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What is the Business and Society Symposium?

The UCB-SBSEM Business and Society Symposium is an invitation-only event jointly hosted by the Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management (SBSEM) and UCB, a leading European pharmaceutical company, fostering cross-stakeholder collaboration to tackle societal challenges. The May 2024 Symposium focused on leadership for a sustainable future, bringing together leading voices from business, civil society, academia, policy and youth to discuss practical cases on innovative leadership initiatives and stress-test the Leadership for a Sustainable Future Framework, developed by Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL).

Find out more about the Symposium here.









Executive summary

The Symposium was designed to unlock participants' own understanding and uncover insights around leadership for a sustainable future in a multi-stakeholder context. This report delves into the insights and learnings unearthed through exploration of concrete case studies, interactive break-out sessions and plenary discussions; some highlights include:

01

New leadership approaches are needed to navigate an increasingly complex world.

Traditional leadership styles, which often focus on individualism and top-down decision-making, cannot deliver the collaboration and systemic change needed to address the complex, urgent challenges facing the world today.

02

Collaborative leadership amongst multiple stakeholders – not just individual leadership – is critical for building a sustainable future.

Discussions about the new leadership mindsets, practices and behaviours needed to deliver a sustainable future were guided by concrete case studies that demonstrated multi-stakeholder collaboration and The Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership's 'Leadership for a Sustainable Future Framework'. The case studies were designed for participants to uncover key insights around challenges, solutions and practical steps for leaders to realise these principles in practice. Each case study at the Symposium had its own collaborative mechanism; participants used the lens of these mechanisms to better understand sustainable leadership dynamics at play in multistakeholder, collaborative contexts.

See Section 3 for more on this approach.

- The European Investment Bank used external stakeholder engagement to better inform its new energy lending policy and ensure it represents diverse European perspectives.
- LIFE BE FREE used **consensus building** in its cross-sector partnerships to more effectively innovate solutions for energy efficiency and building decarbonisation.
- Enabel employed a **collaborative governance** model to aid its organisational restructuring and increase the impact of its newly adopted strategy.
- Veolia employed **multi-stakeholder governance** to collaboratively facilitate its organisational transformation, including through external consultations, proactive governance models, and stakeholder empowerment.

03

However, conflicting priorities, rigid hierarchies, a fear of difficult conversations and other barriers hinder the transformation of leadership, organisations and systems.

Participants felt that overcoming these barriers to achieve sustainable transformation will require courage, creativity, vulnerability and a willingness to listen.

04

Implementing new leadership mindsets, characteristics and behaviours in practice is challenging – but leaders can learn from existing examples and practical steps.

While sustainable leadership means different things to different stakeholders, creative and courageous leadership were considered the most important of the leadership characteristics amongst participants. Section 4 outlines examples of actions leaders can take to embody critical leadership principles, including:

- **1. Connected leadership:** Reframing organisational purpose, sharing information and breaking silos.
- **2. Collaborative leadership:** Listening carefully, communicating clearly, and prioritising inclusivity.
- **3. Creative leadership:** Learning continuously, being flexible, encouraging debate and embracing failure.
- **4. Courageous leadership:** Challenging the status quo and prioritising boldly.

05

Bold action is needed to turn purpose into action post-Symposium.

For the learnings from the Symposium to be implemented within participants' organisations, commitments were made to: engage in difficult conversations; balance short-term and long-term interests; embrace productive conflict; promote cultural change to break down silos and accelerate sustainability efforts within their organisation. See Section 5 for the full range of commitments.

Why do we need a new approach to leadership?

a

Prioritising sustainability: transforming decision-making in our complex systems

The complex, urgent challenges facing the world today require everyone to fundamentally rethink how we operate, lead, and collaborate.

While progress is underway – exemplified by major developments such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and the European Union's Green Deal, as well as momentum among businesses and civil society – activating change on the ground remains challenging. Not because stakeholders are unwilling. Not because technology is underdeveloped. But because we cannot transform the systems at the root of society's most pressing challenges while holding onto the decision-making processes that led us here in the first place.

b.

Evolving demands on leadership

Throughout history, leaders have driven change, shaped societies, and helped navigate uncertainties. Now – as businesses, governments, and communities work within an increasingly complex and polarised world to address global challenges – **the meaning of leadership is changing**.

