatively quickly, but has been a long time in the making. To better understand collaboration's rise and to help consider where it could or should go next, this chapter explores several interrelated themes and drivers, as well as the changing context that is further shaping its evolution.

Collaboration: A Big Idea

A starting point is to draw a distinction between the wider *notion* of collaboration—that is, the cultural and behavioral ideal favoring transparency, openness and cooperation—and the narrower *practice* of collaboration—what we define as two or more parties working together across organizational, sectoral or other boundaries to achieve a mutually desired outcome.

For many, the broader notion—or the big idea—of collaboration is fundamentally appealing. We are a social species. We get crucial material and psychological benefits from identifying and aligning with others, and we take special satisfaction in accomplishing shared goals. So collaboration is innate—but the ideal of collaboration has also experienced a renaissance of late as a potential antidote to many of the key challenges of our times.

Despite unprecedented connectivity afforded by the Internet, many people are socially isolated. Many of our communities are fractured—by political or cultural differences, wealth disparity, resource scarcity, conflict, etc. Many traditional institutions are being weakened or were just never designed to cope with a world that is increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (what some refer to as the VUCA world). In this context, there is the growing sense that collaboration, in both general and specific terms, is something we need a great deal more of.

As a result, the political and cultural pendulum is gradually swinging in the direction of more common interest and cooperation. Of course, this shift isn't happening universally or without resistance. Witness, for example, the recent flaring of libertarian and nationalist sentiments, particularly in the US and Europe.

The political and cultural pendulum is gradually swinging in the direction of more common interest and cooperation.

However, the overall trend is clear, and it is manifesting in a variety of ways. For example: religious leaders (and some political ones, too) seeking to unite the global community in response to inequality, climate change, social exclusion and other issues; increasing advocacy and action by the UN and other global institutions with diverse members; new regional and bilateral agreements and other collaborations between states (including various peace and trade pacts, but also unique new kinds of agreements, such as the US and China's joint effort to ensure an effective deal would be reached at the Paris climate conference in late 2015); the rise of the so-called collaborative economy; and, indeed, unprecedented growth in partnerships and collaborations among companies, NGOs, governments.

Of course, we do not aim to fully examine or account for increasing interest in collaboration in general. Still, the big idea is important because it serves as the backdrop for the growing universe of multi-stakeholder collaboration that we do focus on, and because it shapes our evolving expectations of what such collaboration can and must accomplish.

Sustainability, Collaboration and Business

Beyond this general context, there are several specific currents that provide context for the increasing importance of collaboration for sustainability, particularly for companies.

From Engagement to Partnership to Collaboration

For many companies, collaboration represents a logical next step in a decades-long evolution of how they engage with the world around them.

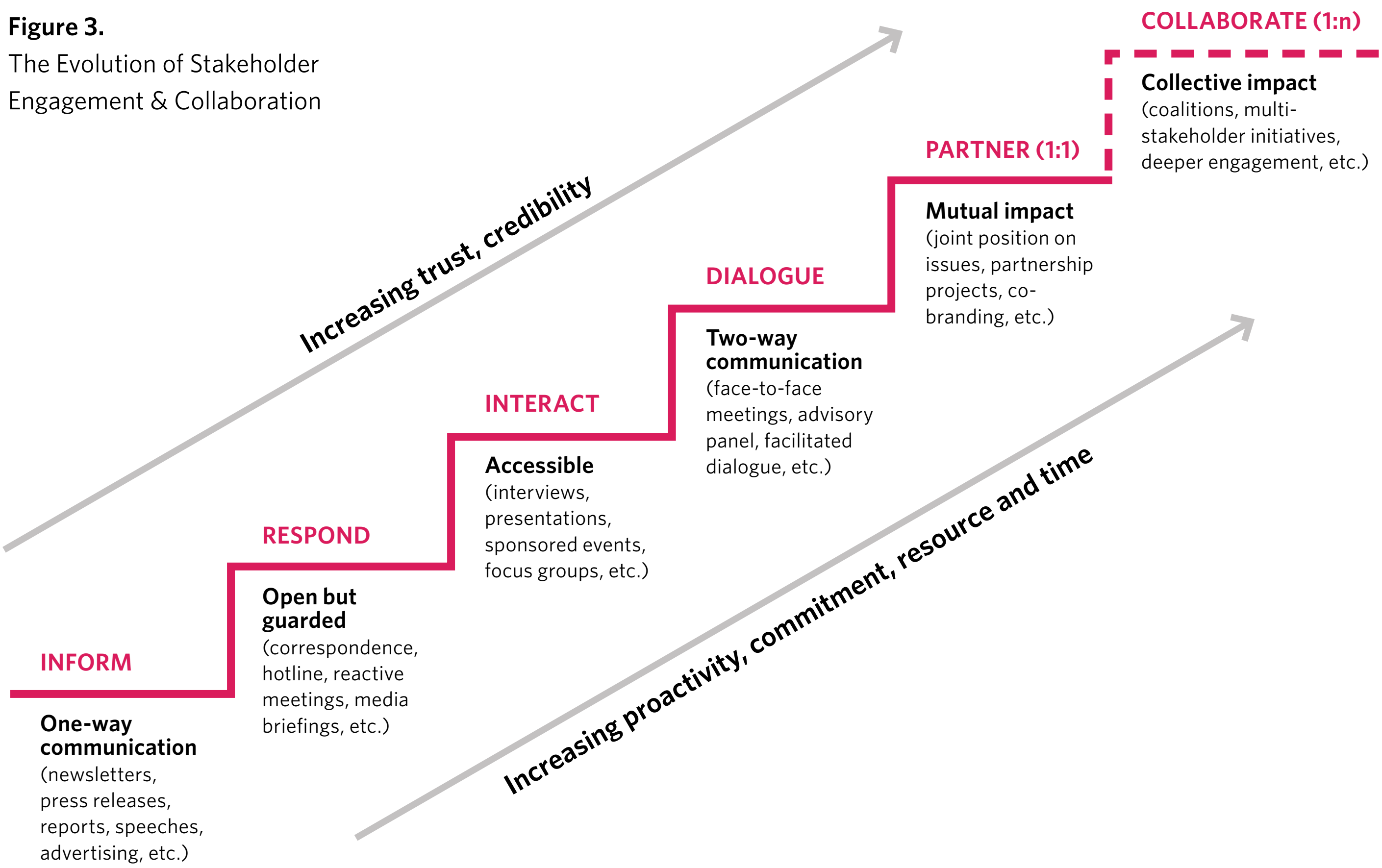
In the 1970s and 80s, when what we now refer to as the sustainability agenda first coalesced, business was not yet seen as an active partner and participant in such causes, and was frequently at odds with their proponents. In this context, company responses to NGO campaigns were often evasive, defensive or worse. Frustration on both sides would then fuel further antagonism, leading to an escalating cycle of mistrust, which played out again and again in clashes between activists and companies over natural resources, pollution, labor rights, etc.

The dynamic between companies and governments was slightly more complicated due to the myriad ways in which they depend on one another, but when it came to challenging social or environmental issues, there was often a similar tendency toward conflict. In the United States, particularly, but elsewhere as well, because of business' growing influence under globalization, the aversion to new regulation made business suspicious—and often actively critical or disruptive—of any government attempt to respond to such issues.

In recent years, we recognized 'partnership'—both its idea and practice—as the ideal, and indeed emerging, endpoint of this progression. The emphasis was largely on the juxtaposition of one-way vs. two-way relations between companies and their stakeholders. The solid portion of **Figure 3**, taken from a framework SustainAbility has long used to advise companies on best practice in stakeholder engagement, illustrates the gradual progression toward more inclusive, transparent forms of engagement.

At that time though, the framework did not reflect the potential of a subsequent evolution—now illustrated by the shaded portion of the figure—from partnership (understood as mainly bilateral cooperation) to collaboration (cooperation involving more parties and/or deeper, more relational engagement). In this more expanded view, the rise of collaboration can be understood as a logical and positive extension of an ongoing trend, and a sign of growing willingness and capacity of key actors to band together in pursuit of sustainable development.

Figure 3.
The Evolution of Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration



Changing Institutional Expectations

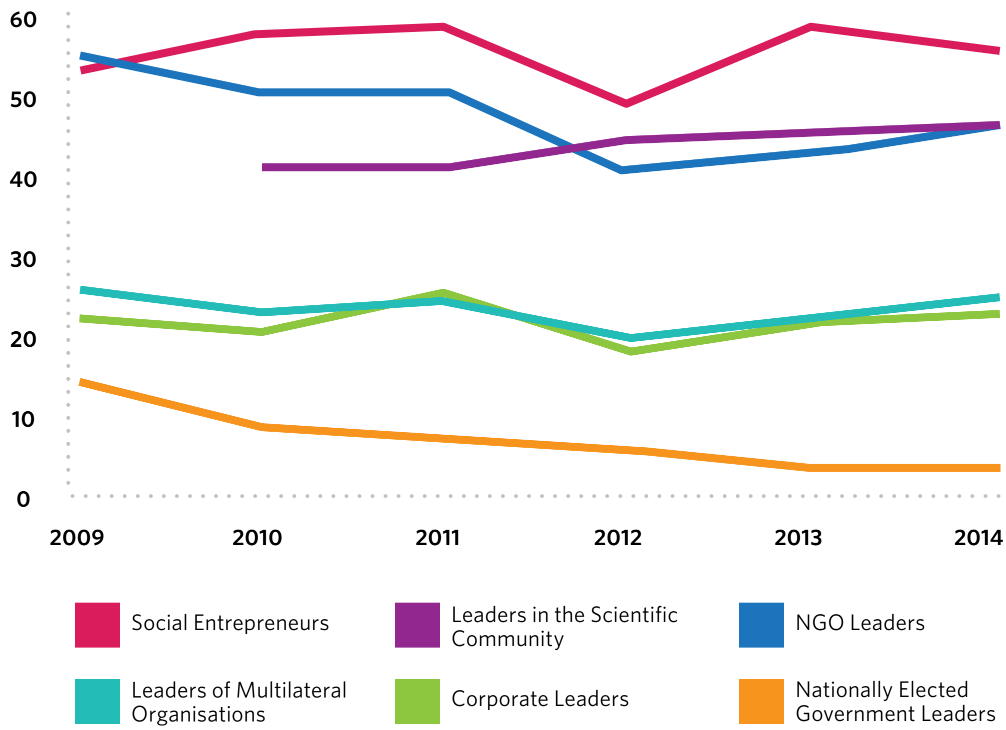
Partly underlying the evolution toward greater partnership and collaboration have been historic and ongoing changes in public expectations for each of the major sectors of society. Whereas the major roles of business, government and civil society were once more sharply defined in relation to one another, each now faces a complicated array of expectations and circumstances that strongly influences the ways in which each of them operates and relates to the others.

At the core of this trend has been the steady decline in the perceived effectiveness of national and international political leadership, particularly on the large-scale challenges inherent to sustainable development. **Figure 4** relates survey results showing that, in contrast to the performance of other institutions, which tend to vary within a relatively steady range, only the performance of national governments is seen to be consistently declining year over year. Besides simple frustration, a growing number of experts now express doubt that many governments are even capable of adequate response—due to the built-in shortcomings and biases of many political systems—which is further accelerating the shift in expectations for other sectors.

> You cannot achieve any significant global outcome without partnering with the private sector. That change is irreversible."
>
> *Artavazd Hakobyan, Consultant at The World Bank*

The corollary to *decreasing* confidence in government has been steadily *increasing* expectations of business. This derives from at least two linked premises. First, because of its ever-increasing scope and influence in the world, business is a key culprit in current unsustainability, and yet also has perhaps the best ability to mobilize and support necessary action to fight it. Second, because of the growing need for large-scale and rapid change, approaches to sustainability will need to be increasingly *market-driven*, and therefore uniquely dependent on the innovation, cooperation and leadership of the private sector.

Figure 4.
Sustainability Leadership Performance, 2009-2014*



***Question:** Please rate the overall performance of each of the following types of leaders in advancing the sustainability agenda over the past year. Please use a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is "poor" and 5 is "excellent." Results are percent of respondents replying 4 or 5.

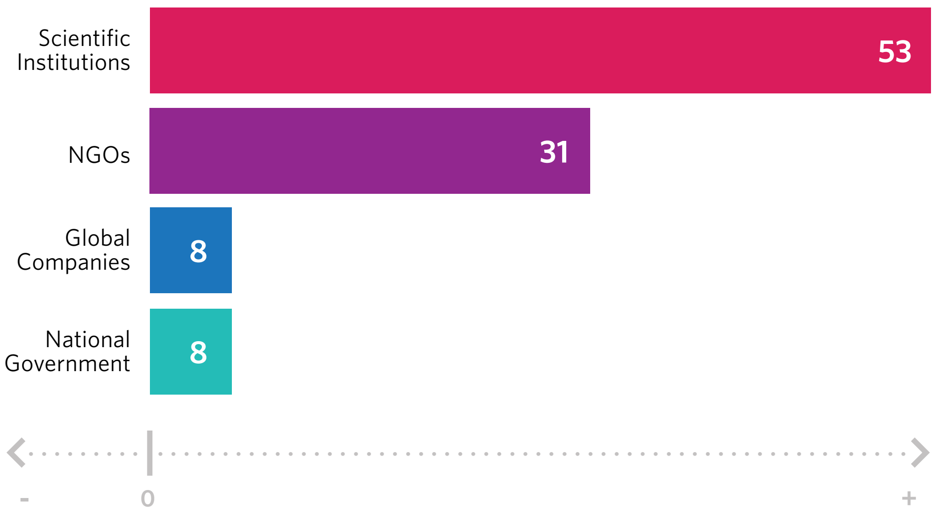
At the same time, efforts to realize the potential of private-sector sustainability leadership are hampered by a significant underlying trust deficit. **Figure 5** shows results of a 23-country public survey, part of The Regeneration Roadmap, underscoring that government and business face equally low overall trust. In contrast, civil-sector players such as NGOs and scientific institutions are considerably more trusted.

Figure 5.
Net Trust* in Institutions

Source: GlobeScan Radar, 2013

***A lot of trust** and **Some trust** minus **Not much trust** and **No trust at all**

General Public Average of 23 Countries 2013



But the civil sector—generally encompassing NGOs, academia, organized labor, religious and community organizations, foundations, etc.—has also seen gradual changes in its role and influence. While still a crucial mediator in the dichotomy between business and government, which includes its ability to rally popular opinion for or against major political and economic decisions, the process of organizing and wielding this power has grown more complicated. We see indications of this in the overall number and diversity of organizations (the World Bank estimates the number of international NGOs grew from roughly 6,000 in 1990 to more than 60,000 in 2006, with millions more operating within individual countries[4]); the increasing size and professionalization of some key groups, and the less organized nature of many others; and pressure for many of them to better integrate with—or even take on roles and attributes typically associated with—other sectors.

Together these changes form a key part of the foundation for cross-sector collaboration. Government is viewed as either too slow or ineffectual on its own. Business is seen to have significant reach and the potential to deliver lasting solutions, but is not entirely trusted to follow through. NGOs and other civil society actors enjoy greater trust, but are potentially fragmented and ultimately only as effective as their ability to influence other institutions.

