



## **Improving environmental sustainability awareness among employees**

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## Abstract

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<p>The introduction of the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) has prompted many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to begin sustainability reporting. As these companies take their first steps in sustainability reporting, there is a growing need to improve their sustainability practices. One key aspect is increasing employee awareness of the environmental impacts of the company's operations.</p> <p>This thesis aims to provide development suggestions for the commissioning company to improve sustainability awareness among employees. The research assesses the current level of sustainability awareness and explores how increased understanding and implementation of sustainability can benefit the company's business. The implementation of the proposed development suggestions is outside the scope of this thesis.</p> <p>The theoretical framework focuses on the concepts of sustainable development, corporate sustainability and employee engagement in sustainability initiatives. These are examined through definitions, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), academic literature and relevant case studies. Strategies for engaging employees to sustainability work are also explored, focusing on communication, training, performance measurement and motivational incentives. Based on this framework, a sustainability awareness improvement model was developed.</p> <p>The research was conducted as a qualitative case study. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with ten employees from the commissioning company and the data were analysed using content analysis.</p> <p>The findings indicate that sustainability awareness within the company is currently relatively low. While employees are aware that a sustainability program exists, their knowledge is generally limited to aspects directly related to their daily responsibilities. The results highlight several opportunities for improvement, including the need for clearer, more consistent communication and the implementation of targeted sustainability training. Additionally, change management was identified as essential for creating lasting awareness. Employees expressed a desire for more concrete information on the company's sustainability targets and their individual responsibilities in achieving them.</p> <p>By implementing the suggested development measures, the commissioning company has the potential to strengthen its sustainability culture and support long-term organisational change.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> Corporate sustainability, sustainable development, environmental sustainability, change management

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## 1 Introduction

The European Union Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) entered into force on 5 January 2023. CSRD has led to many companies required to report according to European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS), that have not previously been required to do any reporting. As the companies might not have thought about sustainability before this, they face pressure to implement sustainability reporting into their daily operations.

One of the goals of CSRD is to help different stakeholders evaluate and compare the sustainability performance of different companies. Investors, consumers and other stakeholders are not able to make informed decisions relating to sustainability now, because the way companies are now reporting is not consistent. By implementing the CSRD and the ESRS, the European Union aims to force companies to provide reliable and structured information to all relevant stakeholders. (European Commission s.a. a.; European Commission s.a. b.)

Many companies might look at the new CSRD as a negative thing, something additional to complete and invest resources in just because they are obliged to do so. By doing this, these companies do not realize the full potential of sustainability work and initiatives on their business. Clear and thought-out sustainability programs have clear advantages for the companies, such as decreased cost of funding, increased brand reputation which might open new markets to the company and increased customer satisfaction just to name a few. By operating sustainably, the company ensures that their business can continue for the foreseeable future. (Parihar 2024.)

Sustainability work and initiatives are viewed as something that the commissioning company wants to focus on in the future. According to a recent survey that the company has conducted, some of the employees of the company do not understand the company's focus on sustainability work. These employees feel that the resources used in the sustainability work could be better used somewhere else. The commissioning company has not had a sustainability program in the past, which might have contributed to these negative views of their employees. Raising the sustainability awareness of the employees, especially on the environmental factors, is considered an important task in the leadership team of the commissioning company. The thesis provides development suggestions for the commissioning company to raise the awareness of their employees regarding the environmental impact of the company's business.

The thesis is a qualitative case study, focusing on improving the awareness of the commissioning company's employees relating to the environmental impact of the company's daily operations. The goal of the thesis is to examine the current state of sustainability awareness among the employees

of the commissioning company and make development suggestions to improve this state. The goal of the thesis is reached by answering the following research questions:

Q1: What is the current level of employee awareness related to sustainability matters in the case company?

Q2: What advantages can a company achieve by implementing sustainability in their everyday business?

Q3: How can the commissioning company improve the awareness of their employees related to the company's environmental impact?

Sustainable development, corporate sustainability and change management in organisations are investigated in a closer depth during the theoretical framework. However, the development suggestions focus on improving the environmental sustainability awareness of the employees at the commissioning company. This excludes a part of sustainability topics, such as economic and social sustainability, outside of the development suggestions. The thesis also excludes the potential implementation of the recommendations by the commissioning company. The recommendations are reviewed by the commissioning company and the provided feedback is included in the thesis. The results of the thesis are also presented to the team leaders and managers of the company in a separate meeting.

The research methods for this qualitative case study include a series of 10 semi-structured interviews and the qualitative content analysis of the results from the interviews. The interviews offer qualitative insights by capturing the perspectives and experiences of the commissioning company personnel. The interviews are designed to explore the current state of sustainability awareness in the company and to uncover any potential improvement topics specific to the commissioning company. Qualitative content analysis based on the interviews offers insights into participants' experiences, perceptions and behaviours. The analysis provides flexibility to explore potentially uncovered themes while maintaining a structure that ensures consistency across interviews, enabling the identification of patterns and meanings in the data.

The commissioning company is a medium-sized Finnish company operating in the manufacturing industry area. The company has over 100 employees and the yearly revenue is around 25 million EUR, figures are from 2023. The company is operating in a highly specified industry with a limited number of potential customers and competitors. The commissioning company will remain anonymous in the thesis, due to potentially sensitive topics relating to their employees being discussed.

This thesis consists of six main chapters. The introduction begins the thesis by providing background information, the research problem, objectives and an overview of the study. The theoretical framework is presented in the following two chapters. This serves as the foundation for the study, providing understanding of the research topic by analysing existing studies, key theories and industry reports. Topics of sustainable development, corporate sustainability and sustainability reporting standards are explored in the second chapter. The methods of engaging employees to sustainability work and change management theories are explored in the third chapter. In chapter four, the methods and implementation of the case study are presented. Chapter five presents the results of the 10 semi-structured interviews conducted during the case study. The thesis concludes with chapter 6, which includes qualitative data analysis, sustainability awareness improvement recommendations to the commissioning company, the evaluation of the thesis and the author's own learning experience during the thesis.

## 2 Sustainable development and corporate sustainability

This chapter explores the principles of sustainable development and the three dimensions of sustainability—economic, environmental and social. It examines how businesses integrate these concepts through corporate sustainability, balancing profitability with environmental and social responsibility. Additionally, the chapter covers key sustainability directives and reporting standards, highlighting their role in promoting transparency and accountability in corporate sustainability efforts.

### 2.1 Sustainable development

According to some researchers, sustainability has first been discussed in the Limits to Growth (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, William & Behrens III 1972, 46-88), a report written at Massachusetts University for the Club of Rome. According to the report, exponential growth in different areas such as population growth or economic growth can cause a variety of negative impacts, such as lack of food for all people or running out of non-renewable material or energy sources due to over-consumption. The report also raises the issue of increased pollution, by discussing the increase of carbon dioxide emissions and nuclear waste as a negative effect of exponential growth. There was definite understanding that there are limits to the exponential growth, and these limits would be quickly reached if the situation remained unchanged. The outcome of the report was that exponential growth must be contained through constraints, to achieve a sustainable equilibrium. This is something that the world had not seen at this point of history. (Meadows et al. 1972, 46-88.)

The discussion relating to sustainability was fuelled by the above-mentioned report and subsequent studies, which led to a United Nations response through a report called Our Common Future in 1987. The goals of the report, written by the Brundtland Commission, are to propose strategies for sustainable development, improve the co-operation between countries to raise awareness on environmental matters, propose ways the international community can become more effective when dealing with environmental concerns and define common perceptions of long-term environmental issues. The report is seen as a cornerstone on sustainability matters. (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 5.)

A commonly used and agreed upon definition of sustainable development is from the above-mentioned report by Brundtland Commission, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition encompasses the idea of intergenerational responsibility to the core of sustainability. The actions of a single generation will impact the possibilities of all future generations for a normal life. In practice, sustainable development involves addressing global challenges such

as climate change, resource depletion, poverty and inequality through collective action and innovation. (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987; Fischer et al. 2023, 17.)

