REPORT

Visioning Sustainability

A Participatory Workshop for Transformation

TRANSFORM

Visioning Report prepared by Kai Reimer-Watts and Sarah Burch

Visioning Sustainability: A Participatory Workshop for Transformation © 2026

Visioning report prepared by: Kai Reimer-Watts, Sarah Burch.[1]

Design work for this report completed by Abhilasha Dewan and Kai Reimer-Watts.

Cover photos include collage artwork taken from participants' creations during the Visioning Workshop that took place September 19, 2025, as well as still photos from Beyond Crisis[2] film used with permission that were also used during the workshop exercise. All photos and imagery included in this report are used with permission. Credit to Taginder Clair for many photos of the TRANSFORM Symposium.

Note that the Visioning Workshop that this report evolved from took place during the *TRANSFORM Symposium: Accelerating Sustainability Through Small and Medium-Sized Businesses*, which occurred over 3 days in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, from September 17-19, 2025. This workshop was hosted by three members of the BRIDGE Centre for Architecture + Design (University of Waterloo), including Alison Yu, Jordana Polera, and Samuel Correa, alongside TRANSFORM postdoctoral scholar Kai Reimer-Watts.

Published by the Sustainability Policy Research on Urban Transformations (SPROUT) Lab, a research lab located at the University of Waterloo, as part of the research team's contributions to the broader multi-institutional partnership that makes up the international TRANSFORM Project.

To contact us, send an email to: sburch@uwaterloo.ca

You can visit our website at:
https://uwaterloo.ca/sustainability-policy-research-on-urban-transformations-lab/

The TRANSFORM Project website is: https://transformcities.ca/

TRANSFORM

1 Suggested citation for this report: Reimer-Watts, K., & Burch, S. (2026). Visioning sustainability: A participatory workshop for transformation. Waterloo, Canada: Sustainability Policy Research on Urban Transformations (SPROUT).

2 Beyond Crisis film is a feature-length Canadian documentary on climate action directed by the lead author of this report and current postdoctoral scholar with the TRANSFORM Project, Dr. Kai Reimer-Watts. To watch the film visit: https://www.beyondcrisisfilm.com/

Land Acknowledgement

The TRANSFORM Symposium, supported by the University of Waterloo, took place at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) from September 17-19th, 2025.

The TRANSFORM team acknowledges and celebrates that the 2025 TRANSFORM Symposium took place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples in what is commonly known as Waterloo, Ontario. The work and learning of the lead TRANSFORM team based at the University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract. This land was granted to the Six Nations in 1784, which includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Since then, Six Nations of the Grand River lands comprise less than 5% of what was originally promised in the Haldimand Treaty. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place through research, learning, teaching, and community building.

About TRANSFORM

TRANSFORM was a 7-year international research project, from 2018 – 2025, based at the University of Waterloo and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

As an international research project, TRANSFORM is comprised of global researchers committed to building the capacities of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to accelerate the transition to more sustainable and resilient communities. TRANSFORM Co-Investigators included Jose DiBella, Megan Farrelly, Daniel Lang, Barry Ness, Kes McCormick, Wendy Stubbs and Arnim Wiek. While the formal research period of TRANSFORM has ended, this network continues to operate and grow to support this crucial work. We operate across five university research hubs (University of Waterloo, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Lund University, University of Freiburg and Monash University), collaborate with a range of private and public partners, including municipal governments, and act as a nexus of policy and practice. More details can be found at: www.transformcities.ca

Table of Contents

Welcome Message

Welcome to this Visioning Report, which captures the collective energy, creativity, and critical thinking that animated the TRANSFORM Symposium and its participatory Visioning Workshop. It is a privilege to introduce this work as Director of the international research partnership TRANSFORM, and to reflect on what this moment represents for our community of scholars, practitioners, business leaders, students, artists, and community partners.

This report is the result of an extraordinary shared effort. Over three days in September 2025, we came together in Waterloo to mark the culmination of seven years of international research focused on how small- and medium-sized enterprises can play a catalytic role in accelerating sustainability transformations. The symposium was not only a space for presenting findings, but also a space for listening, imagining, and co-creating – recognizing that the complex challenges of climate change, social inequity, and economic transition demand collaborative and creative responses.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the many people who made this symposium, and the Visioning Workshop at its heart, possible. This includes the dedicated TRANSFORM research team, whose intellectual leadership and care shaped both the substance and spirit of the event; the student volunteers and facilitators, particularly those from the BRIDGE Centre for Architecture + Design (University of Waterloo) whose creativity and professionalism brought the workshop design to life; and the designers and contributors who transformed raw ideas, images, and conversations into this thoughtful and visually compelling report.

Most importantly, I thank the symposium participants and community members who generously shared their time, experience, and imagination. The insights captured here emerged from your willingness to engage deeply, to challenge assumptions, and to explore what more just, resilient, and sustainable futures might look like – within businesses, across communities, and at the scale of global systems.

This Visioning Report is not intended as a definitive roadmap. Rather, it is an invitation: to reflect, to adapt, and to act. We hope it serves as a living resource – one that inspires dialogue, experimentation, and leadership well beyond the TRANSFORM project itself. The future of sustainability will be shaped not by any single actor, but by the many interconnected choices we make together.

Sarah Burch

Dr. Sarah Burch

Professor and Canada Research Chair in
Transformative Climate Change Governance
Project Director, TRANSFORM
University of Waterloo

Executive Summary

Visioning Sustainability: A Participatory Workshop for Transformation documents the outcomes of a participatory visioning workshop held during the 2025 TRANSFORM Symposium in Waterloo, Canada. This workshop brought together researchers, business leaders, policymakers, designers, and community practitioners to explore how small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can sustain and deepen their sustainability commitments within increasingly complex and volatile contexts. Using a fictional company (Cold Storage, a mid-sized refrigeration logistics and sales firm) as a shared reference point, participants collectively examined practical, organizational, societal, and systemic pathways for sustainability transformation.

A central insight that emerged from the workshop was that sustainability leadership within SMEs cannot be treated as a discretionary or "good times" activity alone. Participants consistently framed sustainability as a strategic necessity that is integral to long-term competitiveness, risk management, workforce wellbeing, and resilience in the face of climate, economic, and political uncertainties. Short-term financial pressures, shareholder expectations, and policy headwinds were recognized as real constraints, but not as sufficient justification for retreating from ongoing sustainability commitments.

At the **business level**, participants emphasized the importance of embedding sustainability more deeply into organizational structures, decision-making, and culture. Key themes included strengthening internal accountability through clearer targets, measurement, and reporting; investing in employee engagement, training, and shared ownership of sustainability goals; and reframing sustainability through more effective communication. Notably, participants stressed the value of positioning sustainability as both risk mitigation and as a source of long-term business value, rather than as an optional cost or reputational add-on. In addition, technical strategies such as energy efficiency, circular economy approaches, waste reduction, and clean energy investments were viewed as necessary but still insufficient on their own – requiring complementary cultural and governance shifts also.

At the **societal and ecosystem level**, participants highlighted the role of SMEs as conveners and collaborators. Strategic partnerships with suppliers, peers, research institutions, community organizations, and governments, were seen as critical for accelerating learning, sharing risk, and scaling impact. Participants also emphasized anchoring sustainability efforts in community needs, such as through contributing to food security, public health, and local economic resilience, and engaging broader publics through transparent storytelling and reciprocal dialogue. Government action was viewed as essential to facilitating societal changes, particularly through supportive regulation, targeted funding, preferential procurement, and incentives that reward sustainability leadership.

At the **global and systemic level**, discussions broadened to questions of climate responsibility, justice, and economic models. Participants underscored the need for SMEs to advocate for systems change – particularly a rapid transition away from fossil fuel dependence – and to prepare for future disruptions through strategic investments in resilience planning and adaptive governance. While perspectives differed on how far businesses should go in challenging dominant economic paradigms, there was broad agreement that "business as usual" is incompatible with a stable climate and living planet. SMEs were encouraged to act as champions of change within their sectors, sharing responsibility for shaping more sustainable and equitable futures.

Overall, this report is not a prescriptive roadmap but a reflective and forward-looking resource. It demonstrates the value of participatory visioning as a method for surfacing shared priorities, tensions, and opportunities, and it invites readers to adapt these insights to their own organizational and community contexts. The findings reinforce a clear message: sustainability transformation is not a linear or purely technical process, but a collective, values-driven endeavor that requires imagination, courage, and sustained collaboration across scales.

The 2025 TRANSFORM Symposium:

Accelerating Sustainability Through Small- and Medium-Sized Businesses

From September 17-19th, 2025, the TRANSFORM team at the University of Waterloo hosted a 3-day international symposium titled *TRANSFORM: Accelerating Sustainability Through Small- and Medium-Sized Businesses*.

This symposium marked the culmination of seven years of research focused on building capacity among small businesses for accelerating deeper shifts towards sustainability. The symposium was hosted at the prestigious Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) in Waterloo, Canada, with activities and lectures happening both on- and off-site.

This symposium brought together scholars, practitioners, and elected representatives to explore the ingredients of sustainability transformations, and strategies we can scale up to make our communities more resilient to a rapidly changing climate. It also featured compelling artworks by Canadian and international artists, working at the intersections of sustainability and experimentation to form a creative response. For more on these artworks and messages behind them, see the TRANSFORM Symposium Report, which is separate from this document.

Small business leaders were also present to share transformative interventions and innovations to accelerate sustainability.

Crowd gathering following the keynote presentation by speaker Diana Fox Carney at the TRANSFORM Symposium, September 17th, 2025. The title of Diana's compelling talk was "*Pathways to a Sustainable World*"

2

1

1: A staff member representing Little Mushroom Catering, which catered the event and was the first Canadian catering company to be B-Corp Certified; 2: Lena Friblick representing Botildenborg, a "social farm and kitchen" small business improving local food security and empowerment of marginalized communities in Malmö, Sweden; 3: Adrian Conrad, COO of The Cora Group, a Waterloo-based developer that led the creation of Canada's first certified Zero Carbon, net positive clean energy, commercial multi-tenant office building "evolv1" in Waterloo.