"We are not wired for success in a world that we have today, which is very complex, volatile, uncertain, ambiguous. So, what are the capabilities, mindsets, practises we need?"

- Zoë Arden, Fellow at the CISL

As sectors and industries transition to more sustainable practices, leadership must also evolve. There is increasing recognition across sectors that traditional styles of leadership will not be compatible with – and may be hindering progress towards – a resilient, inclusive, sustainable future. Conventional leadership models too often focus on individual leaders, reinforce hierarchies, and prioritize top-down decision making¹. This can widen the distance between decision 'makers' and 'followers', deprioritising collaboration, diluting the benefits brought by diverse perspectives, and contributing to the prioritisation of short-term gains over long-term goals.²

"We need a new approach to leadership because the nature of the problems we're trying to solve is very complex and systemic, so you need to bring together different stakeholders. Dealing with multiple stakeholders requires different mindsets and different practises."

- Prof. Estelle Cantillon, Academic Director of the Sustainable Development Initiative at ULB

Large-scale transformation cannot happen without effective coordination and collaboration across industries, governments, and communities. In this context, leaders cannot afford to work within siloes and will need to **foster collaboration**, **collectively drive systemic change**, and **implement forward-thinking strategies**. For this, developing new mindsets and capabilities is critical.



¹ Benmira, S., and Agboola, M., 2020. Evolution of Leadership Theory. BMJ Leader. Accessed <u>here</u>.

² Cherry, MSEd, K., 2020. How does the great man theory of leadership hold up? Verywell Mind. Accessed **here**.

Building leadership capabilities for a sustainable future

Acknowledging the important and changing role of leadership, participants at the third UCB-SBSEM Business and Society Symposium explored the leadership styles, mindsets, and behaviours needed to for a sustainable future – as well as the enablers and barriers to fostering this leadership.

Guided by the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership's Leadership for a Sustainable Future Framework, the Symposium included a presentation on the Framework by its authors, a testimonial from a business leader reflecting on the framework, and break-out sessions during which participants explored leadership mindsets and behaviours in the context of concrete case studies. See the full programme here. Through conversation with one another, participants began to put into practice the connection, collaboration, creativity, courage needed from sustainable leaders.

"[The 2024 Symposium] is a good opportunity to see what can be done in the future and how we can improve by learning from new experiences, other organisations and other stakeholders."

-Juan Manuel Sterlin Balenciaga, Head of the Transparency and Civil Society Unit at the European Investment Bank



a. The Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership's Leadership for a Sustainable Future Framework

The <u>Leadership for a Sustainable Future Framework</u> was created by CISL to identify and activate the new styles of leadership that are needed in a sustainable world.

"We have the solutions, we have the technology, and yet we're just not coming up with solutions and innovations at scale. That has a lot to do with our own leadership and the leadership within our organisations.

We're very much hoping to close that gap."

- Zoë Arden, Fellow at the CISL

At the Symposium, this framework was used to **inspire thinking and dialogue** around leadership mindsets, practices, and approaches. Through the break-out sessions, the CISL team **stress-tested the framework** and gathered examples of leadership practices for delivering sustainable outcomes.

"To stress test the CISL Leadership for a Sustainable Future framework we will be using the wisdom shared in the powerful case studies presented together with the insights and examples from the lived experience of those present, provoked by the case study discussions. This will help to inform and contribute to an evidence base of examples that demonstrate the application of our leadership framework in practice. The workshops helped to highlight key elements, barriers and enablers as well as areas that might need further focus as we work to further refine the framework and how it can be used to develop leadership capabilities and influence culture in practice."

- Gillian Secrett, Director at the CISL

The framework identifies four core characteristics of leadership with the most potential for achieving and maintaining a sustainable future:

- Connected leadership: recognise our connections to others and nature, and act accordingly
- Collaborative leadership: work in a way that has co-created genuine benefit for multiple parties; linking ideas, people and resources that would not normally interact
- **Creative leadership:** inquire, explore and experiment with purpose
- Courageous leadership: know the values that leadership stands for and nurture courage, integrity and resilience to pursue societal good.



b. Four case studies illustrating collaboration and leadership for greater sustainability and impact

Every year, multi-stakeholder collaboration is a key theme of the Symposium. To effectively develop solutions that transform business' impact on society, collaboration across sectors and within organisations is essential. With this in mind, participants were presented with four real-world case studies that illustrated a distinct collaborative mechanism designed to unlock progress: external stakeholder consensus building, collaborative engagement. governance, and multi-stakeholder governance. These mechanisms provided a lens through which participants deeply analysed the leadership principles within the cases, noting the challenges and enablers, and uncovering key and transferable learnings.

