

# Generating Sustainable Value: Moving Beyond Green Teams to Transformation Collaboratives<sup>©</sup>



Research Study produced for *Sabre Holdings* by:

## **Dominican University, Program in Sustainable Enterprise “Green MBA Program”**

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# Foreword



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It gives me great pleasure to introduce this research project and I want to express my deepest thanks to my cohorts in Sustainability at the companies who participated in this project. It is this kind of open sharing of good practices that makes this job uniquely satisfying, because when we have a problem to solve, we inevitably have a network of colleagues to reach out to, each with unique levels of expertise to share.

When I launched this project with the MBA Program in Sustainable Enterprise within Dominican University, I was looking to benchmark what we were doing at *Sabre Holdings* with our global Eco Teams and to gain insight on the practices employed at other leading companies. For the purposes of this study I am going to continue to use the word “Green Teams<sup>3</sup>” but for those who know me, I tend to avoid the word “green” in that it offers an extremely limited definition of what these employee-led teams are actually focused on.

The project started with an excellent foundation from prior studies<sup>4</sup> on Green Teams that had illustrated organizational attributes of Green Teams as well as primary focal areas such as; infusing the workplace with education on sustainability, catalyzing awareness about the issues, identifying operational efficiencies and bringing sustainability deeper into the organization.

What I really wanted to know with this research was how many of these teams were creating ideas that could be translated into new products and services, thus adding value to the top line of the business and not merely creating bottom line savings. My insight was that this former activity would, if an identifiable phenomenon, be much more interesting and worth exploring. And, if we could find out the dynamics of what made Green Teams with this product/service, or “value add” focus successful, that this would be a market trend well worth replicating. In short, I wanted to know if and the extent to which Green Teams went beyond mere internal operational savings opportunities, who had been the most successful at doing this, and how? Our Eco Teams at *Sabre* have been enjoying global expansion and are developing some very innovative initiatives, but I wondered how others were reaching beyond where we had tread.

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<sup>3</sup> These team proceed under varying names: Eco-Team, Green Teams, Sustainability Action Teams, etc. For ease of reference, we use the term “Green Teams” in this discussion as a placeholder for all of these terms.

<sup>4</sup> Green Teams; Engaging employees in sustainability, By Deborah Fleisher, December 2009 (<http://www.greenbiz.com/business/research/report/2009/12/03/green-teams-engaging-employees-sustainability?ms=35943>)

At the end of this research project I came to some simple, yet not uncomplicated conclusions. We know we have the opportunity to make our businesses better when we engage with our employees (and customers) in a way that lets them express their thoughts and ideate on topics they are passionate about; sustainability being just one of these. But a “Green” Team is no different than an Innovations Council, a Working Mothers group or any other type of team – they all need systems and tools that will allow them to channel their ideas into their existing business systems, and do so in a way that can create “user-generated” change. This reinforces everything we know about all dimensions of sustainability; enterprise transformation for sustainable value has to be systemic and exist within the frameworks at the core of an organization, not at the fringe. It also reminds us that change management, business transformation and sustainability fundamentally require the same rules of engagement to succeed and hold up over the long term. So, while employee-led teams’ focus or passion may differ, at the core of the organization we must provide operational support so that they can meet freely, develop ideas, channel the ideas into tangible, actionable efforts and implement the generative changes that large organizations need. These groups – Green or other – are necessary to keeping organizations “young” and fresh, yet they rely upon existing systems and business processes to develop new ones.

At *Sabre* we offer a multitude of ways for our employees to develop ideas, innovate freely and take on projects that they are passionate about. We have systems in place where innovative products, services or ideas can be presented to a council, voted on, funded and implemented. Our task now is to ensure our Global Green teams have access to the same processes and systems so that their work can continue to help us transform the business. This research can certainly enable and inform that process.

# SABRE HOLDINGS GROUP GREEN TEAM RESEARCH STUDY

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – TRANSFORMATIONAL COLLABORATIVES

The prevalence of Green Teams in the corporate sector is a growing phenomenon. Groups of intelligent, caring, and driven individuals volunteer their time to spearhead initiatives that will drive change within their workplaces and within their companies. More often than not these teams have high hopes that their efforts will help transform the mindset and the values of other employees and the company at large to bring sustainable practices into their organizations.

The 14 companies that participated in this survey were identified as leaders in their industries as well as leaders in employing differentiating sustainability initiatives. The objective of the research project was to learn about the overall structure of the companies' Green Teams and specifically how the teams are affecting product and service innovation. The purpose was further to discover these best practices within and across industries and then to share them in order to enable readily repeatable practices.

What emerged overwhelmingly in this project was that the teams and companies that are driving successful and sustainable transformation are those with strong Executive Support, a centralized leader that is the conduit for communicating corporate goals to the Green Teams and taking the Green Team's idea back into the corporation, high diversity amongst team members, and systems for creating, measuring and tracking initiatives.

Green Teams need both the enthusiasm of the grassroots approach and the discipline of "traditional" company processes in order to bring about business innovation both in and beyond internal operational efficiencies. Executive support remains a primary success factor in guaranteeing that Green Teams have the liberty to innovate, but also the structure and support to know that their initiatives are part and parcel of the core business. The freedom to self-motivate leads to the generation of good ideas, and Executive recognition of those ideas ensures the success of Green Teams in helping reshape the culture of their businesses.

All companies surveyed recognized that a single or centralized Sustainability leader is vital to aligning the Green Teams' initiatives with the larger company-wide goals, while still providing the opportunity to innovate on the local level. Goals matter. The companies that had clear communication with the Green Teams on goals and tracked to their success had the most engaged teams and found the achievement of the goals was one of the most rewarding factors for Green Team members. The centralized Sustainability leader or Council is equally important in the success of taking the Green Team ideas through to fruition and by doing so maintaining the energy necessary for the teams to innovate repeatedly.

Diversity within Green Teams is another critical success factor. Green Teams that had collaboration between disparate business silos and departments with varying perspectives

emerged as the most successful in creating holistic and innovative solutions for the future of the business culture, the business model and the product/service offering.

The Green Teams that were the most successful in moving innovative ideas to execution had idea-capturing mechanisms based around a corporate culture that encourages upward mobility of ideas and fosters idea-generation through groups organized specifically to capture and manage these. Whether through software tools that rate the ideas and then allow for voting or rewards systems that recognize the best ideas, systems to capture, evaluate, fund and implement these ideas are essential to companies looking to move beyond internal office-based initiatives and into product and service innovation and transformation.

In conclusion, the influence of Green Teams on product and service innovation is still extremely limited. Overall, Green Teams are infusing the workplace with much needed education on sustainability. Their efforts are catalyzing awareness about these issues, and it is only a matter of time before leading companies like those surveyed here find new ways of harnessing the energy and innovation of their Green Team to drive further culture change and sustainability transformation within the enterprise.