Even though the above definition by the Brundtland commission is generally accepted through many different sources, sustainability can be defined in other ways as well. Daly provided a framework for understanding sustainable development by integrating ecological limits with economic and social systems. His three key principles outline the conditions under which development can be deemed sustainable. Daly emphasized that the rate at which renewable resources are harvested must not exceed their natural regeneration rate, as it would place humanity in the risk of running out of these resources. (Daly 1991, 20-21.) In addition, the production of waste and pollution must not exceed the environment's capacity to absorb, recycle or neutralize these outputs without harm (Daly 1991, 63-65). Daly also argued that the depletion of non-renewable resources (such as fossil fuels and minerals) must be offset by investments in sustainable alternatives or technologies. Daly's framework shifted the focus from mere economic growth to maintaining the ecological integrity and resource base necessary for sustained human well-being. (Daly 1991, 78-80.)

For even further definitions of sustainable development, Staub-Bisang (2012) presents that sustainability can be defined as the capacity to endure. Moreover, Staub-Bisang concludes that sustainability has environmental, economic and social dimensions, which is a common idea among researchers. This idea was originally presented by Elkington (1997) as the "Triple Bottom Line", which balances people, planet and profit. These three dimensions of sustainability will be examined deeper later in this thesis.

On a geological timeline, the latest events faced by humanity are something completely unprecedented. Some researchers claim that the Anthropocene epoch began at the start of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries. During the 20th century, the Anthropocene evolved into the next stage, known as the "Great Acceleration." The scale of human activity, particularly in resource extraction, energy consumption and industrialization, has increased exponentially, far outpacing the planet's ability to regenerate and adapt. As a result, we are experiencing widespread environmental degradation, which includes climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. All of these are causing disruptions to our biosphere that have never been seen before. These changes highlight the urgent need for a more sustainable relationship with the Planet Earth to mitigate further damage and ensure the survival of future generations. (Crutzen 2002; Robertson 2019, 4.)

The state of the climate report 2024 by World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) states that 2024 is on track to become the warmest year on record. However, long-term warming which is measured over decades remains under 1.5 degrees Celsius, even though we are approaching that milestone. For us to not reach that milestone, the time for sustainability actions is now. (WMO 2024.)

## 2.2 Sustainability initiatives of United Nations

After the initial report by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 which laid the groundwork, there have been several different reports created by the United Nations that expand on the subject, such as Millennium Development Goals (United Nations s.a. a) and Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations s.a. b.). Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set out 8 different measurable goals that were supposed to be achieved by target year of 2015. The MDGs have been defined in Table 1.

Table 1. Millennium Development Goals (adapted from United Nations s.a. a)

<b>Goal 1</b>	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
<b>Goal 2</b>	Achieve universal primary education
<b>Goal 3</b>	Promote gender equality and empower women
<b>Goal 4</b>	Reduce child mortality
<b>Goal 5</b>	Improve maternal health
<b>Goal 6</b>	Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
<b>Goal 7</b>	Ensure environmental sustainability
<b>Goal 8</b>	Develop a global partnership for development

Even though progress was good in several different goals, such as eradicating extreme poverty, the MDGs failed to be fully completed by the target date of 2015. The progress in MDGs across different countries and regions was uneven, which led to creation of significant gaps in performance. Millennium Development Goals were superseded by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. SDGs cover 17 goals with 169 targets that have been unanimously agreed by all 191 UN member states to try to achieve before the year 2030. These goals act as a blueprint for people across the planet to base their actions on. (United Nations s.a. b.) The SDGs are presented in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations s.a. b)

Sustainable Development Goals have provided a globally available framework for every stakeholder that wants to pursue balance in their sustainability actions. According to United Nations, the participation of the private sector is considered crucial, if the SDGs have a chance of being accomplished. (United Nations s.a. b.) A similar thought has been explored in an article by Porter and Kramer, which states that organisations are far more effective than governments and nonprofits in creating change, as they have more resources and experience towards marketing their societally beneficial products. These products include for example healthier food and environment-friendly products. (Porter & Kramer 2011.)

However, according to the latest report by the United Nations on the progress on SDGs, only a minority (17%) of these goals are on track to be fulfilled by the target 2030. A large part of the goals is showing too little progression, stagnation or even regression. The blame is placed on several global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, growing number of conflicts and large geopolitical tensions across the world. Even though the governments remain united behind these goals and the target dates, the current conflict-ridden situation prevents us from reaching the targets of the

SDGs. There is a definite call for world peace, co-operation across all countries and development towards green transition in the latest report. (United Nations 2024.)

### **2.3 Three dimensions of sustainability**

Majority of academics agree that sustainable development consists of at least three different dimensions, the economic, the social and the ecological dimension. (Schwarz-Herion & Omran 2015, 30; Robert, Parris & Leiserowitz 2005; Tracey & Anne 2008, 27.) This idea was originally presented by Elkington (1997) as the "Triple Bottom Line", where sustainability actions balance people, planet and profit. Sustainable development targets stability on all three dimensions, to provide a stable foundation for sustainability initiatives. The basic idea of the three dimensions is that people, habitats and economic systems are all connected to each other. This interdependence between the dimensions cannot be ignored for extended periods of time, as it will inevitably lead to some type of crises. (Schwarz-Herion & Omran 2015, 30; Sutton 2004; Tracey & Anne 2008, 27.)

To achieve economic sustainability and stable economic system, avoidance of existence-threatening debts should be practiced on all different levels. This includes states, cities, banks, organisations and individuals. Stable systems attempt to offer every single person all necessary items and services for physical and mental well-being. (Schwarz-Herion & Omran 2015, 30.) Economic development provides an increase in employment rates, consumption and overall wealth of the nation (Robert et al. 2005). The dependence on developed economic systems is clear, as without these our daily life would look vastly different. Businesses are kept operational; jobs are provided to individuals and communities are built through the economic activity. The result of this economic prosperity is that the population remains well-fed and content. (Tracey & Anne 2008, 27.)

Some researchers combine the social sustainability dimension with an additional one, the political dimension. The goal of sustainable social systems is the equality of all people regardless of origin, gender, age or religious and ideological point-of-view. These systems would also foster political activity and empowerment of their inhabitants. Peace would be achieved through mutual agreements between the affected parties, rather than military interventions or global legislation suppressing those who are expressing different opinions. (Schwarz-Herion & Omran 2015, 30.) Long-term societal success relies on a population that is healthy and productive. An unwell society promotes unrest and poverty among the population. Social and economic prosperity are interconnected, and one cannot exist without the other. (Tracey & Anne 2008, 27.)

The environmental sustainability dimension relates to the habitats that the humankind lives in. Sustainable environmental systems require fertile ground, security in water, food and energy resources, preservation of the atmosphere which includes the need for clean air and the protection of

the current living flora and fauna that exist on Planet Earth. (Schwarz-Herion & Omran 2015, 30.) Environmental sustainability cannot exist without economic viability, therefore economic factors will always play a large role when organisations are deciding on the environmental aspects of their business (Ha 2014, 2). Similar thought is presented by Tracey & Anne, who state that all three dimensions are interconnected. Without a healthy environment to live in, the social and economic wellbeing of the population does not prosper in the long-term. (Tracey & Anne 2008, 27.)

Environmental sustainability can be defined as “the ability to maintain the qualities that are valued in the physical environment”. These values include sustaining human life and natural environments capability to provide survivable conditions for humans and other species to live in. Maintaining the aspects of the environment that provide renewable resources and ensuring the functioning of society despite using non-renewable resources is also a part of environmental sustainability. Keeping the usage of renewable resources on an appropriate level and decreasing the usage of non-renewable resources is an important part of keeping the environment sustainable. Sustainability issues occur when a part of an environmental system is under threat of decline in quality or existence. Major environmental sustainability challenges include the destruction of natural habitats, pollution from harmful chemicals and waste, greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change and the depletion of affordable fossil fuel resources. These issues significantly impact ecosystems and the long-term health of the planet. (Sutton 2004, 1-2.)

As previously stated, the United Nations have defined 17 goals that form the Sustainable Development Goals. Three of these goals are especially related to environmental sustainability. Goal 13 relates to climate change, encouraging us to take action to combat climate change and effects caused by it. Goal 14 is related to protecting life below water, promoting the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. Goal 15 is related to conserving as life on land, protecting ecosystems on land, managing forests sustainably, halting and reversing land degradation and biodiversity loss. (United Nations s.a. b.)

