



My purpose today is to share research highlights from the Sustainability Research Initiative. Offer some insight into what Canadians think about sustainability.

SRI is the largest and most comprehensive public attitude research project ever undertaken on sustainability in Canada.

We launched this research because we believe that sustainability experts and the public are out of synch on this subject.

To bridge that gap the sustainability community must learn what the public starting point is and how to address it.

The more you know about that starting point – or where the public is – the better you'll be able to communicate and lead on sustainability.

It's key to learn what the public's pet preoccupation with sustainability is and address that first before discussing other facets of the subject.

Conclusion:

My goal today is to get you thinking about where Canadians are on sustainability and what that means to you and your organization.

I think you'll see that if your organization is taking a leadership position on sustainability, you are on the right path as far as Canadians are concerned.


There are findings in this research that you can use to your advantage, that can make you more effective as a communicator and a leader.



Before I begin, I want to thank the sponsors of the research.
 Commitment and support

Without them this project could not have happened.

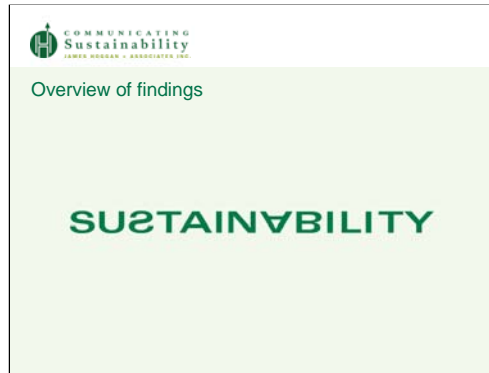
Where Canadians are on “Sustainability”

1. Research overview
 2. Review qualitative research
 3. Web poll highlights
 4. What the research tells us about leadership
- 

This is the structure of my talk

Start with an overview of the research, qualitative research, overview of web poll findings.

What research tells us about sustainability leadership and communications.



Overview of findings

I'll start with the Bad News:

- The word sustainability gets in the way
- Mistrust is the key barrier
- We underestimate one another's concern

The Good News:

- Canadians' are quick to understand an explanation of sustainability
- Canadians' values are in line with sustainability principles;
- Public is looking for trustworthy, reliable leadership
- Sustainability leaders should feel encouraged, emboldened

Research challenge

- Although sustainability is a marquee term that covers the interconnectedness of social economic and environmental areas. Canadians see sustainability first from an environmental perspective.

The Good News

- However, our research shows that when they understand that sustainability is an approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of environment, social imperatives, economic – and even cultural – they are supportive of that.



The research includes three streams:

Brief explanation of :

- Choice Dialogues Viewpoint Learning and StoryTellings and McAllister web poll.
- Goes well beyond traditional focus and group polling.
- The findings in the Choice Dialogues and Storytellings sessions were tested in the web polls.



ChoiceDialogue: A new research tool



- What are Choice Dialogue?
- A series of 4 dialogues with representative cross-sections of the public (40 participants in each session); 162 GVRD residents
- Eight-hour sessions allow intense social learning
- Yankolovich