## II. INTRODUCTION

Green Teams, Environmental Responsibility Teams, Eco-volunteers; call them what you will, delegations of corporate employees who organize to improve the environmentally friendliness of their workplace are here to stay. Whether grassroots volunteers or mandated from the office of the CEO, Green Teams are having an impact on the workplace that will last forever.

In conjunction with Sabre Holdings, to fulfill a requirement for a course entitled Thriving Regenerative Enterprise, four students from Dominican University of California's MBA in Sustainable Enterprise conducted a research study to investigate the impacts corporate Green Teams are having on product and service innovations within their firms. The interview questions were designed to discover what, if any, indicators or measurements are in place to track the success of Green Teams.

The various names that different companies use for their employee teams focused on environmental and sustainability issues will be referred to synonymously as "Green Teams" for the sake of coherence throughout this report.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this project consisted of identifying companies based on the criteria below and contacting company representatives, holding interviews, analyzing and synthesizing data, and creating this report to highlighting findings:

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### SELECT COMPARABLE COMPANIES AND RESEARCH

Companies were selected based on 3 criteria: size, product or service offerings, and existence of a Green Team (although some companies employ a different name). Medium to large sized businesses in the financial, software, medical, and consulting industries were chosen. Initially, manufacturing companies were avoided for easy comparison to Sabre Holdings which is an electronic service-based organization, but due to proven leadership with Green Team efforts the scope was expanded to include several manufacturing companies (e.g. Companies C and F). On-line research was then conducted for all companies including investigation of websites, CSR and sustainability reports.

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### COLLECT CONTACTS

Contacts at companies were selected based on their relationship with Green Teams, and availability of contacts to the research team, either through Sabre Holdings or through its own network.

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## DEVELOP RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The guiding research question was: “Are company green teams helping to produce customer facing product or service innovations.” To operationalize the question, it was broken into seven sub-questions, which made up the focus of the interviews (see Appendix II for research questionnaire).

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## CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted via telephone conference calls with two members of the research team and the interviewee. In most cases, and after asking permission of interviewees, the calls were recorded to aid in more accurate data analysis. The duration of each interview was between thirty minutes and one hour.

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## DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORT

The data were analyzed for each interview. Highlighted content was placed into a spreadsheet matrix broken down by question. Concise distillations of each interview were written by the interviewers, and are included as Appendix I. Emergent themes were extracted from this spreadsheet and are elaborated upon in this report.

## IV. COMPARABLE COMPANIES

All of the companies are comparable to each other on the basis that they employ similar numbers of people to Sabre Holdings, operate internationally, and engage in green or sustainability oriented initiatives.

<b>Anonymous Name</b>	<b>Company Name</b>	<b>Industry</b>
Company A	Names Removed	Software
Company B		Professional Services
Company C		Biotechnology
Company D		Data Management
Company E		Software
Company F		Medical Technology
Company G		Hospitality
Company H		Internet Services
Company I		Drug Technologies
Company J		Software
Company K		Advisory Services
Company L		Information Technology
Company M		Tech Services/Software
Company N		Health care

## V. FINDINGS

### ORGANIZATION AND SIZE

Almost all of the companies that were interviewed operate on a global scale and have established Green Teams at most of their office locations. Most company Green Teams emerge from a grassroots effort that is led by inspired employees. The majority of the members participate in the teams as volunteers. Usually each office or worksite has unique needs, resulting in teams working on issues specific to their localities. For the most part, Green Teams do not operate under excessive structure or receive much pressure from upper management to perform specific tasks. Nevertheless, Green Teams have often helped to reshape the culture of their businesses. Many of the companies recognize that allowing employees the freedom to self-motivate leads to the generation of good ideas. As one manager described, “cultural change is an organic process, you cannot manage it, and our people are all smart, and smart people work well when they have their own ideas and are supported in implementing them.”

There are some companies that establish Green Teams in the structure of their profit generating operations and appoint a coordinating manager in the role of sustainability director. This allows the company to better direct their sustainability efforts so that employees across departments are all working towards the same goals. Company M, for example, has an senior level green board that establishes a company-wide vision and top-level priorities. This board creates task forces to address specific sustainability issues around operations, products, and solutions including reduction in use of water and energy. The senior level green board is a standing team with representatives from each department.

Depending on the size of the company, the number of teams ranges from 1 to 35. The general size of a Green Team ranges from 10 to 50 participants per location. Some teams have only a few very active members while others have a few hundred. Most teams try to include employees from each business function. Employees are encouraged to sign up if they want to get involved and most teams heavily depend on email or intranet systems to stay connected.

### ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT

Eleven of the companies interviewed have Green Teams that are actively recruiting new members. Tactics for recruitment involve occasional company-wide emails outlining what the Green Team is doing within the firm. Communication also comes in the form of e-newsletters, company eco-fairs, awareness days or weeks such as Earth Day or Earth Week where sign up sheets are available, and through word of mouth. Companies that do use e-newsletters as an outreach tool often do so infrequently and are aware of the risk of overwhelming potential enthusiasts with too many e-mails. Three of the companies interviewed have fairly recent Green Teams (started within the last two years) that are quite small. They identify people whom they think would be a good fit for the team and invite them personally rather than opening teams up

for universal involvement. The reason for this seems to be strategic; the teams in their early phases are interested in setting up a foundation of interested employees and creating tactics for reaching their goals before launching into full-blown action-oriented Green Teams.

Several companies have developed toolkits for Green Teams at new sites within the company to successfully launch and draw on the best practices of existing Green Teams. Most large companies with multiple locations have multiple Green Teams. Some of these teams actively collaborate with one another through conference calls (generally involving just the team leads) and other communication methods. In almost half of the organizations (Companies A, B, C, J, K, L, and M), the companies have hired sustainability managers or corporate responsibility managers who help direct the Green Teams by maintaining contact with site team leaders and working toward organizational goals. While the work is done at the local level, the sustainability manager drives company-wide initiatives for recycling, reducing energy, plastics, and water use, and more.

Most of the companies interviewed expressed that there was some difficulty in keeping people active in the Green Teams' long-term objectives because the teams generally require work outside of company time. There are particular stresses on volunteerism during periods of high corporate workloads. The challenge for Green Team organizers is to keep people engaged beyond just the major events like eco-fairs and Earth Day. Company D has countered this challenge by setting up short-term (6 months), mid-term (within 2 years), and long-term (5+ years) sustainability goals. They recognize the importance of considering a wide spectrum of timelines when addressing the complexities of sustainability goals for the corporation.

