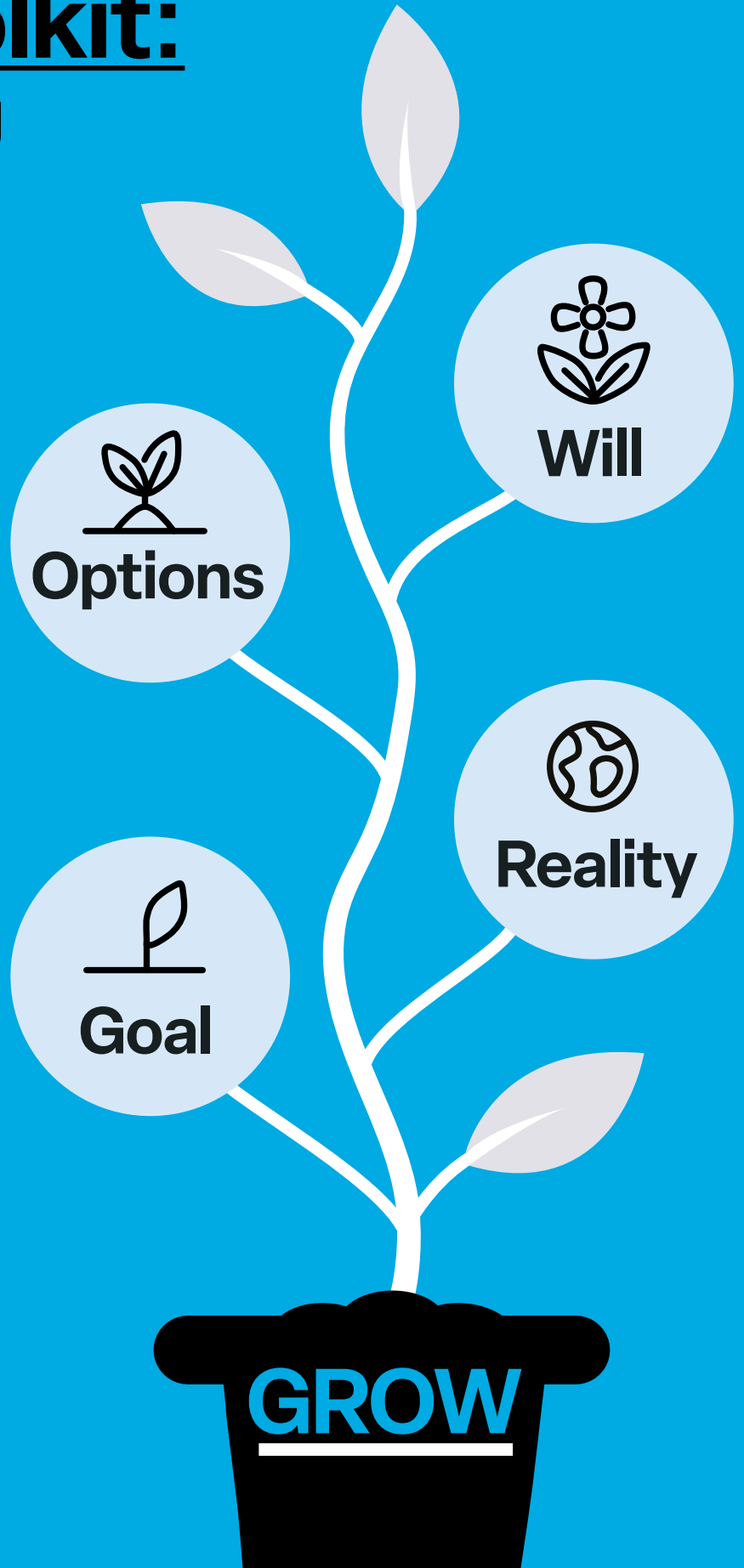




Manchester
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OPPS Toolkit:

Orchestrating Partnership Portfolios for Sustainability



OPPS Toolkit

Orchestrating Partnership Portfolios for Sustainability

The OPPS toolkit is a practical reflection guide for sustainability and partnership professionals managing multiple, complex sustainability collaborations across sectors – business, NGOs, academia, and the public sector.