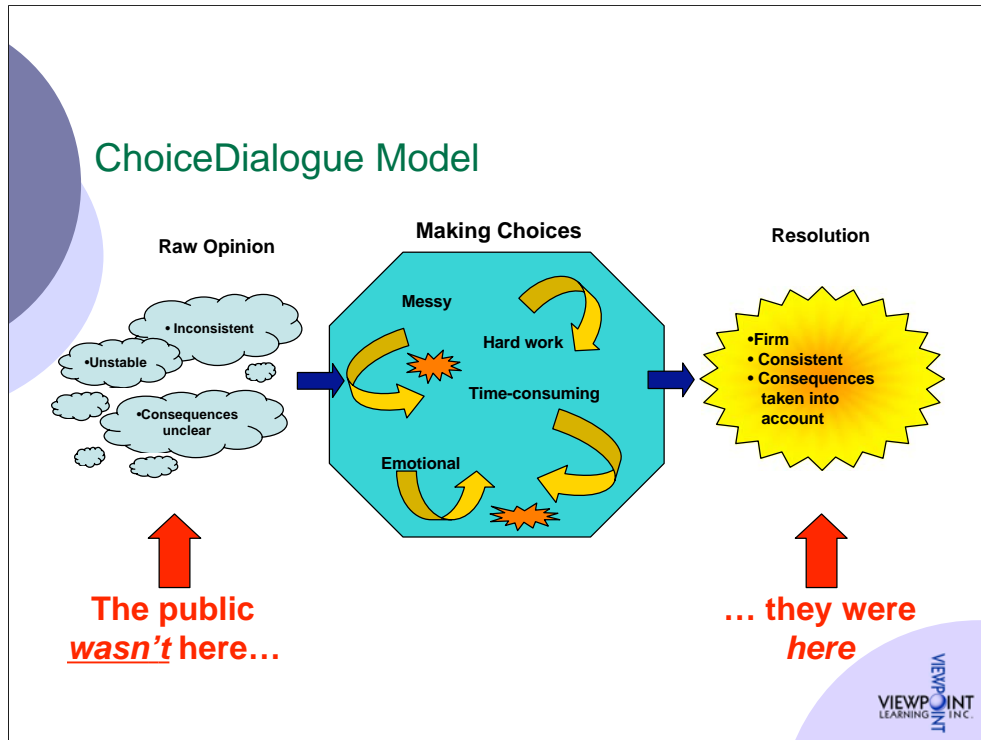
Questions considered in Dialogues

What do we want Canada and Vancouver to be like in 20 years?

Which choices are best to move us toward the kind of Canada and Vancouver we want?

The Dialogues were started using an environmental problem asking how could Canadians think of themselves as sustainable when we don't behave that way.

But the discussion was free ranging and incorporated environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability as participants set out to answer these question.



Explain choice dialogue model

The most striking finding was the public's views on sustainability represent considered judgment, not just raw opinion.

Striking because of the inconsistencies between the public's attitudes and their actions. Seemed to indicate wishful thinking and lack of resolution.

This was not the case.

The public had already worked through the issues to considerable degree and reached a firm judgment.

Attitudes and values were clear, consistent and strongly held from the outset.

The gap between stated values and behaviour were the result of practical barriers, which participants were able to identify and discuss in some detail.



Three Examples of barriers participants described. Not a complete list these are the big ones.

Mindset Barriers

Participants describes a set of internal expectations and assumptions that often get in the way of their making more sustainability sound decisions.

In particular, force of habit; consumerism and peer pressure to over consume; a sense of entitlement that we “deserve the good life”. Human nature, one person can’t make a difference etc.

Information Barriers

Prices do not reflect real long term social and environmental costs.

Product labels do not provide reliable info on products’ energy, ecological and social footprints.

Measures used to assess performance – such as GDP – reinforce focus on short term economic factors

The way the media covers issues related to sustainability – or doesn’t cover them – doesn’t help public understand them.

Trust/ Mistrust Barriers

- Mistrust emerged in all four dialogues as the most fundamental barrier to effective action on sustainability values.

- Businesses and government send mixed signals – say one thing and do another.

- Lack of accountability increases mistrust

They don’t trust business to do the right thing and don’t think government is doing what it should.

When citizens believe that others – especially leaders – cannot be trusted to do their fair share, they are less likely to take action themselves.