"[This methodology] is an opportunity for us to explain how we went through this entire process at the EIB, but it's really to learn."

- Juan Manuel Sterlin Balenciaga, Head of the Transparency and Civil Society Unit at the European Investment Bank

1. External Stakeholder Engagement

External stakeholder engagement is used as a collaborative mechanism to gain clearer understanding of diverse perspectives to inform decision-making, build trust and relationships across value chains by resolving conflicting viewpoints, identify risks and opportunities, and foster collaborations and partnerships towards more sustainable, equitable outcomes.



Case: European Investment Bank

In 2019, the European Investment Bank (EIB), the lending arm of the European Union, launched a public consultation on its new energy lending policy. Conducted amidst Europe's growing climate ambitions, the consultation garnered a greater number of contributions from a broader array of stakeholders than any previous consultations. Not only did the consultation significantly impact the final version of the policy, it also contributed to breaking internal silos inside the organisation and paved the way for more systematic use of external consultations by the Bank. **Read the full case study here**.

The EIB case illustrated external stakeholder engagement through a range of approaches:

• Multi-level stakeholder engagement:

- At board level: Annual conversations between the board and civil society.
- At policy level: Public consultations, covering both transversal policies and sectoral policies, proposed by the management committee and decided by the board.
- At project level: Projects funded by the EIB account for diverse stakeholder perspectives by following rules of engagement with stakeholders.
- **Issue mapping:** Following a public consultation to revise its energy lending policy, the contributions were reviewed by a panel of representatives of all directorates and summarised in an "issue matrix" that organised the different viewpoints along the consultation guestions.
- **Internal consultation:** To resolve issues involving contradictory viewpoints, the panel drew on advice from other people within the organisation including some of the EU Member States.



Juan Manuel Serlin Balenciaga, Head of the Transparency and Civil Society Unit at the European Investment Bank, presenting the EIB case.

2. Consensus Building

Consensus building is used as a collaborative mechanism to ensure inclusive decision-making that leads to commitment and cooperation from all stakeholders involved, promote mutual understanding around shared challenges, and build solutions that are resilient in the long-term by considering potential conflicts.



Case: LIFE BE FREE

With buildings accounting for a significant 20% of Belgium's greenhouse gas emissions, accelerating decarbonisation is a nationwide imperative with implications for stakeholders across sectors. LIFE BE FREE, a cross-sectoral partnership, was created to develop innovative solutions that overcome barriers to energy efficiency renovations and buildings decarbonisation. However, engaging and coordinating the diverse set of stakeholders to deliver concrete results is no small task, especially within Belgium's highly decentralised policy environment. **Read the full case study here**.

The LIFE BE FREE case illustrated consensus building through their organisational structure and processes:

- A core team: The partnership is led by six individuals, one in each partner organisation, who meet weekly to monitor progress and coordinate work. Leadership for the different workstreams is assigned based on expertise and availability.
- Organisation-level integration: Each team member liaises with their organisation to ensure smooth informational flow, validation, and continued engagement. Progress is regularly discussed at the board meetings of each organisation.
- Prioritisation based on legislative or regulatory implications: Discussions with key stakeholders at a national roundtable was used to identify priorities for both the short and the long term, with a focus on delivering concrete results early on.
- Thematic roundtables: To produce concrete proposals and reach consensus, the partnership brings stakeholders and experts together 3-4 times per year to share their understanding of the current barriers and discuss potential solutions, based on the priorities identified.
- Advisory board: A group of experts is being created to validate priorities and provide a sounding board for the solutions unearthed at the roundtables.



Wim De Geest, Project Coordinator at the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, Anne-Laure Lejeune, Sustainability and SME Advisor at Embuild, and Daniel Kryszkiewiez, Senior Counsel Retail Credit at FEBELFIN, presenting the LIFE BE FREE case.

3. Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance is used as a collaborative mechanism to promote inclusive decision-making by ensuring that relevant perspectives are represented, address complex challenges by leveraging collective expertise and resources, create shared ownership and accountability amongst stakeholders, and promote flexibility and adaptability in for managing change and uncertainty.