## **2.4 Defining corporate sustainability**

Corporate sustainability is a similar term to corporate social responsibility, and it can be used interchangeably. For the purposes of this thesis, the term corporate sustainability is used, as it is included in the name of Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). The CSRD is an important factor in the purpose of this thesis, as it is one of the main reasons behind the commissioning company focusing on sustainability initiatives.

Defining corporate sustainability is a difficult concept. Dahlsrud analysed 37 different definitions of corporate social responsibility in his study. The initial problem was that there were too many

definitions for the topic, which creates biases towards certain definitions depending on who is defining the concept. The inherent indefinability of corporate social responsibility is due to the challenge of creating an unbiased definition, since there is no way to examine underlying biases. However, all the definitions are referring to 5 different dimensions: The environmental, social, economic, stakeholder and voluntariness dimensions. (Dahlsrud 2008.) A common definition for corporate social responsibility is from the Commission of the European Communities (2001): "A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis". The "voluntary basis" in the above statement can be argued to have become outdated, as sustainability reporting has become mandatory for thousands of companies through the European Union directives regarding Corporate Sustainability (European Commission s.a. a; European Commission s.a. c). These directives are examined further later in the thesis.

Corporate sustainability extends the principles of sustainable development to the business context, focusing on how companies can operate responsibly while contributing to broader sustainable development goals. When considering the idea presented by the Brundtland Commission (1987), it can be translated to business landscape as "Meeting the needs of a firm's direct and indirect stakeholders without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well." These stakeholders include shareholders, employees, clients, communities and so on. (Dyllick & Hockerts 2002.) Key aspects of corporate sustainability include minimizing carbon footprints, fostering diversity and inclusion, ensuring ethical supply chain practices and supporting community development. (United Nations. s.a. b.)

Dyllick and Hockerts (2002) define corporate sustainability as a business approach that prioritizes creating long-term shareholder value by integrating opportunities and managing risks associated with economic, environmental and social developments. They argue that corporate sustainability goes beyond traditional profit-driven objectives by emphasizing a balance between economic growth, environmental stewardship and social responsibility, which is similar to the idea of "Triple Bottom Line" originally presented by Elkington (1997), that has been previously explained in this thesis. Their framework highlights the importance of aligning business practices with broader sustainability goals, ensuring that companies contribute positively to society and the environment while maintaining profitability. By addressing the triple bottom line of people, planet and profit, Dyllick and Hockerts present corporate sustainability as a comprehensive approach that focuses on resilience and ethical business operations in a rapidly evolving global landscape. (Elkington 1997; Dyllick & Hockerts 2002.)

The definition of social responsibility differs from that of corporate social responsibility, as it envelops a larger group of stakeholders, rather than only organisations. Social responsibility assumes that both individuals and organisations act in a way that does not jeopardize the environment or the society. (Ganti 2024.)

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) is a term that is often used when organisations present their sustainability initiatives. The term was initially raised in a report “Who Cares Wins” by United Nations Global Compact (2004), when discussing the need for capital market shareholders to further integrate ESG factors into their investment decision making. The need for action targeted all financial market stakeholders, such as financial institutions, companies, investors, regulators, stock exchanges and analysts. ESG as a term is related more towards the financial market and investments, and it cannot be used interchangeably with corporate sustainability, even if both terms relate to the same larger topic. (Rau & Yu 2024.) ESG factors are becoming increasingly important in investment decisions. This is likely to influence companies to create sustainable strategies aiming to implement carbon neutrality and reduce their carbon footprint. (Jinga 2022.)

Corporate sustainability has been criticised by Porter and Kramer, who presented a concept of Creating Shared Value. The argument was that corporate sustainability is not enough, as it focuses on improving the reputation of an organisation and has only a limited connection to the business. This disconnection makes it difficult to justify corporate sustainability in the long run, as it is seen as an expense to the organisation. Porter and Kramer also highlighted the need to create shared value in a way that creates both economical and societal value, by addressing the needs of the societies. This way, creation of shared value is a competitive advantage to the organisation, making the process truly sustainable and not something that can be cut or downsized when the organisation is facing difficult times. Companies can create shared value in a variety of different ways, such as reimagining their products and markets, redefining productivity in the value chain and enabling local society development. (Porter & Kramer 2011.) Similar thought to shared value has been presented in *Grow the Pie* by Edmans (2020), which states that organisations should not have to choose between earning a profit and serving a purpose. According to Edmans, businesses driven by purpose are consistently performing at a higher level, which translates to long-term success of the organisation.

Most organisations practice some level of corporate sustainability; however, the way it is being practiced differs a lot between organisations. The most effective way for an organisation to practice corporate sustainability is to implement sustainability factors into the core purpose of the business. This can be identified as strategic corporate sustainability. There are multiple different levels in how organisations can practice corporate sustainability, such as systematic corporate sustainability

or project-based corporate sustainability. Systematic corporate sustainability occurs when organisations take concrete steps to include sustainability in their daily operations, however they are not using sustainability for competitive advantage. Project-based corporate sustainability relates to individual projects such as donating to a charitable course, even if the cause is not related to the organisations line of business in any way. Some companies might only do the bare minimum that is required by the law, and it could still be called corporate sustainability. (Harmaala 2024.)

## **2.5 Sustainability directives and reporting standards**

Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) was implemented on 5 January 2023 across the European Union. One of the goals of the directive is to help different stakeholders evaluate and compare the sustainability performance of different companies. Investors, consumers and other stakeholders are not able to make informed decisions relating to sustainability now, because the way companies are now reporting is not consistent. CSRD has led to many companies being required to report according to European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS), that have not previously been required to do any reporting related to sustainability matters. As the companies might not have thought about sustainability before this, they face pressure to implement sustainability reporting into their daily operations. The CSRD applies to large EU companies (meeting two of: 250+ employees, over 40M EUR turnover, over 20M EUR assets), listed companies (excluding micro-enterprises), and non-EU companies with €150M+ EU turnover and significant EU operations. (European Commission s.a. a; European Commission s.a. b.)

However, in April 2025 the European Parliament approved the European Commission's proposal to postpone the expansion of the CSRD obligations to smaller companies. The change does not affect large companies with over 500 employees that are already subject to the CSRD. These companies will proceed with their first sustainability reports in 2025, based on 2024 data. The postponement specifically concerns large non-listed companies and certain smaller listed companies, including SMEs. Under the original timeline, these groups were scheduled to begin reporting in 2026 and 2027, respectively. With the new decision, large non-listed companies will now start reporting in 2028 based on 2027 data, while SMEs will also see their obligations pushed to 2028. For these smaller firms, reporting will remain voluntary for the first two years, as previously planned. (Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto 2025.)

Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) is a European Union directive implemented on 25 July 2024, that defines how organisations can act sustainably in their operations. CSDDD focuses on the actions that organisations can take to improve sustainability and responsible behaviour across their global value chains. Companies should be looking to identify and address the impacts of their operations towards human rights and environmental factors globally.

There are several proposed benefits of the directive for citizens, which include better protection of human rights, healthier environment for current and future generations and increased trust in businesses through more transparency. Organisations can also expect several benefits, such as a more level playing field, higher customer trust and better risk management through increased resilience and competitiveness. CSDDD is not implemented as widely as CSRD, as it is only mandatory for large EU companies, with over 1000 employees and over 450 million EUR turnover, or large non-EU companies that have over 450 million EUR turnover in EU. The Directive is planned to be applied fully by July 2029, following a staggered approach across the European Union. (European Commission s.a. c.)

The ESRS are a set of guidelines developed by the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group (EFRAG) under the CSRD. These standards aim to enhance transparency and comparability in sustainability reporting across EU companies. The ESRS outline specific disclosure requirements on ESG topics. They include sector-specific standards and emphasize double materiality, requiring companies to report both the impact of their activities on sustainability and how sustainability issues affect their business. (European Commission s.a. b.)

Applicable from January 2024, the ESRS are designed to align with global frameworks like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB). Their goal is to help investors and stakeholders access reliable, standardized ESG data to drive sustainable decision-making and compliance with EU climate goals. By implementing the CSRD and the ESRS, the European Union aims to force companies to provide reliable and structured information to all relevant stakeholders. (European Commission s.a. b.)