Company H stood apart in that they expressed that there was very little organization and maintaining of the system from the top. They use company-wide electronic tools such as Google sites and a product they created themselves to give everyone in the company visibility to posts and voting activity on environmental ideas for implementation as well as the ability to chat about latest events. This company finds that their employees are very engaged in environmental volunteering and making changes to improve sustainability at work.

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## ORGANIZATION FOR ACTION

The research found that companies that had a central sustainability initiative with at least one paid position slated to guide these initiatives, saw that the actions of the Green Teams were generally aligned with the larger company-wide sustainability goals. Company L is tasked with specific initiatives for the Green Teams to spearhead, with the teams themselves deciding how to implement the projects. At Company M, a senior level green board directs the activities and sets priorities. These priorities are then communicated into the Green Team forces for implementation. This board primarily functions to find systemic solutions for the entire company. Distinguished from this board is the employee Green Team of Company M, which mostly focuses on fostering employee awareness of environmental issues and the top level

strategy and priorities established by the senior-level green board. Employees are separately engaged on initiatives as part of green task force or initiative activities. Company J has a CSR team that tracks their Green Teams, collects statistics, and sets goals for each site to build its program. Company C reported that the best ideas filter up from the Green Teams to an environmental sustainability team or to the appropriate departments (such as facilities). The head of the sustainability team can then direct these ideas to where they can be best be utilized, communicating directly to the people who can make them happen. Thus, the role of the CSR or sustainability team leader is often to deliver employees' ideas to the appropriate person and maintain energy behind the ideas to see them come to fruition.

Company I reported that its activities are managed through the Environmental Health and Safety Department which assesses the value of suggestions made and whether to implement them. This company has a corporate policy to establish energy reduction targets. A 10% energy reduction target was established by the Gainesville facility. The Gainesville site also has seen a 30% waste reduction based on Green Team initiatives implemented.

At other companies with less of a centralized sustainability system, Green Teams run their own local programs, including their own engagement programs. Intranet sites are often used to share information and get the word out about events, programs, and volunteer opportunities. Sometimes, competitions are held between sites to see who can do the best in terms of reduction of energy, water, or waste with an award going to the best site. Such competitions have proved to motivate and engage employees in creative solution finding.

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## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The scope of activities expected from Green Teams within companies is often limited by the amount of time and resources the team members have within their work schedules to dedicate extra effort to set objectives. There are five areas around which expectation for the Green Teams are generally organized:

1. Employee awareness of sustainable practices both at work and at home.
2. Involvement and education of employees in Green Teams, green events, and taking on projects in the workplace, or volunteer projects outside of work.
3. Internal efficiency measures are a core set of what most Green Teams aim to do. Reductions in waste, energy, and water, increases in recycling and reuse of resources, and adopting greener daily activities such as drinking from reusable mugs and water containers instead of from Styrofoam cups and one time use plastic bottles characterize these efforts. Carbon footprint accounting is another task often delegated to green teams.
4. Brand image is improved by taking on projects that are green in nature that also get the attention of press or customers. Examples of this are locating in LEED certified buildings,

using sheep instead of lawnmowers to manage the vegetation on the landscape, and communicating what the company is doing to be greener through press releases, newsletters, and the company website.

5. Product and service innovation is the least likely task for Green Teams to take on, and is also the objective finding of this report. Examples of successful product and service innovations by Green Teams and other groups within the company are highlighted below in the product and service innovation section.

Expectations of Green Team outcomes are delegated depending on the organization of the team itself. Some grassroots volunteer teams such as those in Company H decide themselves which tasks to take on quarterly or annually through an employee council that votes on which ideas to pursue. Other teams such as those at Company D are given specific tasks directly from the executive level. This company has a five-year strategic plan for its environmental programs that is being implemented by the Green Teams. Many organizations employ several levels of groups between the executive level and the Green Teams. Company J employs Green Teams, a CSR team, and a sustainability council, where members from all functional departments that have a stake in environmental issues such as facilities, supply chain, procurement, and IT, are tasked to share best practices and collaborate to address complex projects.

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## EVALUATION OF SUCCESS

Green Team success is generally evaluated by lagging, or after-the-fact indicators. The simplest form of evaluation, often used to measure employee awareness, is to include questions about the efficacy of Green Teams into employee surveys. For instance, this indicator is used by Company C that distributes an annual survey asking: "Are you proud to be a member of the Green Team?" and "Is the Green Team an effective employee club?" Company K asks employees to rate their agreement with the statements: "The communication I received about environmental programs in my area was useful and relevant," and "I am satisfied with the actions taken in my local area with regard to environmental programs."

Most companies measure involvement in Green Teams by number of employees. Several companies evaluate employee involvement through their existing systems to measure the number of volunteer hours per employee per quarter or year. Company H noted a 179% increase in employee involvement in environmentally related volunteerism from 2006-2010.

Others measure the number of self-selected affiliates on the company's internal green, eco-social media or intranet pages. Company L reported 2400 employees affiliated with Green Team actions in some way through their green team intranet site.

Success in efficiency campaigns is measured using indicators that are relevant to the exercise. Examples are the commuter challenge that Company E takes each year, which measures how many driving miles are saved per employee by carpooling, biking, walking, or using public

transportation to get to work. At the shoreline cleanup, the same company measures the number of pounds of different types of garbage removed from the environment. It is easy for companies to measure reductions in energy use on their bills, and many Green Teams take on the task of setting a baseline, and then implementing energy reduction practices in the office. Company I has set a goal to lower energy use by 10%. Water reduction is tracked on the utility bills as well, while waste must be measured by weight and type, or by number of dumpsters in some cases. Similar measures are used to track increases in recycling. Company D has set the goal of 55% solid waste reduction from their corporate office. Company F has an ongoing competition between sites that measures the energy, water, and waste and offers rewards to the site that is most successful. Company K has global goals of reducing carbon emissions per employee by 40% (by 2012 from a 2007 baseline), and collects metrics locally including elimination of styrofoam cups, print paper quantities and recycling activities. Company L gives specific projects to Green Teams, and collects progress reports on the outcomes of those projects.

Company J actually collects stories from employees that add more color and depth to the experience of greening the workplace.

Brand image improvement is measured most often by awards that the business receives from the media, or from corporate watchdog groups in the green realm. Another indicator that is used is when clients tell salespeople that the company's green activities influenced their purchasing decisions.

Company F has designed metrics to hold suppliers up to their sustainability standards designed for packaging and chemical use.

Product and service innovations are the topic of the next section. Measurement of these is usually undertaken in the form of number of ideas that percolate up from individual employees, Green Teams, and other employee groups in an organization. Company L reported over 60 innovations that came from employee teams last year although few if any of them came directly out of the work of the Green Teams who are more focused around green education and efficiency in the firm. Idea capturing mechanisms are discussed in the best practices section.

