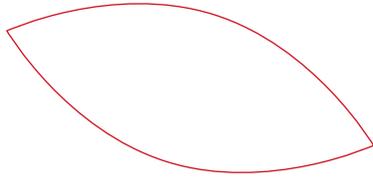


HUMANITY • FUTURE POSSIBILITIES • ENGAGEMENT  
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE • INNOVATION • WHOLENESS

**PETRA KUENKEL   KRISTIANE SCHAEFER**



# ***SHIFTING THE WAY WE CO-CREATE.***

*HOW WE CAN TURN THE CHALLENGES OF  
SUSTAINABILITY INTO OPPORTUNITIES*

**COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP** STUDIES - VOLUME 1



**COLLECTIVE  
LEADERSHIP  
INSTITUTE**

Building Competence for Sustainability

***IMPRINT***

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# ***SHIFTING THE WAY WE CO-CREATE.***

## *HOW WE CAN TURN THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABILITY INTO OPPORTUNITIES*

### ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

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There is a global trend that cannot be ignored any longer – sustainability moves on the agenda of every nation, every organisation and more and more citizens. Sustainability megafactors will not only impact businesses over the next 20 years<sup>1</sup>, but also governments and civil society organisations. They range from climate change, ecosystem decline, energy security, water scarcity, and resource management to poverty, economic justice, food security, demographic change, and population growth.

Those who are confronted with sustainability challenges in addition to the actual implementation of strategies to tackle these challenges, notice another global trend: solutions cannot be found in isolation. Collaboration between different actors is not only paramount, but the sole route to success. The ability for constructive, result-oriented dialogue and value-based collaboration is at the core of humankind's ability to master sustainability challenges.

In May 2012, the Collective Leadership Institute

started a research project to explore the factors and patterns that help engender a collective way of leading for sustainability. For this purpose, we interviewed practitioners from the private sector, the public sector, and civil society who brought forward essential steps in sustainable development. We wanted to know how they built committed teams both within and across organisational boundaries. How did they manage to integrate different organisational cultures into joint initiatives and foster collaboration between diverse stakeholders?

We found out that human progress needs individual maturity and ethical know-how as much as effective methods to improve co-operation. Throughout the conducted interviews, it became clear that leaders required to develop certain competencies which enable them to lead collectively and ensure collective action across institutional or national boundaries.

The insights gained from this study show that isolated action needs to be replaced by

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<sup>1</sup> KPMG International, 2012

collective leadership – a paradigm shift in how individuals find their leadership roles in the spirit of co-creation and contribution to the common good.

In **chapter 1**, we describe the current sustainability challenges as leadership challenges for businesses, governments, and civil society organisations. To illustrate these challenges we outline examples of global sustainability issues that cannot be tackled by one single actor alone, but have to be solved by co-operation across nations and institutions.

In **chapter 2**, we describe the motivation for the research and the methodology that we used, give an overview of who we interviewed and the challenges that they engaged.

In **chapter 3**, we present the insights from the study by identifying the strategies for collaboration that were applied by our interview partners. Throughout our research, it became clear that leading for sustainability is not successful in isolation. It is about enacting networks and creating collaborative change – no vision for change can be manifested and held by one person alone. We identified four strategies applied by our interview partners:

- **Fostering trust based co-creation:** Solutions of sustainability need a variety of thought, knowledge, expertise, ideas, and world views. The respect for difference and putting effort in finding common ground is therefore indispensable. Moreover, the degree of passion of the people involved and the role of innovation to rethink the future is important.
- **Modelling evolutionary change processes:** Evolution is an imperfect yet creative learning

process that eventually leads to progress. The result-oriented engagement of actors and the role of the caretaker – a person or group that keeps communication flowing and carries the process further is crucial.

- **Invigorating networks and connectivity:** The development of personal networks often lasts. Leaders who drive sustainability issues need to create movements for change – they may start small in the beginning, but need to grow and incorporate complementary competences in order to have an impact.
- **Creating patterns of mutual support:** In high-quality collaboration processes people open up, bring in their expertise and leverage support – even if there are conflicts and differences in opinion. Transparency and the presence of humanness in the process is a prerequisite, but combined with the right amount of formal rules and structures, breakthrough solutions are achieved.

In **chapter 4**, we translate our learnings into a compass for leading collectively towards sustainability. Combining the insights with our experience in leadership development, stakeholder engagement, and cross-sector co-operation, we suggest six competencies that enable individuals to lead for sustainability and inspire large groups of people to act in favour of the common good. The compass is a guiding structure that helps navigate complex multi-sector settings collaboratively and implement more outcome-oriented and constructive co-creation on a day-to-day basis – for individuals, teams, an entire organisation, and cross-sector co-operation initiatives.

**Chapter 5** shows how to use the compass and put it to practice in your everyday work.

# 1. SUSTAINABILITY AS A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

We live in an era where sustainability issues are moving on the strategic agenda of companies, public sector institutions, and civil society organisations. However, we also know that truly sustainable development will only happen when both strategic decisiveness and collective action on the ground come together. The challenges of sustainability have reached the entire globalised world. Our success – or failure – in moving towards a more sustainable way of living on this planet affects everybody – the global interdependency of our societies is tangible when it comes to issues of sustainability.

Lately the private sector has also realised that this interdependency will have to lead to a change in how we undertake business. Sustainability megaforges will not only impact businesses over the next 20 years<sup>2</sup>, but also governments and civil society organisations. They range from climate change, ecosystem decline, energy security, water scarcity, and resource management to poverty, economic justice, food security, demographic change, and population growth.

*“These megaforges do not function in isolation from each other in predictable ways. They act as a complex and unpredictable system, feeding, amplifying or ameliorating the effects of others.”*

*KPMG International, 2012, p.14*

These challenges cannot be dealt with in isolation. The capacity for constructive, result-oriented dialogue and value-based collaboration is hence at the core of humankind’s ability to master sustainability challenges.

**Sustainability** stands for long-lasting development in which reasonable economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social equity can be achieved in a balanced way. In the corporate world this is usually referred to as the triple bottom line (economic, environmental, social), a new measurement for business performance. Realisation of sustainable development would mean an improvement in living conditions for most people in the world and would also ensure that progress is within the limits and capacities of a functioning global ecosystem. When considered seriously, this prospect has wide-reaching consequences, as it cannot spare any actor in the global society.

There are many examples of global sustainability challenges that cannot be taken on by one single actor alone, but that have to be solved by co-operation across nations and institutions. Climate change is among the most prominent of these challenges. International collective action is therefore required because no single country can take effective action to control the risks – just as the devastating consequences do not stop at national borders.

