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Assessing the level of collaboration in the Egyptian organic and fair trade cotton chain

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Highlights
• A method for designing collaboration indexes in food and fibre chains is defined
• The index refers to decision synchronization, information sharing, incentive alignment
• Six distinct factors were extracted across the three dimensions of collaboration
• The collaboration between the lead company and the contracted farmers is described
• The index indicates how to implement effective collaborative strategies

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Abstract
There is rising interest in collaboration among supply chain partners in food and fibre supply chain management studies. In organic and fair-trade chains, collaboration is rooted in both principles and current practices. A tool for assessing collaboration in the food and fibre sector has not been developed to date. To fill this gap a collaboration index has been adapted to the Egyptian organic and fair trade cotton supply chain. A factor analysis has been performed to this end. Two factors emerged within each of the three constructs defining the collaboration index: information sharing (price information and logistics), decision synchronization (exception management and general management) incentive alignment (risk sharing and technical support). The study contributes to defining a method for designing specific collaboration indexes in different food and fibre chains. The index provided relevant context-related information supporting the collaboration strategies in the Egyptian organic cotton chain.

Keywords: supply chain collaboration, factor analysis, organic, fair trade, Sekem, Egypt.

1. Introduction
The current debate on innovative and sustainable models of production and consumption considers, among other issues, the necessity of introducing new ways to assess businesses performances and success (Blok et al., 2015). The dimension of sustainability in business management is addressed by the Sustainability Oriented Theory of the Firm, which states that “the firm is a profit generating entity in a state of constant evolution. This entity is a system comprised of resources and networks of relationships with stakeholders” (Lozano et al., 2015). The same authors also state the necessity to provide “a firm’s leaders and its stakeholders with a more complete vision of their obligations, opportunities, relationships, and processes...to make societies become more sustainable in the short and long term” (Lozano et al., 2015). Improving the stakeholders’ relationships, by assessing the level of collaboration between supply chain partners, as a driver of effective sustainability management, can thus represent a relevant contribution to the debate on sustainable models of production. Collaboration has recently received increased attention in the supply chain literature; an increasing number of enterprises recognize the importance of working and operating together to resolve common problems and achieve desired goals (Barratt, 2004; Corbett et al., 1999; Schöggel et al., 2016; Seliger et al., 2015; Wagner et al., 2002). Collaboration is also viewed as a business process whereby collaborative partners work together toward common goals that mutually benefit the partnering firms (Mentzer et al., 2008). Several authors argue that a supply chain agent’s ability to compete is strongly related to its ability to collaborate with suppliers at various levels in the chain as a way to construct more efficient and responsive supply chains (Christopher, 2005; Gunasekaran and Patel, 2001; Lamming, 1993). In particular, the benefits associated with closer collaboration, according to Lee et al. (2007), involve cost reductions and revenue enhancements as well as flexibility when dealing with supply and demand uncertainties. Crook et al. (2008) refer to
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