Case: ENABEL

Enabel is the Belgian Development Agency. Following the recruitment of a new CEO in 2018, Enabel embarked onto a transformative journey that revisited its governance, organisational structure and culture to support its newly adopted strategy and increase its impact. **Read the full case study here**.

Enabel illustrates collaborative governance through their approach to redefining their organisational structure and culture:

- Assessment of external environment and internal strengths: Through an in-house assessment involving staff and the board, Enabel developed a comprehensive strategy and defined its vision.
- Organisational restructuring: The management team was enlarged to include units directly reporting to the CEO, including the new "Global Partnerships" and "Strategy and Organisational Development" units.
- **Prioritisation of impact:** Impact replaced expenditures as the focal Key Performance Indicator of the organisation, shifting focus from the finance division to the operations division. Training and workshops were deployed across the organisation to promote holistic approaches to working with partner countries.
- Inclusive structures: "Circles", which cut across hierarchical and organisational lines, were created for all change projects. These groups involved all internal stakeholders interested in working on the project. They organised themselves, with one representative reporting to the management committee.



Jean Van Wetter, CEO of Enabel, presenting the Enabel case.

4. Multi-stakeholder Governance

Multi-stakeholder governance is used to create more effective solutions by leveraging the strengths and perspectives of diverse stakeholder groups to ensure commitment and buy-in by co-creating solutions and resolving conflicts, as well as to improve resilience and adaptability by creating a structure that enables continuous input and improvement.

○ VEOLIA

Case: Veolia

Since its adoption of ecological transformation as its purpose in 2019, Veolia has achieved an impressive level of coherence in its business activities, narrative and governance. However, aligning a 220,00 people strong organisation across 58 countries and changing the way the organisation interacts with its external stakeholders does not happen in one day. This case describes Veolia's journey as of May 2024 as it seeks to integrate its multi-faceted performance approach throughout its organisation.

Read the full case study here.

Veolia illustrates multi-stakeholder governance in their approach to integrating multi-faceted performance:

 Multi-stakeholder consultation: Veolia's purpose was articulated and refined through 16 rounds of iteration, involving the company's management bodies, employees, clients, consultative committees and external stakeholders.

• Proactive governance:

- A Purpose Steering Committee coordinates and promotes the initiative throughout the company; each objective is managed by a member and group of experts.
- Multi-faceted performance is integrated into the compensation of senior executives and management.

• Empowerment and engagement:

- A network of Purpose Officers accelerates the deployment of Veolia's purpose and multi-faceted performance.
- "+1, the ecology turned into actions" initiative engages stakeholders to identify new solutions for ecological transformation.
- "Purpose in motion" training equips managers with the tools and skills to engage in new ways with clients and stakeholders.



Fanny Demulier, Head of Purpose and Stakeholder Engagement at Veolia presenting the Veolia case.

Four participant groups explored the business cases, co-creating new solutions

The **Symposium's structure** was informed by the belief that learning happens through practice, not just theory. To facilitate learning about sustainable leadership and stakeholder collaboration through 'doing', participants were divided into four groups, each of which was assigned a real-world case study for the group to critically think about and discuss.

In the breakout groups, public and private sector leaders presented their real approaches to sustainability leadership; participants explored the concrete case studies and engaged with the case study protagonists to dig deeper into their examples. Each breakout consisted of a diverse group of stakeholders representing business, civil society, academia, investment, and policy. The value of the group discussions was derived from the diversity of the participants, each contributing their own lived experiences, backgrounds and perspectives to enrich the conversations.





"What I find extremely rich in the conversation today is the variety of sectors that we represent. We're not all from the same industry, same type of multi-national organisation, but also smaller organisations and startups. It's where you can really learn and cross fertilise."

- Jean Van Wetter, CEO of Enabel



Key learnings and insights

The Symposium explored several probing questions around leadership for a sustainable future. This section captures the challenges identified by participants, followed by the consolidated insights from the presentations, discussions and breakout sessions around how to overcome them.

What challenges and barriers hinder effective leadership for a sustainable future?