3

Visioning Sustainability: A Participatory Workshop for Transformation

On the final day of the symposium, a 2-hour workshop took place designed as a powerful 'bringing-together' of multiple themes explored so far, and giving attendees the opportunity to share their knowledge through a hands-on visioning exercise.

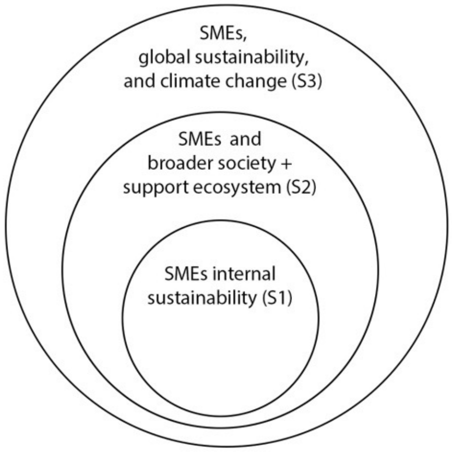
Over the workshop, attendees were divided into seven sub-groups of 3-5 people each that then rotated between three distinct 'stations' located at different tables, each addressing varied approaches to sustainability transformation and engagement through business. This included engaging in 'within-business' actions, societal-level and 'business ecosystem' actions, and actions to address climate change issues of common concern at the global scale – described further below. A total of 32 people participated, all of whom were attendees of the TRANSFORM symposium, and who embodied varied ages and personal and professional backgrounds. Professionally, attendees included representatives from research institutes, small businesses, civil society organizations, and local government.

At each station, attendees were encouraged to co-create shared visions for more sustainable futures and forms of engagement led by a fictional medium-sized business called 'Cold Storage', as well as to address potential barriers and challenges that may emerge in this effort. Facilitated, hands-on activities were designed to empower those participating to bring their best creative minds to this work, resulting in twenty different visual-textual mind maps (shown below) that described possible next steps for sustainability engagement by company employees and leaders.

This unique session was co-hosted by students in the University of Waterloo's Master of Architecture program who were also volunteers with the student-led BRIDGE Centre for Architecture + Design, and by members of the TRANSFORM research team.

This Visioning Report showcases some of the key outcomes from this workshop, including participants' insights and lessons learned.

Workshop Design and Methodology



Station 3: *SMEs and Global Sustainability: Sharing Responsibility for a Healthy Planet and Addressing the Climate Crisis*

Station 2: *SMEs' Roles in Supporting Societal Changes for Sustainability*

Station 1: *Business-Level Changes Towards Greater Sustainability*

The visioning workshop was designed to apply a 'nested' approach to each of the three stations, connecting their relatedness to each other, as the visual above helps to illustrate. Briefly, Station 1 looked more closely at changes within a business towards greater sustainability; Station 2, at SMEs' roles in supporting broader societal changes, and the 'ecosystem' of actors around a company that can help support change; and Station 3, at the relationship between SMEs and global sustainability, in particular in sharing responsibility for addressing the global climate crisis.

Before the activity began, facilitators at each station described it in more detail and posed a question for each group to respond to within the 30 minutes that they had at the station. Teams were then challenged to use the materials provided collaboratively together – including markers, sticky notes, and photos – and through conversation, decide what kind of mind map or written/visual response they'd like to create in response to the questions posed to best capture their group's core ideas.

This resulted in 20 different mind maps in total, produced by seven different groups over the three stations. Selections from the mind maps that resulted are included throughout this report.

Considering all three stations together, the intention was for participants to better see how business choices connect to changes that can happen within the business, as well as changes seen within broader societal and business ecosystems that they operate in, and within the planetary context as a whole.

The intention here was for participants to better see the interconnections between sustainability choices made (or not made) by actors within and beyond a business, that in turn serve to shape the broader systems, sub-systems and sustainability outcomes at each of these levels.

INTRODUCING

Cold Storage

a fictional company

Before groups could dive into discerning and sharing their ideas, it was important for facilitators to first 'set the stage' by describing a specific scenario for everyone to respond to.

For the purposes of this exercise, this scenario involved introducing a fictional for-profit company called Cold Storage, which operates in the refrigeration logistics and sales sector. The remainder of this section will describe this fictional company and its current context, as this was presented during the workshop.

Description of Cold Storage

Cold Storage (abbreviated as CS) is headquartered in Ontario, Canada where this workshop took place – with additional facilities also located in other provinces across Canada and the United States. Given shifts in manufacturing globally, CS is also reliant on an international supply chain spanning multiple countries, especially China and Vietnam. Its clients are based mainly in Canada and the United States, with some international sales also in Europe.

The company employs over 250 people, and has been featured for several years on a "Best Employers" list in Canada, ranking employers according to their performance across varied social, environmental and economic factors. It has also received some awards in recognition of its ongoing sustainability efforts and achievements.

For the purposes of this exercise, this scenario involved introducing a fictional for-profit company called Cold Storage, which operates in the refrigeration logistics and sales sector. The remainder of this section will describe this fictional company and its current context, as this was presented during the workshop.

1. Technical approaches to sustainability

Cold Storage integrates multiple approaches to sustainability into its core business practices – with a strong focus on making informed technological improvements and investing in greater energy-use innovations and efficiencies.

The company sources best-in-class technologies for maintaining reliable, temperature-controlled conditions to meet clients' needs, at a low energy use. It also implements strict waste management practices, working with suppliers to reclaim and even repurpose many excess materials created through the production process.

CS invests directly in on-site clean energy production to reduce its own reliance on fossil fuel energy and corporate emissions, and is increasingly pressuring companies in its supply chain to reduce their dependency and emissions also. It also offsets some of the company's direct emissions that still exist from remaining fossil fuel energy use by investing in sustainable forest planting and conservation.

2. Social sustainability, policy and leadership

On the social sustainability front, the company engages in customer outreach and education on sustainability – for instance, by promoting opportunities for energy reduction, efficiencies and best practices for food storage to help extend food life and reduce food waste.

Recognizing that sustainability is not only limited to environmental action, CS also offers employees access to multiple programs with a focus on supporting employee health and wellbeing, and supporting efforts towards developing a company-wide 'culture of sustainability' – providing dedicated workshops and 'sustainability hours' for employees to share their own ideas and engage more fully in this work.

3. Recent challenges

In recent years there have been an increasing number of new competitors entering into the cold storage industry that lack a strong sustainability focus and are undercutting the product pricing of CS, eating into its market share. The Ontario provincial policy environment is also currently not highly supportive of sustainability – a shift from just a few years ago – making it easier for companies without this focus to start and gain traction.

At the same time, Cold Storage leadership recently made the bold decision to become a publicly traded company – leading to increased shareholder demands to deliver greater returns on investment now creating added pressure.

Also, the company faces increased operational costs due to multiple factors: including broader economic inflation, extreme weather events impacting operations of key suppliers and facilities, as well as increasing heat conditions making cold storage technologies overall more costly and energy intensive to operate.

4. Effects on sustainability leadership

All of this has had somewhat of a chilling effect on sustainability leadership. After all, the company is facing increasing pressure from impatient shareholders, many of whom don't prioritize this focus as strongly; pressure from competitors and a less sustainability-focused market; and increased overall costs.

Sustainability-focused policies, positions and programming at CS are all possibly on the chopping block, and the management team is nervous – especially with an upcoming shareholder meeting around the corner.

To be clear, most of the Cold Storage team prides itself on delivering quality products and solutions for their customers – while aligning with core sustainability principles as being essential to their success, and as deeply embedded company values.

Many employees want the company to 'stay the course' on sustainability and in fact possibly deepen its commitments as key cornerstones of the company's identity and success. This is particularly the case given the many benefits employees have seen from this work, and considering the global context of climate change that requires bold action.

So, management is hearing from multiple voices, pushing strongly in different directions.

The Cold Storage management team is also broadly committed to the sustainability focus of the company – but has additional costs now to take into account, and pressures to prioritize financial returns and corporate growth or face a growing risk of backlash from investors.

Management knows that cutting employee-focused and sustainability programming could save costs in the short-term, but would also be very unpopular amongst employees and a broader public – with a risk of undermining the company's values and damaging their reputation.

5. Shift in approach and mindset needed?

So, CS management as well as the company as a whole finds itself at a crossroads – where it is clear a shift in approach and possible change in mindset is needed to "stay the course" on sustainability.

After all, it is also clear that sustainability leadership is not only important during so-called "good times" in society, but also – and perhaps especially – when times get tough.