StoryTellings™ : the process

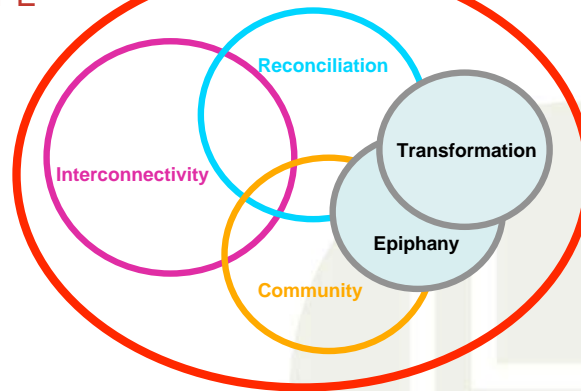
STORYTELLINGS™

Our Second Stream of Research was:

- Stories are **THE** fundamental form of communication.
- If we want to communicate in a way that captures peoples' imagination, and reaches them at an emotional level, we tell a story.
- StoryTellings research set out to understand the key elements of sustainability stories.
- How did we do this?
- Total : Five sessions
- Two with Thought Leaders, three with the public
- Total 95 participants
- 95 Stories
- 20 Team Stories
- The Story Prompt: *Working toward our long term well-being*

Themes

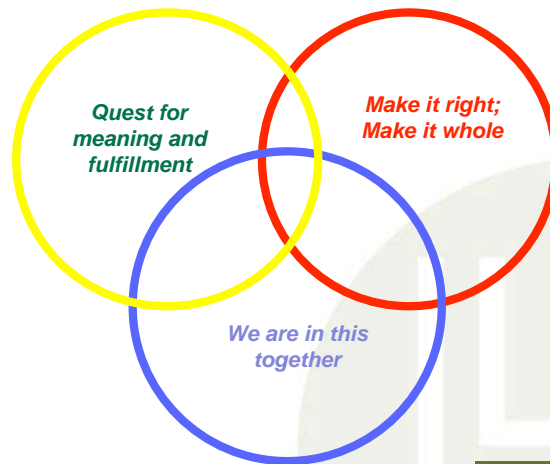
MetaTheme:
HOPE



STORYTELLINGS™

- Themes that emerged
- This is abstract, but, again, these are themes that were common to the sustainability stories that participants wrote about “working toward our long term well being”.

What are the emotional hot buttons?



STORYTELLINGS™

- These are some of the emotional triggers that emerged from the stories that were told by participants in response to the prompt “working toward our long term well being”.
- Ray Anderson’s speech mirrors the structure of the “StoryTellings” story; includes all the key themes.



Web Polling



MCALLISTER
opinion research

- Third stream of research was Web Polling
- We tested the findings from Choice Dialogues and Storeytellings work to see if other Canadians shared these views.
- **Thought Leaders**
- National online survey (n=560)
- **Public Opinion**
- National online survey (n=2500)
- National telephone tracking (n=1750)



Awareness of the term “Sustainability”

- 53% of Canadians say they have never heard of the term “sustainability”
- 32% of British Columbians have not heard the term
- 7 in 10 Canadians are unable to define "sustainability”

Source: Environmental Monitor



The words get in the way.

Priority of sustainability

Once explained, using the Brundtland definition, 82% of Canadians rate sustainability as a top or high priority national goal

Brundtland:

"...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."



Agree or disagree with the following statements:

- 84% **agree** (52% strongly) that we need stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment
- 65% **agree** (33% strongly) that sustainability will not be possible until wealthier nations start sharing their knowledge and resources with poorer countries
- 65% **agree** (23% strongly) that companies that are more socially responsible are MORE likely to be profitable over the long run
- 61% **disagree** (25% strongly) that socially responsible products SHOULD cost more

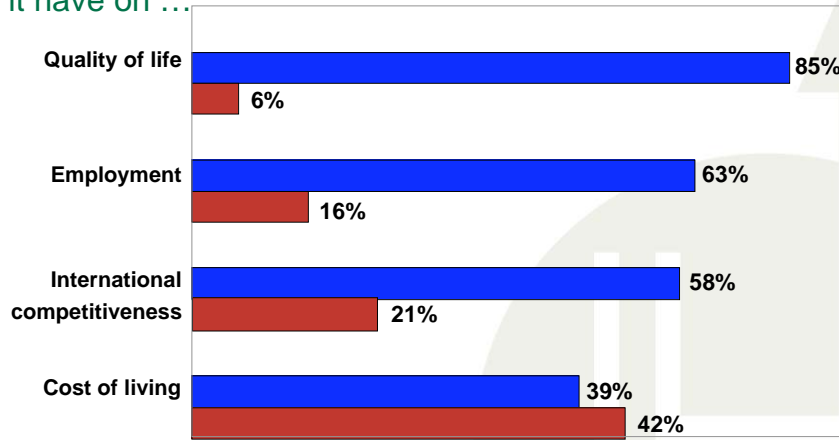


Web Testing of small group findings showed that Canadians across the country share many of the views that were expressed in the small group findings.