Another sustainability challenge example is the increasing complexity of supply chains. Sustainable supply chains are more and more seen as a core issue towards delivering long-term profitability. But determining all crucial sustainability issues along the supply chain is a

<sup>2</sup> KPMG International, 2012

Sustainability Challenge #1: Climate Change

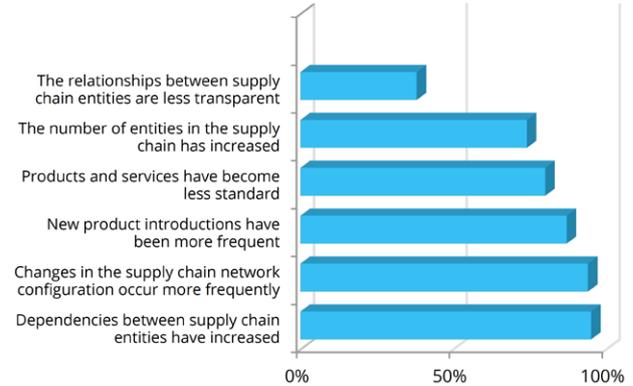
Climate Change since 1992

- Coral reefs are experiencing higher ocean temperatures and acidity than at any other time in at least the last 400 000 years
- Global mean temperature increased by 0.4 °C between 1992 and 2010
- The average annual melting rate for glaciers has almost doubled with record losses in 2004 and 2006
- The amount of CO2 in the Earth's atmosphere rose by 9 %
- The sea level has been rising at an average rate of about 2.5 mm per year
- The annual minimum extent of the Arctic Sea ice continues its steady decline

Source: UNEP, 2011, pp. 27

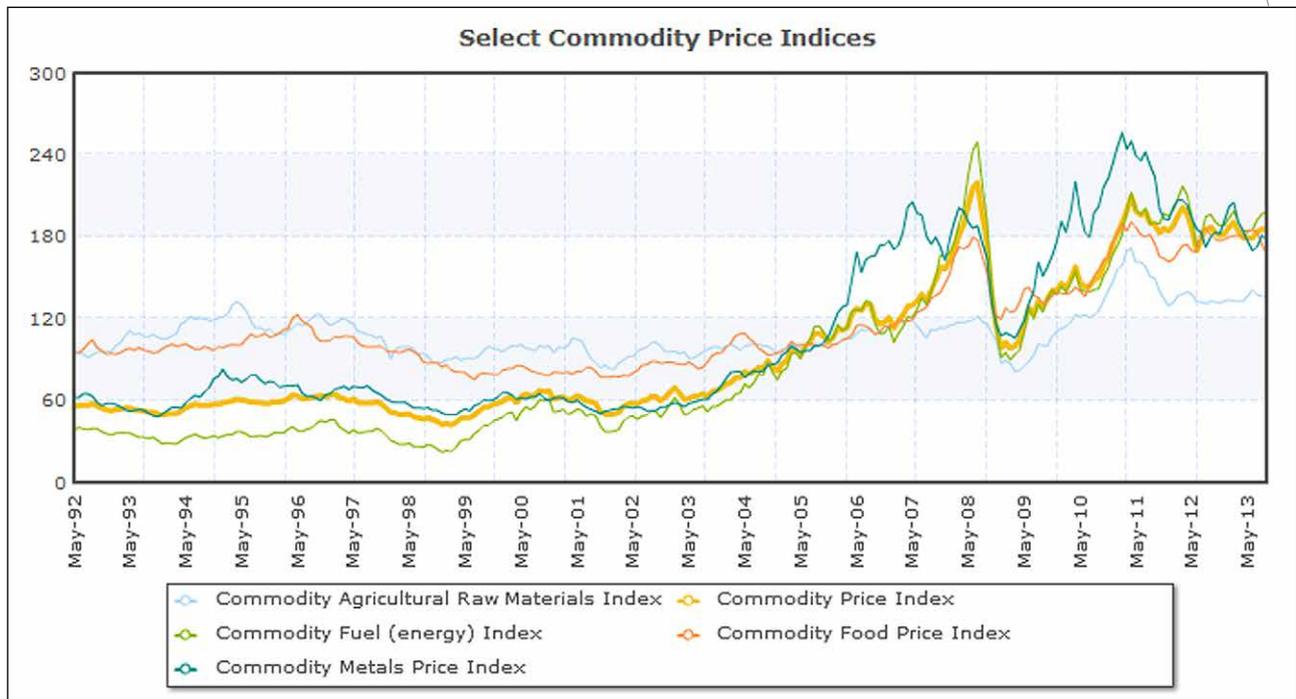
Sustainability Challenge #2: Complexity of Value Chains

Evolution of supply chain complexity over the past three years



Source: PwC & MIT, 2013, p. 5

Sustainability Challenge #3: Uncertainty of markets



Source: IndexMundi 2013, Downloaded November 1st 2013 <http://www.indexmundi.com/commodities/>

demanding ambition given the high complexity of supplier networks that have evolved with globalisation. The key to addressing sustainability issues along supply chains successfully is closer collaboration and transparency – the only way to achieve the traceability which sustainable production requires.

Businesses and governments are trying to adapt to an environment that is more and more prone to rapid changes and instability. The volatility of commodity prices for example, constitutes an increasing destabilising factor for national economies. Short-term market gains for some actors may lead to long-term political instability for other actors<sup>3</sup>. Approaching new market opportunities or large-scale food security projects therefore need to consider these factors. Collaboration across-sectors, including expertise and viewpoints from different fields allow for better planning and risk assessment.

Sustainability is hence not one single issue, it is a vast variety of issues including political, technological, environmental, social and economic aspects. If we envisage a planet in ecological balance, social justice around the globe, and an economic system that serves both humankind and keeps the planet healthy – we must admit that sustainability is, as a matter of fact, a global learning journey.

The challenges of sustainability require new forms of collaborative inventiveness and, above all, people who are willing to implement change at all levels of our global society. We need to acquire new competencies, i.e. the abilities to bring about change collectively on a broad scale. This includes developing our human capacity for outcome-oriented dialogue, effective collaboration, and future-oriented collective

action. These skills enable us to lead change processes that harness collective intelligence, engage different stakeholders, and deliver tangible results that move sustainability forward.

#### Some practical examples where collaboration between different actors is essential

**Example 1:** Developing a mainstream sustainability standard for worldwide green coffee requires a joint approach between major coffee traders, standard organisations, international NGOs, coffee producers, and governments.

**Example 2:** Improving the infrastructure in Southern Africa – railways, ports, telecommunication, and roads – cannot take place without structured dialogue and firm collaboration between public and private actors in the field.

**Example 3:** Implementing sustainable water management worldwide requires collective action on the ground – by municipalities, companies, civil society organisations, and communities – and an exchange of best practices across nations, regions, continents.

**Example 4:** If a nation decides to become independent from nuclear energy or fossil fuels it needs to create consensus and collective action between various stakeholders and get the surrounding countries engaged in the vision.

**Example 5:** A community struggling to regain traditional land rights needs to co-operate with both public and private stakeholders and facilitate a joint learning journey on how to ensure a sustainable use of the land.

**Example 6:** Dealing with the consequences of climate change requires the combined efforts of governments, of civil society as well as of the private sector. Capacities to effectively scale-up innovative solutions and to design a result-oriented dialogue processes that can translate them into international regulations are required.

Addressing sustainability challenges clearly requires different actors in all sectors to work together in a more fruitful and constructive way. No single actor has the be-all and end-all

<sup>3</sup> KPMG International, 2012

solution for sustainability issues<sup>4</sup>, but each actor may essentially contribute a parcel of knowledge, a puzzle piece that counts. **Sustainability initiatives and complex co-operation projects** have become key elements for global and local change towards a more sustainable development on our planet.

On our global learning journey towards sustainability, we encounter major leadership challenges. Three identified major challenges are uncertainty, interdependency and complexity – turning them into opportunities is our task (see Figure 1 below).