Double materiality assessment is a key step companies should take when they are identifying the essential items used in their reporting. Previous sustainability reporting initiatives, such as GRI-standard only considered single materiality assessment, which means that organisations should only consider how sustainability risks, such as those regarding climate and ESG factors, affected the organisations financial performance and position. Double materiality assessment considers the effects that the organisation has on the environment it operates in, in addition to how these factors can affect the financial performance of the organisation. (Manifest Climate 2024.)

Porter and Kramer (2011) have created guidelines for governments on what kind of sustainability regulations should be created that enhance shared value creation and innovation among organisations and society. Regulations should incentivize organisations to invest in long-term value creation, rather than short-term profits. There should be clear and measurable goals for the organisation regarding their social effects. Performance standards should be laid out, however the methods to achieve these standards should not be clearly defined, as it only creates incentive for

organisations to copy the methods rather than think truly what would be beneficial for their business. Organisations should report in an efficient and timely manner on their progress on universal measurement and performance reporting systems and regulators should be able to audit these results, if needed. (Porter & Kramer 2011.)

The above guidelines by Porter and Kramer (2011) can be argued to have a connection to the latest directives on sustainability reporting that the European Union has created, as there are several factors that can be connected to the guidelines. These factors include for example double materiality assessment that every applicable organisation must perform on their own, connecting to the guideline of laying out performance standards but not specifying the actions to reach these standards. The reporting that is done through ESRS is also following the guidelines set out by Porter and Kramer, as it is a universal reporting system, that is not audited by the government. (European Commission s.a. b; Porter & Kramer 2011.)

### **3 Engaging employees to sustainability work**

This chapter explores the role of employee engagement towards sustainability and its impact on creating lasting change within organisations. Strategies for managing corporate sustainability are also explored, which ensure that sustainability goals are effectively integrated into business operations. Additionally, the chapter discusses the importance of communicating sustainability matters, highlighting how transparency and clear messaging influence stakeholder trust and participation.

Successful sustainability initiatives require strong leadership and adaptability. Therefore, this chapter also covers change management principles and the role of leadership commitment in creating a sustainability-driven corporate culture. Finally, it introduces the sustainability awareness improvement model based on the previously mentioned topics, which provides a framework for improving sustainability knowledge and engagement at an organisation.

#### **3.1 Employee engagement towards sustainability**

Engaging employees in sustainability initiatives is crucial for companies aiming to enhance their environmental performance and achieve long-term success. When employees perceive their organisation as genuinely committed to sustainability, their engagement levels can increase by up to 16%, creating a more motivated and productive workforce. This increase in engagement is relatively consistent among all age groups, with only minor changes identified between demographics. (Culture Amp 2024.) Additionally, according to a survey conducted in March 2023, 69% of respondents wanted their companies to invest in sustainability efforts. These efforts include reducing carbon, using renewable energy and reducing waste. Younger generations, between the ages of 18 and 34, show an even stronger interest in sustainability initiatives than their older counterparts. According to the same survey, the potential sustainability efforts of companies affect 27% of job seekers decision-making in accepting job offers. This alignment with employee values can further enhance job satisfaction, retention and overall well-being. (Deloitte 2023.) Focusing on employee engagement in sustainability not only supports environmental goals but also enhances employee morale, retention and overall organisational performance (Culture Amp 2024; Deloitte 2023).

Organisations can evaluate several different recommendations when promoting green behaviour within their employees, that Zacher, Rudolph and Katz (2023) identified in their work. These recommendations are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Recommendations for organisations to improve employee green behaviour (adapted from Zacher et al. 2023)

Incorporating sustainability goals directly into business strategy
Enhancing an environmental organisational culture through mission and values
Environmental initiative support program at all organisational levels
Offering sustainability education and training as part of personal development opportunities
Including sustainability factors in performance appraisal and management
Rewarding positive behaviour and penalizing unwanted behaviour
Including sustainability tasks in job descriptions

Developing sustainable business practices is a major part of sustainability work for organisations. Without large scale reduction of organisational use of energy and resources, international organisations, countries and cities are unable to reach their sustainability targets. Previously, organisations have relied on facility managers focusing on the physical aspects of the workplace to consider sustainable choices as part of decision-making. However, facility managers often struggle with this aspect of their jobs due to lack of relevant expertise and the tasks not being a part of their role. (Greene, Crumbleholme & Myerson 2014.)

Employees consider two main things when evaluating their attitude towards environmental sustainability, cost of the actions both to their employers and to themselves. Sustainability should be seen as something that gives a competitive advantage rather than takes that away. Employees also often think that they shouldn't care about sustainability factors, if they are not rewarded for it somehow, for example through additional pay. (Greene et al. 2014.) However, this is not the case for all employees, as Greene et al. (2014) identified four different types of employees in relation to sustainability. These four types are pragmatic, libertarian, housekeeper and campaigner. Each type has their own view on who should cover the costs related to sustainability efforts, what they are motivated by and what types of sustainability initiatives they would support. The similarities and differences in the ideologies between these four types are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Four different types of employees in relation to sustainability (adapted from Greene et al. 2014)

	<b>Pragmatist</b>	<b>Libertarian</b>	<b>Housekeeper</b>	<b>Campaigner</b>
<b>Who should cover the costs</b>	Costs should not occur	Organisation	Workforce	Both the organisation and the workforce
<b>Motivated by</b>	Financial rewards, social norms, privileges and achievement	Financial rewards, privileges, status, achievement and autonomy	Making a positive difference to the environment, shared goals, being part of a community	Personal values, concern for environmental issues and achievement
<b>Sustainability initiatives that could be considered</b>	Quick and easy "wins"	Investing to sustainable infrastructure	Behavioural change of the workforce	Initiatives that should be worked on together by the organisation and the workforce

The co-existence of the different types of employees within one organisation is a challenge, as tensions can arise due to difference in opinion and way of working. Organisations should be looking in to finding the positives that each group can bring to the table, as every group could bring a meaningful contribution to the table. (Robertson 2019. 9-11.)

According to a study by Law, Hills and Hau, employee's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainability factors, especially environmental factors can be changed through environmental education and awareness training. The education and training included topics such as global climate change, ecosystems and services related to these, sustainable development and corporate sustainability. The educational programmes that the employees completed were existing trainings, such as HSBC Climate Banker Staff Training and Awareness Building Programme and the Train-the-HSBC Eco-trainer Programme. In addition to the improvement of attitudes and behaviours, employees demonstrated improved loyalty and job satisfaction after completing the programmes. (Law et al. 2015.)

### 3.2 Managing corporate sustainability

The management of corporate sustainability is a large and diverse topic with plenty of research conducted from a variety of different viewpoints. Organisations are looking for advice on how they can manage their sustainability initiatives and reporting obligations, especially after the

implementations of CSRD and CSDDD. This chapter will be looking into several aspects that organisations can consider when planning for the management of corporate sustainability.

### **3.2.1 Corporate sustainability management and governance**

Sustainability initiatives should be embedded in the company's organisational culture, management processes and the company governance to achieve the greatest chance of success. Sustainability initiatives are led from the top down, which means it is crucial that the board of directors is involved in the entire process surrounding the initiatives. This also means that the board should take sustainability matters into consideration when making decisions regarding the company's future. (Gutterman 2021a, 13-14.)

The need for organisations to become more sustainable may arise from external or internal sources, or through a combination of these sources. External sources can be for example the society through public agenda or through the rest of the business sector and the clientele. The role of directors and managers as internal sources of pressure cannot be understated, however leading from above might not be the only direction that can make things happen. Organisations own workforce can also be a driving force for sustainable changes, as a lot of people are now very environmentally concerned. (Barreiro-Gen, Lozano, Carpenter & Bautista-Puig, 2022.) However, Porter and Kramer (2011) argue that external pressure is often the main reason behind organisations creating corporate sustainability programs. In this context, sustainability programs are seen as a necessary expense to enhance the organisation's reputation.

Organisational sustainability is also impacted by organisational resilience and vice versa, as sustainable organisations can see challenges coming ahead of time, reducing potential risks and crises. In addition, combining organisational sustainability and organisational purpose is important, as they are closely linked to each other. Making sustainability a part of the organisational purpose promotes positive sustainable behaviour, resulting in organisations being able to achieve their sustainability targets more efficiently. (Florez-Jimenez, Lleo, Danvila-del-Valle & Sánchez-Marín 2024.)