The result is both continued pressure for improved leadership from government and business particularly, *and* the growing belief that multi-sector collaboration can be a critical conduit—and, if necessary, a substitute—for it. (See Figure 8 for experts' take on expectations vs. performance of multi-sector collaborations relative to other kinds of institutions).

Survey Snapshot

In late 2012 and 2014, GlobeScan and SustainAbility surveyed global sustainability experts to explore expectations and opinions about multi-stakeholder collaboration. Spread throughout this report are several pages like this one sharing results and discussion of the 2014 survey, which had 536 respondents representing public, private and civil sector organizations and spanning dozens of countries. Where useful, we also compare to results of the 2012 survey.

Figure 6.
Role of Institutions in Driving Collaboration for Sustainable Development

Experts believe that multinational companies will be the key drivers of broad-scale collaborations to advance the sustainable development agenda over the next five years.

Following companies are NGOs and multilateral organizations, and a step behind those are national governments which, despite low expectations for their individual leadership, are still expected to play a significant role in driving collaboration.

Question: How large or small of a role do you think that each of the following types of institutions will play in driving broad-scale collaborations to advance the sustainable development agenda over the next five years?

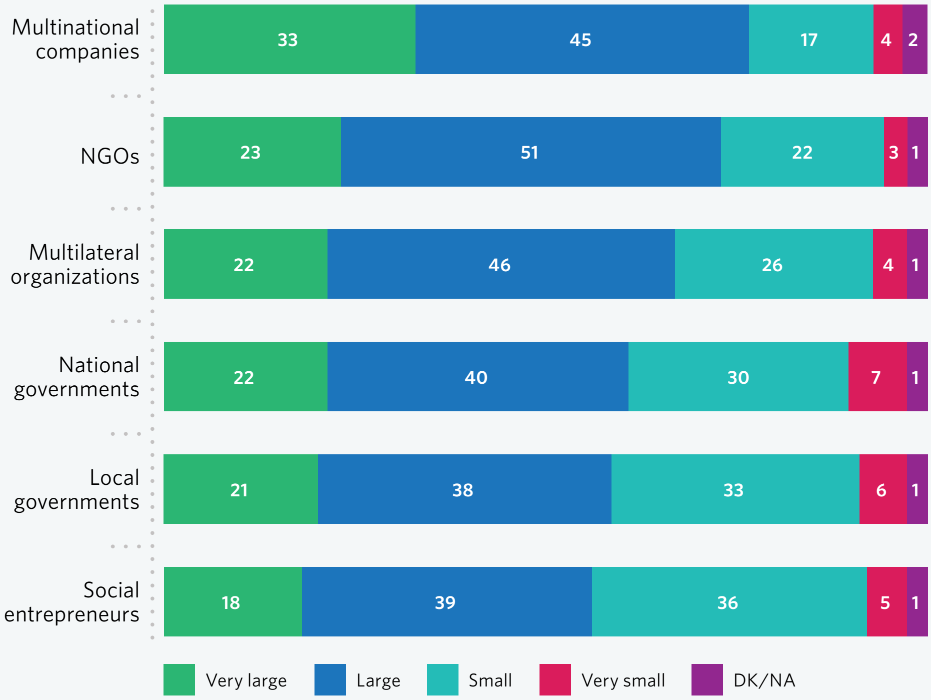
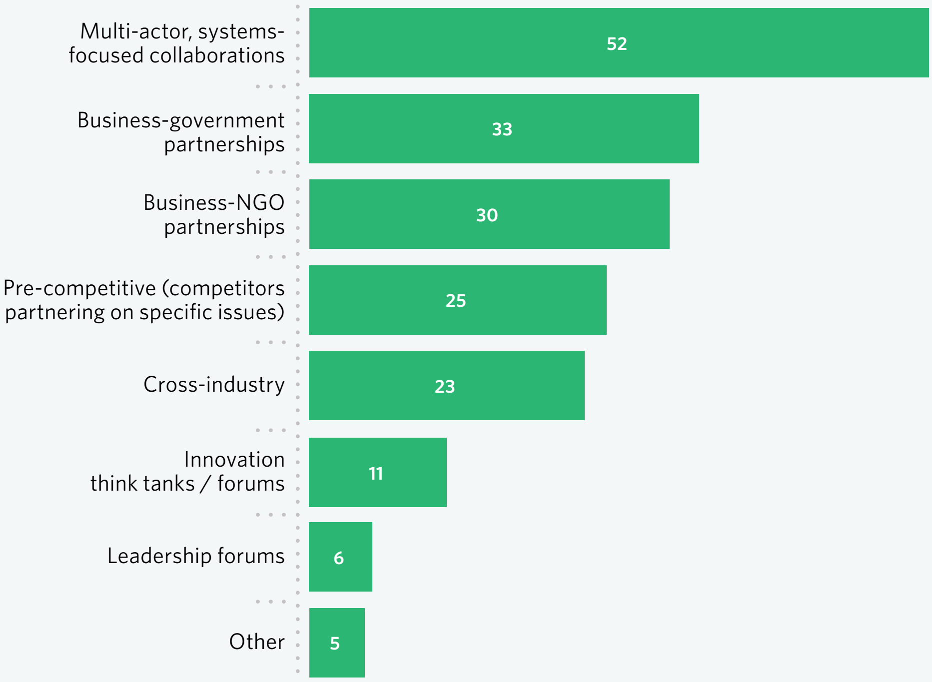


Figure 7.
Most Important Forms of Collaboration

Reflecting growing emphasis on systems thinking and impact at scale, experts feel strongly that collaborations involving multiple actors and seeking system-level solutions will play the greatest role in advancing sustainable development in the near future.

At the same time, experts still see significant value in partnerships between business and government and business and NGOs.

Question: What forms of collaboration are likely to drive greatest progress in sustainable development over the next five years?



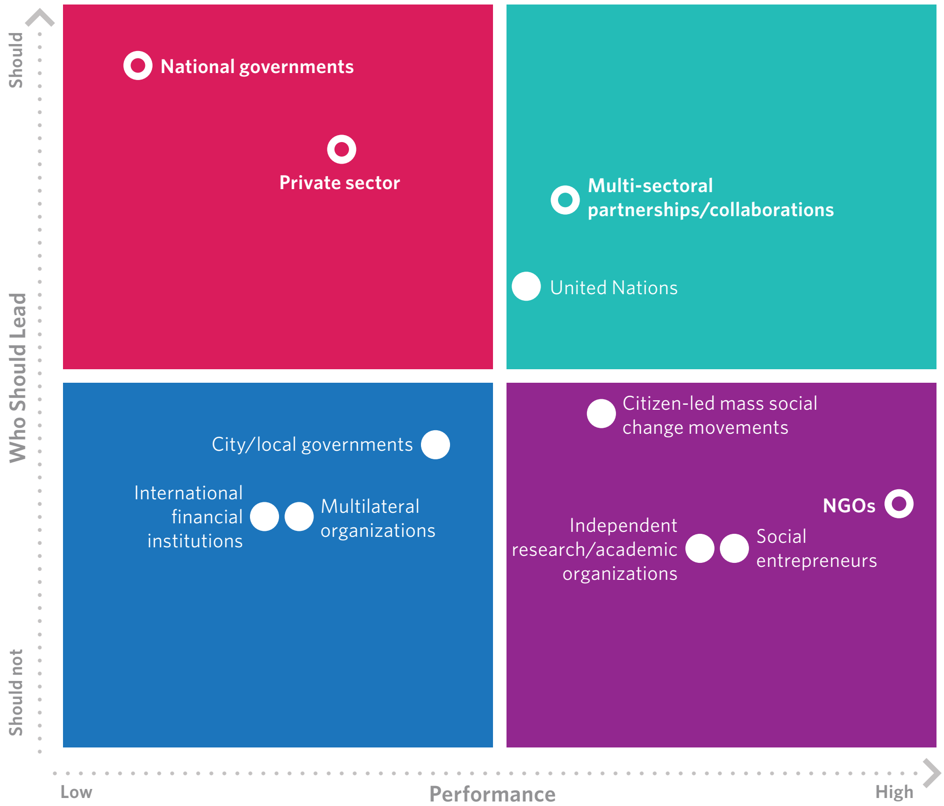
“In the past you had governments who took care of society, NGOs who complemented them and business who did business. We don’t live in that world any more.”

Janet Voûte, Global Head of Public Affairs, Nestlé [5]

Figure 8.
Who Should Lead vs. Performance on Sustainable Development

Source: GlobeScan & SustainAbility, 2015[6]

Question: (a) How would you rate the performance of each of the following types of organizations in terms of its contribution to progress on sustainable development since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio? Please use the 5-point scale provided (where 1 is “poor” and 5 is “excellent”). (b) In your opinion, who should lead the sustainable development agenda over the next twenty years? Please select the two most suited from the following list.



Focus on Systemic Solutions

It has long been recognized that sustainability challenges are inherently systemic—that is, characterized by complex, multi-layered interactions among people, policies, institutions and natural processes—and that addressing them requires far-reaching, coordinated action. For years, application and discussion of systems thinking were largely confined to the academic sphere, but over time, increasing appreciation of complexity and the need for greater pace and scale of change have led to more mainstream emphasis on systems change, and in turn, on collaboration.

Behind this, we believe, is the increasing desire to realize tipping points—that is, the hope that a set of intelligent and specific interventions could lead to rapid shifts toward sustainability—and to create solutions that are both comprehensive and self-organizing (i.e. appropriate to the scale of the challenge and able to spread and sustain themselves over time). As a result, we see increasing effort to reengineer both large-scale industries or supply chains (e.g. the food system, the energy system, the water system) and, in order to ensure complete and lasting change, the economic system as a whole.

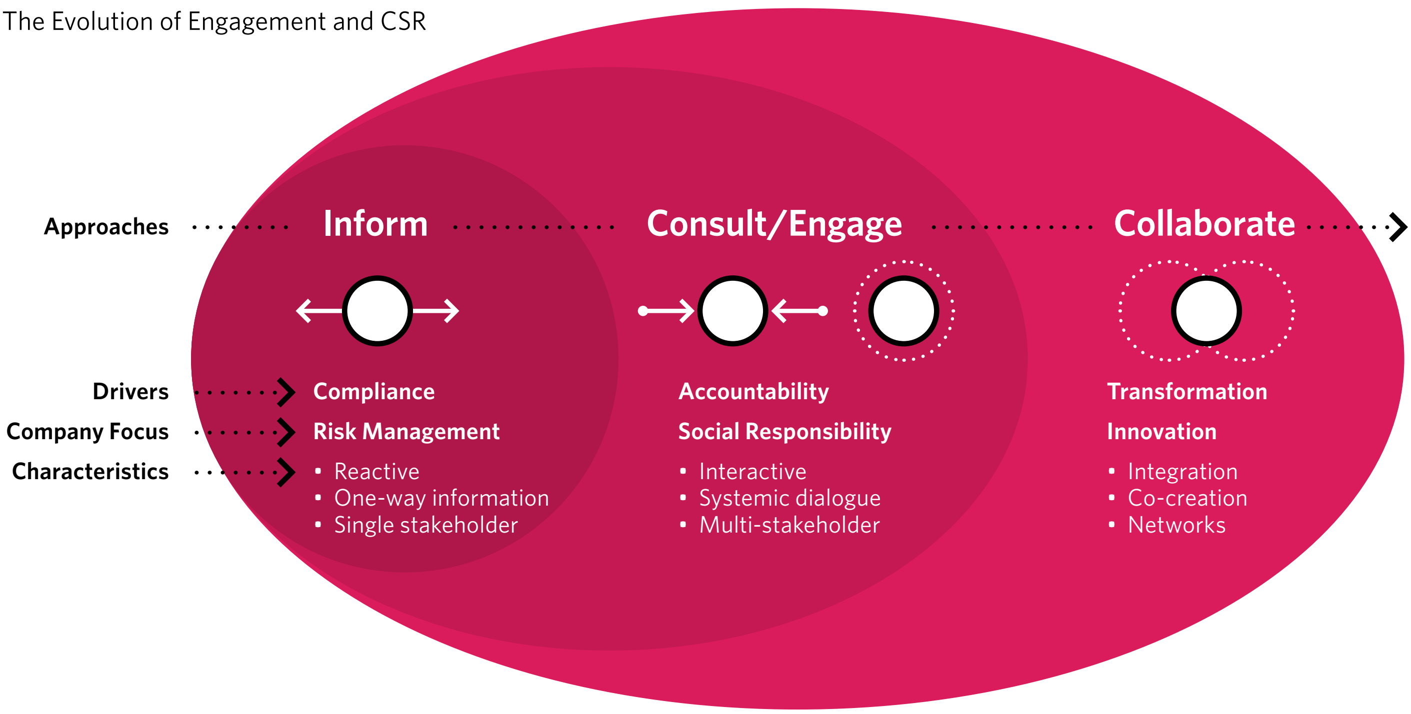
"Collaboration is the human face of systems thinking."

Peter Senge et al., The Necessary Revolution[7]

The scale and complexity of each of these undertakings unquestionably requires collaboration. Not surprisingly, the experts we surveyed see greatest necessity and value in applying collaboration to advance solutions that are more systemic in nature—e.g. shifting public policy, creating industry standards, changing investment norms (see **Figure 10**).

As illustrated in **Figure 9**, the sustainability agenda has evolved progressively, initially focused on regulatory compliance, then greater accountability (i.e. beyond compliance), and now, increasingly, on driving market transformation—in other words, system change. The figure also shows how this progression has moved in concert with the evolution of engagement, discussed earlier in this chapter. Over time, improved engagement has informed and enabled greater ambition, then greater ambition required further engagement, and so on up until the present state, where multi-stakeholder collaboration—in particular, across public, private and civil-sector boundaries—has become the critical path toward system change.

Figure 9.
The Evolution of Engagement and CSR



Collaboration = Innovation

Inherent in the connection between collaboration and system change is growing understanding and interest in collaboration's role in driving innovation. The influence of this idea is amplified by the fact that it is being applied both within and beyond the domain of sustainability, with the hope that both collective effort in general, and especially non-traditional partnerships, may unlock new and more effective solutions.

"Competition and constraint help shape nature, yet it is collaboration and synergy—not competition—that are responsible for nature's sustained success."

Giles Hutchins, The Nature of Business [8]

In recent years, the study of innovation has yielded more and more evidence that collaboration, in a variety of forms, is often at the root of breakthroughs in science, technology, business and elsewhere. As a result, we are no longer enthralled with the myth of the lone genius. Instead we emphasize the power of innovation clusters such as Silicon Valley, where tech workers, entrepreneurs, investors and researchers at nearby universities all live and work in close proximity to one another, allowing new technologies and ideas to be rapidly developed and refined, across institutional or organizational boundaries, often with spectacular results. (Of course, competition plays a vital role as well.)