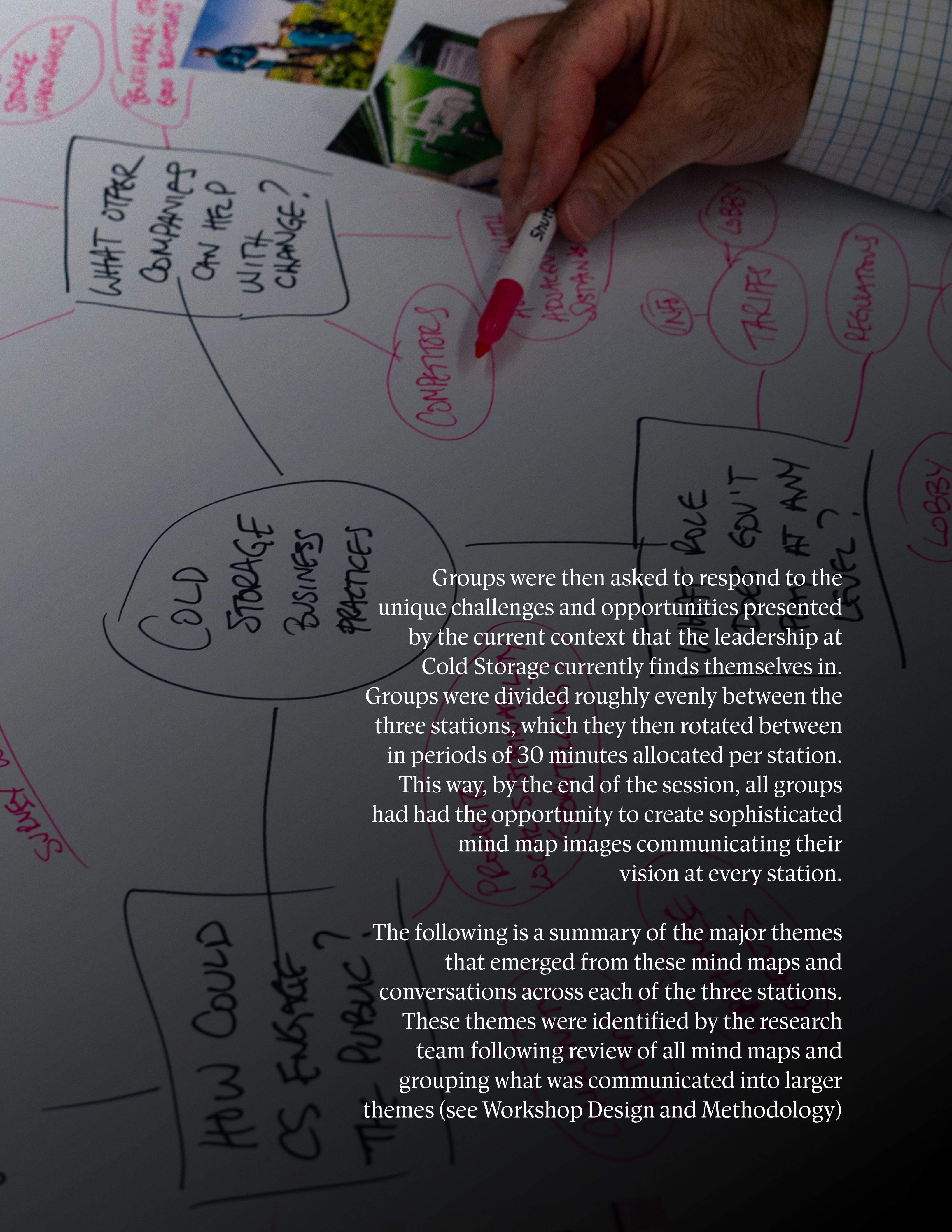
And while tradeoffs and accepting lower returns may sometimes be required, a sustainability commitment does not have to be seen as "zero sum" – as it can in fact be a key part of making Cold Storage successful and competitive in the long-term.

A shift in mindset and approach may be needed to better appreciate the strategic value of sustainability commitments within the firm – while effectively communicating the value of those commitments to those who are more skeptical to get them on board.

6. What we asked of each group

This is the full set-up illustrating the current challenging context in which Cold Storage finds itself as the company strives to move forward on its vision and commitments – a challenge that many small- and medium-sized businesses can likely relate to, and may be faced with when approaching sustainability work.

For this exercise, what we asked each group was to design a response tailored to their station to help ensure that Cold Storage actually does stick to its sustainability commitments, and perhaps even deepens these while altering their approach as needed. CS should also inspire others around them to engage more deeply on a shared journey forwards.



Groups were then asked to respond to the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the current context that the leadership at Cold Storage currently finds themselves in. Groups were divided roughly evenly between the three stations, which they then rotated between in periods of 30 minutes allocated per station. This way, by the end of the session, all groups had had the opportunity to create sophisticated mind map images communicating their vision at every station.

The following is a summary of the major themes that emerged from these mind maps and conversations across each of the three stations. These themes were identified by the research team following review of all mind maps and grouping what was communicated into larger themes (see Workshop Design and Methodology)

STATION 1

Business-level changes towards greater sustainability

Within Station 1, groups were asked to respond to the following challenging core questions:

> **What would you do, if you were in a leadership position at Cold Storage, to encourage the company towards maintaining and deepening its sustainability commitments, despite the challenges? How would you do this while also mitigating the potential risk of lost business and profits, and justifying this move to skeptical insiders and stakeholders?**

Ideas and suggestions from groups in response to these questions have been captured through the following three major themes and accompanying sub-themes described in detail below. This includes:

THEME 1

Suggested changes to business policies, social approaches to engagement, and communication approaches

THEME 2

Suggested technical changes

THEME 3

Broader changes, business model shifts and vision forward

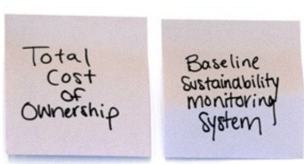
Suggested changes to business policies, social approaches and communication

Four major sub-themes emerged across the varied ideas suggested for Cold Storage to change business policies, social approaches to engagement and how the company approaches communication. This included a focus on 1) Organizational policies and actions, 2) Stakeholder input and engagement, 3) Employee programs, culture and training, and 4) Communication, values and framing.

1. Organizational Policies and Actions

Groups shared a wide range of suggestions that fit within the broader category of suggested organizational policies and actions. First and foremost, this included emphasis on the need to **implement stronger company-wide environmental and sustainability policies** – with the encouragement for Cold Storage to do any or all of the following:

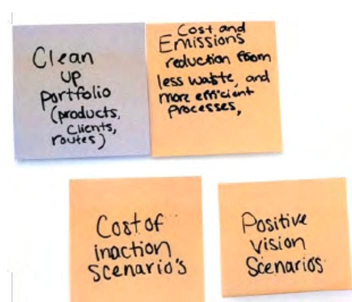
- embed clear emissions reduction targets and other sustainability targets into their mandate
- use less packaging wherever possible
- implement policies connected to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices (some of which could save the company money, such as through costs savings through using less materials, less staff turnover, reduced taxes, etc.)
- pursue new opportunities for collaboration with other companies and partners to help drive solutions and shared approaches to policy



Connected to this was an emphasis on the need to develop mechanisms for **improved internal accountability, measurement and reporting** on sustainability progress, to better hold the business (and more specifically, its management, shareholders and workers) accountable to action. This included suggestions for better auditing, disclosure and quantification of sustainability actions and progress – among other possibilities.

Within these, suggested steps for Cold Storage included the need to:

- quantify the **real risks of not taking sustainability action**, with the recognition that "it's too risky not to do this"
- quantify the potential return on investment of sustainability actions for employee engagement
- conduct technical measurements of the fully scoped company emissions across operations
- provide climate-related financial disclosures (e.g., TCFD reporting) and ESG reporting
- establish a clear view of the full cost of business ownership



Another emphasis here was for employees to help **maintain and monitor existing sustainability work** at the company, recognizing that Cold Storage already is a leader on sustainability in different ways, and that existing efforts need to be strengthened and maintained.

> Suggestions were made for company leadership to:
>
> - consider how best to continue to maintain current sustainability actions
> - consider how best to build on previous actions to better inform future efforts
> - establish a baseline sustainability monitoring system to help inform future actions

To strengthen corporate sustainability action, groups emphasized the need to **prioritize local procurement and sourcing where possible**, using local suppliers and producers. Strategies to achieve this could include, among others: offering larger contracts to local businesses, and establishing creative payment structures that can help such businesses to build their capacities to be able to fulfill such contracts.

> Groups also emphasized the need to **provide incentives and inspiration for sustainability engagement** within the company, such as through steps to:
>
> - implement specific sustainability incentives that are attractive to employees
> - find new, creative ways for employees to be more deeply motivated and engaged, by nurturing a shared company-wide passion for sustainability
> - encourage competition between departments, with sustainability as a goalpost
> - celebrate the expertise and creativity of company employees, such as through an "Idea of the Month" program that provides recognition of compelling sustainability ideas and innovations that are brought forward and created

Lastly, many groups emphasized the need for Cold Storage to **promote lifestyle shifts** towards sustainability – such as by promoting eating local, organic and seasonal foods at its facilities.

Offering educational programs on specific sustainable practices (both relevant to the business, and broader) as well as supporting employee mental and physical wellbeing were additional approaches suggested to support this effort.

2. Stakeholder Input and Engagement

Multiple groups further encouraged company leadership to **establish clear mechanisms to receive feedback on sustainability approaches** from key stakeholders – including from employees, investors and shareholders, broader business partners, customers, and a general public – that could in turn help to inform the company's future sustainability policies and adjusted approaches.

> Feedback mechanisms were seen to further link to informing many forms of company engagement, which could include efforts to:
>
> - create surveys shared with varied target groups to identify what is important to them related to company offerings, and to see if changes in product or service costs and approaches would be broadly accepted or not by target markets
> - engage company management and leaders to commit to deeper forms of more effective and inclusive sustainability engagement, incorporating stakeholder feedback

3. Employee Programs, Culture and Training

A range of suggestions emerged within this broader sub-theme, some of which can be captured under the broader umbrella of co-developing a shared, company-wide "culture of sustainability", with contributions from both company leadership and employees.

This was further described by one group as a process of **shifting values, mindsets and culture** in a holistic and systemic way towards greater sustainability across the full firm.

Suggested elements of "culture of sustainability" (COS) within the company included for Cold Storage to:

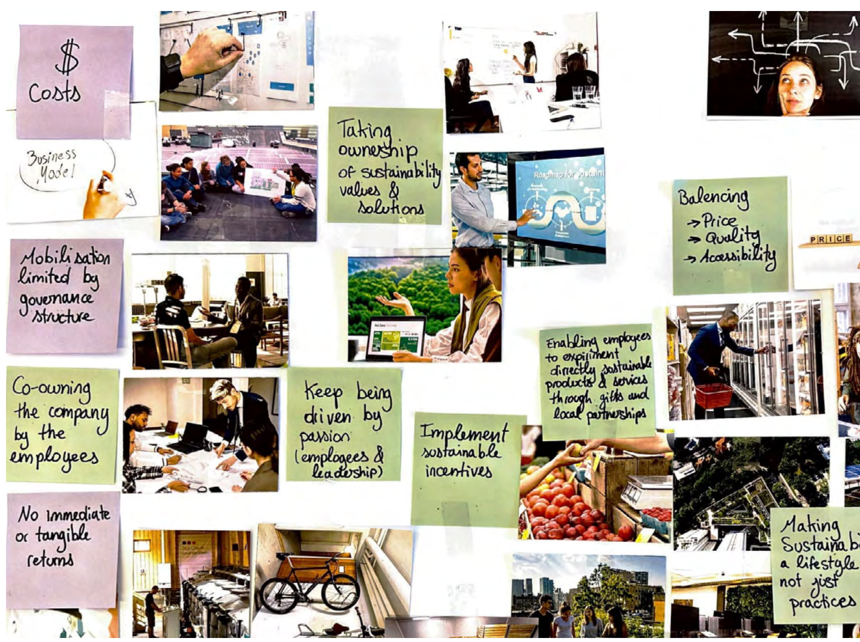
- provide targeted sustainability training and baseline education to staff
- enable employees to experiment directly with developing more sustainable products and services, initiating and receiving support for compelling new ideas
- establish employee sustainability and wellbeing programs (assuming these don't exist)
- encourage more sustainable behaviours from company management and employees (e.g., through encouraging the use of active or electric transport to get to office)
- support management- and employee-led sustainability events open to everyone in the company, and sometimes open to a broader public
- engage in local partnerships to help to strengthen and cross-support larger COS initiatives

Several groups also observed that in addition to leading to greater sustainability performance at Cold Storage, these measures could also lead to **happier and healthier employees**, while providing a greater sense of shared purpose. This could potentially have the co-benefits of greater work outcomes, higher company loyalty and less employee turnover – among others.