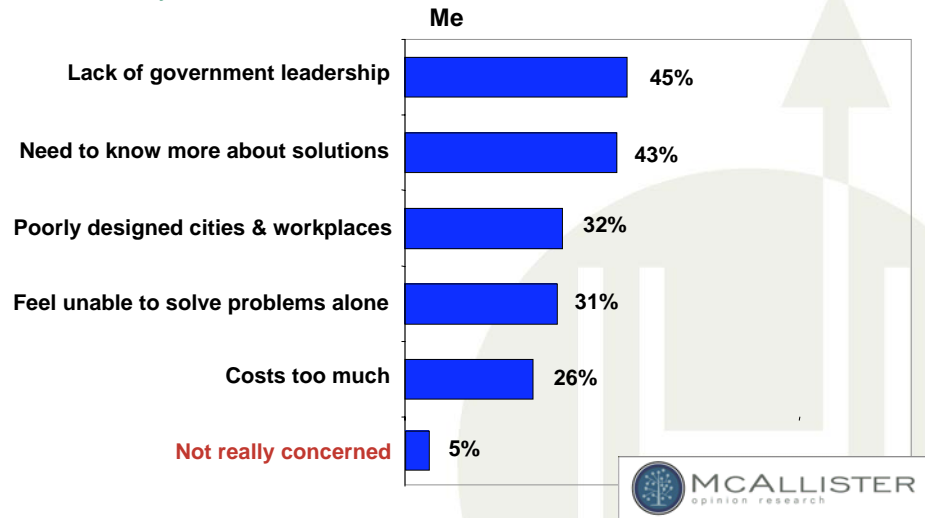
Approve or disapprove of the following approaches to achieving sustainability in Canada:

- Set strict national sustainability targets and report back to Canadians regularly on progress
83% approve (33% strongly approve)
- Offer tax rebates on fuel efficient vehicles funded by double GST paid on gas guzzlers not used for commercial or industrial purposes
79% approve (49% strongly approve)
- Phase-in mandatory standards requiring all new buildings & appliances to deliver 50% more energy efficiency in 10 years
92% approve (61% strongly approve)

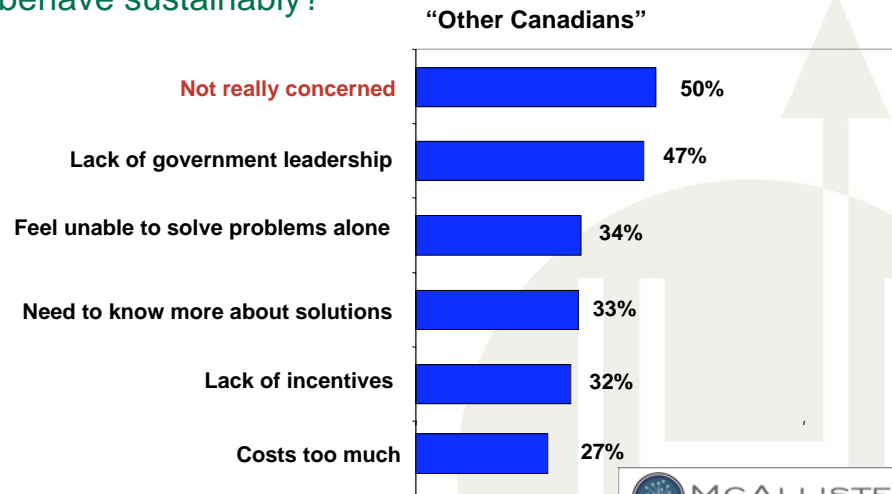
If Canada adopted sustainability as a top priority tomorrow, how much of a positive (blue) or negative (red) impact would it have on ...