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## PRODUCT AND SERVICE INNOVATION

Companies are at various stages in the development of their Green Teams. Most are focusing on employee education and internal sustainability projects. Even though most companies indicate that they have not quite reached the point for their Green Teams to focus on customer facing product or service outcomes, there were a few companies that have had success in these areas. The Green Team from Company G worked with uniform producer Cintas to develop sustainable uniforms made from recycled plastic bottles. The employees working at the front desk of Company G now wear a uniform that is made from 25 two-liter plastic bottles. The customers are aware of this innovation because each employee wears a button that requests guests to “Ask

me about my green uniform." The team also helped to implement a linen reuse program to reduce water and energy as well as assisting other business units to establish a solar farm.

Another company that is working towards implementing customer facing sustainable products is Company N. Their Green Team is still in the start-up mode and developing a company wide recycling system but some of their members have larger ambitions. The Green Team leader has been researching ways to reduce the amount of pharmacy waste caused by the use of non-recyclable medicine bottles. She wants to change the grade of plastic used from #5 to a recyclable plastic such as #2. In the interview, she stated, "I am working on developing a material that is durable enough for multiple uses and can ultimately be composted." If she is successful, this innovation could have a tremendous impact on the sustainability of the pharmaceutical industry. She also mentioned that many of the Green Team members develop great ideas around sustainability but that most of those ideas have not come to fruition. This is mainly due to not having the necessary resources or support from upper management. This does not get in the way of the Green Team's dedication, and the company is still making progress.

Company M has been focusing on how to create products and services that help their customers reduce their carbon footprints. Their senior level board works with the engineering department to spur innovation that can change how business is conducted to a greater sustainability platform. Company A mentioned that while it is not a goal for their Green Team, one Green Team member has come up with a very plausible idea for a proprietary product innovation, although it is still being decided whether this product can be developed and brought to market.

The Green Team from Company C has influenced its research and development department to reduce the use of toxic substance use in products. Company I has been taking steps in this direction in that its Environmental Health and Safety department reviews compounds in new products to check if less toxic materials could be substituted. To this date, a compound has not yet been substituted based on these reviews, but the process to do so has been set in place.

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#### RATING OF SUCCESS IN CUSTOMER FACING RESULTS

One of the questions asked of each company was: "To what extent have Green Teams been targeted to or successful at stimulating customer facing results in terms of product or service offerings?"

- not successful
- low success
- neither successful nor unsuccessful
- moderate success
- very successful

Most of the companies that were interviewed have Green Teams that work mainly on educating employees and improving internal operations. There have been only a few companies whose Green Teams have stimulated customer facing results. There were many responses that indicated that developing customer-facing results is not in the scope of the Green Team goals at this time. The result of this narrow scope on the answer to the question were many responses of not applicable, or low or not successful. Company I stated: "We have reduced waste and costs but have not yet used that to market ourselves or change our product." There is movement in this company toward substituting certain toxic chemicals in their processes for less harmful ones, but they have not yet implemented a program to display or advertise these advancements.

Other companies that achieved positive public relations in the eyes of their customers are implementing changes to become more environmentally friendly. These companies rated the success to be low to moderate in customer facing results. One example was how company F's Green Team convinced their facilities department to hire a farmer with a flock of sheep to manage the weeds on the grounds of their facility, instead of using weed whackers. This proved to be a very good public relations maneuver even though it was not directly cost effective.

There were a few companies that felt that they were very successful at stimulating customer-facing results. Company M has had green product development as part of normal marketing and emerging technology product development, because such product development is part of normal business processes (opportunity, assessment, development, release). Green Teams members frequently participate on industry activities, enabling standards development or technology adoption. Company G's Green Teams have helped design innovations and projects that customers see every day. These Green Teams have moved beyond the internal company focus and are finding ways to impact their customer base as well.

## VI. BEST PRACTICES - KEY THEMES

### SYSTEMIC ORGANIZATION AND COLLABORATION

An emergent theme that the successful Green Teams had in common was the way in which they organized their teams and fostered collaboration. Many teams that are loosely organized and do not utilize methods for effective collaboration were having less success than the teams who were using these methods. One of the companies that had customer-facing success was Company G. Company G organizes their Green Teams by their different business units and communicates global best practices by having meetings and using newsletters. As their vice president of sustainability and innovation stated, they work to create a "culture of collaboration and communication, and employees are encouraged to come forward with ideas and try them out." Using this structure allows employees to feel comfortable to share their new ideas and have confidence that they will be heard.

One company whose Green Team did not have much success with customer facing innovations was still able to have a huge impact on the culture. Company M describes its Green Team as responsible for connecting, engaging, and inspiring employees to have a shared commitment towards the environment. One of the managers stated: “The real results are from the other 100 full time equivalent employees who pursue sustainability as their job whether it is in their title or not.” The team has changed the way management and all the employees view environmental sustainability. Even though the Green Teams have not developed any new customer product or service ideas, the regular employee body is actively engaged in idea generation for sustainability.

Companies typically had more success when they included a representative from each business unit to join the Green Teams. Leveraging these various perspectives while planning for the future provides additional insights to an overall holistic operation. Establishing communication tools, such as an intranet, to correspond with other employees and upper management allows for ideas to gain traction. The companies that had success creating Green Teams use a combination of structure and some freedom while making sure that upper management supports their efforts.

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## EXECUTIVE BUY IN

Executive support is probably the most important link in the success of Green Teams within organizations. Buy-in at the highest levels means that the Green Teams are aligned with their company’s goals and the companies themselves are seeing sustainability as an issue that they must make a part of their foundation. Company A has a conference call twice a year with all the Green Teams along with the CEO, VP of human resources, and VP of procurement. This means that the message about company sustainability is coming from the top, not from the sustainability manager. A VP at Company D started the sustainability team by personally asking certain individuals to join. Now the VP is still actively involved in the team. Interestingly, this company has chosen to move more deliberately with the team and is strategizing and setting long-term goals before actively engaging working groups. They are already envisioning Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) for their products as being an outcome of their team's strategic plans.

At Companies C and K, an executive is supportive of the team’s mission and provides a budget to fund activities and events. At company B, the CFO is incredibly involved in the movement and the management believes that Green Teams play a vital role in how sustainability will become part of the company culture. At Company F, committees have champions appointed by the CEO who assigns each site to a VP who is responsible to report back on the site’s progress. Thus, the success of these Green Teams has become part of the company’s business process. A key business objective of Company M is to forward their sustainable goals, and executive participation is firmly established to that end.

Other companies are still waiting for executive support; for this reason they often feel like they are fighting an uphill battle. Company N waited two years before rolling out a recycling program

in one of their facilities, mostly because there were only a few people on the Green Team supporting the issue.