4. Communication, Values and Framing

Within *Communication, Values and Framing*, an even broader array of potential actions were suggested. At a high level, this included encouragement for employees to work to **improve the company's communication on its core values, identity and commitments**, and more clearly link these to sustainability and action.

For example, one group emphasized that Cold Storage leadership needs to "*reaffirm the value of values*", while another stressed the importance of employees "*taking ownership of the company's core sustainability values and potential solutions*."



Employees were encouraged to promote the value of the company's existing environmental and social policies as well, such as by helping to:

- more effectively "tell the story" of why sustainability remains an important core company value and priority
- connect sustainability engagement to other meaningful company values and actions, to show clear relationships between these and the need to achieve progress in multiple areas

Another communication sub-theme identified was the perceived need to better **justify and frame potential sustainability benefits to skeptics and stakeholders**. Within this, groups emphasized first identifying who key stakeholders or skeptics might be, and considering which different audiences might need to be most engaged to help them to "get on board" with sustainability efforts.

Another communications sub-theme identified was the perceived need to better justify and frame potential sustainability benefits to skeptics and stakeholders.

Reframing to these audiences could take multiple forms, however recommendations fell largely across two connected categories shown side-by-side in the table below.

1: Understand and frame sustainability as effective risk mitigation	2: Understand and frame sustainability as being financially good for business
Within this category, groups suggested to: • emphasize the value of intelligent risk mitigation as also being good for business (e.g., in the face of increasing product and service costs and climate-driven business impacts, building resilience protects against potential future losses and makes financial sense) • emphasize that being sustainable can also help ensure the company remains insurable in difficult times and possibly lead to insurance savings	Within this category, groups suggested to: • provide measurements of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) benefits to the business where possible • "tell the numbers story", showing the likely payback and savings created over time from implementing specific sustainable practices • communicate the short-term results of potential investments (i.e., under 2 years), while also highlighting longer-term benefits • collaborate to improve the business case for sustainability, such as through investing in sustainability pilots, research, and shared guiding principles alongside other partners

An additional theme focused on shifting the company's public communication efforts to **more clearly link to supporting local community interests, values and benefits** – something that could in turn help to win over more future supporters. For instance, company leadership could promote the benefits of their refrigeration technologies for preserving and transporting local foods to market, and could share their policies for prioritizing regional sourcing of products and materials as part of a broader overall message.

Many groups emphasized the **value of storytelling** as key to engaging broader audiences on sustainability more effectively. Suggested strategies to do better at storytelling included for Cold Storage to:

- brag about what the company uniquely offers (its "value proposition") and what makes its products or services truly valuable and unique, possibly in contrast with the competition
- highlight best practices Cold Storage follows for sustainability, and its successes
- link the company's core identity to sustainability in their public marketing (e.g., through slogans such as "*We care! Keeping your food, you and your planet from spoiling*")
- strive to form deeper connections and dialogues with diverse audiences and customers, including through providing opportunities for feedback. This can help to move company communications away from one-directional marketing only, and towards instead centering more reciprocal, multi-directional communication relationships

Suggested technical changes

Groups suggested many potential technical changes that Cold Storage could make to improve its sustainability, captured across six sub-themes: 1) Circular economy and material efficiencies, 2) Waste reduction and product life cycle analysis, 3) Experimentation and research & development (R&D) for developing alternative solutions, 4) Green infrastructure, 5) Energy efficiency, and 6) Clean energy and transportation.

1. Circular Economy and Material Efficiencies

Suggestions for **investments in the circular economy and material efficiencies** that could be made included for Cold Storage to:

- assess the potential value of treating waste as a resource to shift towards more circular economies across value chains
- automate logistics tracking to reduce material waste and associated costs of surplus, unneeded materials
- emphasize the potential co-benefits of supporting reductions in emissions and materials used company-wide – such as the cost savings of creating less waste and using more efficient processes, and benefits of meeting company sustainability goals and commitments.

2. Waste Reduction

The importance of waste reduction was expanded on by encouraging Cold Storage to:

- commit to low-waste policies – including investing in the responsible reuse, recycling and disposal of all that comes out of company facilities
- track all waste streams and complete **full product life cycle analyses**
- consider changes to building materials where needed to use lower-impact materials designed for specific environments

3. Experimentation and Research & Development

Investment in experimentation and research and development (R&D) within Cold Storage included suggestions to:

- explore **alternative food storage techniques** within Cold Storage
- potentially revert to older preservation technologies and traditional practices in some cases where it suits, such as using salt storage for some foods. This approach can also ensure a variety of solutions to problems remains on the table, and that attention is given to selecting the 'best fit' solution – which might be a simpler one (and in turn, avoiding 'overdesigned' systems)

4. Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure suggestions included the potential to add attractive green roofs to building facilities, which could also have the co-benefits of providing valuable wildlife habitat and additional absorption capacity for stormwater to help to reduce the impact of stronger rain events.

5. Energy Efficiency

Groups shared suggestions for the company to:

- **improve the energy efficiency of all business facilities**, and look at existing shortcomings and gaps to identify low-hanging fruit for action (e.g., considering lighting upgrades to more energy efficient options)
- convert building facility excess heat production into electrical power to enable on-site greenhouse-based food production, as another revenue stream and to help address community food and employment needs
- improve the logistics of transportation required to use less energy, become more efficient and reduce costs

6. Clean Energy and Transportation

Groups shared suggestions for the company to:

- **invest in their own renewable energy independence**, such as through implementing rooftop solar PV, wind, geothermal, or other clean energy options
- invest in more sustainable company trucks and transportation technologies (e.g., electric vehicle fleets)

Broader changes, business model shifts and visions forward

1. Move Away From the Current Model and Towards Alternatives

Finally, within *Broader Changes, Business Model Shifts and Visions Forward*, groups strongly suggested that Cold Storage transition away from being a publicly traded company, and towards alternative business models. This was in large part because being a publicly traded company was perceived to be harmful to the company's overall sustainability ambitions and efforts.

Groups strongly suggested that Cold Storage transition away from being a publicly traded company, and towards alternative business models.

More directly, some groups suggested a need to "*implode the current business model and structures*" and to "*reimagine the whole company structure*" in this shift to alternatives. While this might sound dramatic, this clearly does not mean everything about the company would have to be destroyed – but rather, that there should be an openness to questioning current foundations and approaches and where necessary, reimagining them.

Suggestions for changing the business model included for Cold Storage to:

- transition towards becoming a social purpose enterprise, or benefit corporation
- embrace a cooperative structure that could allow for worker co-ownership, employee shareholder programs, and more participatory forms of governance. Such a shift could have added benefits of deepening employee commitment to the company and shared investment in its success
- consider franchising the company when expanding to allow for individual ownership (rather than monopolized and centralized ownership) in different geographies

Clearly, any of these options would require moving decisively away from the company's current business model, and towards alternatives deemed more conducive to fostering sustainability.

Notably, if company leadership decided to maintain the current business model of being publicly traded with shareholders, groups emphasized the importance of demonstrating to shareholders that sustainability is good for business and should be supported. This could be done in part by highlighting the many benefits of the company's current approaches, and the direction of the overall market and broader trends that clearly underscore the value of this commitment.

2. Make the Business Case for Sustainability and Identify Opportunities

Groups also articulated a need to make a stronger business case for sustainability improvements, as well as to identify possible alternative revenue streams or spin-offs that could provide opportunities to further strengthen the business.

> Future business opportunities shared included suggestions for Cold Storage to:
>
> - create a sustainability consulting business
> - create a separate subsidiary within the business to help communicate sustainability more effectively (both internally, and as a form of public education)
> - create a trust or philanthropic arm for the business to better support different social causes (e.g., such as helping to address local food needs, and providing mobile cooling stations as a public health service during heat events)
> - promote cold storage technologies as key solutions to addressing the cooling and preservation needs of varied industries (e.g., most obviously the food industry, but also for instance preserving valuable medical supplies, vaccines and pharmaceuticals)

3. Change Relevant Decision-Making Practices and Mindsets

Also emphasized was the importance of making changes to relevant decision-making practices and mindsets that are shaping decisions made related to overall sustainability within the business. This recognizes that shifting mindsets and decision-making approaches to focus more clearly on sustainability can help to produce more innovative and favorable outcomes.

Attention to longer-term horizons in particular was seen to require a shift in mindset to counter the more common "short-term primacy" orientation of many businesses, and to define larger time horizons of value and steps forward for action.

> These shifts in mindset included the need for Cold Storage to:
>
> - **balance multiple priorities** in decision-making processes, including broadly, balancing multiple social, environmental and economic concerns to be considered (e.g., balancing "people, planet and profit")
> - balance considerations of product and service costs and consumer pricing alongside other concerns. This could include concerns for product quality, utility, accessibility, and relationship to social and environmental justice, among others

4. Establish Future Scenarios and Guiding Pathways

To help inform "where the company is headed" multiple groups emphasized the need to invest time and resources in future scenario-building and pathway development. Exploring future scenarios could in turn involve creating dedicated spaces for leadership to explore both "cost of inaction" and "vision forward" scenarios for the business to be developed, among others.