What are the main reasons you do not behave sustainably?



What are the main reasons other *Canadians* do not behave sustainably?



One reason people don't act sustainability is they don't want to be the chump.

Mistrust pervasive

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Images

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opinion research

Which images say the MOST about the issue of sustainability? Click on up to 3 images.
Which images say the MOST about the problems sustainability seeks to address? Click on up to 3 images.

2 Rows of images – top row positive images bottom row negative.

12 Positive Images (top row)

12 Negative Images (bottom row)



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Favoured positive images representing sustainability



#1



#2



#3



#4



#5



#6

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SOLUTION PARTNERS

Respondents were asked to select the 3 photos that best represented sustainability.

This is how they ranked.

They were also asked to use words to describe what the photos represent.

These are the most often cited words to describe why they chose the photos:

1. Alternative/Renewable energy/Innovation
2. Replenishing/Taking care of our natural resources – getting kids involved
3. Investment in future generations Working together/Co-operation

You see the focus on environmental sustainability and future generations

Positive image descriptions

Public: Top 10 Descriptions of Sustainability	%
1. Alternative/ renewable energy	62
2. Replenishing/ taking care of natural resources	36
3. Investments in future generations	24
4. Getting children involved in taking care of their environment	15
5. Need to protect water/ water resources	15
6. Working together/ co-operation	14
7. Stewardships/ protecting the environment	13
8. Clean water/ air/ environment	11
9. Relationships/ social interactions/ community	8
10. Earth/ world as a whole	8


Communicating Sustainability
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Favoured negative images representing sustainability issues



#1



#2



#3



#4



#5



#6


MCALLISTER
GROUP

Negative images:

Respondents were asked to select the 3 photos that best represented the problems sustainability seeks to address.

This is how they ranked.

They were also asked to use words to describe what the photos represent.

Most often cited words to describe why they chose the photos:

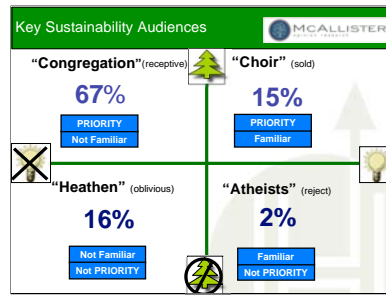
- 1. Pollution in general**
- 2. Climate change/Global warming**
- 3. Population growth/overcrowding/congestion**

Again you see the focus on environment.

Negative image descriptions

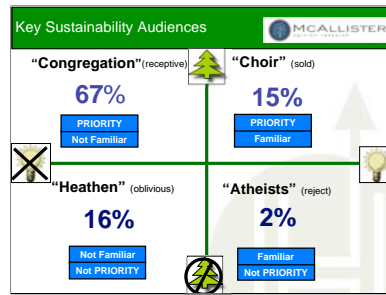
Public: Top 10 Descriptions of the problem	%
1. Pollution in general	34
2. Climate change/ global warming	30
3. Population growth/ overcrowding/ congestion	22
4. Depletion of natural/ non renewable resources	16
5. Air pollution/ air quality	15
6. Environmental problems/ ecosystems damage	15
7. Poor planning/ mismanagement	12
8. Poverty/ homelessness	11
9. Individual greed/ excess/ waste – lack of respect	10
10. Poor leadership/ political self-interest	9

Canadians see sustainability as “environment”



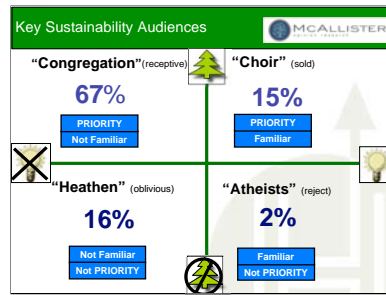
Atheists (2%)