It is now recognized that novel ideas frequently arise at the chance intersection of two or more disparate realms, whether these are different industries, academic disciplines, cultures, etc. But such collaborative innovation also needn't arise entirely by chance. More purpose-driven collaboration is seen as a key way for innovators to access additional resources or expertise, gain credibility, and share risks and costs, particularly for the most ambitious undertakings. It may also provide a forum to test innovations that offer different, competing solutions.

Consequently, more companies have been investing in collaborative to innovation, for both business and sustainability reasons. Approaches include:

- 'Open innovation' strategies and challenges (e.g. Nike's GreenXchange, P&G's Connect + Develop, Walmart's "Get on the Shelf");
- Corporate venture funds (e.g. BMW's i Ventures, UPS's Strategic Enterprise Fund, Citi's Urban Innovation Initiative); and,
- Bespoke innovation partnerships (e.g. BMW and Boeing working together on carbon fiber recycling; FedEx, Eaton and the Environmental Defense Fund developing hybrid delivery trucks; Barclays and GSK working to develop new models for access to healthcare in Zambia).

Survey Snapshot

Results and discussion of the 2012 and 2014 GlobeScan/SustainAbility surveys on collaboration.

Figure 10.
Effectiveness of Collaboration vs. Individual Direct Action, 2014

Respondents see multinational companies achieving the best outcomes on policy advocacy, engagement of citizens/consumers and investors, and improving standards and practices in their value chains—all of which are advocated as routes to greater systemic impact—if they work on these issues through multi-actor collaborations.

Individual direct action is seen as the more effective approach for increasing employee engagement and developing sustainable products and business models. However, collaboration is still seen as important, especially for shifting business models, which are often built around complex relationships and interactions among multiple actors.

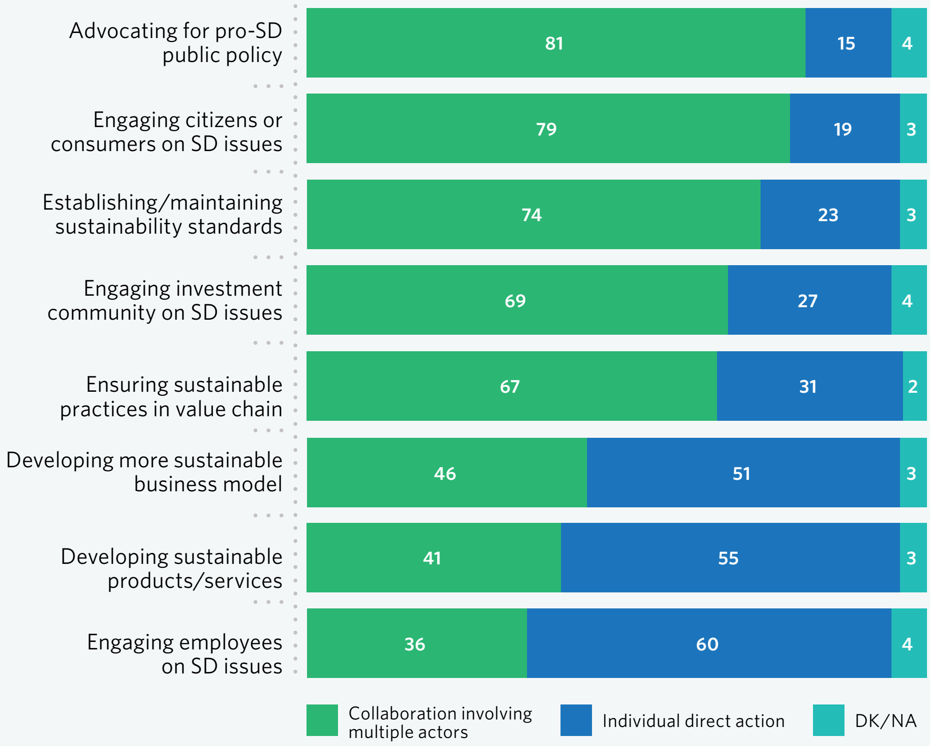
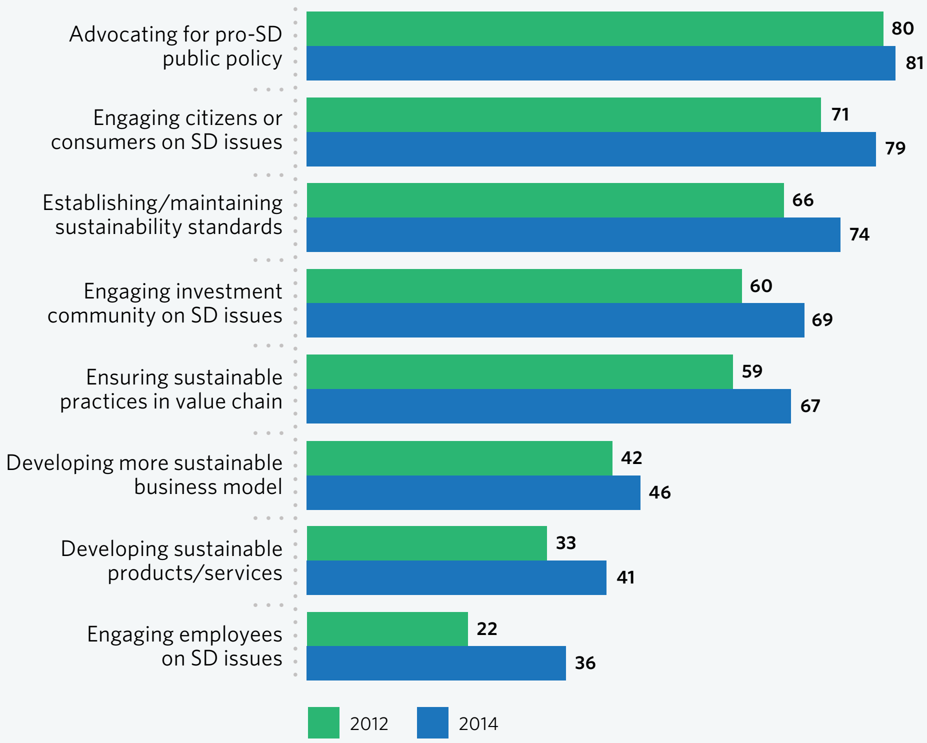


Figure 11.
Effectiveness of Collaboration, 2012 vs. 2014

Notably, when comparing results from 2012 and 2014 (**Figure 11**), respondents see collaboration as increasingly effective on every one of the listed activities.

Question: For each of the following activities, on balance, which approach is most effective for large multinational companies to take in order to achieve positive environmental, social and economic outcomes?



Dialing It Up

While these factors help explain collaboration's growing importance in recent years, the context remains dynamic. In particular, several new developments—namely, adoption of the ambitious new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), growing urgency and tangibility of key issues, and increasing pressure for impact at scale—are raising the stakes and pointing to the need for collaboration to further evolve in response.

Announced in the fall of 2015, the SDGs articulate global development priorities through 2030. As has been emphasized during their rollout, they are unprecedented in their scope and ambition and include an explicit call for partnerships and collaboration, including deep involvement from the private sector, to achieve them. As such, they bring renewed focus and urgency to the sustainability agenda and to collaborations that purport to advance it.

Another important dynamic is that key global issues such as climate change, water scarcity, food security and inequality are no longer just long-term or conceptual threats. For many companies and governments particularly, they now present real-time impacts and risks. At the same time, real and compelling solutions are emerging, but require significant effort and focus to integrate. So there is even further demand for—and burdens on—collaboration.

Finally, and partly as a consequence of these other developments, there is increasing pressure for collaboration to deliver impact at scale. This means finding ways for new ideas and initiatives to not just carve out small niches for themselves, but to more quickly create or shift entire markets. It also means building the capacity for both individuals and organizations to cope with even more, and more complex, collaboration aimed at such large-scale outcomes.

Of course, these developments are already influencing existing collaborations (explored in the next chapter), but even more so, they're setting the stage for how we expect (and need) collaboration to evolve from here, which we explore in more detail in Chapter 5.

"All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise; that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in the community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for)."

Aldo Leopold , The Sand County Almanac[9]

Results and discussion of the 2012 and 2014 GlobeScan/SustainAbility surveys on collaboration.

Figure 12.
Collaborations Best Equipped to Tackle Specific Issues, Emphasis: **Government**

Experts believe government-led collaborations would be most effective for the majority of the issues we asked about, including especially water scarcity, climate change, inequality/poverty, access to healthcare and food security.

Note this view of where government should lead stands in contrast to the degree that experts expect government will lead. Indeed, while experts believe government-led collaborations on these issues would be ideal, their responses to other questions (e.g. Figure 1 on page 5) indicate they still expect other actors—especially the private sector and NGOs—to play a bigger leadership role in the near future.

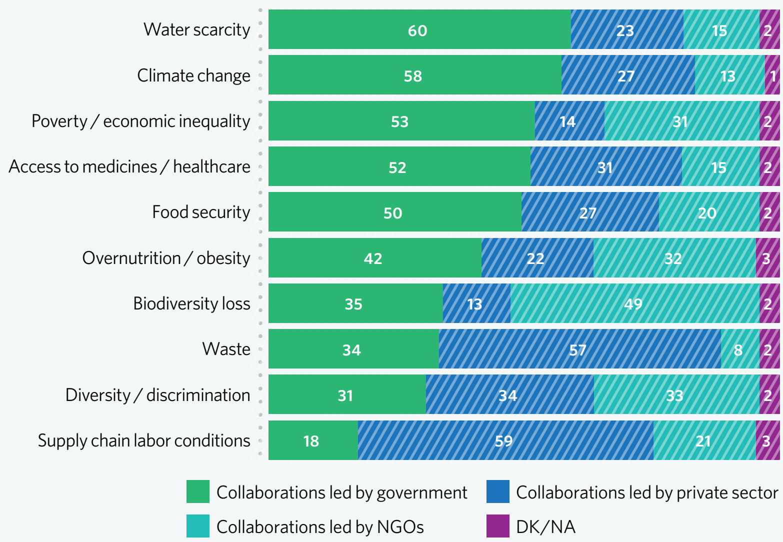


Figure 13.
Collaborations Best Equipped to Tackle Specific Issues, Emphasis: **Private Sector**

Experts believe that private sector-led joint initiatives are the best choice for tackling waste and improving supply chain labor conditions.

The private sector is also seen as having a key leadership role, alongside government, on climate change, access to healthcare and food security.

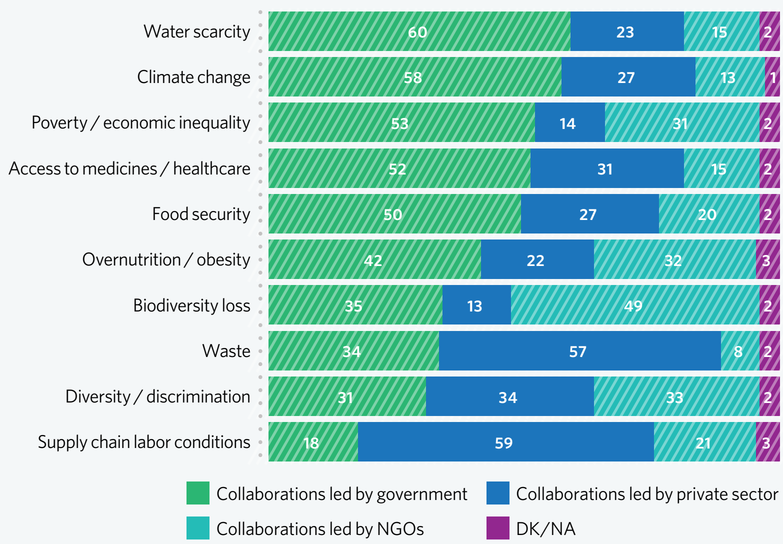
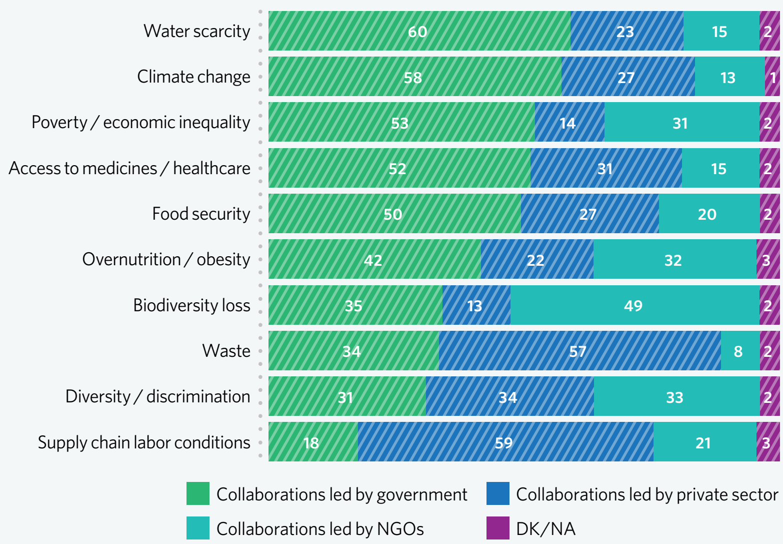
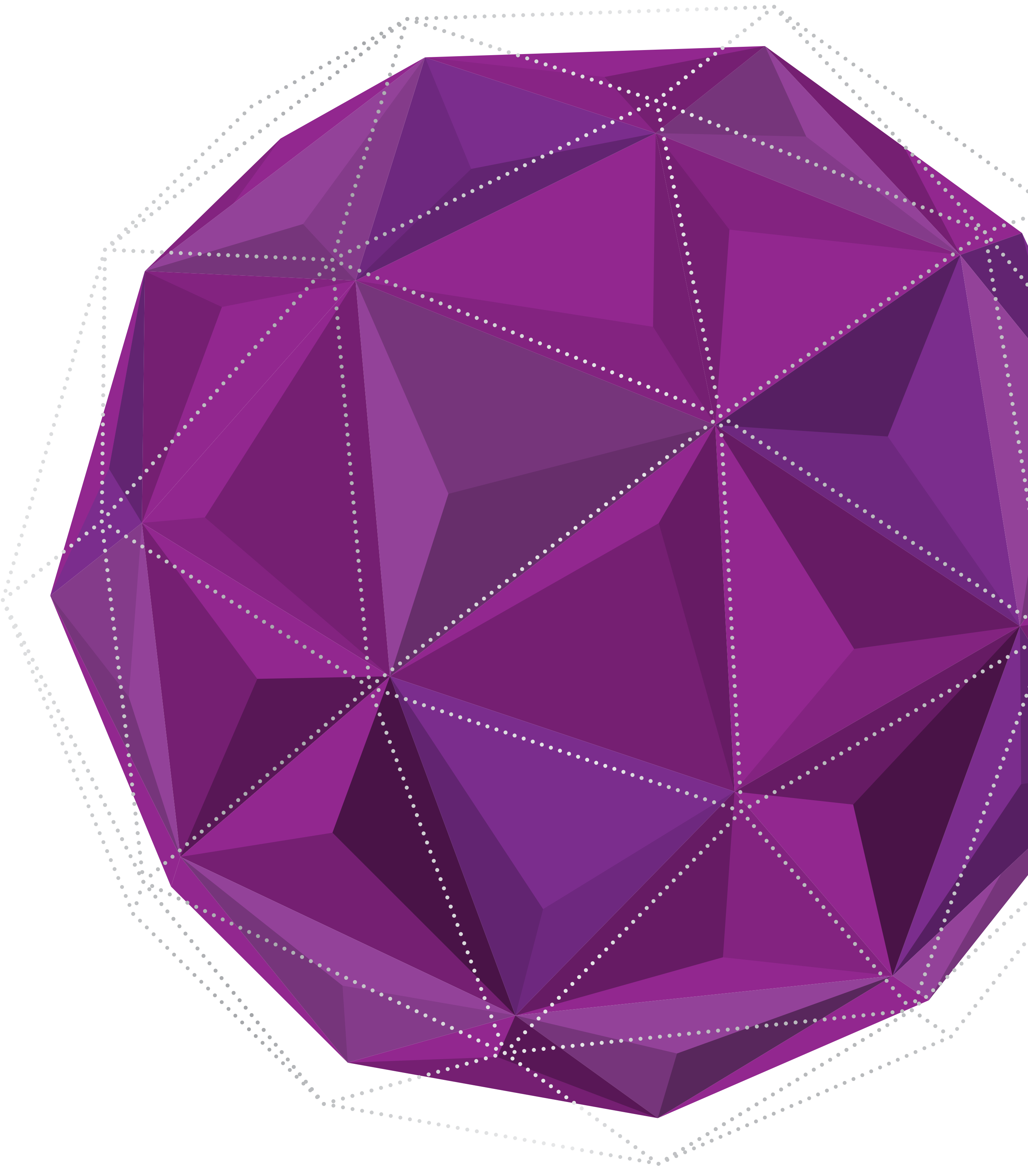


Figure 14.
Collaborations Best Equipped to Tackle Specific Issues, Emphasis: **NGOs**

Question: For each of the following issues, please select the type of collaboration that you think can most effectively address it. Please select one for each issue.