It supports those seeking to:

- ✓ Strategically align and integrate sustainability-focused partnerships.
- ✓ Balance tensions and trade-offs within dynamic partnership portfolios.
- ✓ Strengthen coherence between partnerships and broader sustainability goals.
- ✓ Facilitate learning and decision-making across different sustainability partnership initiatives.

This toolkit is built around the **GROW** model:

- **Goal** – Clarify desired sustainability outcomes.
- **Reality** – Assess your current landscape and coherence.
- **Options** – Identify new opportunities and recalibrate strategy.
- **Will** – Commit to action and enable adaptation over time.

Each **GROW** section is organized to help users:

1. **Identify:** Clarify current portfolio realities, goals, or improvement areas.
2. **Confront tensions:** Engage with dilemmas through reflective questions.
3. **Get started:** Apply light-touch tools to drive clarity and learning.

What makes OPPS unique?

- **Portfolio-centered:** Moves beyond viewing partnerships as standalone initiatives.
- **Reflexive by design:** Encourages thoughtful navigation, not rigid steps.
- **Grounded in research:** Developed through doctoral and postdoctoral work on partnership portfolios, paradox management, and learning approaches. Please visit this link for the [references](#) that helped form this toolkit.



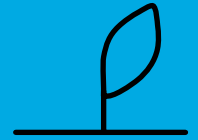
Toolkit

All worksheets, frameworks, and typologies are available in the [companion Excel file](#).

This document shares selected highlights; please refer to the workbook for partner role typologies, health checks and evaluation grids, sector analysis templates and mapping and tension tracking tools.



Goal setting: Define what you're trying to achieve



1. Identify: Clarify your ambition

Take time to reflect on the overall purpose of your partnership portfolio and how it connects to both sustainability and business strategy:

- What impact are you aiming to achieve through your collective sustainability partnerships?
- Are you driving incremental improvements, systemic transformations, or a blend of both?
- Do your partnerships contribute to broader sustainability goals (e.g., SDGs, ESG, Net Zero, Just Transition)?
- Are they helping to transform your organisation, or reinforce existing practices?
- What does the diversity of your partnership ecosystem for sustainability look like—across global, national, regional, and local actors?
- Are smaller, community-rooted partners present alongside prominent players? Do they support local legitimacy, resilience, and equity?
- Are your partnerships helping your organisation align with emerging regulatory expectations, such as: Due diligence on supply chains, Net Zero targets, ESG disclosure standards?
- What principles, values, or ethics guide your decisions around which partnerships to pursue?
- How do partnerships align with your core business objectives? Consider how each contributes to your broader strategy through: Innovation and R&D, Market access or growth, Risk reduction and resilience, Brand/reputation enhancement, Regulatory readiness, Organisational learning and adaptation.

2. Confront tensions: Reflective questions

These aren't problems to solve, but dilemmas to navigate with intention and awareness:

- **Ambition vs. Capacity:** Are your partnership goals bold yet achievable? Do you have the resources and leadership support to deliver them?
- **Stability vs. Transformation:** Are you maintaining the status quo or fostering systemic change when you evaluate your partnerships and overall portfolio?
- **Global Vision vs. Local Relevance:** Can you ground global goals in local context and priorities in these partnerships?
- **Visibility vs. Impact:** Are you focusing on high-profile partners or those quietly delivering meaningful change but may be lacking visibility?
- **Strategy vs. Values:** Are your partnerships aligned with internal values or shaped more by external expectations?

3. Get started

- ✓ Draft a 1–2 sentence *Portfolio Purpose Statement* – capture your overarching aim in plain language.
- ✓ Map types of value (social, environmental, economic) across your partnerships.
- ✓ Gather your partnership managers or boundary spanning managers for a goal alignment check-in.
- ✓ Review how your organisation defines sustainability and its effect on partnership decisions.
- ✓ Take stock of your partnership mix across national, regional, and local actors.
- ✓ Use the Multi-Level Mapping Table to visualise alignment across scales.





Reality: Take stock of where you are now



1. Identify: Assess your current portfolio



Partner landscape

Who are your current sustainability partners? Map each one and identify their primary role – keeping in mind many actors play multiple roles (e.g., disruptor, implementer, amplifier).



Are you leaning too heavily on one type of partner? Which roles are underrepresented, and how might that affect your impact?