### **3.2.2 Performance measurement and impact assessment**

After the implementation of the corporate sustainability initiatives, organisations should always make sure that they have created sufficient controls, so that the results can be evaluated. Previously, the measurement has focused on financial criteria, however recently other approaches have begun to surface. These include measuring items such as customer satisfaction, employee wellbeing and organisational development, to name a few. (Gutterman 2021b, 143-145.)

Wolk, Dholakia and Kreitz have created a practical guide for the creation of performance measurement systems for organisations. The performance measurement cycle includes the following phases: measure, report, learn and improve. Organisations should analyse and choose what they want to measure. These can include factors such as financial sustainability and implementation effectiveness, which measure the organisational health. Outputs, quality and program costs measure the initiative performance by analysing the short-term results produced by the initiative. Long-term outcomes and systemic impact generation, for example how the initiative impacts other organisations, measure the social and economic impact of the initiative. Choosing the correct indicators for the organisation can be an overwhelming task, however the main goal is to keep it simple and remember that the indicators can be modified in the future, if they are not deemed successful. (Wolk et al. 2009.)

The measuring systems used by the organisation should be tailored according to the specific needs of the sustainability initiative. Data gathered through performance measurement can be stored in several different ways, for example in a spreadsheet software, customer relationship management tool or customer-built sustainability performance measurement software. The data storage tool should allow for the creation of dashboards, which act as a main source of analysis for the organisation. These dashboards can include both a high-level management dashboard view for management purposes, and a more detailed program-level dashboard view for the use of the specific groups in charge of the specific programs in the initiative. (Wolk et al. 2009.) Even though Wolk et al. (2009) encourage to keep the measurement factors simple, Zoysa, Takaoka and Zhang (2020) have found a positive impact that sophisticated measurement systems have on the impact of corporate sustainability initiatives.

Zoysa et al. have found a correlation between the corporate sustainability performance of organisations and three different variables related to sustainability initiatives. These variables were sophistication of the corporate sustainability management systems, awareness and affordability. If the management systems used in organisations were well-thought and sophisticated, the indirect effect they have on the overall corporate sustainability performance of the company was significant. Sophisticated management systems also had a mediating effect on the two alternative variables, awareness and affordability. This is due to the fact, that having sophisticated management systems enables organisations to identify key factors enabling positive sustainability outcomes. (Zoysa et al. 2020.)

### **3.2.3 Strategic approaches to sustainability implementation**

Griffiths and Petrick have defined three key aspects of organisational design that are hindering the implementation of sustainability across organisations. First, the way that large corporations usually

work, with already pronounced tasks and processes, does not leave enough space for new sustainable ways of working. The second finding was that command-and-control organisational structures do not encourage the collaboration between the stakeholders and the organisation, which is an important part of sustainability initiatives becoming successful. Finally, traditional organisational design does not have a specialized environmentally knowledgeable department, that could aid the organisation in distributing the necessary information to the rest of the departments. If these hindering factors are identified throughout the organisation, there is a need for organisational change to achieve the best possible results from sustainability initiatives. (Griffiths & Petrick 2001.) Moreover, Gutterman states that combining the aspects of organisational design and sustainability should begin by the creation of sustainability strategy followed by sustainability initiatives and programs. Effective strategy should be based on identifying and accepting the need to make a change within an organisation. This change is achieved through commitment to continuous improvement and high level of commitment from the executive leadership team and the board of the company. (Gutterman 2021b, 10.)

Additionally, organisations can progress more efficiently towards sustainability, if they have strong performance in organisational creativity and sustainability-oriented innovation factors. These factors provide an answer if the organisation is struggling to overcome sustainability challenges. Creativity is paramount when attempting to find solutions to the problems, managers should be looking to design and guide the creativity process to achieve applicable results. Additionally, integrating the three sustainability dimensions, that have been discussed in chapter 2.4 of this thesis, throughout the organisation is an important factor. This is done to impact the economic, social and environmental sustainability performance at the same time. (Souto 2021.) Aligning sustainability items across the organisation and assessing the sustainability performance of the organisation is also important. Organisations should be looking towards finding an agreed upon definition of sustainability, that the employees can resonate with, to promote effective sustainability awareness. (Djordjevic & Cotton 2011.)

Cheng, Zhao and Zhang identified during their research that the correlation between implementing socially responsible concerns and decreasing economic profit is not true. Socially responsible organisational supply chain can operate with a higher profit than the socially irresponsible supply chains. Conversely, organisations with socially irresponsible supply chains will have fewer profits. (Cheng et al. 2022.)

Jamali, Makarem and Willi found out that often the sustainability strategy is envisioned from the headquarters and then implemented towards subsidiaries. Imitating another organisation's corporate sustainability strategy is not effective, especially if it occurs on an organisational level from

parent company to subsidiary. The subsidiaries should follow the grand scheme initiated by HR when implementing corporate sustainability, with some customisations to local market that is allowed within the guidelines. (Jamali et al. 2018.)

### **3.3 Change management and countering change resistance**

Change management is an important part in every change made within an organisation and it is essential for managers to understand the need for proper change management practices during organisational change. Change management includes analysing, organising and managing a change process within an organisation. Change management can be practiced using several different techniques to manage both the technical and human sides of change implementation (Ha 2014, 8). In the past, change management theories were either technical or non-technical. Technical theories were based on historical works such as the Scientific Management theory by Frederick Taylor (1910). These theories explain that by analysing and improving their policies, processes, procedures and systems, organisations can achieve higher performance. The theories that were essential to non-technical change management were created by for example Roethlisberger, in his book *Management and the Worker* (1939). The main idea behind these non-technical theories was highlighting the importance of human factors, such as employee skills and adaptability to change. Over time, these two schools of thought have combined, as the results from utilising only one of them in change management are subpar. This can lead to either demotivated employees or depletion of innovation, therefore both technical and social elements should be included in every change management model. (Ha 2014, 8-10.)

Motivating employees to act in a certain way is an important part in change management. Motivation drives individuals to act and can arise through intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors are related to how individuals view and feel about things, such as changes that are occurring. Extrinsic factors focus on what the organisation can offer to the individuals, to motivate them. However, it is difficult for organisations to know beforehand, which way of motivation will be successful on their employees, as everyone could have different wants and needs. The needs of the employees also do not remain static, they are everchanging. The level of employee engagement can be defined as the degree of attachment the individual has formed to the organisation. High levels of employee engagement have a positive correlation with improvement of customer satisfaction, productivity, profits and turnover, all of which are important factors to organisations. (Smith, Farmer & Yellowley 2012, 61.)

Organisational culture is an important factor to consider in change management. Organisational culture can be defined as “a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguish one organisation from other organisation” (Robbins & Judge 2014, 497). Organisational culture will affect

both the individual performance and the organisational performance. Especially in sustainable change management, sustainability initiatives cannot succeed, if the employees are not willing to change their preconceived beliefs and attitudes towards a more sustainable business model. (Ha 2014, 78.)

Linnenluecke and Griffiths explore the relationship between corporate sustainability and organisational culture by addressing three key questions. First, they highlight that different cultural types within an organisation prioritize various sustainability aspects, such as employee development, resource efficiency, environmental protection or stakeholder engagement. The research also discusses whether organisations can have a single, cohesive sustainability-oriented culture. While the integration perspective assumes a dominant culture with shared values, the differentiation perspective suggests that multiple subcultures can exist, each with distinct attitudes toward sustainability. Barriers to sustainability-driven culture change are also identified, including organisational rigidity and subcultures. However, sustainability adoption can happen at different levels. Surface-level changes, such as sustainability reporting, employee training and performance evaluations, can also create an environment that gradually shifts values and beliefs over time. (Linnenluecke & Griffiths 2010.)

Organisations often face resistance when trying to implement changes in the process. Change resistance often stems from the human need to keep the situation the same as before, rather than accepting the changing environment. People might experience the loss of status quo as a negative even in situations where the thought of change is positive. For example, when a student is graduating, the actual change is a positive outcome, however the student might have negative emotions on the loss of their role as a student. (Peacock 2017, 45.) Resistance can appear in a multitude of different ways, such as decreasing productivity, increasing turnover in employees, working environments turning hostile and workers arguing in several different ways on why the change will not work (Lawrence 1969.)