- Balancing competing priorities, such as between profit, people and planet is a major challenge for leaders – particularly in the private sector. Employees at all levels will increasingly feel the pressure of competing objectives, putting them at risk of burnout. The ability to balance priorities and understand what matters most for sustainability and business will only grow in importance.
- A lack of consensus around complex issues and solutions can be challenging. At the same time, models that depend on consensus can block progress by not allowing for the diverse perspectives of different stakeholders or leaving space for constructive debate and compromise. It is still critical to ensure there is a minimum level of alignment within teams to ensure consistent and effective approaches.
- Navigating hierarchical leadership models can be complex, as there may be tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Top-down leadership often involves directives set by senior management, which can lead to quicker decision making but may not fully consider insights from all employees. Conversely, bottom-up approaches foster a more inclusive and innovative environment but can slow down processes. Balancing these approaches is essential for leveraging diverse perspectives towards shared objectives, within organisations as well as in the context of multi-stakeholder collaboration.

- Insufficient training and education around sustainability issues among employee bases can result in slower transformation. Corporates have an increasingly important role to play in building a sustainable future and leveraging the power and potential of their employees, partners, and other stakeholders will bolster overall commitment to sustainability.
- Deferring to comfortable conversations can hinder progress and prevent constructive conflict. Progress is possible when leaders and stakeholders embrace discomfort – whether that is engaging with new concepts or experimenting with untested approaches.
- Defining leadership can present challenges, especially as the roles and expectations of leaders are changing. Rather than managing and regulating change, now leadership has a broader mandate to facilitate transformation. It is important for every organisation to define what leadership for a sustainable future means for them, as well as in the context of multi-stakeholder collaboration.



What leadership mindsets, characteristics and behaviours are needed to deliver a sustainable future, and how can these be implemented?

Participant engagement actively shaped the outcomes of the event. Their perspectives on which leadership mindsets, characteristics and behaviours are needed to deliver a sustainable future, guided by the four key principles outlined in the CISL Framework, are captured below as the key insights of the Symposium. Participants shared examples of leadership principles employed in practice in their breakouts.

Connected leadership: recognise our connections to others and nature, and act accordingly.

- Reframe organisational purpose beyond delivering financial success or organisational performance and communicate this broadly to inspire those within organisations as well as externally. Prioritising environmental and social impact at a similar level to financial performance is critical for leaders seeking to deliver a sustainable future.
- How? Re-articulate organisational purpose through consultation with stakeholders and integrate it throughout the organisation, as in Veolia's case study.
- "We want our leaders and leadership to see that their role is to deliver both for their organisations and for society as a whole." - Gillian Secrett, Director of the CISL
- "The role of the leader is not to manage, but to inspire his or her team in a new narrative. The young generation is expecting a lot from organisations. Not anymore to make profits, but to have a positive impact on society. Leaders need to integrate those different components together."

 Jean Van Wetter, CEO of Enabel

- Share information through education, training or storytelling to enable others to recognise their connections to people, nature and organisational purpose. This understanding can unlock action at scale as more stakeholders become equipped with the knowledge to act within their own context.
 - How? An engagement campaign to inform leaders and teams around the interconnection between environmental and social issues and organisational performance. Another example, shared by a participant from the FOD Economie / SPF Economie / FPS Economy, is to create advice committees throughout organisations to increase the flow of information between stakeholders.
 - "Sharing your purpose within the organisation triggers connection and action. Sharing information is critical. Educate and train people." - Vanessa Temple, ESG Lead at ING Belgium
- Break down silos to ensure stakeholders, teams and individuals who would not normally work together have opportunities to connect.
 - How? Develop cross-functional and cross-sectoral engagement programmes to formally facilitate collaboration.



- **Encourage everyone to lead** by nurturing confidence in team members and stakeholders, while emphasising every person's potential for positive impact.
 - How? Mentorship programmes where leaders engage with other team members, fostering confidence and emphasizing everyone's potential for positive impact through regular discussion, feedback, and recognition.
 - "We are all leaders and we all need to work together to transform organisations, to transform the economy and to prepare a better world for the generations to come."
 Véronique Toully, Global Head of Sustainability, Corporate Affairs and Risk at UCB
 - "Leadership is a characteristic of every single person to contribute. Leadership is contextual and creates the opportunities for people to engage." - Paul Van Oyen, Director of PVO Advisory
 - "Be inclusive and bring people into the room. Inclusion leadership isn't about just having someone talk but also ensuring their ideas are used." - Timothy Mallinson, Manager in the Health & Life Sciences Practice at Kearney



Collaborative Leadership: work in a way that has co-created genuine benefit for multiple parties; linking ideas, people and resources that would not normally interact.