To explore "where the company is headed", Cold Storage leaders could:

- co-create tailored pathways forward for corporate sustainability leadership, with specific targets and informed by Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles
- work towards earning rigorous third party sustainability certifications, to both strengthen and inform the company's sustainability path forward, and to enhance the company's reputation

5. Empower the Workforce to Lead on Sustainability

For Cold Storage to better 'live into' the sustainability pathways it is committed to over time, groups emphasized the need to attract a more committed, lasting workforce, with the hope of increasing employee retention in part as a values-based company, and through offering clear incentives and benefits.

As shared by one group: "*Values-based companies that give their employees a chance to participate and to shape company culture have higher retention rates, and are much more attractive to the next generation workforce.*"

Groups further emphasized the importance of "*empowering employees to lead the change they want to see on sustainability… for us and the world*". Much of these efforts were seen to have the additional likely benefit of expanding market reach, and helping to further solidify the reputation and success of Cold Storage within broader markets.

6. Align Financial Investments with Sustainability Priorities

Multiple groups emphasized the need to for Cold Storage to "clean up the company portfolio" to better align with sustainability. This could include, for instance, a need to:

- investigate the positive and negative impacts of current investments across various dimensions, as well as those of the company's product development processes, suppliers, and transportation practices
- shift company funds into more responsible investment choices wherever possible, aligned with sustainability values and priorities

7. Manage Risk and Build Resilience

An additional emphasis was placed on **risk management**, including studying financial, environmental and social risks linked to the company, and investing in risk and resilience planning. This included recommendations for management to consider specific approaches to risk prevention and how to best manage identified risks.

Short-term	Long-term
Groups suggested for Cold Storage to: • give attention to skill-building, incentive programs and recruitment among employees to better incentivize strategic near-term sustainability actions • give attention to economic risk factors in the near-term that may impact sustainability engagement or company prospects, such as those due to competitors or other factors	Groups suggested for Cold Storage to: • consider leases, assets, cash flow and consumer preferences as all influencing and shaping risk • benchmark sustainability work against other areas of work and previous successes • consider broader societal issues of food security and water access that the company could possibly help to address and de-risk

Attention to **shifts in relevant politics and increasing climate change risks** on broader regional or global scales was also emphasized as increasingly important to shaping company risk management approaches.

8. Address Challenges

Finally, **challenges** were also raised as groups recognized that:

- many interventions will come at the cost of limited financial and human resources that must be accounted for alongside other costs or impacts to consider (e.g., limited staff time available, for instance)
- some interventions may not provide any immediate or tangible returns to help incentivize action, while others do
- mobilization for sustainability may be limited by the current company governance structure, and worker job descriptions and responsibilities – among other factors
- there may also be sustainability costs or shortcomings to expanding the business. This recognizes that “more and more company growth” is not necessarily always desirable or sustainable, and that it is also possible for a company to become overextended and “too big”. This again reflects the emphasis on considering all company goals through a sustainability lens, that may then help to shift the company’s key priorities


COLD STORAGE BUSINESS PRACTICES
MANAGEMENT
SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENTS
SUSTAINING
CURRENT STATE
DEEPENING
SAVINGS
PACKAGING (LESS)
MANAGING RISKS
NEW COLLABORATION
STAKEHOLD
SHAREHOLDERS
CUSTOMERS
IDENTIFY WHAT THEY NEED
IDENTIFY WHO THEY ARE
JUSTIFY TO STAKEHOLDERS
MEASUREMENTS
COLLABORATION
RESEARCH
PILOTS
STORYTELLING
SHORT TERM RESULTS <2YRS
LONG TERM
LEASES
ASSETS
CASH FLOW
BENCHMARK OTHER SUCCESSES
SKILL BUILDING (EMPLOYEES)
CONSUMER PREFERENCES
FOOD PATTERN
Environmental Policy
ESG

STATION 2

SMEs' roles in supporting societal changes for sustainability

Within Station 2, groups were asked to respond to the following provocative core questions:

> **What other organizations or companies could Cold Storage possibly work with to accelerate collective change in the refrigeration logistics sector? How could the company better engage a broader public on sustainability? What role might government (municipal, provincial, federal) play in supporting these efforts?**

Group suggestions in response to these have been captured in the following four major themes and accompanying sub-themes, expanded on in detail below:

THEME 1

Co-learning and identifying "win-wins" through strategic partnerships

THEME 2

Co-create community benefits and engage a broader public

THEME 3

Engage others in growing a circular economy based on clean energy

THEME 4

Government leadership and company advocacy efforts

Co-learning and identifying "win-wins" through strategic partnerships

1. Work With Other Leading Companies in the Sustainability Space

Responding to the first two questions, group responses emphasized a need for strategic company partnerships that can build support for sustainability efforts alongside the efforts of other businesses. This included suggestions to prioritize working with companies with an existing sustainability focus – demonstrated by existing sustainability practices, policies and third party certifications, for instance – as much as possible.

Groups further emphasized the value of **working with adjacent companies** that can support specific needs of Cold Storage, such as with companies that:

- build electric vehicle fleets and transportation
- lead on passive cooling, heating and clean energy innovations
- provide other material- or energy-efficiency improvements and innovations to help improve the sustainability of specific corporate practices and technologies

Cold Storage could further seek out **strengthening partnerships throughout its full supply chain**, for instance to:

- identify how much sustainability engagement there is (or is not) in the supply chain
- encourage suppliers to adopt more sustainable practices and technologies wherever possible
- select local or international suppliers based on their demonstrated commitments to more responsible and ambitious practices
- pivot to more local suppliers where possible, reducing transport emissions and contributing to local economic development

Further suggestions were made to extend this effort to careful selection of clientele, for instance by seeking out potential clients in companies that are already demonstrating leadership in the sustainability space, and that therefore may be more interested in and aligned with the services and values of Cold Storage.

2. Learn From Other Companies and Identify Future Opportunities

Searching out opportunities to learn from other companies and business leaders was also stressed, for instance by **benchmarking sustainability efforts** of Cold Storage against those of other leading firms. This could include coordinating sustainability efforts with other leaders and even, at times, with potential competitors in the sector – such as by initiating horizontal coordination with competitors, and co-learning alongside peers.

> Opportunities to make valued contributions in their sector could also include, among others, the potential to:
>
> - **engage in public speaking** to share best practices and experiences with other business leaders
> - support cross-training and capacity-building initiatives in the industry
> - share relevant data and reports openly with peers
> - **invite community members and other businesses** who want to learn about viable sustainability practices or interventions to tour the company's facilities to learn more

In turn, groups suggested that Cold Storage could play a valuable role in **sharing and providing guidance to other businesses** as well, participating in the broader "sharing economy" to contribute to more sustainable futures, and to help "lift multiple boats" including its own.

From a business perspective, this could involve **establishing working relationships with other companies** to help develop their value propositions further, and in compensation for these efforts, exploring opportunities as potential sustainability consultants within the sector.

Suggested future business opportunities could also include seeking out potential partnerships with food wholesalers and retailers, to provide each of these with targeted cold storage solutions to address their unique cooling needs.

3. Establish Supportive Networks and Institutional Partnerships

> Cold Storage leaders were encouraged to seek (and co-create) strategic support for sustainability efforts from other actors and networks, which could possibly be achieved by steps to:
>
> - **create cooperative networks** committed to making sustainability progress across the full sector
> - **engage intermediary organizations**, such as non-profit organizations already committed to supporting companies on leading in sustainability (e.g., Green Economy Canada)
> - **build partnerships and strategic support networks with government** to enable Cold Storage to better contribute to addressing social needs, with government support (e.g., supporting the development of public cooling stations to help address increasing heat events due to climate change)

- **build institutional partnerships**, including with universities or think tanks – such as through creating student co-op placements between select universities and the company, or engaging students and faculty in relevant disciplines in product design challenges with a specific sustainability focus

In total, such partnerships and networks could help to inform further research, problem-solving and solutions-building linked to sustainability – and in turn, provide Cold Storage employees with the deeper evidence and guidance they need to better inform the company's future efforts.

4. Address Potential Challenges

Finally, within the context of pushing forward to secure strategic partnerships to help drive sustainability, a range of challenges were also mentioned. This included recognizing that:

- company shareholders might not be that interested in advancing corporate or community-wide sustainability, or supporting sustainability efforts
- some companies in the sector might be disengaged or adverse to engaging on sustainability
- within any given broader society in which Cold Storage happens to be situated, there may be a more general societal avoidance and unwillingness to act for sustainability, and to address the climate crisis

Clearly, any of these or possibly other challenges could emerge and need to be carefully addressed on the journey towards deepening sustainability, as Cold Storage leaders seek to strategically advance a holistic sustainability agenda and solutions alongside chosen partners.

Co-create community benefits and engage broader audiences

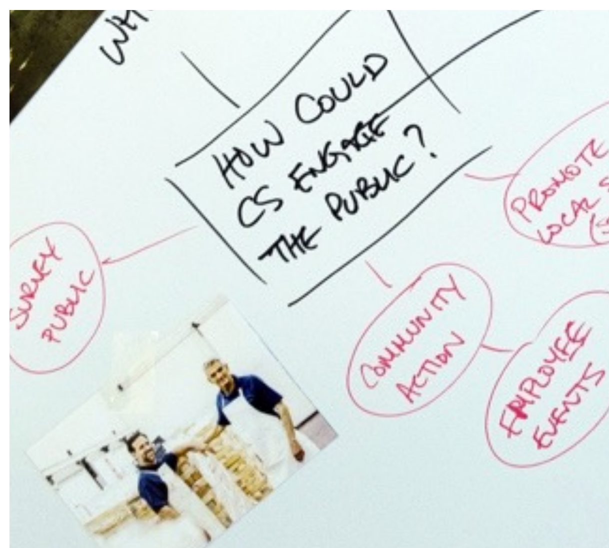
Beyond business-to-business or institutional partnerships, groups also emphasized the value of engaging broader communities and non-business actors in co-creating and leading sustainability efforts.