**1.1 COMPLEXITY**

The fact that complexity is continuously growing is no news. Stakeholders become more and more diverse, national borders and geography less and less significant, and ever faster flowing operations shape our work and life environments. Our businesses, our governments, civil society, and we, as individuals, are dealing with unknown complex challenges<sup>5</sup>. This becomes obvious in the difficulties we encounter when we try to solve the pressing problems of humanity. Biodiversity loss, for example, is an acknowledged problem that has so many different and multi-level causes

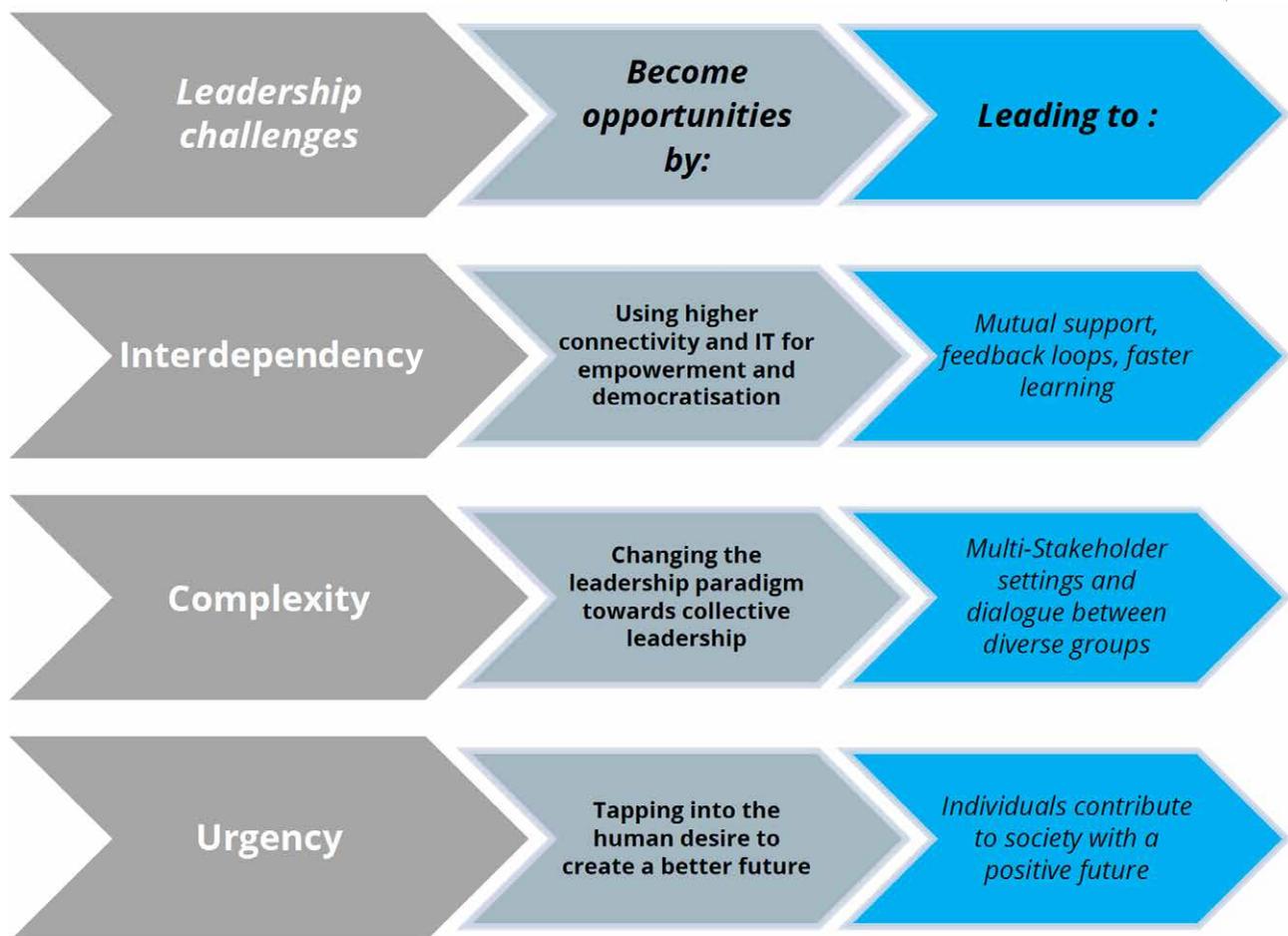


Figure 1: Leadership challenges and their opportunities for sustainability

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Global Compact & Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

that we are unsure how to even start stopping the decline of species.

The challenge of complexity is overwhelming, however, if we want to turn it into an opportunity, it may help to remember what we know from system dynamics<sup>6</sup> and systems theory<sup>7</sup>: a system, is more likely sustainable at the edge of chaos. Where **complexity** is high, the capacity to adapt, to evolve, to coordinate, to innovate, and to change is high<sup>8</sup>. This is one of the greatest learnings to internalise. Not only does creativity surge in the face of chaos, but so does the openness to change a system. The diversity inherent in complexity means that we need to learn to operate and to deliver in multi-actor settings as well as to be even more efficient than in the past. Leading successful projects in multi-stakeholder settings requires a broad skill set in the area of dialogue and collaboration<sup>9</sup>.

## 1.2 INTERDEPENDENCY

Globalisation could already be distinguished as a megatrend in the 1990s, however, only today are the effects of interdependency becoming more and more apparent. With increased access to internet and the dissemination of social media, humans are connected in a way thought impossible prior to this decade. This interdependence leads to uncertainty and high risks in markets, examples of which can be perceived in the Euro crisis, where the survival of one bank may determine the fate of a whole economic system. However, new media and digital connectivity

also have positive impacts. One example is corporations' growing need to address sustainability challenges since new communication technologies and social networks have raised the level of awareness and made corporate reputations more fragile than ever<sup>10</sup>. We can turn the challenge of **interdependency** into an opportunity by leveraging these networks, using information technology for empowerment and democratisation. We can harness the power of mutual support across borders, feedback loops for governance or business operations, and faster learning on all fronts.

## 1.3 URGENCY

In today's world, it often appears that everything "should have been done yesterday". And indeed, we are facing deep, structural challenges whose root cause can only be addressed if done with great urgency<sup>11</sup>. This has partly to do with the magnitude of action required and the delay between action and positive effect. For example, the climate crisis is caused by anthropogenic lifestyles that emit too many greenhouse gases – the consequences for the decades to come are clear unless we act now to keep global warming under two degrees Celsius by 2050. Incidents like the collapse of the Rana Plaza complex in Bangladesh earlier in 2013 not only have systemic root causes, but also show an urgent need for action to address systemic inequalities in the global trade system.

In order to turn the challenge **urgency** into an opportunity, we need to connect to the human

<sup>6</sup> Forrester, 1971

<sup>7</sup> Niklas Luhmann, 1995

<sup>8</sup> Kauffman, 1995

<sup>9</sup> Accenture & United Nations Global Compact, 2013

<sup>10</sup> KPMG International, 2012

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Global Compact & Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012

potential to make a difference<sup>12</sup>. This means especially tapping into the desire of individuals to contribute positively to society and to create a better future for themselves and their children. We need to ensure framework conditions where these instances of positive action are possible and where people can connect with a future that they want to own and live in.

#### 1.4 FROM CHALLENGE TO OPPORTUNITY: THE PARADIGM SHIFT

Large companies may have adopted their sustainability strategy as a result of public pressure, but they soon realised that internal structures which enable them to learn faster in collaboration with their stakeholders also accelerate business opportunities. Governments increasingly realise that they cannot prevent connectivity and transparency and that staying in a structured dialogue with their citizens is the better way ahead. Civil society organisations experience that their impact increases through collaboration with other sectors.

- What helps companies become joint leaders for the common good?
- What enables cities, networks or even states to become leaders for sustainable development?
- What makes a group of committed inner-institutional or cross-institutional actors successful in leading structural change?

We can move forward when we unearth the composition of competencies that enable *individuals to lead for sustainability*, enhance the cohesion of a group of *collaborating actors* for sustainability, and inspire large groups of *people to act in favour of the common good*.