Sector representation

- Which sectors dominate your partnership portfolio for sustainability (e.g., business, NGOs, academia, government)?
- Are there gaps or overrepresentation?
- Are grassroots or informal actors sufficiently included?

Insight: Less-visible actors may bring trust, local insight, and legitimacy – even if they lack formal capacity.

Constraints

- Are your decisions limited by internal structures (e.g., procurement rules, approval hierarchies) or external factors (e.g., compliance, risk policies)?



What promising partnerships are being stalled by bureaucratic or political barriers?

Power dynamics

- Who holds real influence in your partnership portfolio overall (e.g., agenda-setting, resource control, visibility)?
- Whose voices may be absent or marginalised – and why?
- Are there hidden hierarchies around legitimacy, representation, or decision-making?



What implicit power structures shape how your partnerships function?

2. Confront tensions: Reflective questions



- **Control vs. Trust:** Are partnerships over-structured and driven by control mechanisms or too loosely defined but based on trust?
- **Inclusiveness vs. Efficiency:** Are you inviting the right range of voices, without compromising decision-making?
- **Similarity vs. Diversity:** Are you surrounded by like-minded partners – and what perspectives might be missing?
- **Visibility vs. Legitimacy:** Are prominent partners overshadowing those with local credibility?
- **Formality vs. Informality:** Are formal partnerships prioritised over informal or grassroots ones that offer insight and access?

3. Get started



- ✓ **Map the partner landscape:** Categorise partners by dominant roles (e.g., innovator, funder, amplifier).
- ✓ **Analyse sector spread:** Visualise balance across sectors; identify under-represented areas.
- ✓ **Spot redundancies or gaps:** Are efforts duplicated? Are key groups/stakeholders excluded from the partnership portfolio? Why?
- ✓ **Uncover internal barriers:** Review if internal risk aversion or politics are blocking strategic partnerships.
- ✓ **Power mapping:** Use a light-touch tool to explore influence, agenda control, and silences.
- ✓ **Revisit partnership origins:** Were sustainability partnerships formed strategically or reactively in this organization? Do they still align with values, purpose, sustainability priorities of the organization?



Options: Explore how to improve the portfolio



1. Identify: What's missing or misaligned



Now that you've clarified your goals and assessed your current reality, it's time to uncover gaps, blind spots, and hidden dynamics in your partnership portfolio for sustainability:

- Are there redundant partnerships or overlaps in effort when you review the Goal setting and Reality stages?
- Are critical voices, communities, or topics consistently excluded from your partnership portfolio – and why? Could it be that impactful or sensitive sustainability partnerships or partners being avoided due to complexity or politics?
- Are core social sustainability values (e.g., justice, regeneration, inclusion) reflected across the portfolio of sustainability partnerships?
- Are you retaining partnerships for historical or internal reasons that no longer serve your goals?
- Who is missing from your current partnership ecosystem for all the sustainability challenges your organization faces and prioritizes, and what specific issues or opportunities could they help address?
- Do you have the capacity and systems in place to manage new or more diverse sustainability partners?
- Are there potential synergies between existing and new sustainability partners that could unlock greater value?

2. Confront tensions: Reflective questions



As you explore new possibilities and recalibrate your sustainability portfolio, keep in mind a further set of strategic trade-offs that often determine which options gain traction and which stall. Treat these as ongoing conversations rather than once-and-done decisions:

- **Scale vs. Innovation:** Are you prioritising scalable, proven models over bold, untested approaches?
- **Collaboration vs. Competition:** Are brand politics or turf sensitivities blocking collaboration?
- **Flexibility vs. Alignment:** Are you open to new opportunities while maintaining strategic coherence?

- **Transparency vs. Politics:** Can internal power dynamics or personal agendas be discussed openly in your revised partnership portfolio plans?
- **Legacy vs. Purpose Fit:** Are long-standing partnerships maintained out of habit rather than impact?
- **Ambition vs. Capacity:** Can your organisation realistically support additional partnerships without overstretching teams?