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## IDEA CAPTURING MECHANISMS

A key finding of this report is the best practice of implementing idea capturing mechanisms within corporations. Several of the companies that were interviewed employed some kind of formal or informal process to capture ideas from employees that drive product and service innovations, increase operational efficiencies in the workplace, and keep the business on the cutting edge of its industry. As mentioned above, several businesses take a systemic approach in nearly everything that they do. This approach has proven particularly valuable to Company H, who has developed internal software that employees use to offer their ideas for how the corporation can improve. The software is also used to discuss those ideas and develop them from sketches into richer pictures. Egalitarian employee councils vote on which of these will receive grant funding from a business pool for implementation.

Company K awards employees for participating and generating the best green ideas as decided by their environmental steering committee. The awards include a solar powered laptop bag, having trees planted in your honor, electricity usage tracking hardware, thermal leak detectors, and web-cam and speakers the employee can use to reduce their travel. Company G has both a formal idea generation award process, and an informal process called "caught green handed" in which employees can reward one another with cafeteria coupons for engaging in activities that are sustainable.

Systems for communication between employees are an excellent method for capturing ideas as well. Company D is very adept at this. In addition to maintaining a completely open door policy in which even the CEO has a cubicle, the Green Team maintains an internal website that is updated with all of the actions that they are taking. In addition they maintain a thriving social media site, and an internal communications team who interviews and makes reports about employee actions on the internal radio station. This company also delivers newsletters through the company-wide email system.

Many of the companies that were interviewed reported that they maintained complex communication systems including internal blogs, newsletters in multiple languages and with fun themes and graphics to enhance the reading pleasure, email announcements and memos, events, lectures, and green sponsored lunches. Earth Day and the month of April were commonly leveraged to push for sustainability awareness.

Green councils comprised of departmental representatives from research and development, human resources, IT, facilities, operations, sales and marketing, and others with a proven knowledge of sustainability issues can come together to brainstorm. The best idea capturing mechanisms are based around a corporate culture that encourages upward mobility of ideas, and

fosters idea generation through groups who are organized specifically to capture and manage the ideas generated. When every employee is tasked with making sustainability a part of their job, the need for Green Teams to come up with new ideas for the business becomes less necessary.

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## GRASSROOTS

Green Teams are most often organized from a grassroots level. People who are passionate about sustainability and see opportunities in their workplaces to make a positive difference organize groups to make changes based on their observations. There is a lot of power in grassroots organization, and the findings of this study show that companies benefit when management supports grassroots movements within corporations. Company L said it best. “Why try to micromanage people when you hired them for their excellence?”

Grassroots efforts cannot thrive without support from management. It is certainly not necessary for best practice to have managers oversee every aspect of green team activities, but some level of infrastructure, financial budget allocation, and moral support creates a balanced environment that nourishes the groups, and empowers them to flourish and yield benefits to the corporation.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The current research into the effectiveness and usefulness of employee Green Teams has revealed that they are forming, adapting, and progressing on a variety of fronts. This particular study contributed one more perspective to this larger research effort. The solutions companies seek in order to reach operational sustainability, and provide greater economic, environmental, and social benefits, will evolve out of the collective human ingenuity at all levels. The majority of the Green Teams investigated through interviews with these fourteen companies are not deeply involved in product and service innovations that could improve the sustainable performance of their firms and reduce costs. However, innovations out of Green Teams are gaining momentum. These companies are leaders in their fields and are learning about the value proposition of organizing and optimizing the energy and social capital of their Green Teams.

It is clear that measurements and indicators need to be created to better quantify the outcomes of the Green Teams. The reason for this is to enable readily repeatable best practices within and across industries as well as to show executives the value of Green Teams to the companies' bottom line. The types of leading indicators that are required are not self-evident; otherwise they would be more prevalent in corporate tracking mechanisms. Collaboration between disparate silos and the sharing of ideas seem to be the best paths to uncover the ways that the business world will impact the creation of a truly sustainable future.

## APPENDIX I -- COMPANY DESCRIPTIONS

### COMPANY A

Company A is an international business with 12-15 Green Teams worldwide which include 150-200 people at any given time. The teams hold meetings on their own time and include people from supply chain, procurement, and facilities. The teams have leaders who report back to the corporate Director of Sustainability. There is a high degree of senior management support, as exemplified by the twice-annual phone call between Green Team Leaders and the CEO, VP of HR and VP of Procurement. Messages about the companies mission to be a green leader come from the top.

The Green Teams are not focused on product or service innovations; although at the time of the interview there was one idea from a Green Team member that was in strong consideration as a product to develop. Most of the ideas springing from the Green Team are internally facing and have to do with recycling, composting, waste diversion, and energy efficiency. 90% of employees say that this company is committed to being a green company although some say more action could be taken. Green Team events certainly help with employee engagement.

## COMPANY B

This company has teams in 30 different offices nationwide. They started from a grassroots and company-supported movement that originally had three pilot Green Teams to determine what areas they should address. They have a strong commitment to being more environmentally responsible and contributing to a healthier environment. They meet quarterly and each office has measured their carbon footprints. With respect to carbon emissions reduction, the teams' focus is in three areas; air travel, workspace (recycling, cups, energy, paper, etc), and commuting. Team size ranges from 25 members to as many as a two hundred members in some locations. Green Team leaders work with their local management or reach out in e-mail or use the corporate responsibility email inbox.

The teams focus on changing behavior in each office by elevating awareness of ways to save energy and resources. They are encouraged to look for big changes that will have large sustainable impacts. The teams have formalized calls with a full agenda that includes guest speakers who cover policy and environmental actions. Every office has different issues and so they focus on what issues are relevant to their sites. Since the company does not own any of their own buildings, offices have not historically focused on water given the difficulty of getting a water footprint from landlords. Going forward however, the CEO has requested that offices start looking at it through the CEO Water Mandate, though it is a real challenge given water reporting in large buildings, where they occupy between half a floor and 18 floors.

The commitment from senior management is very strong. The CFO is significantly involved, especially how this relates to cost management, while the CEO and other leaders have kicked off Green Week and other environmental projects. The company is engaging their employees at the local level and allowing them to become vested in the process.

The movement comes from the bottom up with management depending on the employees to direct the activities of Green Teams. So far, over 50 offices have eliminated Styrofoam and switched to paper cups, which costs more money but has a lower environmental impact (Styrofoam cups are not recyclable). They are also encouraging employees to use their own mugs or cups and wash them, the point being that the firm is willing to meet people half way – they will make an investment as a firm if their people are willing to change their behaviors. The bulk of the teams are driving internal actions, while product and service focus is not the number one charge.