**Leadership for sustainability** is here defined as the conscious bringing forth of a different reality in view of a future world that is ecologically sound, socially just and economically viable. It can include leading followers, employees, etc. in hierarchical settings. In non-hierarchical settings it means leading issues, change initiatives, networks, etc. and includes the coordination and bringing together of different actors.

As individuals and teams carry more and more responsibility in complex decision-making, our capacity to become constructively co-creative must grow. Being a leader therefore entails practicing co-creation in a way that is meaningful to the defined vision and to the relationships of all stakeholders. This type of leadership will change the way collective efforts take place and contribute to better overall results. Further, it involves awareness of the underlying system dynamics – a shift from a self-centred consciousness to becoming more aware of the larger whole.

Leadership paradigms often refer to the individual, but we need to go beyond the individual and simultaneously build the capacity of groups and systems to move sustainability forward. This includes collective action, dialogue and co-operation. It is the aspect of collectivity that adds a new dimension to our understanding of leadership for sustainability. The **collective** has been missing in **leadership** thus far.

The paradigm has already started to shift. Recent events, such as the Rio+20 summit, have made it even clearer that in order to address global challenges the **joint capacity of**

<sup>12</sup> Accenture & United Nations Global Compact, 2013

**leaders to become catalysts for change** is called for. This will become the cornerstone of our response to the global sustainability challenges.

Producing tangible results and enhancing collective responsibility for sustainability is increasingly becoming part of our daily business and institutional practices, irrespective of whether we are creating responsible supply chains, developing innovative technology for climate adaptation, or engaging stakeholders for better water resource management.

**The paradigm shift in leading for sustainability**

Old paradigm: leading focuses on the capacity of the individual only	New paradigm: leading becomes the capacity of a collective
Leadership is seen as taking place in a <b>hierarchical</b> context only.	Leadership takes place in non-hierarchical and <b>co-operation</b> contexts.
Leadership is seen as the <b>delivery of goals</b> through enlisting followers.	Leadership is understood as the joint delivery of agreed upon common goals in a climate of <b>collective responsibility</b> .
The <b>common good</b> is not necessarily the focus of leadership tasks.	Leadership is seen and enacted as a <b>contribution to the common good</b> .
Leadership positions are <b>clearly distinguished</b> from followership.	Depending on expertise and experience <b>leadership and followership is interchangeable</b> .
Leadership development focuses on growing <b>individual leaders</b> .	Leadership development takes into account the success factors for <b>collective action</b> .
Dialogue and co-operation are <b>side-issues</b> or add-ons.	The capacity of a leadership collective to ensure <b>outcome-oriented dialogue and future-oriented collective action</b> becomes a decisive success factor.



## 2. MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

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In May 2012, we started a research project in order to explore the factors and patterns that help engender a collective way of leading for sustainability. For this purpose, we interviewed practitioners from the private sector, the public sector, and civil society who brought forward essential steps in sustainable development. We wanted to know how they built committed teams both within and across organisational boundaries. How did they manage to integrate different organisational cultures into joint initiatives and foster collaboration between diverse stakeholders?



We found out, that human progress requires individual maturity and ethical know-how as much as effective methods to improve cooperation. Throughout the conducted interviews it became clear, that leaders needed to develop certain competencies that enable them to lead collectively and to ensure collective action across institutional or national boundaries. But how could developing these individual capacities bring forth collective action

on a large scale? When did collective action work and why? How did leaders navigate the challenges of complexity, interdependence and urgency?

When we analysed the interviews, we looked for commonalities and extracted four decisive strategies that leaders applied – across cultures, projects, topics, positions, and types of organisations. These are summarised in chapter 3, each succeeded by a list of action learnings. In addition to the interviews, we reviewed recent studies and articles that addressed the issue of collaboration for sustainability prominently. For

a list of reviewed literature, please refer to the bibliography. During the last step, we looked at the coherence underneath the five successful strategies that the interview partners applied and identified recurrent elements. Combined with our long-standing experience in leadership development, stakeholder engagement, and cross-sector co-operation,

we suggest a compass that helps leverage Collective Leadership for a sustainable future.

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### **WHO DID WE INTERVIEW?**

30 people from around the globe – **innovation experts**, coordinators of **global sustainability initiatives**, experts from **standard organisations**, corporate sustainability **managers** from multinational companies, **executives** from international NGOs, **social entrepreneurs**, public sector leaders, and **youth movement** actors.

### **WHAT DID THEY ENGAGE IN?**

They created an internationally applied **sustainability standard**, pushed their company to move **sustainability to the centre stage**, created an international **youth network around biodiversity**, built a **social enterprise** helping hundreds of young people to bring their lives in order, produced a **change** in the way a country approached **environmental issues**, pioneered a ministries **sustainable trading initiative**, implemented a company's **diversity strategy**, pushed a company into mainstreaming **sustainable sourcing**, campaigned **against dumping chemical waste** in Africa, brought **innovation for sustainability** on the agenda of the corporate world, equipped a whole region to better **deal with climate change**, helped a **company network** to raise its sustainability profile, supported a **nation's sustainability strategy**, managed an internationally active **environmental NGO**, created an **NGO network** in Southern Africa, **taught innovation** to business leaders, helped **CSR managers** in companies to strategise implementation, built a pioneering company only **producing sustainable goods**, convinced their companies of the **business case for sustainability**, implemented a **fossil-free energy concept** for their company, opened their company to offer **socially disadvantaged people** a new perspective.

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### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS: SHIFTING THE WAY WE CO-CREATE

The fundamental insight that emerged from the interviews is that the global learning journey towards sustainability is a leadership challenge of a different kind – it is about shifting the way we co-create the future. As a matter of fact, there is no lack of leadership many individuals who drive change lead, but there is a knowledge gap when it comes to understanding how diverse actors can lead collectively and complementarily while contributing to the future of our planet. It is about understanding patterns of collaboration, coordination, and collective action that work.

In all successful examples the interview partners mentioned that the joint capacity of leaders to become catalysts for collective responsibility made the difference. Personal passion is crucial, but is not automatically translated into more fruitful collective action. Leading for sustainability is not successful in isolation, it is about enacting networks and creating collaborative change. This does not mean to undervalue the power of individual capabilities, ideas, vision or commitment – all this has a catalysing effect. However, it is important to be aware that no vision for change can be manifested and held by one person or one stakeholder group alone. In the area of sustainable development we face such complex settings that attention to the actors' network interaction, the quality of communication, and relationship building between all stakeholders is as important as the design and realisation of ambitious plans. We need to become aware of the factors that support future-oriented collective action.

Characteristics of leadership most often refer to the individual, which is important as we need to develop strong leadership capacities to be able to jointly lead towards sustainability. However, what interested us most in the research was which factors came together and enabled people to commit to take joint action and to collectively follow through on sustainability issues. How did leaders handle crises and keep people on board? How did they engage them in the first place? How did collective action for sustainability come about?

*“Most people gravitate towards dominant leaders, but in complex situations that are the norm in sustainable development the qualities of leadership have to be more subtle. It is not the loudest, the most outspoken leaders that count.”*

*Founder and CEO of an international sustainability standard initiative*

The interview partners identified the following four strategies.

#### 3.1 FOSTERING TRUST-BASED CO-CREATION

*“When people have developed trust with each other the results of a group are far better”*

*American innovation expert*

It became clear across all interview partners that solutions to the challenges of sustainability do not emerge in superficial harmony. On the contrary, we need a variety of thought, knowledge, expertise, ideas, experience and world-views. **Respect for difference** turned out to be a crucial element in dealing with the

challenge of complexity. People observed that solutions emerged as coherence beneath difference. Appreciating the dignity of another person, acknowledging a different world-view, an opposing opinion without necessarily agreeing, fostered trust and unleashed a dynamic of contribution.