Managers should remain steadfast when facing resistance towards change. There are several different strategies to overcome resistance towards change. Education, communication, training and development are preferred soft tactics to counter resistance, allowing employees to change their viewpoints on their own. If the softer tactics do not work, managers can attempt facilitation, consultation and negotiation by addressing the problem and attempting to create specific solutions with the employees to address their concerns. Even though managers have coercion and disciplinary tactics at their disposal, they should avoid using them as long as possible, as these are not seen effective when attempting to create a lasting change. It can be argued that managing change

resistance is one of the most important tasks for managers during the change process. (Smith et al. 2012, 163; Peacock 2017, 47-51.)

Resistance should not be attempted to be quashed at the very moment it appears, since it could have a significant positive effect in the change process. Resistance will balance the process and remove the unwanted parts of the change that would have otherwise remained in the process after the change. Resistance will also add a level of energy to the change process that would have otherwise not existed, making the change process feel rewarding to the employees. This can only happen if the resistance has an effect to the change at hand. (Waddell & Sohal 1998.) Ford, Ford and D'Amelio (2008) also conclude that resistance to change should not only be viewed as obstacles for the change, but resistance could also become a resource for change.

### **3.4 Communicating sustainability matters**

Communication is at the heart of every action in the workplace. Whether the communication happens physically or remotely, it is used to understand the task at hand, plan how to overcome obstacles and set clear and common goals. Everything of significance that occurs within an organisation involves communication in some way or form. Through communication, information and viewpoints of people are exchanged. Communication between individuals is influenced by a variety of factors, such as emotions, perceptions, attitudes and body language. (Smith et al. 2012, 115.) Building an effective communication strategy within an organisation should take into consideration the following factors that are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Factors for effective communication strategy (adapted from Smith et al. 2012, 115)

Top management should understand the importance of communication
Communication should be broadcasted through all available channels and using a variety of approaches
Communication should be targeted towards the specific audience
Communication should be consistent over time and between audiences
Clarity and simplicity of communication is preferred
Managers should complete trainings in communication skills
Employees should feel that they can share their opinions without feeling discomfort
All planning of activities should include a specific plan for communications

According to Mikkola and Valo, communication in the workplace can be improved in several different ways. Collaboration between the employees happens, when all are pursuing common goals, problems are not left unsolved and the feedback culture within the organisation works. It is important to evaluate the communication practices regularly. Inappropriate practices should be identified, which can be easily done during times of frustration. Changing long-standing practices of communication could be done for example through organising different settings and attempting new ways of collaboration, to avoid setting back to the old ways communication. (Mikkola & Valo 2020.)

The role of communication in initiatives should be seen as building understanding, rather than motivating behavioural change. Communication works at its best, when there is an understanding on how the human brain works and then basing the communicational strategy on those findings. (Robertson 2019, 3.) Current research understands the importance of communicating on sustainability matters. However, even though there has been increasing debate about the changes in our environment in the last decades, the public opinion has barely shifted, highlighting the fact that humans as a group do not consider the climate change as a growing threat (Gallup 2024.) This could be due to humans being unable to observe small and gradual changes over longer periods of time. Human brains are hardwired to consider current threats more important than worrying about threats that might happen at some point in the future. Educating people to see the need for sustainable actions is the primary goal for all those working to improve sustainability. (Robertson 2019, 6.)

Communicators must consider several different factors when communicating with others. Humans often tend to pay attention to facts that confirm our beliefs, whether they are right or wrong. This effect is called confirmation bias. Communicators should also attempt to connect with the listeners on an emotional level, to achieve a state of relevance in the listeners minds. In sustainability matters, some people might consider the planet's resources as for humans to use, while others believe that humans are merely borrowing them. This segmentation of beliefs makes it difficult for communicators to come through to all listeners. (Robertson 2019, 8-9.) This belief is also shared by Djordjevic and Cotton (2011), who uncovered that communication problems in organisations, especially ones relating to sustainability, can be traced back to difference in values and attitudes. This difference can make it difficult for communicators to reach all their separate audiences in a way that everyone is on the same page.

The goal of the communication should be clear to audiences from the start, as the audience can receive the information better if they understand why they should be listening. Audiences should also be studied before communicating to them, to uncover what they already know, their beliefs, values and interests to find something to resonate with them. (Robertson 2019, 10.)

Voci and Karmasin highlight various strategies and alternative practices to enhance sustainability communication. These include fostering dialogue and engaging stakeholders, utilizing framing and storytelling techniques, leveraging emotional appeals to resonate with audiences and maintaining transparency and openness when addressing uncertainty or complexity. However, a "one-size-fits-all" approach is insufficient in the realm of sustainability communication. Standardised methods often fail to achieve consistent outcomes, as audience responses can vary significantly based on factors such as their background, attitudes, knowledge, education, beliefs, and personal characteristics. What inspires and engages one individual might trigger defensive reactions or rejection in another. Consequently, effective sustainability communication requires a stakeholder-oriented approach and a tailored communication strategy. (Voci & Karmasin 2023.)

Kataria, Kataria and Garg uncover a few insights that could help managers promote sustainability communication within their organisations. Sustainability communication is best received through informal, face-to-face meetings rather than e-mails or memos. Communication should be organized in a simple and structured way, with clear actions rather than long presentations with countless action points. This also gives employees the initial push to act, when the task at hand does not seem too monumental for them. (Kataria et al. 2013.)

### 3.5 Leadership commitment

There are over 400 different definitions of leadership, however three common and regularly repeating aspects can be identified from these definitions. These three aspects are the setting of goals and recognizing achievements, operating in a group and influencing the behaviour of others through own actions. There are several different leadership styles, which revolve around who has the power in an organisation or whether the power is shared between the leader and the group. Most appropriate leadership solution will depend on the specific situation that the organisation is in. (Smith et al. 2012, 94.)

Organisational leaders play a key role in implementing change, as they can influence a multitude of stakeholders invested in the change process. The image of the leaders should remain consistent during the change process, to convince the stakeholders of the need for the change. When faced with difficult decisions over the change process, leaders should be proactive in finding solutions for them. These problems could be related to the changing processes or employees feeling uncertain about the change. (Ha 2014, 47.)

Metcalf and Benn identify that defining leadership styles that suit sustainability initiatives is a difficult task, due to the complexity of sustainability as a topic itself. Sustainability leadership requires strong skills from the leaders in areas such as reading and predicting complex topics, engaging groups towards organisational change and emotional intelligence to manage emotional reactions appropriately. Leaders help connect an organisation's internal operations with its complex external environment, playing a key role in driving sustainability. To do this, leaders need strong problem-solving skills to navigate potential arising challenges effectively. (Metcalf & Benn 2012.)

The leadership of an organisation always faces many expectations and preconceived points-of-view, especially during times of change. Leaders are also burdened with the pressure of delivering good results, as inadequacies are often attributed to the leader. Leaders are unable to lead if they do not have anyone following them, therefore leadership can be described as a relational process. Leaders have a relationship with their followers and the quality of that relationship is defined through how well the social interactions between the parties exist. When feeling a connection towards the leaders, the followers perform better and are more open to change. Functional communication between the leader and the followers is essential during the change process. (Mikkola & Valo 2020.)

### 3.6 Sustainability awareness improvement model

Based on the extensive theoretical framework presented earlier on in this thesis, I have created a model describing the five most important factors that companies should consider when attempting

to enhance sustainability awareness within their personnel. The factors do not have to be followed in any order, companies should rather focus on involving all factors as part of their sustainability awareness enhancement program during the planning stages. Sustainability awareness within an organisation requires a comprehensive and structured approach that integrates leadership commitment, strategic communication, change management, cultural transformation and performance measurement. The below model in Figure 2 presents five factors that organisations should implement to achieve long-term sustainability goals.