## COMPANY C

Green Teams at Company C are an employee club that started from the grassroots and is connected hierarchically in sub-teams and project teams. Employees volunteer to participate in activities that promote environmentally sustainable behavior in the workplace and at home. The team's president sits on the company's Environmental Sustainability Team and is paid to think about sustainability. Besides raising awareness through an annual Eco Fair, neighborhood fairs, lunchtime lectures, and movie and pizza nights to learn about environmental issues, more active members take part in ongoing projects to eliminate plastic bottle use, keep lights in unused rooms turned off, and compost on-site food wastes.

The success in maintaining involvement within the teams is in allowing people to come and go for specific actions in a flexible manner, and tapping into their passion to volunteer and support environmental causes without bombarding them with emails. Employees are often more able to get involved with short-term, acute problems that do not require them to commit to more than they can manage. Ideas that bubble up from the Green Teams can be passed directly to the departments where the idea can best be used (e.g. Facilities) through the President of the Green Team program. Her position is integral to bridging and facilitating communication between employees, upper management, and different departments. The company administers an annual survey to the Green Team membership, gathering data sets on whether employees are proud to be members, how effective they think the team is, and how they signed up.

The Green Teams are the eyes and ears for the company, watching for areas of waste and contributing to the information flow in both directions; to move ideas to management and to inform the greater employee population of the achievements of the Green Teams with newsletters, postings, events, and lectures. They are not expected to accomplish work on environmental issues because they are volunteers. Yet their ideas are harvested through the team president and turned into actions when appropriate and feasible.

## COMPANY D

Company D is an international company with an "Environmental Responsibility Team" formed two years ago of 25-30 members, a cross-functional team with representatives from four US sites

and one site in Bangalore, India, but overseen by an Environmental Sustainability Manager. The team has a mission statement that guides it, and members volunteer for the team but are paid on company time. There is a high level of executive support as the VP of Business Development and the Chief Technology Officer both are members of the team. Information is communicated on the team's activities via the company intranet site.

Currently in early stages of its growth, The Environmental Responsibility Team is choosing not to form too many groups early. Rather, they are taking a strategic approach, as exemplified by a 5-7 year plan for the company's environmental program. Early on, they found themselves getting down too much "in the weeds" rather than focusing on the big picture. They are aligning their goals with ISO 14001 and have set ambitious goals for the next two years; including producing a GHG emissions inventory and setting KPIs such as reducing energy per square footage and maintaining waste diversion. Goals are 2% reduction energy/sq ft and greater than 55% waste diversion. Mid-term goal is to benchmark best practices for green procurement and their long-term goal is Life Cycle Assessment for products and services.

While product or service innovations have not been an outcome yet, they expect it to be as they drive toward their short, medium, and long-term goals.

#### COMPANY E

Company E organizes its Green Teams by site through the facilities department. Every year they poll the members of the teams for ideas of events and opportunities to take on. Employees are aware of the Green Team activities through an intranet sustainability group, the company share-point site, a bilingual newsletter, and company wide emails. Indicators of Green Team success are dependent upon the activity that the teams take on. In shoreline cleanups, for example, success is measured by the number of pounds of garbage are removed from the environment, as well as the number of people who participate, and the number of hours spent on the effort. The commuter challenge measures how many employees reduce how many miles of commuting in a car by carpooling, walking and bicycling to work.

The VP of facilities shares information about Green Team activities at the executive level. The sales team has commented that clients appreciate the efforts of the company to be more environmentally friendly, and the company holds educational sustainable buildings breakfasts at its LEED certified facilities.

#### COMPANY F

Company F is a global company with approximately 50 sites organized in the US by having a sustainability committee recruiting members for different functions. There is one at each site and there are about 10 employees per site. They try to include an employee on the team from each department such as marketing, finance, supply chain, etc.

Members are recruited annually and they participate for one year and then new members come on. They participate on their own time by having lunchtime meetings with lunch provided by the company. They are called sustainability committees. The committees have a champion as the CEO appoints each site to a vice president who is responsible to report that site's progress. They have been focusing on internal operations by tracking each site's energy, waste and water. The company sponsors a competition between sites and provides an award to the site that reduces waste water and energy use the most.

The teams initiated a "bring your own cups" movement and have eliminated the use of Styrofoam cups at the sites. The facilities department chose to use sheep instead of weed whackers, which had a higher cost but proved to be very good for public relations. The company uses newsletters to share updates and an internal website to track each site's carbon footprints. Each site is responsible for adding their results to the website.

Currently they have a corporate run project trying to implement company-wide sustainability metrics. They are also moving into the product development realm with their Green Teams.

## COMPANY G

Company G has three separate business units with different needs. Green Teams are organized along these business sectors. Depending on the sector and site, there are a number of programs that employees can participate in. This company maintains a green council, with members at most sites, to align site activities with the overall sustainability goals of the organization. These goals include improvements in operating efficiencies at the site level by reducing waste, water and energy use, and increasing recycling. Best practices that are developed at the site level are shared across the business with all other sites through the green council.

The green program in this organization has been successful for a variety of reasons. It started as a grassroots organization of employees, and was embraced by the business leadership to become an official process. Employees who are passionate about sustainability become involved, and are provided the tools and support to grow the efforts. Part of the reason for the success is that consumers are demanding sustainability in the industry, and legislation is being introduced that requires green practices. The executive level leadership implements plans, and measures successes at the site level. Internal statistics are consistently updated and best practices continually improved.

The key to the successes in this organization has been their culture of collaboration and communication. There is a formal process for gathering and evaluating employee ideas that rewards employees for their participation, and an informal process of trying things out on the site level and sharing those tactics that work through the green council.

Customer facing outcomes are a green uniform program where uniforms are made of recycled bottles, green cleaning solutions at all sites, ozone laundry facilities, renewable energy, and

recognition in the media that savvy customers will recognize on the website if they are looking for green options in this industry.

## COMPANY H

Company H is an international, Internet based corporation. Green Teams are grassroots organized groups of employees that choose to use their volunteer time to help the environment. In 2006 the company started Earth Council, an internal group focused on managing daily functional efficiencies. The corporate culture is one of employee leadership and philanthropy. Employees write grant proposals to employee councils that fund projects. Employees vote on projects to take on, organize teams and follow through. Examples of past projects are Solarthon, Grid Alternatives, and helping the homeless. The corporation wants as many employee ideas to trickle up as possible, and has designed internal software for submitting and disseminating these ideas. Communication also occurs through company social media, email announcements, at events, and more. Employees are self-organized, and maintaining the system from the executive level is not necessary.

Measurements of employee involvement in environmentally related volunteerism show a 179% increase since 2006. Each Green Team runs its own programs, and measurements of success differ by team. The environmental department of the company has been formed and is beginning to make more measurements for the sake of managing these teams and programs.

Customer facing results are that product and sales people are have created and are continuing to work with clients to build customer specific solutions surrounding sustainability issues. There is a correlation between the members of the Green Teams and those who are involved in creating customer solutions in the green realm, but these solutions are not generally related to the work of the Green Teams' volunteer efforts.