*“We learned trust is the core elements of constructive engagement”*

*Founder and President of an international sustainability standard initiative*

Dealt with in the right way, difference and complexity assume a new meaning – they ensure better results. In such a climate there is no need to build walls against each other, impose one’s conviction or dominate each other. Less time is invested in self-protection, the fighting for one’s own territory and the rigidity of one’s vision. More time can be invested in finding the **common ground**, the better solution or the breakthrough innovation. Solutions, agreements, strategies, and changes are of higher quality and more sustainable. The intelligence that develops does not rest only on individual brilliance, but on a process of construction that requests diverse input. Trust-based co-creation makes more effective use of diversity and complexity.

*“I never expected that we would have such a long-term impact when I took over the Ministry of Environment – suddenly people started to co-operate across ministries. We created round tables and joint initiatives, and people who had been dormant woke up and contributed. It was the feeling of a movement that pushed us forward. We pioneered approaches that have since been taken over by other countries.”*

*Former Minister of the Environment, Lower Saxony, Germany*

Visionary actors pioneer change and follow through with perseverance – patiently and persistently. The experts interviewed mentioned the **importance of passion**: If the goal of a change endeavour is not inspirational, people withhold their contribution. It must resonate with something in themselves. They must be able to relate to what should be different in the future. A common cause creates the feeling of being part of something larger, a community, a force for change. And diversity and respect for difference functions as checks and balances for the way forward.

#### Action learnings

- Ensure that people can listen to each other’s differences in a structured way – to different points of view, approaches to solve a problem or interpretations of a situation
- Be open to contribution and authentic with participation – be transparent about how peoples’ inputs count
- Help people to see the limiting effect of judgment and create an atmosphere of building on each other’s ideas
- Identify the common cause and jointly clarify the common goal – acknowledge if people differ how to reach it
- Attend to relationship building and backstage diplomacy when conflicts occur
- Be transparent about disagreements, but focus on commonalities
- Show flexibility, not rigidity, but stick to jointly agreed principles and plans
- Be persistent and patient, show an understanding of the others’ problems
- Work on something tangible together, create experiences of joint achievements, even if they are small
- See people not only as representatives of a group, an institution, a party, but as human beings with all their strengths, shortcomings and desire to make a difference

**Co-creation** of reality happens all the time – consciously or unconsciously. The term is often referred to when people work innovatively on a jointly agreed deliverable while attending to the quality of relationships through respect, trust and genuine listening.

*“The moment people feel that this is about something much bigger than themselves, bigger than their small world – they get inspired, they want to contribute, they are prepared to overcome difficulties and conflicts.”*

*Campaigning expert of large international NGO*

The interview partners described in different ways, that we need to move from competition to co-opetition to co-operation to co-creation – sharing ideas, building on each other’s competence and moving things forward collectively. They also mentioned the extremely important role of **innovation** – not only improving what we already have, but radical, disruptive innovation – to rethink transportation, infrastructure, telecommunication, supply chains and social security.

*“For radical, disruptive innovation, you need co-creation – something very difficult to implement in our current organisations.”*

*Innovation expert*

### 3.2 MODELLING EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE PROCESSES

*“If we took the time to observe how nature evolves, how ecosystems develop, we could become much more successful in our sustainability initiatives.”*

*Youth Movement Leader establishing a network*

By opening up to innovation we can learn from the evolutionary process. Evolution is not perfect, it is more an imperfect creative learning process, of which we are part and which we can influence. It is a never-ending process of creating order from chaos. Things go wrong, developments become dangerous to the sustenance of life, and this creates pressure to reorganize and rebalance. And in this way, imperfection leads to progress.

*“In the beginning it was just an idea that was driving us and we engaged more and more people personally. Then came the turning point when more people came towards us, wanted to join and help. We grew into a large initiative and created structures that moved an entire field.”*

*Social entrepreneur creating a youth support initiative*

The interview partners emphasised that it is important to carefully attend to beginnings – who makes the first move towards an initiative? How to build a small group of committed people and create a foundation of trust? Where change initiatives had been successful they build on a **step by step engagement of actors**, as representatives of institutions and as people who opened up to making a difference. A crucial factor for success is the creation of a space within which the initiative can develop – almost like a **temporary home for the envisaged change**. This can be very practical – time, financial resources, physical space to meet, professional facilitation.

*“We stayed open to the points of view of other people and developed the capacity to intuitively foresee how the co-operation process would develop in order to be able to respond accordingly.”*

*Former Senior Vice President Sustainability at Multi-national Food Company engaged in an international initiative for sustainable sourcing*

Neglecting the need to meet and exchange endangers the process. Complexity and interdependence are best met with **openness to process**. Plans are important, rigidity not.

Action learnings
• Sense the need, test the urgency, build resonance with a change endeavour – it is time wisely invested in the beginning
• Start small and engage a group of relevant people (already representing the differences) and build engagement step by step
• Build inclusivity gradually
• Diagnose the situation jointly and integrate diverse perspectives into future planning
• Invest in trust – and relationship building in the beginning
• Ensure that sufficient knowledge and expertise is available or built
• Follow-up on actions agreed, but maintain a dialogic approach
• Maintain confidentiality, if needed, and avoid the media at an early stage
• Keep the larger vision visible, but break it down into achievable action points, celebrate results accomplished
• Create a culture of iterative learning – review progress jointly

Mentioned as crucial, however often underestimated, was the **role of a caretaker** – a person or group who carries the change process further, regularly attends to engagement and keeps the communication flowing. Combining flexibility and openness to adjustments with commitment and reliability seemed to be the key to success.

*“There was a common goal, but the most decisive factor was the consensus orientation. And this only worked because so much preparation had gone into bilateral dialogue and engagement.”*

*Chief Director in a Ministry pioneering sustainable trading*

No engagement could be maintained without a larger and emotionally charged vision for change that all actors could identify with. But evenly important was to break it down into pathways that people could travel in their own area of expertise or responsibility. **Navigating differences** in the way how to achieve the goal required trust, patience and a continuous exploration of overlapping interests. But engagement and commitment could only be maintained, if people saw tangible results – having contributed to an impact was what kept people going.

*“There was an atmosphere of commitment that made it impossible to become destructive – you would not withhold your position, but always stay in the collaborative field. We knew that this was a global learning process we were all in together – we did not want to fail.”*

*Environmental activist of a large international NGO about an international initiative for sustainable green coffee*

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**Source for more: There is a growing community for dialogic change**

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Mastering a structured methodology that facilitates multi-stakeholder processes is crucial. [www.StakeholderDialogues.net](http://www.StakeholderDialogues.net) helps leaders to master the art of step-by-step engagement processes and builds a global network for

dialogic change. As a combination of comprehensive theory and practical e-learning exercises, StakeholderDialogues.net uses the power of stories from the field, interactive learning exercises and peer coaching to accompany users on their learning journey to become Stakeholder Dialogue experts.

### 3.3 INVIGORATING NETWORKS AND CONNECTIVITY

*“Let us slow down for just a minute and look around. Shouldn’t we be spending more thought on understanding the elements of human connectedness? Isn’t it about people who make things happen?”*

*Diversity Manager in a large pharmaceutical company*

Leaders who drive sustainability issues need to create **movements for change**. They may start small with a step by step engagement process, but they eventually need to grow in order to have impact. Like evolutionary change the movement stretches out along network connections. The initiators become nodes in a network, connected with other leaders who take up the movement.