3 The Evolving Universe of Collaboration for Sustainability



The Evolving Universe of Collaboration for Sustainability

The previous chapter considered the myriad reasons why collaboration has become so prominent and why it will become even more central in the years to come. Here we seek to better understand and assess the broad universe of initiatives springing up in response to the factors we've cited.

To do this, we identified nearly 200 examples of business-involved initiatives designed to affect environmental, social and/or economic change (for the full list of examples, see Appendix). We focused on those that are truly multi-stakeholder. For us this meant initiatives involving three or more parties—i.e. we deliberately excluded bilateral partnerships, though they are relevant and fascinating in their own right. Also, in line with a more precise definition of multi-stakeholder, the vast majority include representation from more than one sector, not just the private sector.

Still, this sample does not capture the full universe of sustainability-focused collaboration. Again, more focused partnerships are also hugely important, as are initiatives that do not focus so much on business. But our sample set is useful for examining one key frontier: how larger groups of partners are working to advance the sustainability of business and markets, and for helping consider how such collaboration can and should evolve in the future.

Below we explore the range of collaborative models we currently see in action and discuss several key observations on how collaboration in general is evolving.

Myriad Models

Individual collaborations vary considerably based on their objective and scope, the number and type of players involved, the governance model, and other factors. As we collected and analyzed examples, we classified them on several dimensions, in order to better understand different models and the universe as a whole. Here we explore three separate but complementary frameworks that emerged.

Diverse Approaches

Looking across our sample set, we identified a range of distinct collaborative approaches or models, summarized in **Figure 12**. While imperfect, this framework is useful for better understanding the basic character of different initiatives and may provide some inspiration and guidance to those considering different potential approaches for tackling a given challenge.

In our sample, we find that *issue-focused knowledge and capacity-building initiatives* are the most numerous. These are generally multi-sector partnerships that coordinate activities and disseminate best practice and knowledge around a particular issue such as supply chain labor conditions, water, food waste, sustainable purchasing, etc. Closely related, but fewer in number, are *issue-focused standard-setting groups*, which go beyond knowledge and capacity-building to advancing some kind of standard or certification for management of a given issue or challenge, and *collaborative funding or implementation coalitions*.

In contrast to most of the other models, issue-focused collaborations tend to involve a greater diversity of collaborators—no doubt because many key issues and topics cut across industry, sector or other boundaries, and because narrowing the focus to a single, well-defined issue may make it easier for more partners to effectively engage with one another.

Figure 15.
Selected Models for Multi-Stakeholder, Business-Involved Collaboration for Sustainability

	Model	Examples
Issue Focus	**Issue-focused knowledge and capacity-building**	• 2030 Water Resources Group • Ethical Trading Initiative • Natural Capital Business Hub
Issue Focus	**Issue-focused standard-setting**	• ClimateWise Insurance Group • Fair Labor Association • Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB)
Issue Focus	**Collaborative funding/ implementation**	• Closed Loop Fund • GAVI Alliance • Uniting to Combat Neglected Tropical Diseases
Industry Focus	**Industry research, information-sharing and advocacy**	• Dairy Sustainability Framework • Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition (EICC) • Media CSR Forum
Industry Focus	**Industry standard-setting**	• Better Cotton Initiative • Forest Stewardship Council • Sustainable Apparel Coalition
Industry Focus	**Industry futures processes**	• Dairy 2020 • Sustainable Food Lab • Sustainable Shipping Initiative
Other	**Multi-stakeholder leadership and advocacy initiatives**	• Aldersgate Group • Business for Innovative Climate & Energy Policy (BICEP) • Net Positive Group
Other	**Partners tackling a specific challenge in a specific place**	• Kenyan Tea Program • R4 Rural Resilience Initiative • Water Futures Partnership
Other	**Company-driven, engaging an extensive partner network**	• Cisco Networking Academy • Novo Nordisk Changing Diabetes • Walmart Sustainable Value Networks
Other	**Multi-industry, multi-issue networks/platforms**	• Corporate Eco Forum • UN Global Compact • World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

An alternative to issue-focused collaborations are those built to address one or a variety of challenges for a particular industry. In this case, there is a similar distinction between coordination/knowledge-sharing and standard-setting. We also distinguish a third type, *industry futures processes*, which generally convene a broad range of industry players and stakeholders (e.g. customers, investors, suppliers, NGOs) to develop a comprehensive, shared vision of how to shift the industry onto a sustainable path. A key example is PharmaFutures, an ongoing dialogue between pharmaceutical companies and their investors about evolving industry business models to align long-term success and positive health outcomes, and in which SustainAbility played a key role early on.

Industry standard-setting efforts are also another common form of collaboration. These are where we see some of the most interesting examples of pre-competitive collaboration, where industry players unite to establish a new floor for performance or even set conditions that they hope will spark new innovation and competition—i.e. a race to the top—in pursuit of sustainability. A good example of the latter is the U.S. Green Building Council's influential LEED standard, which has worked well in part by incentivizing architects, material suppliers and builders to compete to create more and more innovative designs, technologies and finished buildings.

Also relatively common are multi-stakeholder leadership and advocacy initiatives (like Ceres' BICEP, the B Team and the Green Industry Platform) which bring together partners to promote new visions for the economy, advocate for policy or try to shift dialogue around an industry or topic. We also see a number of collaborations where partners are attacking a challenge in a specific place or places, such as the Water Futures Partnership, an alliance among German international development authorities, WWF, The Nature Conservancy and several multi-national companies implementing water stewardship projects in several African and South American countries.

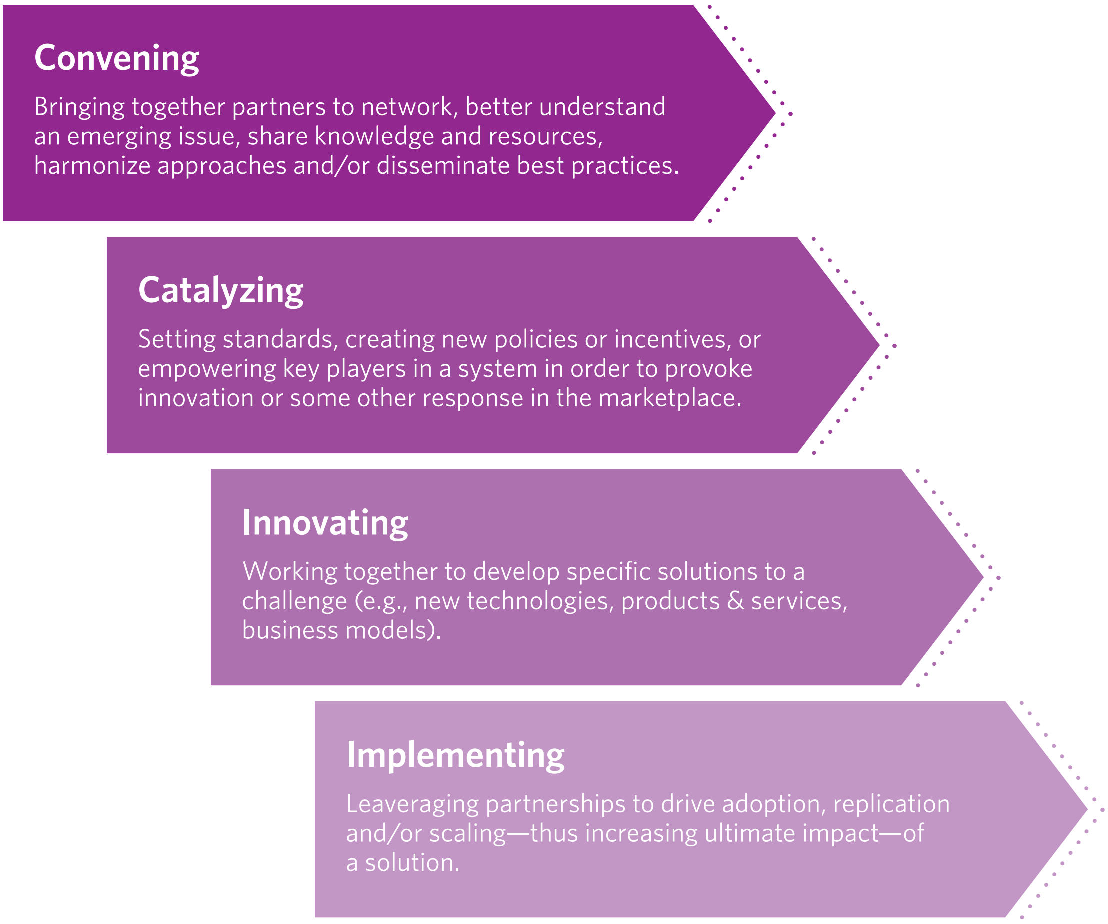
Convening, Catalyzing, Innovating, Implementing

Another way of understanding different initiatives is by identifying their organizing principle, or the key way in which they seek to make change. While details vary, we find that collaborations are generally pursuing one of four basic objectives—*convening, catalyzing, innovating* or *implementing*—described in **Figure 16**.

Together, the four objectives also describe the stages that a single initiative may progress through. For example, a collaboration may start with the purpose of just bringing stakeholders together around an issue, then evolve into a standard-setting effort, and then develop other programs aimed at implementing chosen solutions across the market. Similarly, as an issue or topic evolves, it may spawn a series of different collaborations along the same continuum—i.e. early efforts focus on understanding the issue and forming consensus, later ones focus on setting standards or influencing policy, and still others focus on innovating new solutions in response to those standards, etc.

Consequently, this model is useful not only for understanding and comparing different collaborations, but also for thinking about what strategies and approaches to undertake when designing a new initiative, and how it is likely to interact with other current or future efforts focused on the same issue(s).

Figure 16.
Four Basic Objectives of Collaboration



Engagement vs. Scope

Another useful set of conceptual models is suggested by comparing the scope and type of engagement that an initiative undertakes. By scope, we mean how narrowly or systemically an effort is oriented. Narrowly focused initiatives tend to address issues in isolation and with a short time horizon. In contrast, systemically oriented efforts consider all appropriate linkages around an issue. By engagement, we mean the degree to which interactions among collaborators tend towards transactional exchanges or deeper, more relational engagement. Further detail on the attributes of systemic orientation and relational engagement is listed in **Figure 17**.

Figure 17.
Attributes of Systemic Orientation and Relational Engagement

Systemic orientation looks like:

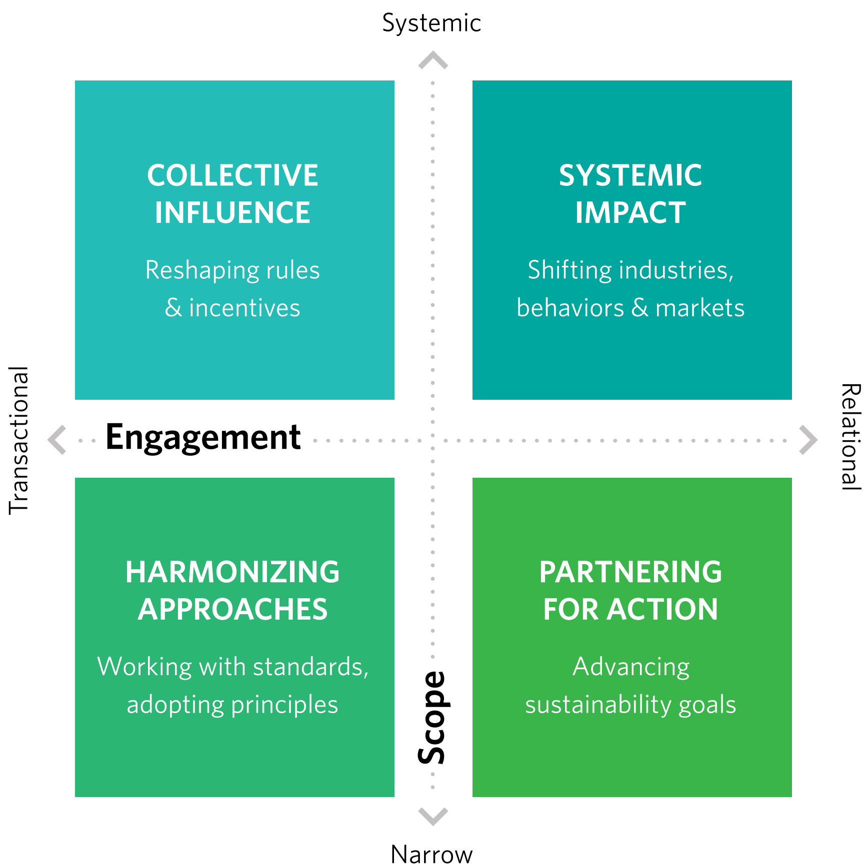
- Intention for large-scale, long-term impact
- Connections drawn to interrelated issues
- Horizontal connections made among companies or institutions facing similar issues
- Vertical connections made with upstream and downstream actors along a value chain
- Emphasis on identifying and acting on leverage points with potential to shift the whole system

Relational engagement looks like:

- Co-creation of mission, goals and agendas
- Equitable distribution of benefits among collaborators
- Governance models appropriate for ensuring discipline and trust
- Sufficient accountability mechanisms
- Means of seeking redress for grievances, both for collaborators and those affected by the initiative

Combining the dimensions of engagement and scope into a matrix, four distinct modes of collaboration emerge (see **Figure 18**). As with other models explored above, these are useful for characterizing the diverse array of initiatives we see today, as well as providing insight for those working to evolve an existing collaboration or design and launch an entirely new one. They also provide an effective framework for any organization seeking to map and/or better manage its current portfolio of collaborations. The following bullets provide additional discussion and examples for each mode.