- **Listen carefully** to different perspectives to develop solutions that truly address the issues at hand. Effective listening requires humility, as ideas and solutions may not appear immediately obvious or aligned with leaders' preconceptions.
 - How? Clear frameworks for discussion that ensure all perspectives are accounted for fairly, as well as internal reflection from leaders to ensure that bias or ego do not obstruct collaborative decision-making.
 - "Collaboration requires humility and courage. It's important to find balance between both." - Sigrid Willame, Director at Helora Hospital Group
 - "The first step of collaboration is to listen to others."
 Jean-Christophe Tellier, CEO of UCB



- Communicate clearly by considering the context, perspectives and vocabulary of different stakeholders and teams.
 - How? Ensure that all technical language and concepts are explained clearly during collaborative discussions.
 - "It's very important that we learn to work together and communicate together." - Prof. Bruno van Pottelsberghe, Dean of Solvay Brussels School
- Prioritise inclusivity to ensure that all perspectives are considered in collaborative decision-making, taking into account voices that may be underrepresented or discounted. This must be active and intentional to avoid presenteeism or performative inclusivity.
 - How? Develop and adopt recruitment strategies with intentional measures to eliminate bias can help HR teams build organisations with diversity of perspective, identity, and experience. Stakeholder mapping can help ensure that collaborative discussions include all relevant actors.



- Share best practices to accelerate learning and progress more broadly, in recognition that societal and environmental goals are shared and require collective action.
 - How? Establish formal or informal knowledge-sharing platforms for stakeholders to share and discuss best practices and successful case studies. Leaders can form coalitions around shared goals with peers or competitors to co-create solutions and systems-level approaches.
 - "Leadership requires experiment and sharing best practices. We are in a very complex ecosystem. There are many paths and options so it's good to inspire each other."
 Fanny Demulier, Head of Purpose and Stakeholder Engagement at Veolia
- Build purposeful partnerships to align behind a common purpose, increase engagement from new stakeholders, accelerate decision making processes, understand and dissolve hierarchical power dynamics.
 - How? Identify key stakeholders and organisations with common goals through stakeholder mapping, followed by consultations to identify mutually beneficial opportunities to work together.



Creative Leadership: inquire, explore and experiment with purpose.

- Continue learning to stay informed and knowledgeable as issues, solutions and context evolves.
 - How? Participate in and/or deliver education and training on sustainability issues.
- Be flexible and adaptable by accepting that there is never just one approach to an issue.
 - How? Adopt a collaborative governance approach as illustrated by Enabel's case study – with collaboration integrated into all levels, from decision making to implementation, to embed flexibility at organisation-level.
- Take time to step back and reflect. The growing complexity of global challenges and the urgency to address them makes it difficult for leaders to pause, step back and reflect but is critical for developing thoughtful solutions. Reflective leadership can help leaders to be mindful and enhance their ability to tap into more abstract systems thinking.
 - How? Set aside time on a regular basis for reflection either alone or with a broader team. Reflection can involve looking inwards to examine mindsets and biases, outwards to understand different perspectives, backwards to consider past situations or approaches, or forwards using scenario-based exercises to consider alternative outcomes and different futures.
- Encourage debate to harness creative tension, while ensuring that different angles and perspectives are accounted for in decision making and innovation.
 - How? Engage with different sectors, young people, competitors, or people with different levels of seniority and experience. In multi-stakeholder dialogues, asserting divergent opinions can help others to rethink their assumptions and biases.
 - "We don't know truth alone, we need to find it together."
 Wim De Geest, Project Coordinator at the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities

- **Embrace failure** to unlock innovation and forward-thinking decision-making by creating a culture of 'psychological safety'. Allowing for mistakes is an important way to close the gap between purpose and action.
 - How? Lead with humility to create an environment that embraces failure and encourage others to contribute new ideas freely. David Orgaz D'Hollader, CEO of Belgium and Netherlands Schneider Electric, suggested that leaders can ask to be challenged while working in a group to demonstrate openness to imperfection and encourage others to share freely.
 - "You just need to start acting and making mistakes. We are allowed to make mistakes, but we have an obligation to learn." - Paul Van Oyen, Director of PVO Advisory
 - "The essential attributes of a leader for sustainable change is someone who is able to work collectively to motivate a large number of people and to coordinate. To be effective in coordination, you need a high degree of humility." - Prof. Bruno van Pottelsberghe, Dean of Solvay Brussels School







Courageous Leadership: know the values that leadership stands for and nurture courage, integrity and resilience to pursue societal good.