> Efforts to engage broader communities could be done, for instance, through taking steps to:
>
> - **support community actions and events** linked to sustainability
> - **support community training and educational opportunities** on sustainability. For instance, Cold Storage could offer select educational workshops and contribute to shaping local school curriculum (which could also provide opportunities for company leaders to learn directly from students and communities)
> - **share the company's sustainability stories** more broadly – such as through providing public talks, presenting at conferences, industry trade shows, etc.
> - **promote local sustainability** through storytelling, centering especially a focus on "what works"

1. Identify the Most Suitable Audiences for Engagement, and How to Engage Them

Within all these actions, groups emphasized the need for Cold Storage leaders to actively consider their audience's possible interests, and how best to engage them. Groups suggested company leaders ask direct questions such as "*Who could benefit most from the knowledge and expertise within Cold Storage?*" as a way to help guide leaders towards identifying potential 'best audiences' to engage, and to direct future efforts towards.

Suggestions were also made to possibly design surveys to share with broader audiences, such as potential suppliers, community members, clients and others, to help provide Cold Storage with greater insight on specific community needs. This could in turn help to deepen the company's relationship with its customers and other stakeholders by soliciting their input, to then better inform future business approaches.



2. Anchor the Company in Community Needs and Wellbeing

Another broad suggestion made by many groups was to **anchor Cold Storage in local communities and their identified needs**, to ensure that sustainability efforts made also provide tangible social benefits. This could include efforts to contribute to community wellbeing, such as through providing community-based 'cooling'

initiatives like tree planting and public cooling stations that could be used during heat events for improved public health.

Other suggestions included **contributing to local food security**, such as by sourcing local food, and providing reliable refrigeration solutions to local food producers and retailers. To better address community food needs and security, one group suggested that Cold Storage develop a philanthropic wing of the company specifically dedicated to supporting and funding this effort.

3. Communicate the Benefits of Company Efforts

Further suggestions were made for Cold Storage to focus on strategic **framing and communicating the potential benefits of their work**, such as by promoting sustainability efforts as helping to "*improve and enable the local environment for business leadership and success*" in these areas, and emphasizing the role of these efforts in supporting "*job creation, job security, business friendly spaces, and entrepreneurship*". Emphasizing the real likely benefits of these efforts could help make their value more tangible and appreciated by broader communities.

Engage others in growing circular economies based on clean energy

Groups further emphasized the importance of engaging others in growing a more circular economy powered by cleaner energy sources (such as renewables), as well as supporting strategic material and technological changes society-wide. Both of these were seen to be additional key drivers for sustainability at Cold Storage.

1. Invest in Clean Energy and Transport Solutions

Support for these priorities could include, for instance, **investing in clean energy** and distributed energy systems. Within this, suggestions were made to:

- connect facilities to local district energy systems
- support electrical micro-grids that could benefit broader communities
- influence local energy choices (e.g., decisions of local utilities, and transport choices)
- look for broader synergies and collaborations for integrating clean energy more intentionally across local economies

Further suggestions were made for the company to **contribute to the growth of clean energy society-wide** through making its own strategic investments, such as by taking steps to:

- support local solar co-operatives
- adopt solar energy for more of the company's facilities as a way to reduce emissions, and to help strengthen energy resilience and independence (e.g., through solar installations on rooftops, parking lots, transport trucks, etc.)
- make other investments in local clean energy where appropriate (geothermal, wind, hydro, etc.)
- support more sustainable transport options (e.g., shifting Cold Storage's delivery systems away from reliance on transport trucks to rail instead through 'truck-to-rail' approaches, or potentially subletting space on trucks already delivering other goods to decrease overall transport needs and to be more energy-efficient)

2. Identify Tangible Benefits of Investing in the Circular Economy

Finally, groups emphasized that Cold Storage should seek to identify tangible benefits in shifting towards a more circular economy in partnership with other actors (e.g., other companies, institutions, individuals and organizations). For instance, this could include steps to **identify the many "value-adds" created by engaging in the circular economy** for local food producers, restaurants and retailers, and creating new value-adds for both Cold Storage and partners wherever possible (i.e., finding strategic "win-wins").

For example, this might include seeing value in taking steps to:

- partner with other businesses that could use the surplus heat that is produced through the company's operations, to help ensure this excess energy does not go to waste
- highlight ways in which Cold Storage could be more resilient by becoming more integrated into a broader circular economy (e.g., through having more reliable local suppliers and partners)
- imagine how the company could contribute to providing greater community employment – e.g., through increased recruitment of local workers and use of locally-sourced materials – among other potential community-scale benefits

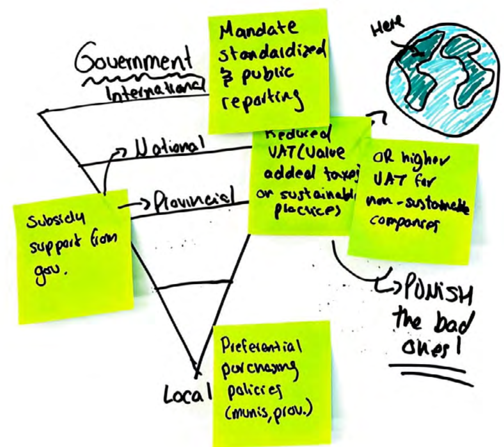
Encourage government leadership and access to business supports

Finally, groups emphasized the need for government leadership and support at different levels through providing additional policies and regulations. As a first step, this could include steps to **implement regulations in favor of corporate sustainability practices**, as well as potentially to mandate public sustainability reporting by all businesses within a given sector, or multiple sectors. It could also include efforts to shape and inform government sustainability policies with an emphasis on future-proofing and future-planning – with suggestions for governments to "combine policy, planning and practice" in a more proactive way, and to try to anticipate future changes in order to better plan for them. Further suggestions linked to government leadership are below, and can be found in the theme – *Advocate for Improved Government Leadership and More Democratic Decision-Making Processes* on p. 40.

1. Use Tax Levers and Preferential Purchasing to Help Incentivize Sustainability

Other actions that varied levels of government could take included suggestions to:

- **use government tax levers** to incentivize sustainability, such as through reducing Value Added Taxes on sustainable products and practices, while applying a higher tax on less sustainable products and practices
- **consider preferential purchasing options** by government to better support sustainable companies and products. For example, government entities could potentially purchase sustainable cold storage solutions for their buildings, which in turn helps support their manufacture



2. Fund Opportunities that Support SME Sustainability Practices

Government funding streams to support SME sustainability leadership could also clearly make a difference. Among others, suggestions for governments included providing:

- **clear incentives for SME leadership on sustainability**, including funding streams and opportunities
- **direct subsidy support** provided by national or provincial governments to support more sustainable business practices
- **regulations to phase-out harmful practices and substances** within the refrigeration industry, and to promote safer alternatives
- **support for fleet electrification** within both public and private sectors

3. Help Address Social, Economic and Environmental Issues that Impact Communities

Groups also commented on the vital role of government in helping to address pressing social, economic and environmental issues that matter to communities. For instance, this could include the roles of different levels of government in addressing issues of food security – helping to build greater community-level resiliency in the face of worsening climate change impacts, and helping to reduce food waste and improve access to quality healthy and affordable food across communities.

STATION 3

SMEs and global sustainability: Sharing responsibility for a healthy planet and addressing the climate crisis

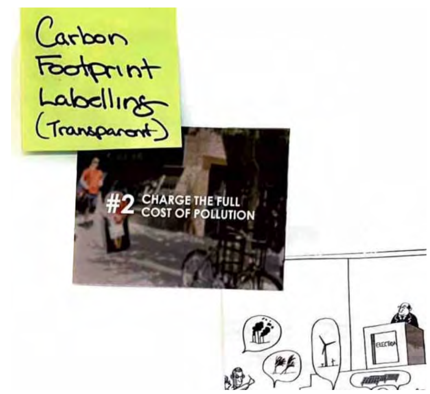
Within the third station, participants shared critical responses to the broadest questions posed over the workshop:

> **Given this context of increasing vulnerability and company contributions to climate change, how can Cold Storage best adapt, build resilience, reduce its negative impacts, and help to champion much-needed changes and climate action? What should business leaders prioritize? Be sure to consider the company's own responsibility for air pollution contributing to worsening climate change as part of your responses.**

At a high level, groups described larger policy and systemic changes that the company could take or advocate for to more effectively address the climate crisis. This could include the role of Cold Storage and its employees in creating greater political pressure to support targeted systemic changes, such as by making climate change and its solutions a key election issue, and by advocating at different levels of government for climate action solutions that also center social equity and justice. The suggestion was made for company leaders to strategically target different government bodies and jurisdictional responsibilities, to better increase ambition and accountability across multiple levels of government.

1. "Systems Change" and Shifting Away From Harmful Fossil Fuel Dependencies

Understanding the outsized contribution of burning fossil fuels to changing the earth's climate, as well as creating localized air pollution – both of which cause significant harm – advocacy for systems changes included strong emphasis on the need to urgently **phase out societal dependencies on fossil fuels**.



This included centering the need for advocacy to all levels of government to "stop subsidizing more fossil fuels", "end fossil fuels now" and to "be wise, decarbonize". It also included suggestions to incorporate the full social, environmental, and economic costs of pollution into its pricing – such as by pricing carbon.

Within the company itself, there was emphasis on the need for Cold Storage to **divest its financial portfolios of all fossil fuel holdings**, and to provide transparent carbon footprint labelling on all of its products (something that could also be mandated for businesses more broadly).

Groups emphasized the importance of "systems change not climate change" to "prevent human extinction" – and encouraged Cold Storage, other companies and all levels government to apply more effective ambitious environmental and social policies to help address this global crisis.

Given clear shortcomings of current systems and approaches that have struggled to break from their dependencies on dirty energy, this could also include **experimenting with new approaches** – informed by community needs, justice and local research, to discover what works best for facilitating energy systems transitions across varied contexts.

2. Shift Towards Clean Energy and Lower-Impact Transport

In addition to shifting away from fossil fuels as an energy source, groups logically suggested the company also shift towards strategic clean energy investments and decisions – including building resilience through investing in district energy solutions, "smoothing buffers" (i.e., battery energy storage systems), decreasing overall cost of energy, and purchasing local renewable energy products and certificates.

Suggestions were made for Cold Storage to:

- increase logistical efficiencies, such as by reducing transportation by shipping or air as a means to help **reduce transport impacts** connected to the business
- track and measure the impacts of lowering emissions, travel miles and dollars saved to help justify and inform company efforts to reduce transport impacts further
- move towards greater local distribution where possible, such as by building out supply chains with better regional integration with suppliers around the Great Lakes (i.e., in Canada and the U.S.)