Figure 18.
Collaborative Modes – Engagement vs. Scope



Harmonizing Approaches

Harmonizing Approaches describes narrow-scope, transactional initiatives in which collaborators work at arms length on relatively proscribed issues and/or within strict terms. Often, the majority of players involved are asked to join or comply with, or provide funding for, a pre-defined program which is shaped and administered by one or a core set of participants. Such initiatives can be valuable for engaging a large number of partners and for participants wanting to stay aligned with or apprised of evolving practices around a given issue or industry. Examples may include knowledge networks like the mHealth Alliance and some standard-setting efforts such as the Aquaculture Stewardship Council or the Ethical Tea Partnership.

Partnering for Action

Partnering for Action entails narrowly-focused, action-oriented collaborations where participants play a more active and equal role in shaping the agenda and activities. These efforts may involve more dynamic or intensive work around the chosen objective, or they may be early-stage efforts where objectives or approaches have not been fully worked out. They may also involve a smaller number of players, which can either result from or enable a deeper, more relational style of engagement. Naturally though, such collaborations tend to demand greater time and resources from those involved, so individuals and organizations may not have capacity to participate in a large number of them at the same time. Examples include GSK, Barclays and the Zambian Ministry of Health working to increase access to healthcare and improve economic conditions in Zambia, or H&M, Kering (PUMA) and the UK-based start-up Worn Again working to commercialize a new technology for textile recycling.

Collective Influence

Collective Influence describes transactional, systemically oriented arrangements in which partners join forces to influence policy, incentives or other system conditions. Engagement among parties may be limited to lending support (e.g., signing a declaration, agreeing to a set of shared principles), or it may be slightly more involved (e.g., participation in a working group). However, what differentiates this from the Harmonizing Approaches model is that it is oriented less toward creating a direct impact on a given issue, industry or place and more toward provoking widespread change in a market or across the economy. Illustrative examples include the UN Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), a long-term effort to embed sustainability into global financial markets; the Sustainability Consortium (TSC), which brings together more than 100 global companies, NGOs, universities and other organizations to advance science and scale up approaches to product sustainability; and Ceres' BICEP, which unites companies to advocate for effective US energy and climate legislation.

Systemic Impact

Systemic Impact encompasses initiatives that also aim for widespread change but leverage deep, relational engagement in order to push their thinking and activities even further. Whether composed of a small or large number of partners, the group tends to be tight-knit and exclusive, relying on extensive dialogue and high levels of trust to remove barriers and spark far-reaching ideas or innovations. One example is the B Team, a group of highly influential, C-level business leaders working to promote a bold vision and systemic action to make business a more effective catalyst for sustainable development. Another is the Corporate Eco Forum, an invitation-only network of senior corporate leaders engaging in deep dialogue and targeted initiatives to accelerate sustainable innovation.

Note that none of the four modes should be viewed as superior to the others. Each one has distinct applications and merits, as well as limits. We therefore see greatest value for organizations that pursue a portfolio approach, which is discussed further in Chapter 5. At the same time, there is clear need for increasing systemic impact in response to a variety of challenges, which does suggest greater emphasis be placed on the upper half of the matrix.

Observations & Trends

Looking across numerous initiatives and drawing further on the frameworks and insights above, we note several observations and trends.

Novel Combinations

Collaborations are not just more numerous, but increasingly composed of unique, or sometimes unexpected partners. Of particular interest in recent years has been so-called pre-competitive collaboration, in which industry rivals work together on issues of common interest, often with the goal of raising industry-wide performance or jointly influencing other actors along the industry's value chain (e.g., common suppliers, customers, policymakers). Alliances among competitors aren't really new; competing companies have participated in trade associations and other forums of common interest for decades. But in response to the scale and complexity of their sustainability challenges, companies in many industries are now working far more closely with one another than ever before. A variety of commodity roundtables (e.g., the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, Tea 2030) and industry initiatives such as the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, the Roadmap to Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC), and the Sustainable Shipping Initiative are just a few well-known examples.

Collaborations are not just more numerous but increasingly composed of unique or sometimes unexpected partners.

Collaborations are also reaching more across industry or sector boundaries in order to form more powerful coalitions (e.g., CEO Water Mandate, Corporate Eco Forum, Sustainable Packaging Coalition); to increase the ability to innovate (e.g., Bioplastics Feedstock Alliance, LAUNCH, WBCSD's Low Carbon Technologies Partnership Initiative); and/or to better influence different elements of complex systems (e.g., Paper Recovery Alliance, Sustainable Food Lab).

Changing the System

As reflected throughout this report, there is significant emphasis and effort on collaborations that endeavor to shift large-scale systems (e.g., the food system, the energy system) and/or that utilize systems-thinking and related approaches to build shared understanding and develop smarter responses. While this is no longer a new development—system-changing collaboration has been the strategy du jour in sustainability circles for the last several years at least—we note that these efforts are maturing and increasingly setting the standard for new initiatives being developed. There are not only growing references to systems and systemic approaches in how certain collaborations are described, but also an increasing number of initiatives like LAUNCH, in which partners have undertaken formal system mapping exercises as a means of developing shared understanding and uncovering leverage points with greatest potential to transform the system or systems in question.

Across the Value Chain

Linked to the discussion of pre-competitive collaboration above, we find that the largest concentration of initiatives in our sample are those focused on improving supply chain sustainability in single industries. This makes sense—a number of the industries most represented (e.g., food, electronics, apparel) are feeling the effects of resource pinch-points, complex supply chains, activist campaigns and related consumer concerns most acutely. Furthermore, supply chains—with their long reach and many invested stakeholders—provide a meaningful frame within which to collaborate on a variety of interlinked issues. On the other hand, so much focus on shoring up existing supply chains may not be entirely good, as it could place too much emphasis on incremental change to existing systems, rather than more fundamental economic shifts.

Outcome-Oriented

Possibly counterbalancing the prevalence of single-industry and supply chain-focused collaboration, many companies are gradually shifting or expanding the focus of their collaborative efforts beyond addressing challenges in their own operations or within their industries, to meeting unmet needs or creating other positive social outcomes. For example, in the Banking on Change initiative, Plan UK, CARE International UK and Barclays have worked to address financial exclusion by linking informal savings groups to formal banking services in several African countries. In the GAVI Alliance, diverse partners, including many of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, have mobilized to drastically increase vaccination rates in developing countries.

Many companies are gradually shifting or expanding the focus of their collaborative effort beyond addressing challenges in their own operations or within their industries, to meeting unmet needs or creating other positive social outcomes.

While this trend has picked up pace in recent years, it is likely that it will become even more commonplace in response to the new Sustainable Development Goals, which ask for unprecedented levels of collaboration in order to turn the tide on broad global issues such as poverty and inequality, education, nutrition, healthcare and ecosystems.

'Orchestrators'

In his book *The Collaboration Economy*, Eric Lowitt describes *orchestrators* as organizations (mostly companies) that "are pulling together networks of collaborators from the private, public and civil sectors to assess the health of specific systems, charting a course toward addressing challenges within these systems, and carrying out plans that can heal these systems." [10]

Indeed, looking closely at the current landscape, it is apparent that several leading companies—e.g. Coca-Cola, GSK, Marks & Spencer, Nike, Shell, Unilever—are disproportionately active in collaboration, and in many cases have played key roles in establishing prominent initiatives. The same is true of a relatively small number of key NGOs and other intermediary organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), WBCSD, the UN Global Compact (UNGC), etc.

That there is such concentration around these organizations underscores the pioneering role they have played and makes clear that many of them have effectively leveraged their own credibility and experience in order to spawn additional and/or wider initiatives. However, it also suggests the need for more to follow in their footsteps, especially in order to increase the overall scale and impact of collaboration.

The New Normal

Combining a number of observations and insights from above, we conclude that traditional corporate engagement and collaboration are fading, and that a new normal for ambitious, outcome-oriented collaboration is emerging in their place (see **Figure 19**).

Figure 19.
Corporate Engagement and Collaboration – Traditional vs. Emerging Norms

Traditional	Emerging
Aggregate impact – sum of individual company actions	'Gestalt' – collective impact, whole greater than sum of parts
Delivering business value, meeting sustainability goals	Delivering business and societal value, meeting needs
Efficiency – focus on operations, products & services	Innovation – addressing barriers and shifting the pitch
Hierarchical, traditional stakeholder engagement	Relational, solutions-focused engagement
Usual suspects	Unlikely alliances

Survey Snapshot

Results and discussion of the 2012 and 2014 GlobeScan/SustainAbility surveys on collaboration.

Figure 20.
The Business Case for Collaboration, 2014 vs. 2012

More than half of polled experts—and significantly more than in the 2012 survey—believe that gaining access to diverse perspectives and expertise is the key benefit companies gain by engaging in partnerships and collaborations. Other primary benefits include reducing or sharing risk and strengthening the company's reputation or leadership credentials.

Question: Which of the following potential benefits of collaboration most support the business case for companies to engage in multi-actor collaborations? Please choose two.

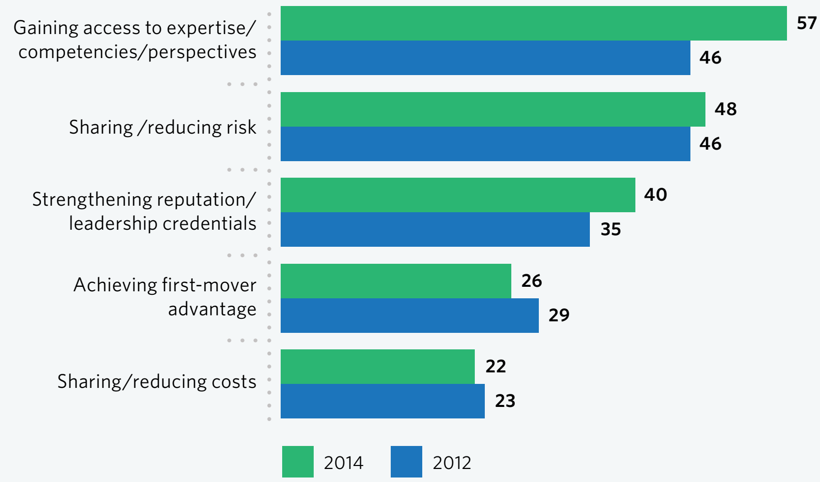


Figure 21.
Collaboration Benefits for Governments

Aside from the overall benefit of driving more progress on sustainable development, experts view the opportunity to either speed up or even avoid the typically slow pace of policymaking as the most important reason for governments to engage in multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Question: Which of the following potential benefits of collaboration most support the business case for governments to engage in multi-actor collaborations? Please choose two. (Question not asked in 2012.)

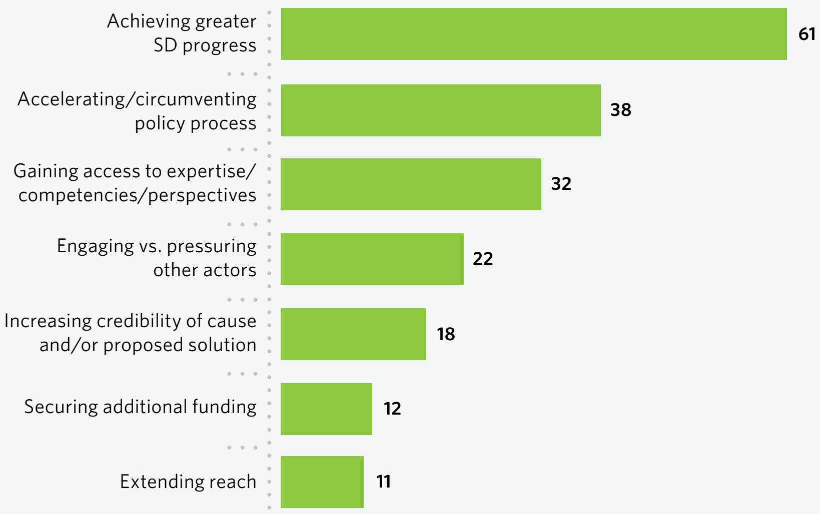


Figure 22.
Collaboration Benefits for NGOs

As they do for government, experts see the general imperative to scale progress on sustainable development as the primary reason for NGOs to engage in collaboration. Beyond that, the opportunity to constructively engage rather than pressure other actors (e.g., companies, governments) and gaining access to additional capabilities or expertise are viewed as key benefits of collaborating with others.

Question: Which of the following potential benefits of collaboration most support the business case for NGOs to engage in multi-actor collaborations? Please choose two. (Question not asked in 2012.)

4 Key Challenges

Key Challenges

As the preceding chapters demonstrate, collaboration holds great promise and is well on its way to becoming standard practice in the field of sustainability. It is clear though that there is still a long way to go before we can truly deliver sustainable development, and whether in the context of the SDGs or elsewhere, all eyes are looking to even more, and even better, collaboration to make the difference.

But can collaboration really deliver all that we're asking of it? Can it move fast enough? Can it be applied even more widely or strategically than it is now? Can companies and other organizations handle even more of it than they're already doing?

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In this chapter, we frame the overarching challenge—ensuring collaboration translates into impact at scale—and then hone in on several related challenges that must be addressed in order for collaboration to meet its long-term potential.

Impact at Scale

It would be wrong to say that collaborative initiatives are not having impact, but it is no stretch to say that their overall impact remains insufficient. So we must ask, can we continue to build on their success, especially at a scale that is appropriate to the challenge?

An honest assessment suggests multi-stakeholder collaborations have succeeded primarily in engaging partners, creating new communities of inquiry and practice, and showing what is possible. They've helped a range of new technologies and other solutions come into view, they've driven implementation of specific solutions in specific industry or geographical contexts, and they've shown us what it looks like to begin to tip certain systems or markets toward long-term change. Together, collaborations have played a key part in bringing us to where we are now—i.e., on the cusp of much more transformative change.

But how, and to what extent, can they help achieve the full and final transformation that's needed—i.e., one that entails more rapid slowing and soon reversal of GHG emissions growth; tangible reductions in rates and degrees of poverty, inequality, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, etc.; closing gaps between anticipated supply and demand of food, water and other critical resources; and so forth?

Together, collaborations have played a key part in bringing us to where we are now—i.e., on the cusp of much more transformative change. But how, and to what extent, can they help achieve the full and final transformation that's needed?

A common answer is: collaborate *more*. This is both genuine and slightly vexing. Genuine because existing initiatives have been uniquely effective at overcoming barriers and moving the needle in some places, because there are still many more places in need of collective attention and action, and because many, many more players are needed to join in. Vexing because companies and other organizations already face such an overwhelming array of initiatives and new ones are cropping up almost weekly.

