

From Policing to Partnering

Building Trust-Based Supplier Engagement for Net Zero Action

Lessons from the University of Birmingham Procurement case and the Net Zero Collaborative Action Framework

Dr Dev K. (Roshan) Boojihawon
Associate Professor of Strategy & International Business
University of Birmingham
ISEP Webinar | June 2026



Core proposition:

- Scope 3 is where net zero succeeds or fails.
- Trust-based engagement improves data quality, participation and action.
- The UoB Procurement case shows how “offer, not ask” can work in practice.

About me:

Dr Dev K. (Roshan) Boojihawon is Associate Professor of Strategy and International Business at the University of Birmingham, where his work sits at the intersection of research, strategy, and sustainability practice in a global context.

- My professional expertise focuses on **how firms can align business strategy with sustainability** to enhance **competitiveness** and create **long-term value**.
- My current research examines **collaborative and relational** approaches to net zero transitions, with particular emphasis on how organisations can **strengthen supplier and partner engagement** to address Scope 3 decarbonisation challenges.
- I have developed of the **Net Zero Collaborative Action Framework (NZCAF)**, a relational toolkit, which supports more trust-based, capability-sensitive, and action-oriented approaches to sustainability collaboration.
- My ongoing work includes applied projects with procurement and institutional partners, helping **translate research into practical frameworks for real-world sustainability action**.



Roshan Boojihawon
Associate Professor in Strategy



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Why this matters now

- Scope 3 refers to emissions that occur outside your own walls but are still created by your organisation's activities, especially through suppliers, logistics, product use, and disposal – all external partners driving the value your business is offering
- Yet partner engagement remains the weakest link in net zero delivery
- Regulatory and reporting pressure is intensifying
- The gap is not only technical — it is relational and organisational

Scope 3 = all indirect emissions across the value chain — upstream and downstream — outside an organisation's own operations.

1

Scope 3 imperative

For many organisations, 70–90% of emissions sit outside direct operations.

2

Pressure rising

CSRD, due diligence expectations and public procurement requirements are tightening.

3

Engagement gap

The issue is not only data collection, but whether suppliers can engage and improve meaningfully.

The challenge is no longer whether Scope 3 matters, but whether engagement design matches the scale of the task.

The compliance trap: Why compliance-led engagement so often underperforms

Compliance-led approach	Likely consequence
Data extraction focus	Low response rates, weak data quality, supplier disengagement
One-size-fits-all requirements	Disproportionate burden on SMEs; capability-blind mandates
Asymmetric power dynamics	Defensive compliance rather than constructive collaboration
Audit-and-report cycles	Snapshot accountability with little learning or improvement
No support to improve	High expectation, low enablement

If we design engagement for extraction, we should not be surprised when we get shallow compliance rather than meaningful transition.

What is really broken?



Most programmes are designed to:

- collect data
- impose requirements
- manage risk
- satisfy reporting needs



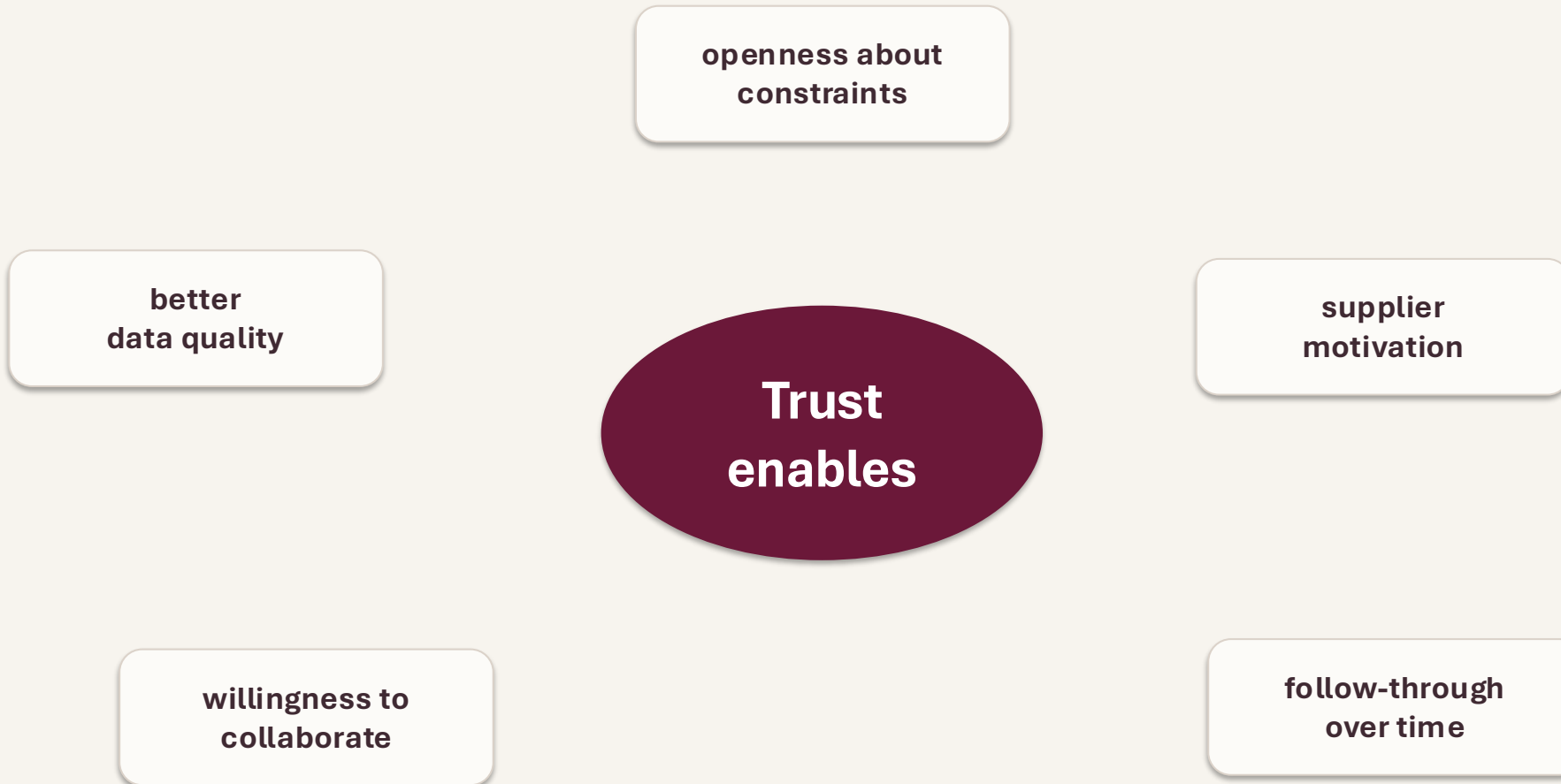
Far fewer are designed to:

- build supplier capability
- create shared ownership
- improve data quality over time
- support decarbonisation through partnership

The issue is not only whether suppliers are asked to respond, but whether the engagement model helps them to act.

Trust is not a soft issue

It is a performance mechanism

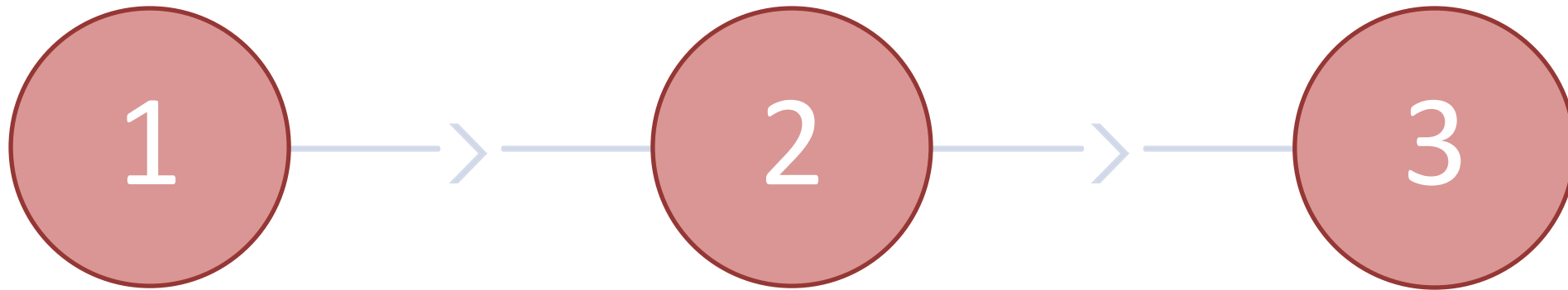


Trust shapes participation, data honesty and the quality of subsequent action.