Groups also emphasized the need to shift behaviour alongside making systems-wide changes. This included suggestions for all company leaders and employees to:

- use lower-impact personal transport options such as active or public transport, or possibly ride-sharing programs
- **support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** as key guideposts for informing future company actions. The SDGs also usefully underscore the importance of making progress in multiple areas as they are interconnected, including through supporting both strategic personal and systems-wide changes

3. Make Structural Adaptations and Prepare for Future Disruptions

In addition to these mitigative approaches to reduce business impacts that could otherwise worsen the crisis, groups also shared suggested adaptive approaches that Cold Storage could engage with to better prepare itself for potential future disruptions.

This included suggestions to:

- **build resilience** through investing in risk management and resilience-planning efforts
- **create redundancies in case of disruption** – such as by ensuring back-ups are available in the event of current technologies going down, and considering obtaining multiple suppliers of specific products to help create more resilient supply chains

Groups further suggested that Cold Storage leaders make contingency plans, including by considering appropriate business responses to varied "What if?" crisis situations. This could include, for instance, creating building management and evacuation plans in the event of severe weather or other disruptions, and exploring forecasts for potential extreme weather events ahead to be more informed and better able to plan accordingly.

Deeper structural suggestions for Cold Storage to adapt as a successful business including recommendations for company leaders to explore the need to:

- *"get out of being a publicly traded company"*, to then be able to move towards adopting alternative business models instead that are more conducive to operating sustainably
- consider the choice of business model as a vital form of adaptation to a changing climate and changing economic/social realities, and an important part of moving the company towards being more sustainable (explored further in the section *Move Away From the Current Model and Towards Alternatives* on p. 21)

4. Create Broader Support Networks, Community Solidarity and Mutual Aid

Many groups also made the case that successful adaptation to dramatically changing circumstances might also involve strengthening company engagement in creating broader support networks and partnerships, beyond the typical business activities and engagements for Cold Storage.

For example, this could involve efforts to:

- **collaborate and deepen commitments to sustainability** across the varied networks the company is connected to
- **support strategic sustainability investments** in the company's suppliers and local food producers – including helping these networks to develop greater efficiencies and strategies to better increase sustainability that can also be amplified and shared with others

Further, several groups advocated for Cold Storage to **support mutual aid and movement-building for social causes** across the varied places in which it operates – playing a constructive role as a vocal advocate for community empowerment and a justice-based, "people first" approach to policies addressing the climate crisis.

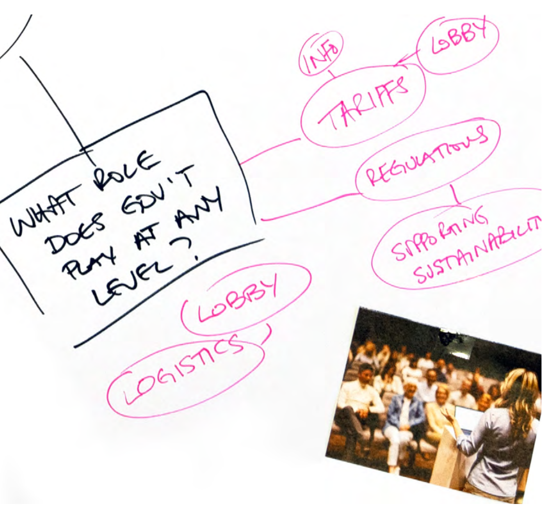
Supporting mutual aid efforts could be another way that Cold Storage could support the communities it is connected to in solidarity and for collective empowerment – particularly following natural disasters or other calamities where such aid may be sorely needed.

Considerations of equity and justice were further referenced in connection to active solidarity with Indigenous-led advocacy and rights, supporting local and international climate justice work, and supporting more vulnerable, marginalized communities wherever possible in their own connected struggles for justice.

Notably, insights here included that advocacy for a more equitable, just society that cares for all is not “charity”, but rather a vital ingredient of broader societal stability. By proactively seeking to support communities and prevent existing social crises from getting worse, this can in turn enable many businesses to also operate more sustainably and securely over time, within more stable societies.

5. Advocate for Improved Government Leadership and More Democratic Decision-Making Processes

Multiple groups suggested that Cold Storage also be an **advocate for improved government sustainability leadership and inclusive society-wide decision-making processes**, enabling customers and a broader public alike to make more informed decisions around sustainability unique to their context, and discern how best to justly address the climate crisis.



Contrasting with the common perception of corporate lobbying of governments as a means to often weaken existing environmental, social and sustainability standards, groups instead emphasized the ways in which Cold Storage could actually play a positive role in encouraging sustainability standards to be refined and strengthened.

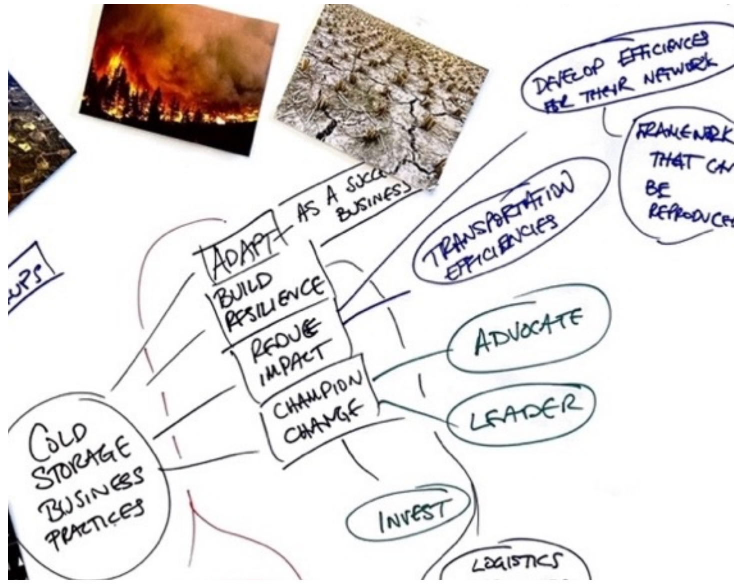
For instance, groups suggested the importance of strategic lobbying of specific government bodies with sustainability principles and the public interest in mind – not only the company’s own interests. In this way, Cold Storage could aim to **strengthen government sustainability policies**, and shape these to help develop more sustainable business ecosystems. Such advocacy could take place across local, provincial, federal, and possibly even international scales. This could in turn help enable many more businesses operating across varied economies to operate more sustainably.

To support greater community-level empowerment and participation in shaping decisions – especially those that impact people where they live – suggestions were made for Cold Storage to **support larger distributed, more democratic decision-making structures** engaging on sustainability across the full economy that many more people could then participate in and contribute to. This could include, for instance, supporting structured town hall forums, workshops and engagement forums facilitated by varied actors – from local government, to businesses, community groups, educational institutions, non-profits, etc.

Advocacy efforts could include, among others, pushing for intelligent legislation that supports companies in sustainably managing waste streams; provides greater support for clean technologies and innovations; and supports business logistics across sectors to increase efficiencies and reduce negative impacts. **Working with municipalities** was also suggested as being a valuable type of partnership to accelerate and support local-level, contextual changes. Finally, “**leading by example**” was highlighted as a clear way that Cold Storage can help to shape and further influence government policies in positive directions.

6. Become a Champion of Change to Help Shape the Sector

Despite facing real challenges, all groups still encouraged Cold Storage leaders to “dig in”, find their courage, and position the company to be a **strong champion of real change** for more sustainable practices and futures.



This included emphasis on the role of Cold Storage in sustainability advocacy and “being a leader”, in many forms – including sharing best practices and opportunities for action throughout its networks that it may be connected to.

Encouragement to **invest in circular production models** was also shared, with the hope to develop models of more sustainable production that could then be further replicated by others. This could include choosing suppliers based on their commitment to responsible sustainability practices, among other approaches – with the intention to help shape the full sector the company is a part of for the better.

7. Challenge Mainstream Capitalism and the Logic of “Business-As-Usual”

Connecting multiple threads, all groups advocated for Cold Storage to **challenge the dominant logic of mainstream capitalism and “business-as-usual”** in some form – logic that too often places the interests of profit over all other legitimate interests, and can clearly lead to systemic crises and very harmful social, economic and environmental outcomes, jeopardizing our shared futures.

Instead, groups advocated for the company to **centre sustainability practices, knowledge sharing, and social and environmental benefits** as its top priorities, while also attending to economic sustainability. “*Planet over profit*” and “*There is enough on this planet for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed*” were two phrases often shared that embody this perspective.

More specifically, one group shared its view that “*If the climate were a bank, it would have been saved*” as a critical admonishment of mainstream capitalism and a reference to the massive financial bailouts that failing banks have in the past received – while the failing environment that supports all our civilizations may receive little attention and no bailout at all.

These types of systemic failures may be part of what led some groups to emphasize the need to “overthrow capitalism” in order to effectively address the climate crisis. While not all groups felt this way, some asserted that ideally, there should not be private ownership but instead locally-grounded and accountable co-stewardship of shared resources. This could include more cooperative-based economies that companies like Cold Storage could then operate within and contribute to, as a way to better strengthen the overall sustainability of a given society.

8. Co-Develop Visions Towards Far More Sustainable Futures

Regardless of differing perspectives on how best to change dominant economic systems that Cold Storage operates within, all groups agreed that company leaders need to get engaged in **co-creating more compelling visions towards far more sustainable futures** alongside willing partners. This could then lead to new visions and pathways that many more people are then also able to contribute to.

Such visions could be informed by key principles such as recognizing energy as a human right, upholding Indigenous rights and the rights of more marginalized and climate-impacted communities, and centering efforts towards climate justice.

The hope shared was that one day, such principles and approaches towards sustainability would be fully integrated and normalized – making sustainability the foundation from which people shape everything else as a society. This could then, with time, solve many of the major systemic environmental, social and economic crises human communities and businesses are now faced with, caused in large part by highly unsustainable economic systems.