*“We stirred up an old pattern of thinking and people happily took it up – almost as if we freed them.”*

*Social entrepreneur*

The interview partners stressed the importance of **invigorating networks**. These can be networks of people who identify with the same issue and enact the agreed upon change in their wider community. Or it can be networks across boundaries of institutions – across the silos of public sector, private sector and civil society.

Once the networks are established it becomes easier to plan change, to inspire and initiate.

*“We build an internal network that helped us understand and speak the language of the different departments – legal, financial, risk management, project management. It was only through our network that we shifted the focus towards sustainability.”*

*CSR Manager in a multinational company pushing sustainability on the strategic agenda of his company*

Connectivity is also seen as one answer to complexity. In connecting within and across institutions, sometimes across nations or across issues leaders tap into the potential of people to make a difference. They empower and set a willingness to contribute free.

*“Sustainability has an emotional component. The moment we realized that we could connect with people more easily and pull them into our change initiative.”*

*CSR Manager of a large international energy company*

Most interview partners observed that sustainability rekindles a latent desire – once it is nourished and inspired, people long for more. They engage and drive change when they see future possibilities emerging. The developing of personal networks often lasts. **Creating collaborative networks with complementary competences** was seen as extremely important to get sustainability issues going.

*“The networks I had developed by participating in the international standard initiative saved me – when it came to sourcing the sustainable commodity I needed, I could easily connect with the right people.”*

*Manager of a sustainable supply chain in a European company*

Connectivity is also seen as an approach to interdependence. If action has unprecedented effects it is the connections we have created that allow to feedback the impact earlier and enable faster responses. And it is the connection of the seemingly disconnected aspects that trigger greater insights and push people into action.

*“It was only because we looked at sustainability issues from very different angles – and then connected the dots – that we managed to shift the company’s strategy towards sustainability.”*

*Sustainability Manager in large technology company*

The breakthrough innovations that sustainability requires are not possible with good ideas from individuals only. We are often imprisoned in our own thinking. We don’t challenge our own assumptions. That’s why we need to connect with people who think differently.

**Collective action** is the coordinated or self-organised process of collaboration among different actors to achieve a common objective.

#### Action learnings

- Use opportunities for cross-sector, interdisciplinary, cross-cultural connections
- Join issue related or thematic networks
- Understand and use social media networks
- Get complimentary expertise together
- Invite experts from an entirely different discipline to contribute their viewpoint
- Build personal relationships beyond professional boundaries
- Attend to the emotional component of sustainability – people’s desire to make a difference

#### Source for more: Attending to the Commons

In the “Strategy for the Commons” the United Nations Global Compact and the Bertelsmann Foundation describe the importance of networks for business driven collective action for sustainability: “As member-based initiatives, business-driven networks for sustainability provide a safe environment to establish common ground for their members. Members meet on equal footing, to a certain degree laying aside their established roles of the regulator, the regulated, a competitor, or an adversary or adherent to certain an idea. Because they can convene members and other stakeholders outside established forums such as government hearings or business fairs, members can speak openly and off the record. If participants feel safe, they may even step back from their official position and engage in joint problem solving.”

*United Nations Global Compact & Bertelsmann Foundation, 2012, p. 27*

### 3.4 CREATING PATTERNS OF MUTUAL SUPPORT

*“You notice that you have shifted a system when people despite difficulties and disagreements start collaborating and finding a solution together.”*

*Chief director in a ministry engaged sustainable trading*

Many of the interview partners mentioned that there was a kind of “magic” happening in high quality collaboration processes – people opened up, brought in not only their expertise, but also their connection to other experts and started **leveraging support**. This took place, even if there were conflicts and differences in opinion. But the value of taking things forward

outweighed scepticism, criticism and doubt. We explored with the interview partners how this would happen and when, and discovered an interesting mix of factors.

*“When we stopped perceiving others in the group as competition, but saw them as support, we moved towards breakthrough. We not only got more financial support, it was also much easier to achieve outcomes. We even went beyond our own expectations.”*

*Project leader of an international youth project*

Transparency in the process as well as the willingness to listen with an open mind and to step into the shoes of another person contributed to achieving breakthrough solutions. It was people’s ability to express their point of view, yet not get entirely swallowed up by their opinion that helped shift a situation and opened up new pathways.

*“We noticed that together we became much more powerful in our attempt to change the situation. It forced us in a positive way to always look at the situation from another person’s position. Different opinions are important, but it is the art of listening that allowed people to shift.”*

*Provincial minister engaged in social change initiative*

The interview partners highlighted that it is the **presence of humanness** that engenders support. It may be the realization of one’s own limitations and need for support or the engagement of the heart, but it became clear – collaboration for sustainability taps into a human need. Despite the fact that we have built societies in which competitions is in the forefront, people are touched when they experience how much we are together in the evolutionary process. Helping each other move forward may at times

be a calculated choice, but most often it contributes to a deeper emotional satisfaction. Once people start supporting, support grows and collective impact is possible.

*“Because we look at things from very different perspective, miscommunication and misunderstanding happen. But exactly this is the key to progress. If we see the humanness of another person, if we acknowledge without agreeing – we can overcome differences and finally see that all perspectives had a contribution to make.”*

*Innovation advisor*

The interview partners hinted to a hidden aspect of mutually supportive networks – they often come with **rules and structures**, some of them may be covert, others overt. But the rules and structures are important – they help people stay in a collaborative field and navigate between seemingly irreconcilable positions. It was mentioned that if rules and structures come in too early they have a deteriorating or demotivating effect – people may accept them, but they prevent engagement and contribution. Too formal structures seem to drain energy. Too loose structures cause a group of actors to disperse and the energy for change gets lost. Getting the balance right between formal agreements, plans, rules of participation and unstructured human encounter is paramount.

*“We need mechanisms that regulate and monitor our progress towards sustainability. They do have an encouraging effect, although at the beginning people often look at them with scepticism. Once they see the impact – they more likely argue for the importance of that regulation.”*

*CEO of an international NGO engaged in pushing companies into sustainability performance*

Action learnings
• Live support and contribution – it is contagious
• Meet people as people, not only as representatives of an organisation
• Regularly check how people are or see the situation
• Acknowledge expertise or any other kind of contribution
• Grow rules and structures gradually in line with the progress of an initiative
• Gain distance and look at a larger picture regularly and particularly when stakes are high
• Evaluate impact and talk about it
• Recognise and realise the fruits of <b>collective impact</b> – the effect of catalysing profound change as a result of collective leadership and subsequent collective action to solve a specific problem.

**Source for more ...**

The architect Christopher Alexander has vividly described how the degree of life on earth is dependent on a pattern of mutual support: „It is useful to understand that all systems in the world gain their life from the co-operation and interaction of the living centres they contain [...] in a bootstrap configuration, so that each one allows one centre to be propped up by another, so that each one ignites a spark in the one it helps, and that mutual helping creates life in a whole“.

*Christopher Alexander, 2004, p.134*

**3.5 CONCLUSION: RESILIENCE IS A GLOBAL LEARNING PROCESS**

Not only did the interview partners made it clear, but the insight is also supported by the literature, that the future resilience of global, societal, and local systems requires better adaptivity, faster learning, and higher quality governance.

With climate change, resource scarcity, social imbalances, and the crisis of financial systems we are realising that our future depends on action that is based on the human capacity to dialogue and to co-operate between different stakeholders. It might be difficult to overcome mistrust, but there is no other route – stakeholder co-operation is the future.