An essential and complementary answer, then, is: collaborate better. At a minimum, this means ensuring the quality and effectiveness of each initiative that is undertaken. But a level above that, it also means ensuring the right collaborations in the right places, at the right times, with the right players, and with enough joined-up thinking between them, so that it all adds up to the needed change. We should be asking, both individually and collectively: what strategies and mechanisms can we use to support effective distribution, alignment and overall utility of initiatives?

Number and Scope

As we seek more impact at scale, it is expected that collaborations will continue to increase in both number and scope. But no organization has infinite capacity for such initiatives, and greater scope may bring greater complexity as well, so there is need to carefully manage this expansion.

There is no right or wrong answer for the number of collaborations that should exist—if there is a need and a critical mass of partners is prepared to act on an issue, then so be it. However, there are real limits to how many initiatives any given player can effectively participate in, which may in turn limit how many can exist in the field as a whole. Furthermore, the number of entities—whether companies, NGOs or governments—that have the capacity to take part in many initiatives at once is relatively limited, which further restricts how far these boundaries can be pushed.

While we haven't yet hit the limit of our collective capacity to collaborate, evidence shows that some organizations are already involved in a huge number of initiatives. In a 2014 survey by *MIT Sloan Management Review*, the Boston Consulting Group and the UN Global Compact, 37% of respondents said their organizations were participating in more than 10 sustainability collaborations. About a quarter of those (i.e., 10% of the overall sample) said they were taking part in more than 50, and others indicated they expect to move into similar territory in the years to come.

If there are limits to the overall number of collaborations that can be sustained, then a logical antidote is to focus instead on increasing the scope of individual initiatives, with the goal that each one may have more far-reaching impact. For example, instead of allowing the proliferation of many smaller or even potentially competing initiatives around a given issue or industry, organizers might seek to create a single collaboration designed to draw in more partners and encompassing many different dimensions of activity.

But with this comes the potential for greater complexity—e.g., more issues, more stakeholders, a larger number of potential causes and effects that the initiative must address. Here again we must confront capacity limits. If a given organization can only participate in a certain number of initiatives, the number of those that can be highly involved and complex is surely lower. At the same time, added size and complexity increases the potential of diffusing motivation, accountability and other essential attributes, which may slow or undermine success.

We must ask—again, both individually and collectively—how can we effectively balance growing utilization and complexity of collaboration against organizations' limited capacity for outside initiatives and the tendency for smaller, more narrowly defined efforts to find greater success?

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Pace

Effective collaboration takes time—to build trust, to understand the nuances, to develop meaningful solutions and to successfully implement them. Increase the scale and/or complexity of what you're trying to do, and this only becomes more true. But, with the clock ticking for urgent action on key issues, and given the fast-moving, volatile circumstances in which we're working, time isn't on our side.

Although initiatives are multiplying and collaborative success stories are proliferating, it is clear that real impact is nearly always a long-term pursuit. Even when partners have the best intentions and strong alignment at the outset, it can be exceedingly difficult to get to the bottom of a challenge and to select a response that sufficiently meets everyone's needs. And as internal and external barriers arise, this dynamic is only compounded. Without wishing to generalize, this is why one sees such a preponderance of networks, roadmaps and pilot projects—i.e., relatively straightforward or near-term steps that are often part of the process of developing a more potent, long-term intervention. Meanwhile, there are relatively few initiatives that seem to have already achieved large-scale and tangible implementations of change.

"If your company is serious about changing things for the better, you do have to invest in collaboration. You should invest, but you have to be aware that the return on investment is low and it requires a lot of patience."

Michael Kobari, Levi Strauss

Further to the point, in attempting to assess the impact of multi-stakeholder collaborations to date, we took note of a number of initiatives that are regarded as relatively ambitious, sophisticated and mature, but that are mostly still trying to achieve breakthrough. Few of these could be fairly labeled as unsuccessful. Rather, most are simply still gathering steam, and so we continue to wait, banking on their promise, and trusting they'll eventually take off or at least pave the way for something better.

So we're left to ask: is it possible to accelerate collaborative processes to drive faster payoff? Are there other ways to square their essential slowness with the urgency of the issues that they need to address?

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Collective Action

Sustainable development is, at its heart, a collective action problem—a state of affairs in which individual and group interests are not immediately compatible, where individual actors face the dilemma of whether to act selfishly or in coordination with the larger group. But if collaboration is a key to achieving sustainability, then are we forced to confront a tautology—essentially, that the key to collective action is collective action?

In a way, we are. For most organizations, and especially for companies, collaboration is easiest when there is a clear business case. GlobeScan/SustainAbility Survey results suggest that the strongest benefits of collaboration for companies include gaining access to additional expertise, reducing or sharing the risk of a given endeavor, and enhancing reputation (see **Figure 20**). However, even as companies see greater reason to collaborate in selected areas, there is little to guarantee that their interests are adequately aligned with those of society, and so there is the potential that such collaboration may not do all that it could to advance sustainability at scale. In other words: a collective action problem.

Meanwhile, a key reason why collaboration is so in vogue is because it is seen as an essential means for reengineering system conditions and making the overall business case for sustainability stronger (for example, by altering price signals and other feedback loops, changing rules, shifting consumer behavior, etc.). If this is done effectively, it will lead to development of a market or markets in which sustainability is rewarded and therefore pursued by all. In other words: collective action!

This creates a sort of chicken/egg conundrum: collaboration for sustainability is driven in large part by a strong business case; yet more and better collaboration is needed in order to enhance the necessary business case for sustainability. The resulting question is: how can we respect and leverage the short-term, varied interests of different collaborators while still utilizing collaboration to help reach the tipping point toward long-term sustainability?

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Survey Snapshot

Results and discussion of the 2012 and 2014 GlobeScan/SustainAbility surveys on collaboration.

Figure 23.
Key Attributes of an NGO Collaboration Partner

Asked what matters most when selecting an NGO partner, nearly half of polled experts put credibility and distinct competencies at the top of the list.

In 2014 credibility was rated slightly lower than in 2012, while shares common goals was rated somewhat higher, possibly signaling a shift toward viewing NGOs less as validators and more as equal partners in advancing certain efforts.

Question: From the list below, please select the two most important attributes of a collaboration partner if the partner is an NGO.

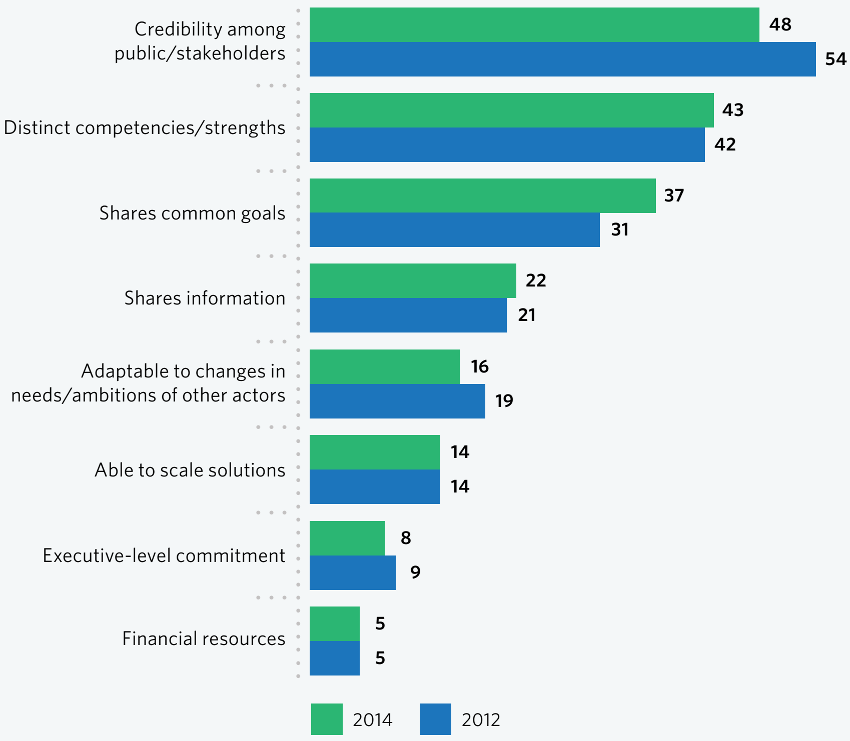
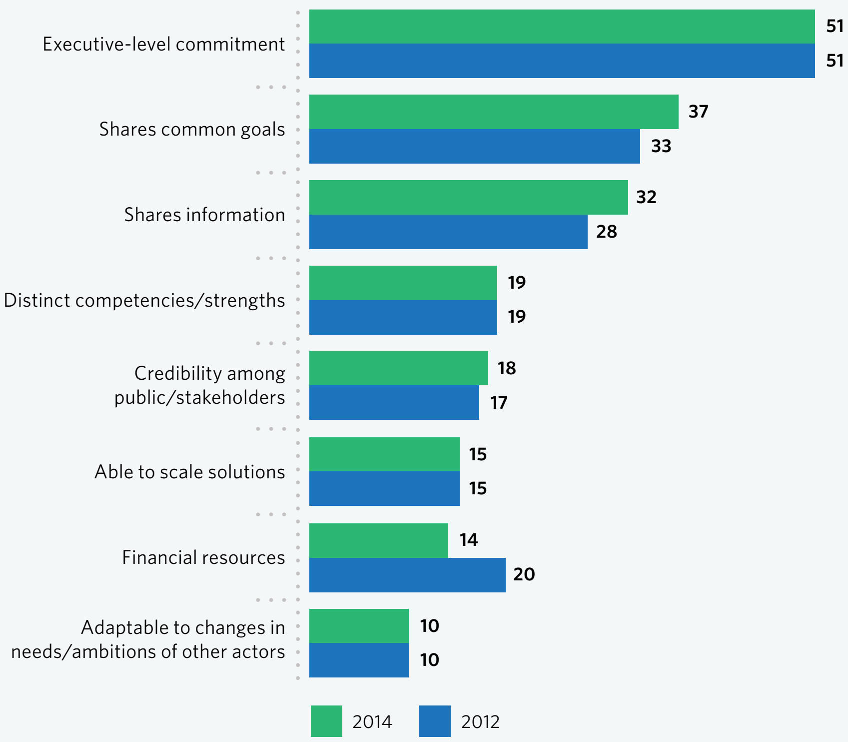


Figure 24.
Key Attributes of a Corporate Collaboration Partner

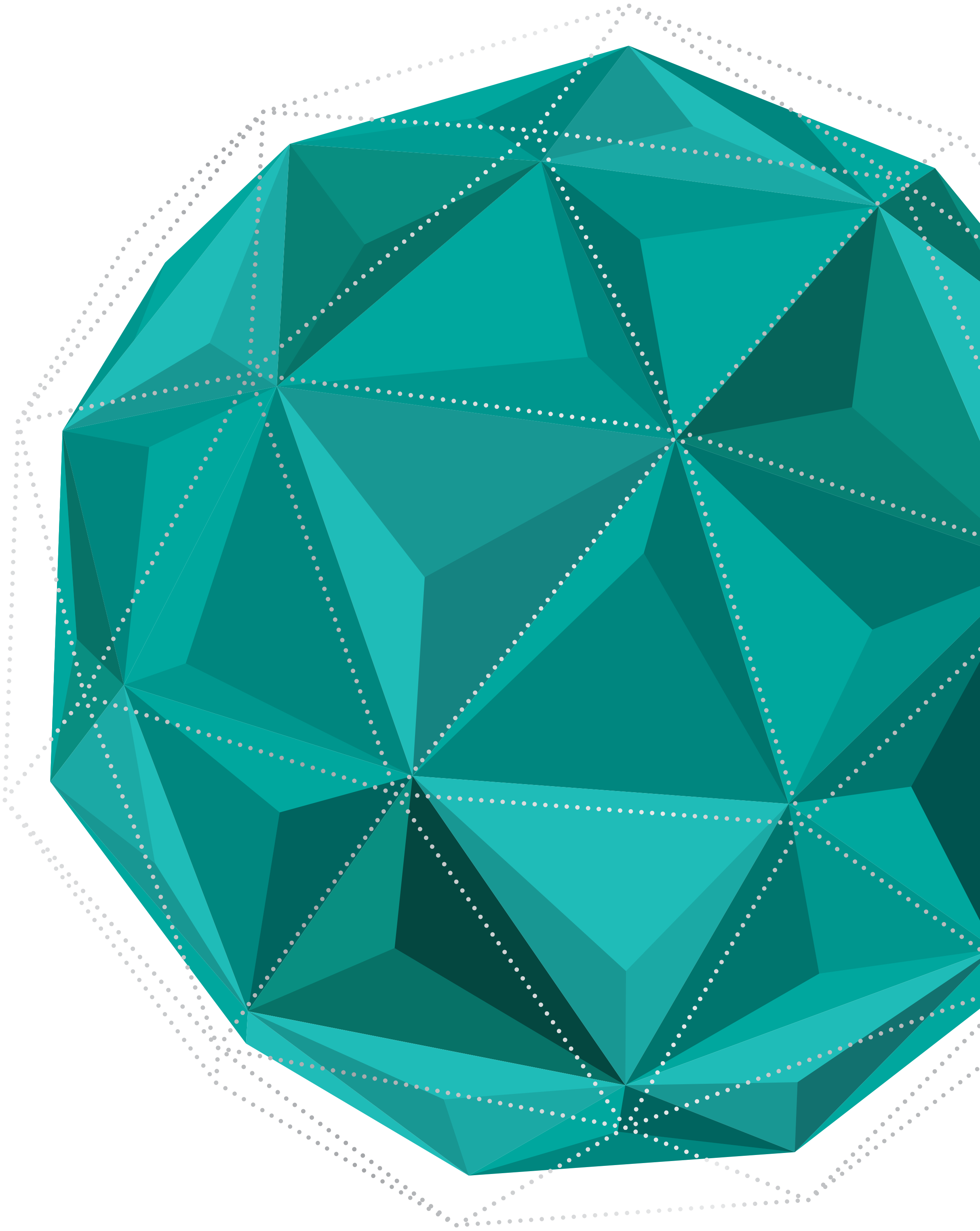
For corporate collaborators, experts consider executive-level commitment—perhaps the ultimate indicator of how seriously a company takes something—as the most essential attribute. Sharing common goals and information are also deemed important, with both ratings increasing between 2012 and 2014.

Also, perhaps reflecting greater emphasis on deeper, more strategic partnerships versus shallow, transactional ones, financial resources were seen as somewhat less important in 2014 than in 2012.

Question: From the list below, please select the two most important attributes of a collaboration partner if the partner is a company.



5 Towards the Next Generation



Towards the Next Generation

In order to better realize its promise and bring sustainability more rapidly to scale, we encourage a new generation of collaboration that is more *aligned, diverse, fluid, networked, far-reaching* and *temporary*. These six guiding principles result from synthesis of insights and ideas we gathered throughout our research, and from our own thinking about how to further evolve and exploit collaboration to drive large-scale change. The following sections summarize each of the principles, along with key strategies and actions for would-be collaborators to apply them.