## COMPANY I

In order to establish a Green Committee, each department in the Gainesville, Georgia facility of Company I was asked if they could volunteer a representative to contribute and provide resource and ideas for green initiatives for their respective areas. Departments are Quality, Human Resources, Administration, Purchasing, Maintenance, Training, and Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). The committee comes together on an organic schedule whenever a member has a new, valuable idea for improvements for sustainability. The group meets on paid time as the purpose of the committee is in alignment with the corporate mandate, which sets targets for and monitors energy conservation. Recruiting people to be involved in the Green Committee is mostly done on an individual basis with the leader of the Green Committee, the head of EHS, targeting people in the company who are actively conscious and informally demonstrate their care for the environment. This particular Green Committee has been very involved with the

Chamber of Commerce in its county, winning an award for being a Responsible Corporate Partner and engaging with other industry leaders to share best practices.

Measurable goals are managed through EHS that evaluates the value of suggestions from the Green Committee and whether to implement them. Corporate officers review and track energy usage and targets of the sites as established by corporate mandate and local management. Resource efficiencies including water, energy, waste, and recycling usages are tracked by EHS. EHS also reviews new pharmaceutical products from R&D and initiates dialogues about whether any highly toxic or hazardous chemicals can be substituted for less harmful or non-toxic chemicals. This practice establishes a feedback channel between the two separate departments that could potentially lead researchers to reconsider formulas and use more environmentally friendly ingredients. Herein lies the potential to affect sustainable innovations in customer facing products, although to date, compound substitutions have not yet been made in this vein.

## COMPANY J

Company J's Green Team is a global network of volunteer members and regional teams. Each region works to spearhead events and projects, share ideas and resources, and communicate about actions taken. Their charter is to educate and empower employees to be greener both at work and at home. Over one hundred employees are involved in action committees that are designed to carry out ideas generated by Green Teams. The CSR Team guides the action committees by setting goals to build the Green Team program and collecting statistics on achievements. An annual summit web conference gives space for members to share their ideas, successes, challenges faced, and inspiration. A goal of the Green Team is to connect employees with similar interests so that the global network of people can partner on environmental initiatives and share skills and resources.

A quarterly reporting to top executives by the CSR Team includes details of Green Team activities and data. This two-way discussion allows feedback to flow in both directions. The Green Team has a volunteer employee representative who sits on the Sustainability Council of the company. The cross group council is comprised of people from all functional departments that have a stake in environmental issues such as facilities, supply chain, procurement, and IT, and is tasked to share best practices and collaborate to address complex projects. Product development is not represented yet, but the CSR Team is working with this department on long-term innovations.

The Green Team produces a monthly newsletter, tables at company cafes, and has a blog and wiki to spread ideas and promote events. Specific outcomes from the Green Teams are not expected due to the voluntary status of the teams. The job of initiating sustainable product and service innovations is a responsibility of the paid CSR personnel.

## COMPANY K

Company K is a Global business whose Eco Program started at a grassroots level with 75 volunteers from locations across the US. This has since grown to about 700 people participating across 24 teams and many geographies outside the US have similar efforts underway. These grassroots efforts have led to greater awareness and focus on environmental sustainability. The company has a global environmental strategy and goals that include reducing carbon emissions per employee by 40% (by 2012 from 2007 baseline), conserving water and paper, and reducing waste to landfill.

The US Eco Program focuses on three areas; raising individual awareness and engagement, lessening internal impacts, and integrating sustainability into client delivery works. Teams are led by local volunteers who report up to two national leads, one who is focused on corporate citizenship and engagement and one who is focused on facility management and impact tracking. The program is further governed by an environmental steering committee made up of representatives from across the business.

This business maintains a Green Team orientation kit for new teams to help them get started, and to sustain consistent structures and approach to Green Team projects across the organization. The current goals of the US eco program are to grow the teams and increase employee engagement. Indicators of eco team success include reductions in energy, Styrofoam and other solid waste, increases in recycling, including a large scale ink cartridge recycling program, and working with landlords to use less water and electricity on site.

This organization surveys its employees often, and includes questions about the usefulness and relevance of communication about the environmental programs, and the satisfaction of employees with the actions that have been taken in their location. As a client based firm, this company is aware of the potential to leverage their eco teams toward customer facing outcomes. They are presently focused on supporting their internal sustainability efforts, developing these strengths, expertise and new ideas in the field of sustainability, to leverage with clients in the future.

## COMPANY L

Company L is an international business with sustainability action teams organized into three regional umbrellas, Americas, Europe, and greater Asia. There are about ten teams in various countries that have self-organized under the sustainability action team banner, but the corporation also has a myriad of other grassroots teams focused on work related improvements.

The director of sustainability handles communication of corporate goals for the teams, and communication from the teams to the rest of the company is done with a social media site, and 2400 employees are affiliated with the team's actions in some way through that site. "It is the largest organic group in the company, and is growing daily."

Sustainability in this corporation is seen as a systemic or cultural issue that touches every employee. Green Teams are encouraged to take on projects to support sustainability within the company, and have been successful in this regard, recruiting speakers to educate employees about the environmental impacts of their behaviors, and taking on projects to increase efficiencies in operations, for example. However, product designers are tasked with developing life cycle assessments for products, the IT department is writing algorithms for energy tracking and management. There are over 60 innovations that directly and indirectly impact customers which have come from teams of employees working together, including within sustainability action teams. It is in the culture of this organization to work in teams, and from that, innovation springs organically. “Why try to micromanage people when you hired them for their excellence?”

#### COMPANY M

Company M uses a collaborative management model to organize around its company goals and initiatives. Through a system of councils and boards, responsibility for sustainability issues is mostly handled at higher levels of the organization. There is a separate track for employee awareness about greening the work place, such as recycling and reducing electricity use on site, but the larger sustainability initiatives call for specific expertise. Employee Green Teams are not expected to come up with suggestions for product and service innovations mainly because these expectations are incorporated into paid, designated positions throughout the company.

This company recognizes that complex projects call for highly collaborative teams across departments. The company’s CSR report gives a comprehensive explanation of the systems through which actions are taken. The upper level councils adopt key priorities and determine which actions to take, delegating tasks to boards. The senior level green board is underneath the Operations Council and sets priorities annually to focus on three main areas: Operations, Products, and Solutions. This senior level board made up of leaders across the business’ global business controls main levers by setting up task forces to work on their Environmental Management System, including GHG reductions, the recycling ability of materials, and products that have major positive impacts for energy efficiencies. Products such as the Smart Grid and Virtual Office are ways in which this company aids its customers in reducing their negative environmental impacts.