*“From an engineering point of view, robustness means that a system can function under all kind of circumstances, resilience means that it can recover from disturbances. It may than be slightly different, but fundamentally the same.”*

*Innovation expert with engineering background engaged in sustainability initiatives*

People are prepared to change their behaviour when they resonate with a future possibility. Only then they welcome catalysts for change. This happens most often at the edge of chaos and not in harmonious phases. Humankind is part of life’s inherent tendency for creative unfolding into forms of increasing diversity and complexity. The more we realise this, the more we become the partner of evolution – and can learn the art of resilience.

## 4. A COMPASS FOR LEADING COLLECTIVELY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Turning the challenges of complexity, interdependency and urgency into opportunities requires more than passion, intuition, or excellent plans. We need to shift the way we co-create – learn faster together, collaborate more efficiently, and enhance collective action for more sustainable human behaviour. We therefore looked at the coherence underneath the five successful strategies that the interview partners applied and we identified recurrent elements. Combined with our experience in leadership development, stakeholder engagement, and cross-sector co-operation, we developed and refined a compass for action and reflection. The compass is a guiding structure that helps navigate complex settings collaboratively and implement more outcome-oriented and constructive co-creation on a day-to-day basis – for individuals, teams, an entire organisation, and cross-sector co-operation initiatives. The enablers of Collective Leadership for Sustainability can be made transparent. They can be learned or enhanced – individually and collectively.

The compass suggests six competencies that we need to attend to and develop further in the way we lead collaboration and the way we contribute to collective action. Each of them has an impact in its own right, but when they come together they create a climate of Collective Leadership.

**Collective Leadership for Sustainability** is the capacity of a group of leaders to deliver their contribution to a joint purpose collaboratively, while putting high priority on a balance between the needs of people, profit, and planet. At the core of Collective Leadership is the human capacity to make a difference by building performance and innovation on dialogue and diversity. It invigorates networks of knowledge sharing, collective action, and mutual support.

*“In order to make collective leadership work you need to have less ego, but sufficient enough selfishness and the knowledge that collaboration can meet your needs far better than going it alone.”*

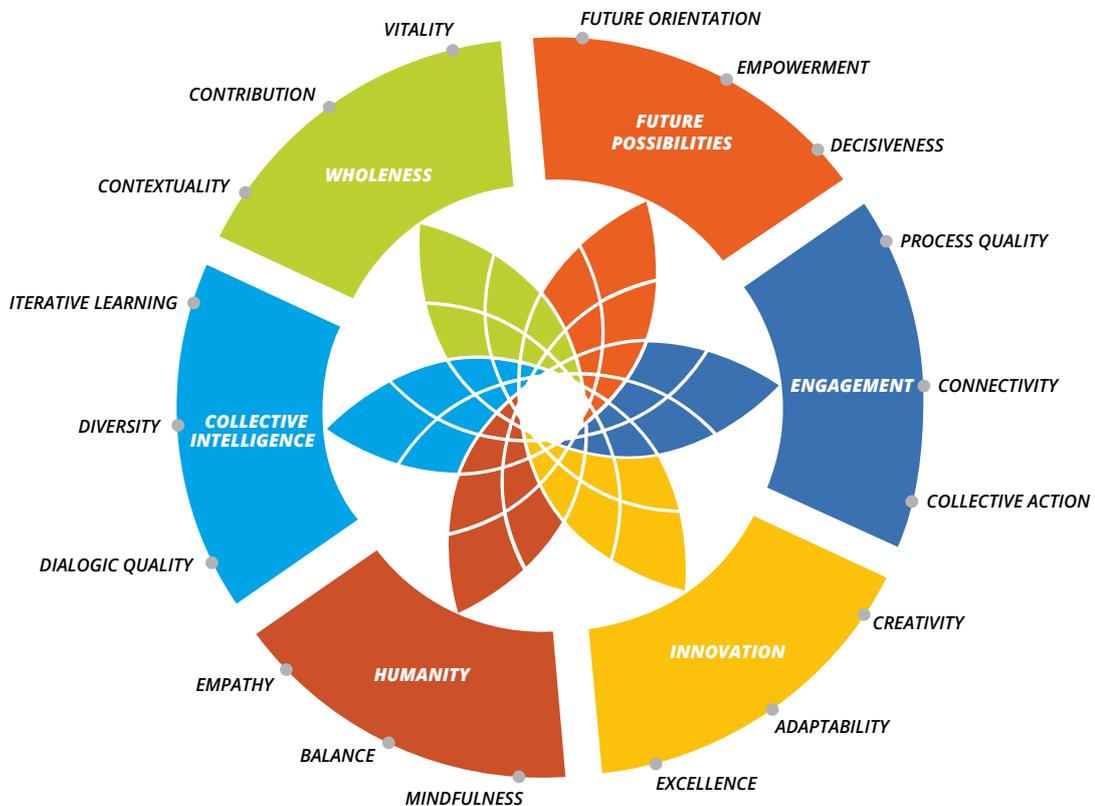
*Innovation Expert*

For each of the six competencies to come to life there are three elements requiring attention. They all contribute to strengthening the individual capacity for navigating the challenges and help a group of leaders stay on track in complex multi-actor settings. They strengthen the capacity of a collective to become more effective in driving the change sustainability requires.

### Six essential competencies for Collective Leadership

<i>FUTURE POSSIBILITIES</i>	Inspiring and empowering others, staying open-minded, observing trends, developments and new knowledge, going beyond problem diagnose, sensing and enacting future possibilities, following-through, taking a stand for sustainability.
<i>ENGAGEMENT</i>	Building meaningful stakeholder engagement processes that create trust and cohesion, invigorating network connections, fostering collective action that leads to tangible outcomes and enhanced collective impact.
<i>INNOVATION</i>	Venturing into the unknown, driving excellence, fostering creativity, acknowledging diverse expertise, building a climate of trust-based co-creation and developing the potential to spot innovative solutions to sustainability challenges.
<i>HUMANITY</i>	Acknowledging diversity in the world and in humanity, accessing our humanity in ourselves and in others, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, cultivating reflection, attending to inner balance.
<i>COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE</i>	Respecting difference, inviting diverse perspectives, experiences and viewpoints for better solutions, fostering structured dialogue, valuing contributions, ensuring iterative learning.
<i>WHOLENESS</i>	Placing our actions in a larger context, opening up to seeing the bigger picture of a situation, acting in favour of the commongood, continuously improving our contribution to sustainability, creating networks of mutual support.

### COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY



Competencies	Elements	Description
<i>FUTURE POSSIBILITIES</i>	Future Orientation	Having a positive outlook, seeking possibilities and solutions, turning into future possibilities
	Empowerment	Inspiring others, awakening their passion for change and enhancing their ability for self-reliant action
	Decisiveness	Taking a stance for sustainability and following-through on issues one believes in, getting things done
<i>ENGAGEMENT</i>	Process Quality	Designing and implementing high quality engagement, collaboration and implementation processes
	Connectivity	Creating network connections and cultivating relationships among different actors, fostering cohesion and identification with sustainability issues
	Collective Action	Aligning actors for joint implementation, delivering results in a spirit of collective responsibility, enhancing collective impact, shifting systems towards collective action for sustainability
<i>INNOVATION</i>	Creativity	Nourishing sources of creative energy for oneself and others, creating time and space for trust-based co-creation
	Excellence	Striving for excellence and quality, building and bringing in diverse expertise
	Adaptability	Staying open to change, being prepared to venture into the unknown, transcending boundaries and adapting quickly to new situations
<i>HUMANITY</i>	Mindfulness	Being attentive to human encounter, the depth of a situation and the deeper meaning beyond surface reality
	Balance	Managing well the balance between personal and professional live, attending to personal relationships, life goals and spirituality
	Empathy	Stepping into the perspective of somebody, attending to each others' humanness, being able to reconcile, listening to the story behind a difficult to understand situation
<i>COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE</i>	Dialogic Quality	Letting coherence and collective intelligence emerge through inquiry, enhancing the effectiveness of communication and
	Diversity	Fostering diversity in thought, viewpoints and experiences to enhance the quality of decisions and subsequent action
	Iterative Learning	Build collective cycles of reflection into action in order to enhance resilience and timely adjustment of strategies
<i>WHOLENESS</i>	Contextuality	Considering a larger context of one's action and staying responsive to the needs of a larger whole – the organisation, cooperation system, society, the world
	Vitality	Fostering interaction that leads to mutual support and enhances each others strength and energy for action
	Contribution	Refining and regularly re-defining one's own and a system's contribution to a sustainable world