Figure 2. Model for improving sustainability awareness among employees

Leadership plays a crucial role in embedding sustainability within corporate strategies and ensuring compliance with regulatory frameworks such as CSRD and CSDDD (European Commission s.a. a; European Commission s.a. b). Companies should choose the most appropriate leadership solution based on the situation that they are in. A clear and compelling sustainability vision must be communicated consistently by leadership to inspire engagement. Furthermore, leaders should undergo training in effective communication and change management to promote a culture of sustainability across all levels of the organisation. (Smith et al. 2012, 115.) Additionally, sustainability leadership requires strong skills from the leaders in areas such as understanding and predicting complex topics, change management culture and emotional intelligence to manage emotional reactions appropriately (Metcalf & Benn 2012).

Effective and strategic sustainability communication should be clear, consistent, and distributed through multiple channels to ensure coherence across different audiences (Smith et al. 2012, 115).

A well-defined communication strategy should leverage storytelling, emotional appeals and transparency to improve engagement and alignment with corporate sustainability goals (Robertson 2019; Voci & Karmasin 2023). Additionally, an open dialogue should be encouraged in a simple manner, ensuring that employees feel safe to express concerns and contribute ideas without fear of repercussions (Kataria et al. 2013). Companies should remember the difference in values and attitudes of their employees. This difference can make it difficult for communicators to reach all their separate audiences in a way that everyone is on the same page. (Djordjevic & Cotton 2011.)

Managing resistance to sustainability initiatives is essential for successful implementation. Education, consultation and structured communication strategies help overcome scepticism and promote buy-in (Smith et al. 2012, 115; Peacock 2017, 47-51). Employee involvement in co-creating sustainability solutions enhances ownership and commitment, leading to more effective and innovative outcomes when compared with crushing resistance at the first sight of it (Waddell & Sohal 1998). Ford et al. (2008) also conclude that resistance to change could also become an important resource for change.

Sustainability should be ingrained into the organisation's culture, influencing daily decision-making and long-term strategic planning through the organisation's members (Zacher et al. 2023). Sustainability initiatives should be embedded in the company's organisational culture, management processes and the company governance to achieve the greatest chance of success (Gutterman 2021a, 13-14). Informal and structured communication methods, such as face-to-face discussions, enhance the effectiveness of sustainability messaging (Kataria et al. 2013).

A continuous cycle of measurement, reporting, learning and improvement is critical to refining sustainability initiatives. Utilizing dashboards and reporting tools provides transparency and accessibility, enabling stakeholders at different levels to track progress. Regularly reviewing data-driven insights and incorporating stakeholder feedback ensures the adaptation of sustainability strategies to evolving challenges and opportunities. (Wolk et al. 2009.)

By implementing these five key factors, organisations can create a strong sustainability culture, enhance employee engagement, and achieve long-term success in their sustainability initiatives.

## 4 Methods and implementation

The thesis aims to provide development suggestions for the commissioning company to raise the awareness of their workforce regarding the environmental impact of the company's business. According to a recent survey that the company conducted, some of the employees do not understand why the company focuses on sustainability work. These employees feel that the resources used in the sustainability program could be better used somewhere else. The commissioning company has not had a sustainability program in the past, which might have contributed to these negative views of their employees, as they are not aware of the importance of their actions. Raising the sustainability awareness of the employees, especially on the environmental factors, is considered an important task in the leadership team of the commissioning company.

The thesis is a qualitative case study, focusing on improving the awareness of the commissioning company's employees relating to the environmental impact of the company's business. The goal of the thesis is to examine the current state of sustainability awareness among the employees of the commissioning company and make development suggestions to improve this state. The goal of the thesis is reached by answering the following research questions during the thesis:

Q1: What is the current level of employee awareness related to sustainability matters in the case company?

Q2: What kinds of advantages can a company achieve by implementing sustainability in their everyday business?

Q3: How can the commissioning company improve the awareness of their employees related to the company's environmental impact?

### 4.1 Case study

Case study is a research method which translates theoretical knowledge to practical application using real-life examples. Usually, case studies aim to study a specific problem, rather than analysing a larger, general problem. Case studies usually have three different sections, which are analysing, discussing and writing about cases. Case study begins with the analysis, at the end of which an opinion should be formed about the main issue in the case study. This analysis is conducted by reviewing theories, methods and studies that have been conducted in the past. The analysis is also an important part in planning the rest of the research process, such as which questions should be asked and what the real development task is. (Ellet 2018; Moilanen, Ojasalo, Ritalahti 2022.) After the opinion has been formed, the second part of the case study can begin. During the discussion part, the issue and the researchers thinking surrounding it is being discussed with relevant

stakeholders. The aim of the second part is to learn more of the issue through collaboration. Finally, after you have received sufficient knowledge about the issue, you are able to write about your case study. (Ellet 2018.)

Businesses typically use the method of case study for development work, when the aim of the study is to create development suggestions and ideas. The current situation within an operational environment is uncovered during a case study by producing detailed and in-depth knowledge about the case. It is important to keep the scope of the case study limited, because the goal is to learn and understand a restricted target thoroughly. (Moilanen et al. 2022.)

The case study research method was selected for this thesis because it effectively combines theoretical knowledge into practical application through real-life examples. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of a specific problem rather than a broad, generalized issue, making it suitable for the research objectives. Case studies are widely used in business research, particularly for development work. By focusing on a specific case, the study can uncover the current situation within an operational environment, producing detailed and in-depth knowledge. The limited scope of a case study is beneficial as it allows for a thorough understanding of the target subject of sustainability awareness, ultimately leading to well thought out development suggestions and practical insights.

Given these advantages, the case study method was deemed the most appropriate research approach for this thesis, as it ensures a structured yet flexible framework for analysing, discussing, and applying knowledge to the subject.

## **4.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The research methods for this case study involve conducting ten semi-structured interviews. Interviews are a commonly used data-gathering method in research and development, allowing individuals to share their perspectives in a non-formal setting. The primary goal of interviews is to clarify a situation within an organisational context and gain a deeper understanding of the potential issues surrounding it. Semi-structured interviews consist of pre-prepared questions; however, the interviewer has the flexibility to modify the order of the questions, exclude certain ones if necessary or ask additional questions as the conversation unfolds. Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews offer greater flexibility, allowing for a more natural and dynamic discussion. (Moilanen et al. 2022.)

The interviews provide insights by exploring the perspectives and experiences of employees within the commissioning company. They are designed to assess the current level of environmental

sustainability awareness in the organisation and identify potential areas for improvement specific to the commissioning company. The interview framework was developed based on an analysis of the theoretical background presented earlier in the thesis, with the initial research questions in mind. The interview questions were structured to directly address the research questions and were divided into three sections. The first section examines the current state of environmental awareness within the company. The second explores the benefits of sustainability for the organisation, while the final section focuses on ways to enhance environmental awareness among employees. The full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix 1 and 2, both in English and Finnish.

After the initial version of the interview was created, a test interview was conducted to assess the quality and clarity of the questions. The test interviewee had no prior experience with sustainability topics, reflecting the potential knowledge level expected within the commissioning company. Before conducting the interviews, the sustainability knowledge of the employees was unknown. Based on feedback from the test interview, minor modifications were made to the first question to make it easier to answer and help ease participants into the discussion. The test participant noted that, with more knowledge of the subject, they would have been able to provide more comprehensive responses. Based on the feedback, the questions were understandable even to an individual that is not well versed in the topic.

The commissioning company selected the interview participants, with the attempt to create a diverse representation of employees across various positions. The contact person at the commissioning company was instructed to include ten participants from different levels within the organisation. As a result, one participant was part of the leadership team, while the rest were employees, experts or middle management. This selection provided a cross-section of the company, aligning with the thesis objective of assessing overall environmental awareness rather than comparing awareness levels across different teams.

The contact person provided the email addresses of potential participants, who were then invited via email. The initial invite sent to the participants is included in Appendix 3 and 4, both in English and in Finnish. After the interviewees responded, Teams-invites were sent out to the agreed upon timeslots. The interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams in Finnish. To ensure confidentiality, participants were guaranteed full anonymity, with assurances that their responses could not be traced back to them.

Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. The first five to ten minutes were dedicated to small talk and an explanation of the purpose of the interviews and the research objectives. Once the introductions were complete, the recording and transcription process began, followed by the

interview itself. The recorded interviews ranged from 20 to 53 minutes, with an average duration of 31 minutes.