- Challenge the status-quo to lead transformative
 - How? Courageous challenges and initiatives from board members and executives can impact organisational policy from the top-down, while establishing a culture that encourages others to do the same.
 - "We need courage to step outside of our comfort zone." -Zoë Arden, Director at CISL
 - "Be bold about using intuition, sometimes intuition goes beyond opposition." Fabrizio Corradini, Managing Director at Genuine Ventures
 - "Change first depends on the engagement of convinced persons who dare to act differently. And we all have this capacity and opportunity in our hands."
 - Jean-Christophe Tellier, CEO of UCB
- Prioritise boldly to ensure that resources and time are allocated to the necessary teams and initiatives driving sustainability. Deciding to re-prioritise requires courage as it will require trade-offs and de-prioritisation of other issues.
 - How? Engage board and senior leadership around sustainability issues, through education and engagement through a variety of stakeholders, to drive home the importance of allocating resources to these issues. Senior leaders can adopt new performance metrics and KPIs to ensure that environmental, social and financial trade-offs are seriously considered in decision-making.

Sustainable leadership means different things to different stakeholders.

Generally, participants from private sector and public sector backgrounds had different interpretations of and approaches to the leadership principles. The sector-based divides emphasize the rich conversations and ideas that are produced from diverse, multi-stakeholder teams.

- Connected leadership: Public sector participants drew on examples of multi-stakeholder dialogue, humility, and humanizing interactions, whereas private sector participants focused on systems thinking, reconnecting with external environments, and finding purpose through intentional disconnection.
- Collaborative leadership: Public sector participants generally emphasized cross-sector teamwork, whereas in the private sector, collaboration is more focused on breaking internal silos and enhancing inclusion, as well as warning against false collaboration with pre-determined agendas.
- Creative leadership: Public sector participants'
 examples of creativity included pioneering innovative
 solutions, and private sector examples included diverse
 leadership backgrounds, balancing long- and
 short-term goals, and rewarding unconventional
 leadership traits.
- Courageous leadership: For public sector participants, courage mainly involves rethinking presuppositions and normalizing mistakes, while in the private sector, it focuses on top-down boldness and prioritizing broader goals beyond profit.



Participants shared one word they felt represents a leadership quality needed for delivering a sustainable future. The larger the word size, the higher number of participants submitted that word. Courage, listening, boldness, and creativity received the most submissions from participants.

Conclusion

While collaborative learning and discussion are critical, the ultimate aim of the Symposium was to spark change in participants' approaches to leadership in mindsets and practices. In line with the Symposium's theme, 'Purpose in action', participants were encouraged to consider practical next steps for bringing learnings into their roles and organisations. A variety of concrete commitments emerged, including:

- Have difficult conversations by stepping outside of comfort zones to engage around complex topics with different stakeholders.
- Look to nature for inspiration to shape mindsets and approaches in a way that is rooted in the interconnection between people and planet.
- Find balance between short-term and long-term interests, first acknowledging the tension between the two.
- Foster a safe space for creativity, including allowing time and space for experimentation, creative exploration, and innovation.
- Be open to productive conflict by acknowledging that conflict is not inherently negative. Reframing conflict as 'debate' or 'discussion' can lead to productive outcomes.
- Accept 'unfinished leadership' by recognising that while leadership is a process of being and doing, it is also a process of becoming, so continuous learning and development is critical.
- Include cultural change on the agenda to ensure that leaders bring their organisations and external stakeholders along
 the journey.
- Develop coalitions and allies, sometimes with unexpected partners, with collaborative leadership models to speed up
 and scale up change.
- Break down silos by actively fostering connections between and across teams, sectors, and industries.
- Prioritise the low-hanging fruit by starting with the lowest-effort and highest-impact ways to achieve sustainability goals.

Building on three years of learning and evolution of the Symposium, the organising team is continuing to develop the approach to ensure that this moment of multi-stakeholder collaboration and connection builds toward positive impact for participants, their organisations, and for stakeholders across their value chains.