Aligned

Embrace collective goals and large-scale frameworks for collaboration, so that dispersed and/or disconnected initiatives can contribute to accomplishing big things.

As the universe of collaboration continues to expand and as individual initiatives navigate among disparate short- and long-term interests of their participants, there is a danger that, in the aggregate, collaborations will remain too incremental or piecemeal, or perhaps even be at odds with one another. While this is in degree natural, it is not acceptable if we are to make sufficient progress on sustainability at the global scale.

One response may be to make individual collaborations that much more expansive, so that they can better understand and coordinate the effort to address all the key elements of the systems they seek to change. To a certain extent, this makes sense. At the same time though, more narrowly-defined initiatives often have a greater chance of success—just as creativity loves constraints, collaboration loves specificity. Furthermore, as we work to address the very biggest challenges, and thus to shift ever larger systems, it just isn't possible for any single initiative to do it all. Instead, we must consider how a multitude of disconnected initiatives can be directed in such a way as to lead to large-scale change.

While there is a role here for active coordination of initiatives (see more under *Networked* below), it is only one part of the puzzle. To aid coordination at the largest scale, it is vital for new or evolving initiatives to become more intuitively aligned with one another and with broader agendas for change. This can be achieved particularly by collaborations avoiding unnecessary competition and finding their place in relation to larger goals and frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the circular economy, which can provide structure to guide the evolution of many smaller initiatives. In doing so, collaborations may also seek to adopt common metrics and commit to simple, effective reporting or other transparency measures in order to send useful signals to others.

Key Strategies & Actions for *Aligned*:

- Ensure new or evolving collaborations fill gaps and do not unnecessarily compete with one another.
- Understand the role of specific initiatives in relation to large-scale frameworks such as the SDGs.
- Adopt common metrics and commit to transparency to aid coordination with others.
- Take care to understand initiatives' larger context and align them with other efforts and circumstances that will shape their long-term success.

Diverse

Adopt new and different models of collaboration, or even multiple approaches to a given challenge.

As we've discussed, it is crucial that individual collaborations not just expand in number and scope, but also become increasingly effective. But as we strive to make them so, we mustn't develop too narrow a view of what models work best, where or how they should focus, or who should initiate and lead them. Rather, there is need for and benefit in continuing to increase diversity of approaches, which will in turn foster greater impact. This means embracing and experimenting with a range of narrow and broad initiatives, shallow and deep styles of engagement, and stable platforms and disruptors, as well as alternating leadership among business, government and others, both within and across individual areas or challenges.

We also apply diversity here to mean more dispersion of collaborative effort across diverse challenges. Again, while the current universe of collaboration is already large and growing, in many ways it remains a patchwork, with some areas of intense focus and effort alongside others where collaboration is either nascent or nonexistent. Through encouraging a more diverse array of collaborators, including new 'orchestrators' as well as participants, and seeking out unmet needs or challenges, there is the potential to both further scale impact and ensure more even and effective coverage of key issues.

For many organizations, this will translate into taking a portfolio approach—i.e., distributing collaborative resources across a range of issues and geographies, trying multiple approaches at once on priority issues, and regularly reviewing and adjusting resource allocations. Also, regardless how much total capacity an organization has, it must consider where it is ideal to play a leadership role or delve into more complex, relational forms of collaboration, versus just signing up to or passively participating in broader initiatives. With this approach, organizations can not only optimize their reach and impact across multiple initiatives, but also accelerate their learning and better manage the risk inherent in some of their initiatives.

Key Strategies & Actions for *Diverse*:

- Embrace and experiment with multiple styles of collaboration within and across individual areas or challenges.
- Ensure adequate coverage of key issues.
- Develop and regularly review a portfolio of initiatives to balance diverse priorities and approaches, and to effectively manage risk and resources.
- Appoint a dedicated leader or a center of excellence to grow and manage the portfolio over time.

Fluid

Speed up the creation and dissolution of specific initiatives, and keep them dynamic, experimental and adaptive.

Of course, there exists a danger that encouraging more diversity and marshaling greater effort around the SDGs and other big goals will encourage further proliferation and eventually stagnation of initiatives. And especially as more complex or formal arrangements multiply, efforts to coordinate within and across them will only become more challenging.

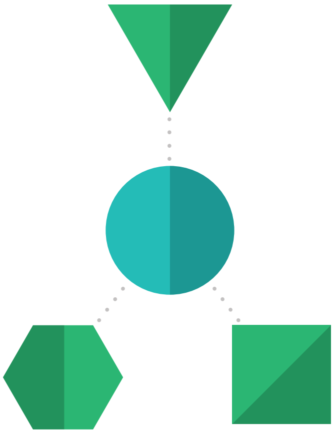
For this reason, collaboration must also be increasingly fluid. Whether engaging in small-scale partnerships or complex, multi-stakeholder initiatives, collaborators should place significant emphasis on moving quickly and actively experimenting and adapting to continually changing circumstances. This means focusing on collaboration skills or enablers like relationship building, continuous communication, brainstorming and negotiation, and on innovation tactics like rapid iteration and freedom to fail. It's also ideal to favor governance models or other mechanisms that embed fluidity into the very nature of an initiative, for example by institutionalizing continual assessment and evolution of strategy.

It is also desirable for some collaborations to be able to form and dissolve quite readily, so that partners do not get bogged down or risk losing sight of what they really intend to accomplish. On the front end, partners should engage in 'speed dating', in order to rapidly evaluate potential. Alternatively, to attract different opportunities, organizations can communicate their overarching goals in ways that make clear how and where they're prepared to collaborate to achieve them. And on the back end, collaborators must rigorously assess the costs and benefits of continuing any given initiative, and, when necessary, be prepared to radically redesign or dissolve it in favor of better applying their effort.

The ultimate emphasis here is on organizations staying close to the ground and being more immersed in the substance and process of collaboration, rather than in the building up or coordination of different initiatives. Indeed, though the title of this report evokes the metaphor of orchestration, which denotes thorough planning and a high degree of control, we are really interested to see much more jazz, which is defined more by improvisation, openness and often surprising coherence.

Key Strategies & Actions for *Fluid*:

- Emphasize collaboration skills such as relationship building, continuous communication and brainstorming, as well as innovation tactics like rapid iteration and freedom to fail.
- Promote governance models and other mechanisms that enable continual assessment and rapid evolution of strategy.
- Ease the early match-making process by 'speed dating' potential partners and/or by sending clear signals about your goals and where you're prepared to collaborate to achieve them.
- Stay focused on outcomes and be prepared to redirect or dissolve initiatives to better apply effort elsewhere.



Networked

Leverage networks to enable more rapid design, scaling and impact of new collaborations.

In the previous chapter, we noted challenges around creating more joined-up thinking between initiatives and the often slow pace of building effective collaborations. To address these, as well as to combine the advantages and mitigate the challenges of pursuing greater alignment, diversity and fluidity, collaboration also must be increasingly networked.

In practice, this means that collaborative efforts, particularly in a given industry or issue area, should be mutually aware and transparent, and that collaborators must build connective tissue between different initiatives. Here again we see the vital role of orchestrators—leading companies, NGOs and others that play key roles in a wide array of initiatives—which are particularly well suited to sharing knowledge, experience and tools across their networks. Also, to connect a thread tied to greater fluidity above, as more individuals and organizations develop their collaborative muscles and experience, they can more quickly and effectively navigate across different efforts, connecting the dots and helping similar or successive initiatives to build on one another. In addition, third-party organizations like the Intersector Project provide curated knowledge and toolkits to facilitate learning across the whole landscape of collaboration.

There is also a vital role to be played by large-scale networks and meta-collaborations, which can provide shared platforms on which to more quickly build and link together diverse initiatives. One such platform is the World Economic Forum's New Vision for Agriculture, which aims to catalyze sustainable growth in agriculture. It brings together and supports investments and partnerships around national and regional agricultural priorities, fostering partnerships with more than 250 organizations in 14 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. For instance, the initiative's Grow Africa projects range from a "food basket" approach in Rwanda to "agricultural growth corridors" in Mozambique. As such, the New Vision initiative coordinates collaborations and calls for further action where needed. Larger platforms include the World Economic Forum itself and other cross-cutting entities like the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the UN Global Compact, and even established trade associations which are increasingly proactive in facilitating sustainability within their industries.

Key Strategies & Actions for *Networked*:

- Maintain open lines of communication between related or potentially complementary initiatives.
- Share and apply accumulated knowledge, experience and tools, and tap third parties to capture learning and intelligence from across an even broader landscape of collaboration.
- Exploit existing relationships, governance, tools and other advantages offered by shared platforms like trade associations and meta-collaborations.

Transformative

Design and prioritize initiatives with the greatest potential to create tipping points.

Core to this report is the view that collaboration is indeed essential for tipping the balance toward sustainability, but that continued growth in collaboration in general will not alone ensure that this is the case, especially at the pace and scale required. Furthermore, if companies or other organizations focus too much on initiatives that they deem to be unproblematic or in their immediate interest, then there is little chance that collaboration will be applied where it is needed most, which is in tackling the very biggest challenges and breaking down barriers to systemic change. It is therefore critical to prioritize initiatives focused on the most far-reaching, transformative interventions—e.g., establishing and enforcing a global price on carbon, empowering vulnerable populations, redesigning business and broader economic models—in order to shift large-scale systems.

In essence, this means continuing to raise ambitions and balancing or integrating short-term strategic goals with the long-term interests of all parties. To do so, organizations can deploy tools like futures analysis or scenario planning, in order to consider the circumstances needed for both them and the system as a whole to thrive over the long term. For example, many companies find that broad societal issues such as inequality, racial injustice or climate change are not in the strictest sense material, but they know that without contributing aggressively to efforts to address them, they jeopardize their own future.

It is also necessary for more individuals and organizations to become outspoken advocates of change, or even what Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton and John Kania recently described as system leaders—those "able to bring forth collective leadership."[12] Senge et al posit three core capabilities: seeing the larger system, fostering deep reflection and development of trust, and helping shift collective focus toward positive visions of the future and the means to get there. By developing and applying these skills, and especially by devoting a part of one's portfolio to initiatives that reflect them, there is much greater chance for catalyzing system change at scale.

Key Strategies & Actions for *Transformative*:

- Use tools like futures analysis or scenario-planning to consider evolving trends and the circumstances required for both your organization and the system as a whole to thrive over the long term.
- Engage and listen deeply to the interests and concerns of a broad range of stakeholders.
- Set far-reaching goals and advocate; shine light on the barriers to your own and broader progress.
- Design and prioritize collaborative efforts that are built around a long-term, positive vision of the future and that foster progressive, far-reaching change to achieve it.

Temporary

Ensure collaboration is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Though we see need for so much more, and so much deeper, collaboration to truly accelerate sustainable development, it is important to recognize that collaboration cannot expand infinitely, nor go on indefinitely. Indeed, by its nature, multi-stakeholder collaboration often asks individuals and organizations to step outside their normal routine, and to look beyond their primary goals or incentives, in order to consciously and methodically reengineer the system, and to sustain that effort over time. As such, there are real limits to how much collaboration can be scaled. Additionally, to the extent that we rely on these supplementary arrangements or 'patches' to our underlying economic and political order, the overall system remains fragile and the fewer resources we have to draw on as new challenges arise.

To remedy this, it is essential that collaboration be truly a means to an end and not an end in itself. In practice, this means driving collaborative efforts all the way through to their stated goals and then disbanding them, avoiding the accumulation of open-ended initiatives with gradually diminishing returns. Of course, some collaborations can and do evolve into standalone nonprofits or other entities that serve to institutionalize some program or reform, or they may become platforms that facilitate even more significant or widespread change (as discussed under Networked above), but these should be the exception and not the rule.

This speaks to individual initiatives, but we also mean for *Temporary* to apply to collaboration in general, because to really bring sustainability to scale, it is essential that we permanently embed sustainability into our global operating system—that is, into the mindsets, policies and business models that shape how people and markets behave. This is so that sustainable development increasingly emerges from habit and the natural order of things (i.e., self-determination), rather than requiring deliberate engagement and effort of all actors (i.e. conscious collaboration). For the time being, it is that process of embedding that collaboration should be most urgently applied to, but with time and luck, it will gradually give way to the more prosperous, sustainable future it promises to help create.

Key Strategies & Actions for *Temporary*:

- Embrace planned obsolescence—i.e., design collaborative initiatives to achieve clear goals and then disband, rather than going on indefinitely.
- Apply collaboration primarily as a means to embed sustainability into business models, policies and markets, which will ultimately drive impact at scale.

Survey Snapshot

Results and discussion of the 2012 and 2014 GlobeScan/SustainAbility surveys on collaboration.

Figure 28.
Most Admired Collaborations

Asked which multi-actor collaboration they most admire, experts identified a wide variety of initiatives ranging from broad platforms like the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the UN Global Compact (UNGC), to issue or industry standard-setting efforts such as the Forest Stewardship Council, the Sustainable Apparel Coalition and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil.

Question: Please specify a multi-actor collaboration that you admire the most.