3. Get started



- ✓ **Run a “what if” scenario:** Test resilience if a key partner exits, regulations change, or internal priorities shift.
- ✓ **Revisit partner selection:** Are inclusion criteria unintentionally excluding smaller or emerging actors?
- ✓ **Audit learning capacity:** Check whether your organisation captures, shares, and applies learning across the portfolio.
- ✓ **Create space for what matters:** Identify partnerships to pause, exit, or shift to enable higher-value work.
- ✓ **Co-create a partner prospect list:** Who could you bring into the portfolio to strengthen efforts around a specific challenge or innovation area?
- ✓ **Map capacity for new partnerships:** Evaluate whether you have the time, systems, and relational or human capital to steward new collaborations well.



Which partnerships are energising your team – and which ones quietly drain attention and resources without delivering impact?



Options: Explore how to improve the portfolio



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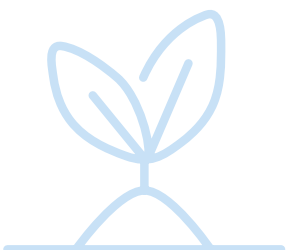
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Will: Commit to action, learning, and course correction



1. Identify: Portfolio stewardship and action systems



This section helps translate insight into action. It supports realignment, responsible exits, and strategic growth by building routines that keep your partnership portfolio dynamic and purposeful.

Portfolio oversight:

- Is there a central coordinator or “portfolio owner” maintaining strategic coherence?
- Are roles and responsibilities clear across functions and teams?
- Are decisions about which partnerships to exit, grow, or pause being made intentionally?

Cross-functional engagement:

- Are key departments (e.g., finance, procurement, comms, CSR, marketing, logistics) contributing to partnership discussions?
- Who influences decisions but remains outside the formal process?
- Is value created across partnerships being recognised internally?

Insight capture & learning:

- How do you record and share learning across partnerships? Could different functions utilize similar methods/share learnings and systems with each other?
- Are failures and challenges discussed openly?
- What systems help prevent knowledge loss during staff turnover?

Leadership communication:

- How is the value of the partnership portfolio shared with leadership?
- What storytelling, dashboards, or framing would raise visibility and support?



What would make your partnership management feel less reactive and more strategic?

2. Confront tensions: Reflective questions



As you shift from insight and reflection to action, several tensions may surface – particularly when dealing with longstanding sustainability partnerships, shifting resources, or rebalancing priorities:

- **Action vs. Avoidance:** Are timely decisions made on your organizations partnership portfolio for sustainability, or are uncomfortable choices postponed?
- **Ownership vs. Oversight:** Is clear accountability in place, or is responsibility fragmented in the management and coordination across this partnership portfolio for sustainability?
- **Reflection vs. Justification:** Are review processes used to improve practice – or justify past choices?
- **Learning vs. Blame:** Is it safe to acknowledge when sustainability partnerships are misaligned or failing and do you have a plan for these partnerships?
- **Courage vs. Caution:** Are bold shifts made when needed, or is legacy preferred over risk when it comes to maintaining or exiting certain partnerships that are misaligned with your sustainability values or portfolio purpose?



Is your team empowered to adjust course when needed – or stuck maintaining what no longer fits?

3. Get started



- ✓ **Set regular reflection points:** Schedule quarterly cross-portfolio reviews, retrospectives, and peer learning sessions.
- ✓ **Develop a learning capture system:** Ask: What are we trying? What’s working? What’s not – and why?
- ✓ **Establish safe feedback loops:** Enable honest reflection on underperformance and alignment.
- ✓ **Use the partnership health check:** Assess performance, alignment, and effort (See Excel Tool).
- ✓ **Apply the exit & evaluation framework:** Review partnerships using structured criteria (See Excel Tool).
- ✓ **Follow the graceful exit checklist:** For respectful transitions: notify early, archive insights, and reallocate capacity (See Excel Tool).



What small process could you introduce this month to make partnership oversight more deliberate and less reactive?



What's next?

Interested in follow-up support or customising the toolkit for your organisation?

Contact the ORCHESTRATE project and Dr Tulin Dzhengiz: t.dzhengiz@mmu.ac.uk

We can offer:

- ✔ Workshops to facilitate use of the toolkit across teams and functions.
- ✔ Custom interventions tailored to your sector, priorities, and partnership context.
- ✔ Guidance on portfolio mapping, ecosystem thinking, and partnership reflection.
- ✔ Support in framing partnership strategy in alignment with business and sustainability goals.

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