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We thank our case study protagonists, Fanny Demulier, Juan Manuel Serlin Balenciaga, Jean Van Wetter, Wim De Geest, Anne-Laure Lejeune, and Daniel Kryszkiewiez, who generously shared their experiences, insights, and time. Their thoughtful engagement with participants was admirable, and the value their cases added to the event speaks for itself; we were all moved, invigorated, and inspired by the conversations these cases prompted.

To all the participants who spent their day with us: thank you for exemplifying sustainable leadership in action. Your collaboration, creativity, connection, and courage were evident in your engagement with the event and your commitment to being leaders in your own lives and work.

We look forward to continuing these relationships and working together towards a more sustainable future.

07 Appendix

Methodology

A distinct methodology – blending Co-development and Socratic methods – was deployed to help participants:

- Dig deeper into their case studies
- Provide the protagonist with an external perspective to enrich and revisit their reading of the situation and process
- · Initiate participants' reflections on the wider applicability of the experience described in the case study
- Stress-test the Cambridge Framework

Process of case study breakout #1

In their case study groups, participants first took time to familiarise themselves with the case. This initial phase was followed by a dedicated period for asking clarifying questions. Their questions were aimed at helping participants better understand the case, its context, and the choices that were made, as well as identify any neglected dynamics at play.

Intended main beneficiary: protagonist (and participants).

Detailed process:

- 1. Presentation of the session by the moderator (welcome, structure, rules: Chatham House, open mindset / defer judgment, ... see inspiration below) (5 min)
- 2. Introductions and ice-breaker (5 min)
- 3. Case overview by protagonist (10 min)
- 4. Participants read the case (7 min)
- 5. Clarification phase: Participants ask clarifying questions, aimed at better understanding the case and choices that were made (surprise? why not this?), identifying neglected dynamics, better understanding the context (15 min)
- 6. Ask protagonist to react and share their insight from this discussion (does it change their perspective? What is/was critical to their success? (10 min)
- 7. Step back (using Socratic method; moderator uses the board to organise / support the discussion, see below) (20 min): Focus on the specific collaboration / engagement mechanism put in place in the case (LIFE BE FREE = consensus building, ENABEL = collaborative governance, VEOLIA = multi-stakeholder governance, EIB = external stakeholder engagement) Ask participants to reflect on their feasibility in their own context (elicit examples) and use this to have them reflect on the mindsets and leadership characteristics that make it feasible / difficult
- 8. Closing (3 min): thank everyone, remind next steps.

Process of case study breakout #2

The second breakout was guided by two overarching questions:

- 1. Based on the provocation of the case studies and participants' own experience, what do they consider are the key leadership capabilities mindsets and practices that are needed to deliver a sustainable future?
- 2. How can participants develop this leadership capacity and culture in our organisations?

Intended main beneficiary: CISL – to gather evidence – and share insights to support the development of thinking and practices of those present.

Detailed process:

- 1. Moderator invites participants to first reflect on these questions by him/herself, then in pairs (5' + 10'), using the template in their folder.
- 2. Ask for a volunteer who will present during the plenary session.
- 3. Moderator opens up discussion and solicits insights. Moderators can introduce both questions at the beginning to set up the total picture, then work on each question in sequence prompting to draw out real life examples in practice. The headlines will be captured on the board for visibility as a prompt to share in the room. Use the Cambridge framework to structure (not straight-jacket) the discussion. Ensures all an opportunity to contribute (20')
- 4. Wrap up (5'): Ask the volunteer who will present the discussion in plenary to present the intended highlights to the sub-group + ask if the people in the room feel strongly about anything else

Insights on how the methodology worked in a multi-stakeholder context.

Each breakout consisted of a diverse group of stakeholders representing business, civil society, academia, investment, and policymaking. In many cases, the participants had worked with one another outside of the Symposium, which further demonstrated the collaborative nature of the event. The value of the group discussions was derived from the diversity of the participants, each contributing their own lived experiences, backgrounds and perspectives to enrich the conversations.

The Socratic Method allowed participants to both deepen and broaden their conversations through thoughtful question-asking, open and attentive answers, and intentional dialogue. The methodology allowed for all participants across the four case study groups to contribute comfortably, while some participants were more vocal than others. Although the breakouts were shaped by guiding questions, the conversations developed organically. Following the co-development method, participants learned from on one another, and built on each other's insights. Participants demonstrated mindful reflection as they shared relevant experiences of their own and showed critical engagement with one another as they asked questions and built on each other's points.