- Appear larger and louder than their numbers would warrant
- disproportionately highly educated, articulate affluent older men, many of whom now reside in Alberta.
- Atheists also include highly educated younger men under the age of 24. Atheists are well-versed in sustainability, and simply reject it.
- They care about social and environmental issues, but for them, economic growth is most important driver of public policy.
- Atheists are more likely to see social ills, even mismanagement as an artefact of human nature.
- Atheists can take up a great deal of energy and resources, but are not likely to be convinced of anything unless there are benefits for economic growth.



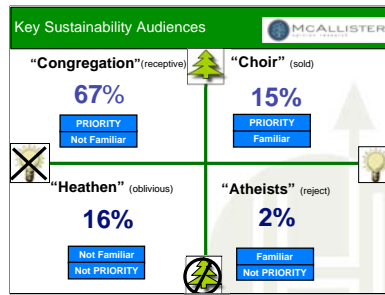
The Heathen (16%)

- These are mostly men, but also women, under the age of 35, with less than university education, living in large cities.
- They do not feel a part of their community, believe that most Canadians do not care about the environment and equate consumerism with gratification.
- The Heathen are sensitive to issues lower down on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs: social status and belonging, security of body and employment and basic physiological needs.
- The Heathen are not the first group to reach out to and will not lead change. However, they can be expected to respond to NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) situations and follow the trend once momentum builds.
- Like the Atheist, the Heathen tend to blame social ills on individual human flaws like greed and laziness.



The Choir (15%)

- These are sustainability advocates, thoroughly familiar with the term and the concept.
- They are mainly of young urban university graduates and boomers who feel connected to the communities in which they live.
- The Choir is energized by the problem and are best recruited as advocates.
- They see individual behaviour as an issue, but ultimately believe that political leadership will lead to solutions through sound management and planning.
- If the Choir's drives the sustainability conversation, then communication will start in the wrong place.



The Congregation (67%)

- This is the key audience segment to target.
- Comprised of largely of boomer women with college but not university education
- These Canadians are enthusiastic and concerned about the issues sustainability seeks to address. But they are unfamiliar with the jargon and do not respond to the same benefits that excite a policy wonk.
- The Congregation does not want to start the conversation with a discussion of land use policy and urban sprawl. They want to start with global warming (not climate change), children's asthma and traffic congestion. But too much negativity demoralizes them.
- The conversation needs to move to practical solutions that give hope and optimism.
- This audience does not spontaneously link sustainability to economic and social benefits.
- The connection needs to be highlighted, but it might be a stretch as a point of entry.
- The Congregation responds well to essential emotional benefits related to the metaphors of life and renewal inherent in nature: water, food, generative ecosystems, children, and life. The fragility of home and the need to take care of it are resonant with this segment. The Congregation would respond well to messages or stories from others everyday Canadians that demonstrate that others share their concerns and perspective.



Reaching out on sustainability

Our research suggests some common sense advice about reaching out to the public on sustainability.

1. Focus on the congregation
2. Given the level of mistrust, communicate through action.
3. Define the term sustainability when you use it.
4. Use a human voice; tell a story that people understand in plain everyday language.
5. Provide specifics; don't talk about things unless people can tell that you're actually doing them
 - If you're talking about something that people can not measure or confirm, you're probably saying something that they will not believe
6. Your story needs to be hopeful
7. Offer everyday solutions and benefits
8. **Importantly**--Let people know they are not alone. Use social pressure to encourage change. Create the sense of "it's what people like us do".



- In closing our research shows that Canadians do not believe there's anyone at the wheel
- Canadians are calling out for leadership on sustainability
- There is a very real opportunity here to lead on sustainability
- Leaders can be confident that the public supports sustainability
- But to be successful leaders must have credibility and build trust
- They must be seen to have the public's interest at heart
- Given the high level of mistrust that's no small challenge.

Thank You.



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