How the UoB supplier engagement process was targeted



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



Step 1: Identify where to focus

- UoB's supply chain included 4,595 suppliers and c. £300m spend
- The top 60 suppliers represented 60% of spend
- Excluding research partners, the initial analytical focus narrowed to 43 high-impact suppliers

Step 2: Segment by impact and maturity

- Suppliers were mapped using a Maturity Matrix
- Impact = spend-linked significance to UoB procurement emissions
- Maturity = progress on emissions measurement and carbon targets

Initial pilot cohort

- 68 suppliers were first approached to register on the NETpositive tool
- Included 18 high-impact/high-maturity and 25 high-impact/low-maturity suppliers



How the process was embedded into procurement practice

- The supplier-maturity matrix became a practical tool for prioritising engagement
- NZCAF helped structure supplier conversations, scripts, and checklists
- A co-creation workshop trained **8 category managers** on sustainability checkpoints and tender gateways
- Carbon criteria were piloted in tendering and RFQ processes
- Monthly cross-functional review meetings helped create continuous learning loops

The key design shift: “Offer, not ask”

Instead of:

**“Complete this
questionnaire for us”**



The model offers:

a free sustainability action plan
practical guidance and support
a lower reporting burden
useful data generated as a by-product of engagement

“An offer, not an ask; focus on action, not policies; data generated as a by-product of support.”

This changes the value proposition of engagement for suppliers.

What the case reveals

Suppliers often show:

- willingness to engage
- interest in sustainability
- readiness to act in principle



But struggle with:

- measuring impacts
- understanding deeper supply-chain issues
- translating ambition into implementation

The real issue is often not lack of intent, but a gap exists between declared ambition and implementation capability.

Trust-based engagement creates value by converting intention into action.

Where is your organisation on this spectrum?



Data extraction



Capacity building

Reporting mandate



Two-way dialogue

Uniform standards



Segmented engagement

Audit failure



Track and support improvement

Buyer burden-shifting



Shared ownership

The point is not a moral binary, but a developmental journey.

What practitioners can do differently

1**Audit your current engagement model**

Do suppliers gain something from engaging with you, or do you mostly extract?

2**Segment suppliers by impact, maturity and strategic importance**

Tailor effort where there is both leverage and need.

3**Reframe the supplier value proposition**

Make benefits explicit: tools, plans, learning, recognition, access.

4**Embed climate into procurement and contract management**

Use tendering, contracts, category strategy and supplier dialogue.

5**Build collaborative infrastructure**

Workshops, peer learning, platforms and shared support reduce friction.

6**Track capability development, not only disclosure**

Measure whether suppliers are progressing, not only whether forms are completed.

Better supplier engagement often begins with a better process, not a perfect system.

From supplier requests to shared transition

**Scope 3 is not only a reporting challenge.
It is a collaborative capability challenge.**

trust

clarity

capability sensitivity

shared ownership

sustained
enablement

Compliance extracts. Partnership builds.

If Scope 3 is a shared challenge, supplier engagement must become a shared transition effort.

Thank you

Questions and discussion

One question to leave with you:

**What is one change you could make in the next 30 days
to move your supplier engagement approach further
from policing toward partnering?**



Roshan Boojihawon
Associate Professor in Strategy



Dr Dev K. (Roshan) Boojihawon
Associate Professor of Strategy & International Business
University of Birmingham
d.k.boojihawon@bham.ac.uk

Selected references and source material

Butt, A., et al. (2024). Role of supplier engagement to reduce Scope 3 emissions in circular supply chains. Business Strategy and the Environment. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.3994>

Choi, D. & Lee, S. (2021). Supply Chain Governance Mechanisms, Green Supply Chain Management, and Organizational Performance. Sustainability. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132313146>

Cook, C., Roehrich, J., et al. (2024). Realizing NetZero in social housing: strategic public procurement and internal stakeholder engagement. Public Management Review. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2352546>

GeSI. (2026). From Supplier Compliance to Ecosystem Collaboration.

Kähkönen, A-K. & Marttinen, K. (2022). Fostering firms' ability to cascade sustainability through multi-tier supply chains. IJOPM. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOPM-11-2021-0739>

Khosravi, F., et al. (2024). Policy Recommendations to Enhance SME Support for Achieving the UK's Net Zero Targets. Sustainability. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su162210116>