#### COMPANY N

The Green Teams in this company began in 2008 when the Green Team leader started writing to editors requesting them to send only one journal per office instead of one per employee. The leader started posting these efforts on the company website and she started getting calls and e-mails from employees interested in this type of work. Those were the people recruited to join the team. The team consists of about 50 members with 30 who regularly meet.

This team has no real structure except for meeting every month or two to coordinate educational events or fairs. They use an inter company website where employees can voluntarily submit ideas. The team does not have funding or authority to implement actions from upper management. As a result, it has taken two years to develop the recycling program that was scheduled to go online on 4/1/10. At other sites in Northern CA there are 10 to 20 members on the Green Teams. Last year the national headquarters asked every facility in Northern California to initiate a day long Green Team retreat.

One of the accomplishments of the team has been to get away from bottled water by buying 30 carbon filters for the conference rooms. Some changes at the national level are that the company is using compostable silverware and eliminating mercury at each site and PVC in one sector that serves newborn children.

The Green Team leader has goals of incorporating sustainability in everything that the company does. Specifically she is working on trying to reduce the plastic medicine bottle waste that all pharmacies have. They are looking into how feasible it would be to change from #5 plastic to #2 plastic which has a market for recycling. Ultimately they want a material that is durable enough for multiple uses and that can be ultimately compostable.

## APPENDIX II – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How are your green teams organized? (Suggestions – hierarchical, local level, volunteer time, paid time). Do you have a Charter? If so, what is the Charter?
2. On average, how many employees are on each green team? How many teams are in your organization?
3. How does an employee become a member of a green team? What is the process? How are employees recruited? Have you achieved success in maintaining employee involvement in the teams and if so, how?
4. How is the output of the Green Team's (GTs) work organized for action? How are the outcomes of GT's work evaluated for usefulness and/or what are the criteria for their success, i.e. how do you evaluate the success of your Green Teams? Do you have indicators? If so, what?
5. What objectives and outcomes do you expect the GTs to achieve? How are these communicated and have you considered focusing them on product and service offerings? If this has happened, what have been the results?
6. To what extent is it an expected outcome of the Green Team's work that product and service development will be influenced? If it is not now, have your teams discussed whether this might be important in the future? To date, have any Green Team's results been targeted to or had the result of influencing product or development work?

- a. If you have had a product or service innovation, can you tell us about how it developed?
7. To what extent have Green Teams been targeted to or successful at stimulating customer facing results in terms of product or service offerings?
  - a. not successful
  - b. low success
  - c. neither successful nor unsuccessful
  - d. moderate success
  - e. very successful

# Epilogue



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The results of this research confirm that the power to inspire, to lead, to transform, and to contribute value to enterprise operations through the patterning of Green Teams is virtually limitless. The only boundary conditions on the power to achieve transformative outcomes which bring enhancement to the social, ecological, and financial well-being of enterprise through Green Teams are 1) the willingness of management to convene processes to unleash the creative power of inspired teams, and 2) the ability of collaboratives such as we have studied here to make the case to implement their transformative discoveries.

In 1972, the United Nations and the Club of Rome convened the Stockholm Conference (see [www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org)) to explore the emerging data that showed environmental degradation inevitably followed significant economic development in the developed world as well as in emerging economies. That Conference coined the phrase Sustainable Development. Fifteen years later, UNEP published the Brundtland Commission Report, Our Common Future, which put substance and policy to the emerging discipline of Sustainable Development.

Now, fully 38 years later, the term “sustainable” and “green” have become common parlance, and virtually every business, product, city and consultant you can name is keen to convince you that they are and have always been green. These “green claims” are now ubiquitous, from Green Buildings to Green Tech to Green Products. We are awash in green claims from businesses, cities, and other organizations. And, as so often accompanies such “trends,” the terms Green and Sustainable have begun to lose their meaning in this storm of green marketing.

It is becoming challenging to distinguish the authenticity or validity of these green claims by businesses. But there are clear techniques to separate the “Liars” from the “Sages.” The convening of authentic transformative collaborations, or the kinds of Green Teams we have studied here, and which are active at *Sabre Holdings*, are clearly a distinguishing feature of enterprises that seek nothing less than to transform the way the people perceive or think about the world as a means of paving the way to a more sustainable future.

The Green Teams model we have studied clearly offers a pathway to moving beyond another barrier to authentic sustainability transformation within enterprise, namely, the tendency to use such teams as a means for self-promotion based on so-called triple bottom line savings. Properly convened, these Teams can do far more than minimize the real and potential harm that their parent enterprises can cause to the environment and communities. They can harness veins of creativity within enterprise to provide net benefits to their stakeholders, shareholders, and others affected by their operations.

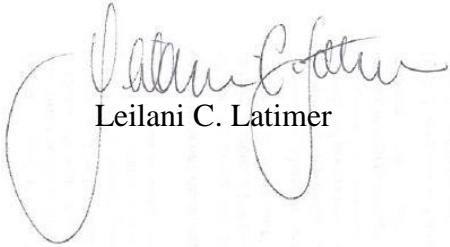
In the end, one conclusion that we take from this research is that we need some new grammar, new modes of work, and a more integrative, systemic approach to enterprise transformation that goes far beyond “sustainability.” Sustainable Development is rooted in notions of minimizing the harm we do today so as to provide the possibility that future generations can thrive.

Through our work with Sabre Holdings within the MBA Program in Sustainable Enterprise, and other work in our law practice at Paladin Law Group<sup>®</sup> LLP, we have begun to focus our attention on the transformation of executives, enterprises, and ultimately the world of business on the concept of *Regenerative Enterprise*. Simply stated, the Regenerative Enterprise makes decisions, manufactures products, provides services, constructs buildings, and undertakes all of its dealings only after developing clear means to ensure that these activities will, over the medium and long term, enhance the financial, social, and ecological well-being of all communities of interest they affect.

This is the future course of business. And there are billions of dollars of profit, and immeasurable positive reputational benefits and competitive advantage, to be unlocked by this Regenerative Enterprise value proposition. This broad and substantial challenge can be addressed effectively, we are convinced, through the convening of transformative collaboratives such as those we have studied here. It is our task, indeed our duty, as a business community to build on this work and continue to make the case for a sustainable future. And the good news is that inspirational, fun, and transformative work performed by Green Teams is at the core of this work.

# Acknowledgements

I greatly enjoyed working with this team of MBA students and found that they each brought a unique perspective to the project which in the end enriched the overall outcome. I am equally encouraged, as an “older” professional in the business world, that this new group of young professional is entering the work force with such strong and guiding principles that will benefit us all.



Leilani C. Latimer

I wish to acknowledge the remarkable work of the four students whose research is at the center of this study. To a person, I have found them to be reliable and consummately professional colleagues, inspirational and thought provoking thought contributors, and enjoyable partners in this work. In short, I am confident that they taught me more than I taught them.

Ed Quevedo