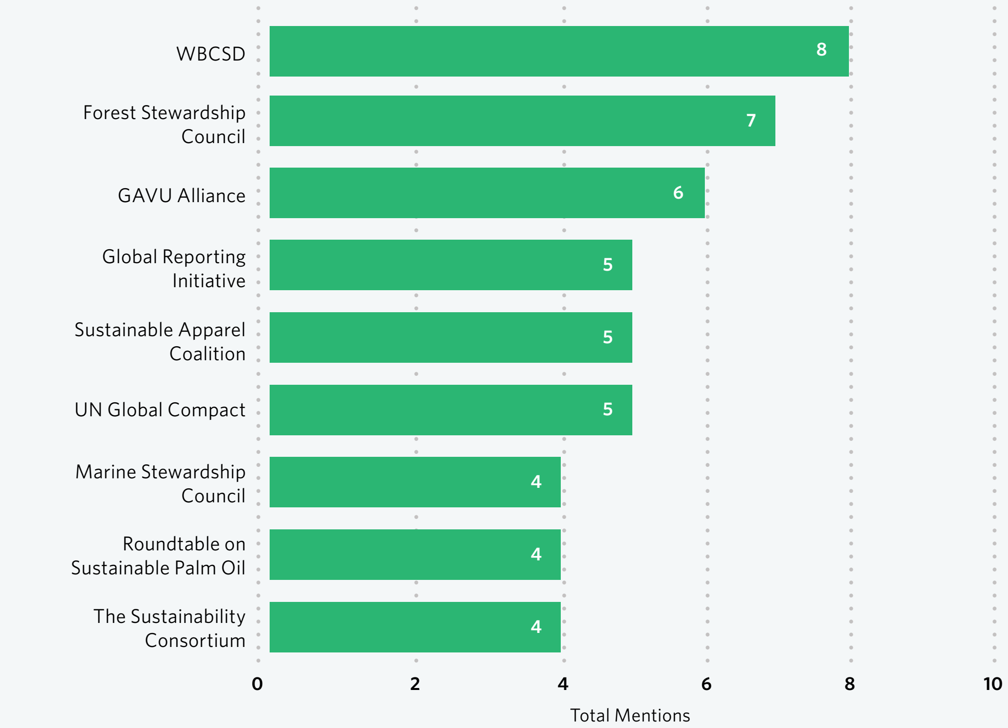
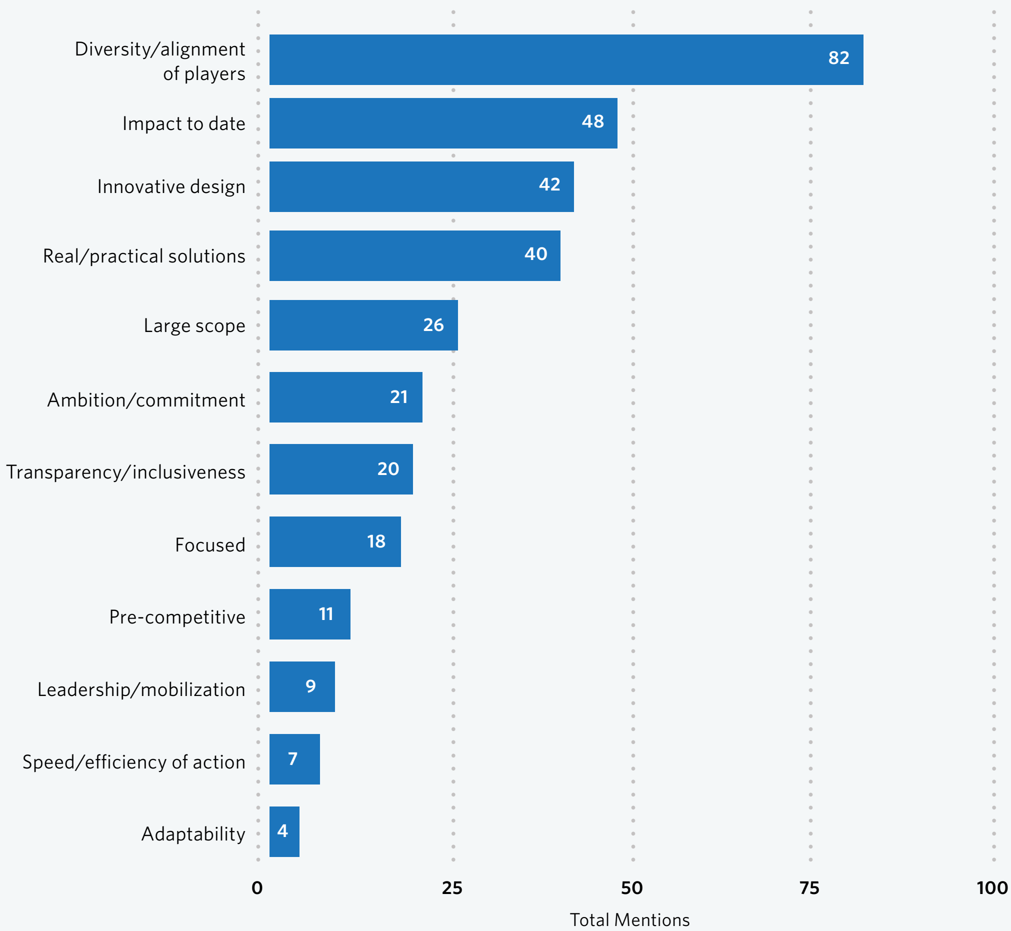


Figure 29.
Reasons for Admiring Specific Collaborations

More interesting perhaps are the myriad reasons why respondents named the collaborations they did. Most important, by a significant margin, was admiration for initiatives' ability to bring diverse or even unlikely partners into alignment with one another, followed by the sense of the impacts they've had, innovative approaches and a focus on practical solutions.

Question: Please explain why you most admire this example of collaboration.



6 Final Remarks

Final Remarks

With this research we have sought to make deeper sense of the current and potential role of multi-stakeholder collaboration in driving greater progress on sustainable development. Overall, our research confirms that collaboration holds great potential for tackling our most significant global needs and issues; that efforts to date have achieved limited but meaningful progress, yet are quickly evolving toward higher ambition and impact; and that with the right understanding and focus by key parties, there is potential for a new, even more impactful generation of collaborations to emerge.

This is of particular significance at this moment, when the world has just declared its collective ambition in the form of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and as it prepares to finally adopt an unprecedented, hard-won agreement to combat global climate change. Indeed, despite enormous effort and not a small amount of leadership from key actors to date, there is an emerging consensus that these and other recent milestones mark the beginning of the real journey toward sustainability, and that more than anything else, collaboration is the key to moving forward.

SustainAbility is tremendously excited about the work that lies ahead, and even more so for the wider future it can create. As ever, we welcome feedback and further thoughts in response to this report, and we look forward to partnering with others to apply and further evolve its ideas.

Appendix

Collaboration Success Factors

While the goal of this report was not to add to the already substantial guidance available for designing and running successful individual initiatives, we include here a basic set of collaboration success factors that SustainAbility has developed to aid its own and its clients' collaborative efforts over the last several years. (Other good examples are included among the Additional Resources listed in this Appendix.)

1. Define (and redefine) the agenda: There must be a clear goal or outcome that collaboration is aimed at achieving. This is simple enough on its surface, but too often partners charge forward without truly clarifying what they've come together to do, and/or they do not mutually adapt as the goals shift and evolve in the course of their work. Begin by clearly defining the issue, problem or opportunity you are working on and a hypothesis for how collaboration will address it. Revisit and update these assumptions throughout the process, making them more specific as you go, and don't be afraid to discard or replace those that don't hold up.

2. Understand the system: As you scope out the collaboration, take time to think in terms of the system you are trying to influence, in order to understand the deeper forces contributing to specific conditions or events. Depending on the circumstances, this may take the form of a formal system mapping exercise, but useful insights may also be gained through less formal means. Use this to test goals and assumptions in your overarching agenda, and to identify the most important risks, opportunities and stakeholders for your initiative.

3. Identify effective partners – not too many, not too few: The most effective collaborations are those that draw together the right set of partners, and like so many things, this is easier said than done. Begin by asking what kinds of partners would truly add value, and explore the best ways to engage them, either through existing relationships or forging new connections. Be prepared to balance the overall size and scope of the group against the need to represent diverse and critical interests (especially in complex systems). Take time to thoroughly evaluate partners, understanding their strengths and weaknesses, and to mutually explore the risks and opportunities of working together.

4. Develop (and document) shared vision and commitment: As partners begin to come together, take time to explore and align different or competing visions of success, and to secure clear commitments to work together. This builds on #1 above (and is a good point at which to re-evaluate the initial assumptions underlying the whole effort), but also goes a step further, by focusing the shared and/or complementary benefits that may be realized from working together. When the time is right, codify the overall vision and each partner's commitment in the form of a charter document, terms of reference, or a memorandum of understanding.

5. Establish clear governance and accountability: As the scale and complexity of collaboration increases, so does the need for clear mechanisms for accountability, management and effective decision-making. A wide variety of established partnership 'structures', from formal to informal, can be leveraged for this, but these must always be tailored to the precise needs of a given partnership. Once established, these procedures should be one of the critical sections of the terms of reference document.

6. Designate leaders/champions/catalysts to drive things forward: Effective collaborations nearly always feature central leaders, champions and/or catalysts – partners who play critical roles in motivating, cajoling and/or pulling along the rest of the group. Importantly, these roles are often distinct from one another and need not – indeed, perhaps should not – be fulfilled by the same person or organization. They may even shift over the course of the collaboration. Regardless, it is useful for the group to develop a collective understanding of why these roles are essential, and to get clear on who is playing which roles at which times.

7. Dedicate appropriate time and resources: Collaboration is nearly always time-consuming and difficult, and in some cases, it's more than worth it. To meet this potential, it is vital that partners are prepared to dedicate the necessary time and resources in proportion to the intensity and ambition of the collaboration, and to maintain these investments long enough for the effort to bear fruit. Conversely, it is just as appropriate to scale back investment in collaborations that have already run their course or are unlikely to be effective, so there is an inherent balancing act here.

8. Show your cards: Building and maintaining trust is fundamental at every stage of the process, which makes transparency an essential value. Understandably (and as referenced elsewhere in this list), partners may enter into collaboration on the basis of numerous competing or contradictory incentives, assumptions and constraints. Making these issues evident, and working to explore and reconcile them as a group, can mean the difference between success and failure in a complex multi-stakeholder process.

9. Communicate: Maintaining ongoing communication, among partners as well as with critical external stakeholders, is critical for ensuring that voluntary partnerships continue and can be effective. Both formal and informal communication, through multiple channels, can support more efficient, effective management and decision-making, build and maintain trust, and allow for collaboration vision and process to evolve and improve in real time. In some collaborations, communications may also encompass formal procedures for performance measurement and evaluation, including regular cycles of review and reporting on key components of the partnership.

10. Prepare an exit strategy: Even when they are taken on with ample resources and the best of intentions, few if any collaborations are designed to or capable of lasting forever. For this reason, partners need to think both individually and collectively about scenarios for how a collaborative initiative might successfully come to an end, whether that means it is fully terminated or else transitioned to a new phase of management and implementation. By thinking about this ahead of time, including laying out specific plans or principles in the terms of reference, it is possible to avoid costly or potentially destructive breakdowns when such a transition becomes necessary or desirable.

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Collaboration Examples

In surveying the landscape of collaboration for sustainability, we reviewed nearly 200 examples of multi-stakeholder, business-involved initiatives. For reference, this sample included the following.

2030 Water Resources Group
Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh
Accounting Bodies Network
AIM-PROGRESS
Aldersgate Group
Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety
Alliance for Water Stewardship
Aluminium Stewardship Initiative
Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)
Aqueduct Alliance
B Corp
Banking Environment Initiative
Banking on Change
BankingFutures
Barclays-GSK Access to Healthcare in Zambia
Better Cotton Initiative
Bettercoal
Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable
Big Energy Vision
Bioplastics Feedstock Alliance
BSR Working Groups
Business for Innovative Climate & Energy Policy (BICEP)
Business Social Compliance Initiative
CEO Water Mandate
Ceres Coalition
Ceres Company Network
Certification Capacity Enhancement Project
China-US Partnership on Smokefree Workplaces
Circular Economy 100
Cisco Networking Academy
Climate Disclosure Standards Board (CDSB)
ClimateWise Insurance Group
Closed Loop Fund
Cocoa Innovations Project
Cocoa Life
Cocoa Partnership
Coffeelands Food Security Coalition
Collective Recycling Project
Collectively.org
Colorado Renewables & Conservation Collaborative (CRCC)
Connected Farmer Alliance
Consumer Goods Forum (Sustainability Pillar)
Corporate Eco Forum
Corporate Leaders Network for Climate Action
Dairy 2020
Dairy Sustainability Framework
Devonshire Initiative
Diageo Water Taskforce (no official name)
Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition
EKOCENTER Partnership
Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition (EICC)
EnergyFutures
Equator Principles (Association)
Ethical Tea Partnership
Ethical Trading Initiative
European Sustainable Tropical Timber Coalition
Every Woman, Every Child
Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)
Fair Labor Association
Feeding the 5000
Filed to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture
Floriculture Sustainability Initaitive (FSI)
Ford’s MyEnergi Lifestyle Initiative
Forest Solutions Group (FSG)
Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)
GAVI Alliance

Global Business Coalition for Education
Global Business Coalition for Health (GBCHealth)
Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI)
Global Food Safety Partnership
Global Food Traceability Center
Global Investor Coalition on Climate Change
Global Network Initiative (GNI)
Global Partnership for Oceans
Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)
Global Roundtable on Sustainable Beef
Global Water Challenge
Global Water Partnership
Global Water Sustainability Center
Goldman Sachs: 10,000 Women / 10,000 Small Businesses
Green Bond Principles
Green Economy Coalition
Green Industry Platform
Grow Africa
GSK: One Family Health
H&M, Kering and Worn Again on Textile Recycling
Health Care Without Harm
Healthy Hospitals Initiative (Global Green)
HERProject
Honey Bee Health Coalition
Horn of Africa Risk Transfer for Adaptation (HARITA)
HSBC Water Program
ICTI CARE Process
Indian Sustainable Tea Program
Indonesia-Netherlands Forum on Sustainable Production & Trade
Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance
International Alliance for Responsible Drinking
International Cocoa Initiative
International Council on Mining & Metals (ICMM)
Internet.org
Investment Leaders Group
Investor Network on Climate Risk (INCR)
Joint Audit Cooperation
Joint in Transport Cooperative (JIT)
Kenyan Tea Program
LAUNCH
Marine Stewardship Council
Media CSR Forum
Mexican Agribusiness Partnership for Sustainable Growth (ALMA)
mHealth Alliance
Millennium Villages Project
National Industrial Symbiosis Programme
Natural Capital Business Hub
Natural Capital Coalition
Natural Capital Leaders Platform
Net Positive Group
Net-Works
NetMark Alliance
New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition
New Vision for Agriculture
Novo Nordisk Changing Diabetes
Oil & Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI)
Oxfam-Unilever Sunrise 2.0
Palm Oil Innovation Forum
Pan American Forum on NCDs
Paper Recovery Alliance (Food Packaging Institute)
PharmaFutures
Plant PET Technology Collaborative
Plastics Recovery Group (Food Packaging Institute)
Prince of Wales's Corporate Leaders Group (CLG)
Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)
R4 Rural Resilience Initiative
RE:100
Refrigerants, Naturally!
Resilience Action Initiative
Responsible Care (Intl. Council of Chemical Associations)
Responsible Purchasing Network
Roadmap to Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC)
Roundtable for Product Social Metrics
Roundtable on Responsible Soy Association
Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)
Safe Water Network
Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Business Network
Soft Drinks Sustainability Roadmap
Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE)
Solving the E-Waste Problem (StEP)
Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB)
Sustainability Initiative Fruit & Vegetables (SIFV)
Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) Platform
Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC)
Sustainable Energy for All
Sustainable Food Lab
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Sustainable Packaging Coalition
Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council
Sustainable Shipping Initiative
Sustainable Spices Initiative
Tea 2030
The Amazon Alternative
The B Team
The Nexus Network
The Portman Group
The Sustainability Consortium (TSC)
The Sustainable Coffee Program
Together for Sustainability
Tropical Forest Alliance
trustea
UN Global Compact (UNGC)
UN PRI (Principles for Responsible Investment)
Uniting to Combat Neglected Tropical Diseases
US Climate Action Partnership (USCAP)
US Green Building Council (USGBC)
Valuing Natural Capital Initiative
Vodafone, GSK & Save the Children (vaccinations)
Walmart Global Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative
Walmart Sustainable Value Networks
Water Futures Partnership
WBCSD Cement Sustainability Initiative (CSI)
WBCSD Low Carbon Technologies Partnership Initiative (LCTPi)
WBCSD Sustainable Mobility Project 2.0
WBCSD Urban Infrastructure Initiative (UII)
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