This perspective also recognizes that **many of the crises humanity now faces can be traced back to economic systems and ways of being that devalue both human and non-human life**. This includes dominant systems and economic decision-making practices that clearly devalue nature, and that often avoid integrating responsibility for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the environmental commons we all share, and of the systems we create and rely on. Where current approaches may often 'discount' humanity's current and future survival, it is clear that we instead need far more just, sustainable economies and informed decision-making approaches that enable us to take care of each other and our one living planet much better.

9. Address Challenges in Responding to the Climate Crisis

Challenges in responding to the climate crisis are clearly many, and groups also raised concerns about how Cold Storage as a local actor can best have a significant impact on addressing such a massive global crisis. At a broader scale, participants flagged that **resources are often scarce** to address climate-related challenges, and that solutions may not always be immediately available where or when they are needed.

Further, groups expressed skepticism at current and past politics that shape many societal responses to climate change, including pointing out that many international climate treaties that countries are signatories to are not legally binding, and so it can be even harder to hold nations accountable to their commitments. Additional challenges such as **dealing with social resistance to change and downplaying or denial of the crisis** among those who the company may interact with – including possibly among some of its own customers and suppliers – were also raised as areas of tension that may need to be dealt with.

What next? Mobilizing knowledge for a more sustainable future

To design societies that are truly "built to last" for the next generations – all of whom deserve a place on this life-giving earth to call home – adopting sustainability mindsets and approaches in all areas of our lives and societies clearly greatly matters. This includes leadership across all scales and types of business as well.

Moving forward from this workshop, one might naturally ask: What next? What did this accomplish? And how can it be leveraged to support even more positive outcomes and 'ripple effects' from this engagement moving forwards?

Aside from the positive impacts that we hope the workshop had on those who participated in it firsthand, it is equally important to us that this knowledge be mobilized and continue to have impact beyond this one-off event. So, we turn next to some starting ideas for how best to do this.

Action point: Time to host your own "visioning workshop"?

A key outcome for us from this process was seeing the value in hosting even a single workshop like this, when it is carefully designed and orchestrated. Hence, emerging from this process we feel it is worth sharing the inspiration and encouragement for readers to consider hosting their own sustainability "visioning workshops".

Reflecting back, in ideal circumstances we would have liked to continue to build on this learning experience by potentially hosting a series of workshops with the same participants – or also inviting others in. In this case, as we engaged a unique group of participants who came from many places – some of whom were international attendees to the broader symposium and returned home once it was over – a series of workshops was not possible. However, we invite readers to consider how to best adapt this example to suit your own needs, either by hosting a one-off workshop or series as may be most appropriate. A series of workshops often demands more from participants and their time, however could also enable those engaged to "dig into" specific topics in more detail, giving more time to each than may be possible in only one workshop.

If you are considering hosting a workshop of this nature, the following steps may help you to adapt the techniques used here to better prepare for it. Note that these capture a general overview of the steps our team followed, but could be adapted or changed based on your preferences. These steps are fluid, changeable, at times overlapping, and not exhaustive.

A. Consider the **intended focus of the workshop** and what you as an organizer want to get out of it. *What are the workshop goals and intentions? Why are you hosting it? What is the workshop's core function or purpose? Why this workshop, at this time?*

B. Consider the **intended audiences** you are interested to invite to participate. Ask yourself: *In what ways might this audience be interested in this workshop? How might attendees benefit from participating? Who is being included, and who excluded? How is this workshop being designed to be accessible – or not accessible – to the people you are hoping will participate? Does the event present any barriers to access and meaningful participation that should be addressed?*

   While "bounding the scope" of focus and participation can often be necessary for more effective workshops tailored to specific audiences, it is still good for organizers to understand why they are including or excluding certain audiences from participating, and to critically examine these choices and assumptions. *Are you confident that the audiences you hope will participate are the best audiences for what you are offering at this time?* Critically examine your choices – and if you wish, explore how the workshop might change if you as an organizer made different choices.

C. Consider the **place and time for hosting** the workshop, tailoring this according to what might work best for engaging intended participants. *Is the location and timing of the event a good match for its intended process and outcomes? How can these choices help to facilitate the engagement process, for better outcomes?*

D. Consider the **workshop design**. *Will the scenario presented (if there is one) be based around a specific, real-world company's experience with sustainability, or something fictional? Will participants engage together during the workshop as a full group, or* *separately as either individuals or smaller sub-groups? How can the workshop design best facilitate participants' own deeper engagement, creativity and critical thinking in the time available? What creative approaches could be taken by facilitators to make the workshop more interesting and engaging – and a better experience for participants?*

E. Consider **who to host the workshop with**. *Who will facilitate the workshop, how will they facilitate it, and what will be everyone's respective roles? Will there be facilitators responsible for connecting with different groups, introducing specific stations, and answering possible questions? Are there any specific partners to approach in advance who might help to "elevate" the workshop experience – potentially contributing to a stronger design, and better engaging intended audiences?*

F. Consider the **intended outputs, and how best to capture knowledge** emerging from the workshop. *How will knowledge be captured during or after the workshop, so that it can be shared further and not lost – and who will be responsible for this? Are there specific methods or creative approaches to capturing knowledge that might be best suited to this situation?*

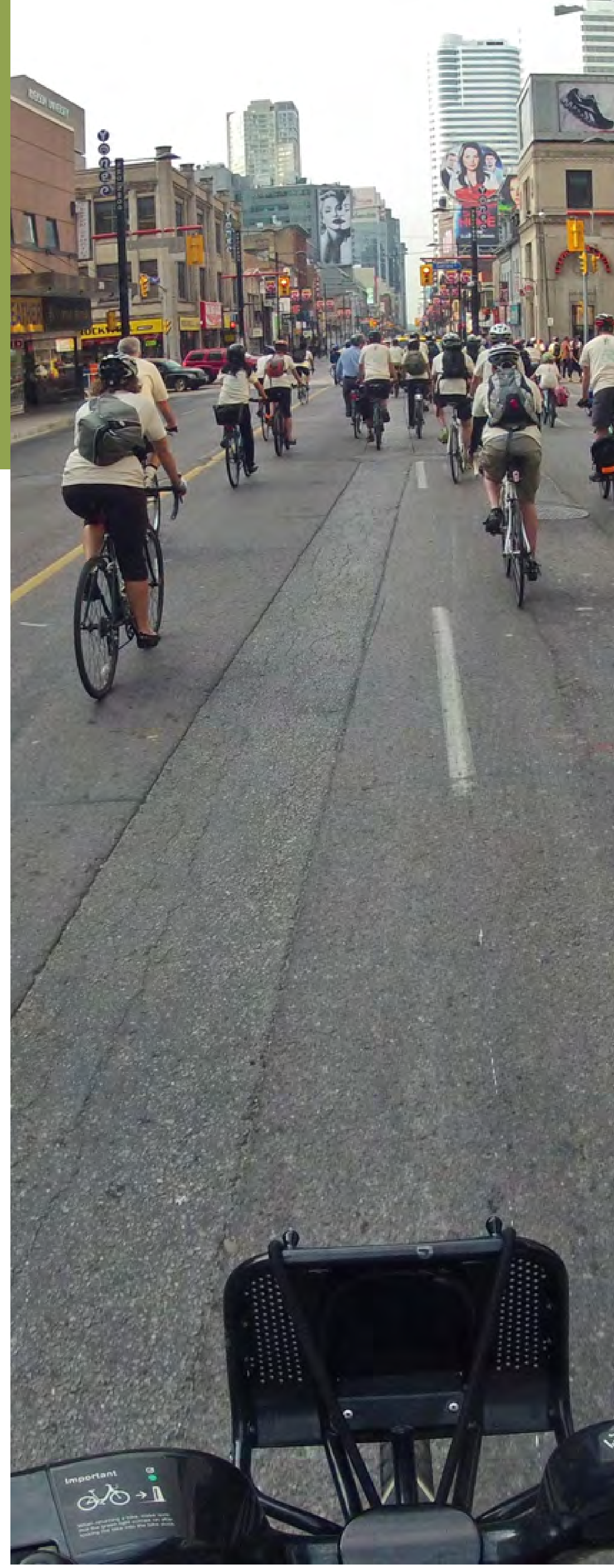
G. Once the workshop is finished, consider how best to **mobilize knowledge that is shared**. *How will this knowledge be documented and summarized? What will you translate it into? How will it be used or shared further, and "put to work" in service of deepening sustainability?*

For example, it is possible that the outcomes of your workshop could be used to help inform future actions – such as the development of different working groups designed to explore and address deeper action in diverse areas. Ask the question: *Following a workshop like this, then what? How can this effort best be translated into further action?*

Ask yourself: *What is in your own circle of control or influence? How can you and others move towards taking greater responsibility for specific actions? How can you best leverage the key outcomes of this workshop into greater action?*

H. Finally, **celebrate your accomplishments** along with participants! There are many potential ways to move forward in leveraging the knowledge created and ideas shared, and it's up to all involved to decide how best to move this work forwards.

Closing ideas for acting towards a sustainable future



While there is much contained within these pages, this report does not comprehensively cover the wide range of actions that could be taken by small- and medium-sized enterprises towards more sustainable business models, and a more sustainable future. Further ideas for action can be tailored to your own specific time, place and contexts in which you hope to use them. To support this, we invite you to take any ideas or inspirations for direction forward from this summary report that may be most useful to you.

Clearly, attention to long-term sustainability and caring for both people and nature is essential for the systems that any given company or society decides to build on our living planet to succeed, and to not be set-up simply to 'struggle' against nature and fail.

Instead, through embedding an **informed and adaptable sustainability mindset** – evolving with new insights, courage, and information – human-made systems and the businesses that shape them can be designed to be meaningfully *reciprocal* with nature and with the communities they support.

In this way, rather than being 'net contributors' to worsening environmental and social problems, businesses can play a far more positive role in giving back to the natural world and communities that sustain us all, and that more than ever need our thoughtful attention and care.

It is up to all of us, then, as business leaders, members of diverse societies, cultures, and of this planet, to act with this knowledge in mind – if we are to shape businesses that will last, and sustainable legacies for generations to come that we can truly be proud of.

Department of Geography and Environmental Management
University of Waterloo

EV1-140, 200 University Ave. W.
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1
+1-519-888-4567

@TRANSFORM_SME

transformcities.ca

This report was made possible by funding from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council