... Enacted through	Guiding questions
Conscious attention to the future, the potential in a situation, person or organization	<b>What are the untapped possibilities in a given situation?</b>
Inspirational conversations, invitations to contribute, accessing other people's passion, connecting people with a larger goal, living one's passion	<b>How can we access people's passion for change and inspire them to join in?</b>
Focus and single-mindedness, discipline, reliability, assertiveness	<b>How do we encourage people to take a stance for sustainability? How do we reliably ensure progress is made?</b>
Attention to high quality process designs that create ownership, trust and result-orientation, structured stakeholder engagement	<b>How do we get people on board for joint action?</b>
Attention to relationship building, respect, network and community building, collaboration, purpose and meaning, understanding of the composition of systems that need to shift	<b>What is the network we need to enact or build?</b>
Attention to the requirements of cooperation systems, transparent communication, goal clarity, mutual accountability, visibility of successes, result-orientation	<b>How do we align people behind a sustainability goal? How do we ensure tangible results?</b>
Attention to the creative urge of people and their potential to cocreate, Acknowledgment of new ideas, space for non-doing, learning from mistakes-culture, attitude of turning crisis into opportunities	<b>How do we create time and space for innovative cocreation?</b>
Attention to quality, continuous improvement, values, client satisfaction, impact	<b>How do we enhance quality? What is the expertise we need to develop or bring in?</b>
Reflection, encouragement to take risks and beyond comfort-zone actions, innovative strategic cooperation, exposure to different worlds/environments, employee engagement, exposure to trends	<b>How do we encourage each other to go beyond boundaries?</b>
Individual and collective reflection, observation, seeing the person behind the task, meditation	<b>How do we ensure regular reflection?</b>
Attention to energy levels, creativity and emotional engagement, regular reconnection with one's aspirations, connecting with a larger goal	<b>How do we keep balanced and healthy?</b>
Suspending judgment, attention to inquiry, exposure to different cultures, taking a bird's eye perspective	<b>What helps us to see the person behind the task, the story behind the person?</b>
Attention to the quality of conversations and communicative processes	<b>How do we cultivate dialogue and harness collective intelligence?</b>
Consideration of a variety of perspectives, exposure to different (world)views, integration of different cultures, stories, styles and approaches	<b>How do we acknowledge and make use of diverse perspectives for better decision-making?</b>
Attention to collective reflection as part of action and implementation plans, openness to adjust strategies as a result of insight	<b>What are our mechanisms for joint reviews?</b>
Exploration of the immediate and larger context, research, facts and figures, integration of opposing stakeholder views, maintaining the connection to a larger vision	<b>What is the context we need to take into account?</b>
Support, culture of mutual support, attention to a system's level of energy, appreciation and acknowledgment	<b>How do we create a climate of mutual support?</b>
Regular reviews of one's own strength and how to utilize them best, fostering the organization's full commitment to all aspects of	<b>How do we regularly review the impact of our contribution to sustainability?</b>

## 5. HOW TO USE THE COMPASS

The Collective Leadership compass empowers individual leaders to unfold their potential to contribute to sustainability collectively – creating impact together. The compass can be applied by **individuals, teams, organisations, and co-operation systems** (networks, initiatives, partnerships, platforms etc.). At each level there is an inward aspect – looking at how the individual develops and how people in the team, the organisation, the co-operation systems act with each other. The outward aspect looks at how the individual, the team, the organisation, the co-operation system enact the future in collaboration with others.

**People who lead collectively** venture into the **unknown**. They take the road less travelled if it leads to innovation and the testing of new approaches. They are **visionaries** who keep a sense of wholeness alive and connect with fu-

ture possibilities. They find **innovative solutions** and consensual agreements through diverse perspectives and respect for difference and **inspire others** to engage with an emotionally compelling goal. They are masters of **relationship management** and create a context of trust and continuity. They **focus on tangible results** through consensus-building and collective action. They **deal with conflicts and crises constructively** and know that they are in fact often pathways to innovation. The qualities of Collective Leadership for Sustainability lie in all of us – let’s foster them and continue our learning journey for a better future together.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*

Margaret Mead

	Possible application	Purpose
<i>Individual</i>	Self-assessment, identification of development areas, personal development plans, coaching guide	Enhance the persons holistic leadership capabilities and capability to lead in conjunction with others, strengthen individual sustainability leadership
<i>Team</i>	Team-assessment, identification of improvement areas, team reflection, dialogue on what matters, action plans, team coaching guide	Enhance team performance, refocus team on sustainability issues, increase awareness of the interface between hard and soft skills, build competencies and elements into action plans (e.g. relationship building, creativity, etc.)
<i>Organisation</i>	Organisational assessment, evaluation of organisational culture, identification of improvement areas, integration in staff appraisal, feedback conversations	Improve organisational culture, align organisation or department behind sustainability goals, build competencies and elements into implementation plans (e.g. relationship building, creativity, etc.)
<i>Co-operation system</i>	Evaluation, self-assessment, evaluation of the quality of co-operation, assessment of effectiveness, reflection of progress, identification of improvement areas	Improve co-operation, re-align behind agreed upon goals, build competencies and elements into implementation plans (e.g. relationship building, creativity, etc.)

## 6. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Petra Kuenkel** is the Executive Director of the Collective Leadership Institute and a senior consultant for systemic change management and leadership development since 1995. Serving private companies as well as public and development co-operation institutions she consulted complex change processes internationally, in particular cross-sector partnerships, multistakeholder dialogues and standard development for value chains.



**Kristiane Schaefer** is the Director Executive Education at the Collective Leadership Institute and has more than 15 years of international work experience in the private sector and international organisations focusing on Leadership and Dialogue for Sustainability in cross-sector settings. She initiated several strategic projects for the CLI – such as “Young Leaders for Sustainability” – a leadership development program building a network of changemakers for a sustainable future.

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## 8. ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

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The Collective Leadership Institute is an internationally operating non-profit organisation based in Germany (Potsdam) and South Africa (Cape Town). It was founded 2005 and is an independent initiative supporting stakeholders from the private sector, the public sector, and civil society in creating and implementing collaborative change initiatives for innovative and sustainable solutions to global, local, and societal challenges.



**Our vision is to empower future-oriented people to lead collectively towards a sustainable future.**

We believe in the principle of co-operation and collectively created solutions – across sectors, institutions, nations, and cultures. With our Executive Education, our Integrated Capacity Development, our Community Building, and our Research, we build competence for sustainability – for responsible business, people-oriented public service, and a strong civil society.

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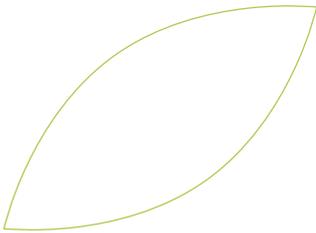
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