Following the interviews, the transcriptions were manually reviewed and corrected for errors. This involved listening to the recordings and verifying the accuracy of the automated transcription provided by Microsoft Teams. As expected, the transcriptions had to be largely corrected. The accuracy of Microsoft Teams capturing the correct responses, especially as the interviews were more of an informal discussion, was relatively low. The interviews resulted in 186 pages of transcribed data in Microsoft Word. However, this figure was inflated due to the transcription method used by Microsoft Teams. The final transcriptions were in a readable format, but not concise. In total, the transcriptions contained 33,562 words, averaging approximately 3,356 words per interview.

### 4.3 Content analysis

The data gathered during the interviews is analysed using content analysis. This method is a broad theoretical approach that allows for various types of investigations. In fact, most qualitative content analysis methods are, in some way, based on this framework. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.) Content analysis can be described as “the verbal description of the content of documents when the aim is to search for and identify meanings in the text” (Moilanen et al. 2022).

Table 5. Four steps in conducting content analysis (adapted from Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018)

<b>Identify Key Themes</b>	Determine which aspects of the data stand out as relevant and interesting.
<b>Filter the Data</b>	Extract information that aligns with the research focus while discarding unrelated content.
<b>Categorize or Themmatize</b>	Organize the selected data into meaningful categories or themes.
<b>Draw Conclusions</b>	Analyse the themes and formulate conclusions based on the findings.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) have identified four different steps in conducting content analysis, that are presented in Table 5 above. The first step can be challenging, especially for less-experienced researchers, as everything may initially seem relevant. It is crucial to stay within the predefined research limitations, as one cannot investigate everything in a single study. Instead, researchers should focus on the data that directly addresses the research questions. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.)

The second step involves transcribing the data and coding the findings. It serves multiple purposes, such as creating internal notes for the researcher, structuring the data for easier interpretation and supporting future descriptions and analysis of the data. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.) Reading the transcribed data several times and identifying connections towards the theoretical framework is a part of this step. Reducing the material or omitting the unimportant parts of the interviews is also an important part of this step. The goal is to link the data gathered through the interviews to earlier theories regarding the subject. (Moilanen et al. 2022.)

The third step is often considered the core of content analysis, but it must be supported by the rest of the steps. Thematization involves identifying and grouping statements based on common topics. This approach allows researchers to compare viewpoints on a particular subject across different data sources. The process can be carried out in multiple stages, ultimately aiming to uncover key perspectives relating to certain themes. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.) Identifying connections between different datapoints is important, as the entire research will be left superficial without describing these connections. (Moilanen et al. 2022.)

After categorizing or thematizing the data, the final step is to develop meaningful conclusions. A common mistake among researchers is to present categorized data as results, without interpreting the significance of the results. Simply organising the data does not constitute content analysis. Researchers should also ensure that categories and themes are distinct enough to prevent confusion. By drawing well-supported and interesting conclusions, content analysis can be fully utilised as a research tool. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.) Creating meaningful conclusions of the data can be done through several different techniques, such as finding patterns and seeing connections within the data, making comparisons and contrasts and counting the amounts that certain items appear in the data. The use of imagination by the researcher is also important, as simply applying the above-mentioned tools and frameworks is not enough to create meaningful conclusions. (Moilanen et al. 2022.)

Content analysis was chosen as the research method for this thesis because it provides a systematic and flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. Given the nature of the research, which involves examining patterns, themes and meanings within interview data, content analysis allows for a structured way to interpret textual information.

Another reason for selecting content analysis is its ability to handle large volumes of qualitative data in a methodical way. Since this thesis involves multiple interviews, content analysis helps to organize the information efficiently, ensuring that significant insights are not overlooked. By systematically thematizing the data, the research can highlight recurring patterns, differences and relationships between responses. This approach enhances the reliability and validity of the findings, as

it ensures that conclusions are drawn based on structured analysis rather than subjective interpretation.

Furthermore, content analysis aligns well with the research objectives of this thesis. It allows the researcher to identify not only what is being said but also how different perspectives contribute to the broader discussion. By applying content analysis, the study can provide meaningful insights into the subject of environmental sustainability awareness while maintaining a transparent research process.

In this thesis, content analysis began once the transcription of all ten interviews was completed. The transcribed responses were first transferred into Microsoft Excel, one question at a time. This method ensured that all responses were grouped according to the specific questions asked during the interviews. Once the data was sorted in Excel, each answer was read multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of its content.

During this reading process, the data was reduced into a few sentences or keywords that captured the essence of each response. Some examples of this process is presented in Appendix 5 of this thesis. This step was crucial for reducing the volume of information while retaining the key data. By summarizing each response into its core elements, the analysis became more manageable and allowed for a comparison of perspectives across different interviewees. Once the key content had been identified in every answer for each question, the next phase of the analysis began.

The next step of the content analysis involved identifying connections and correlations between the different responses. By examining how various answers related to each other, broader patterns and trends were identified. This process enabled the identification of overarching themes, such as the majority opinion on specific topics. Recognizing these connections allowed for the formation of conclusions, such as determining that most interviewees shared similar views on certain aspects of environmental awareness. These findings were then presented in a structured, written format with clarifying figures and tables in Chapter 5.

The final phase of the content analysis focused on drawing meaningful conclusions and creating recommendations for the commissioning company. Based on the identified themes and insights, practical suggestions were developed to improve environmental awareness among the employees of the commissioning company. This concluding stage of the analysis, including the recommendations, is covered in Chapter 6 of the thesis. Through this approach, the content analysis provided a clear way to interpret the interview data and translate it into actionable recommendations.

## 5 Results

A perspective on the development of the company's sustainability awareness comes from individuals working in various roles within the company. Sustainability is perceived differently among the interviewees, which highlights the fact that there is not a well-defined description of sustainability that would apply to everyone. The roles that the interviewees hold within the company did not play a major role in the interviews, except when the questions were regarding the specific daily tasks of the interviewees.

The perspectives on the company's sustainability efforts were explored through ten semi-structured interviews, that were conducted individually through remote channels. The interviewees were professionals working in different roles within the company. The results show varying levels of enthusiasm towards the topic of sustainability, which leads to an understandable conclusion that the level of knowledge towards sustainability topics is directly correlating with the individuals own interest level towards the sustainability area.

### 5.1 Current state of sustainability awareness

The interviews explored views on what does a responsible company mean. Based on the data, a responsible company recognizes the unique characteristics of its industry and the responsibility requirements of its competitive landscape. Responsible companies fulfil their legal obligations and integrate responsibility into daily management, working environment and employee well-being. The company holds the promises it makes to customers and considers the impact of its operations on both employees and business partners.

Environmental considerations are seen as a key aspect of responsibility. This includes effective waste sorting, ensuring product traceability and minimizing environmental impact. Additionally, a responsible company can demonstrate its commitment through certifications, standards and clear processes that cover various aspects of its sustainability work. Some found it difficult to provide a clear answer to this question, as they understood the topic of sustainability as too large and difficult to narrow down to a single response.

In addition to the general definition of a responsible company, knowledge towards the company's current sustainability efforts and programs was explored. The environmental impacts of the company's business were also inquired. The amount of information about the company's sustainability work appears to depend on the employee's specific role and department. Many reported being familiar with sustainability practices mainly from the perspective of their own work, such as supplier audits, product labelling and waste recycling. This suggests that sustainability issues are not

necessarily communicated equally to all employees, but rather, information is fragmented based on job roles.

Many mentioned that they have only a little knowledge of the company's sustainability program. Two explicitly stated that they knew nothing about it, while several others described their knowledge as limited. This indicates that even though sustainability is communicated to some extent, awareness could be broader across the organisation. Environmental responsibility themes, such as recycling, waste sorting, waste reduction and energy efficiency, were highlighted in several responses. This suggests that environmental responsibility is one of the most recognized aspects of the company's sustainability efforts. Other areas of sustainability, such as social responsibility and ethical business practices, have lower visibility and awareness.

One highlighted that the company's sustainability program is under development and that standards of the program are being created and improved. This suggests that sustainability efforts of the company are evolving, with new practices being implemented in practice. However, during these changes, a key challenge is to ensure that information about new sustainability practices reaches the entire workforce. Few also mentioned broader aspects of responsibility, such as human resource management, regulatory compliance and communication. This indicates that for a minority, responsibility extends beyond environmental issues to include social considerations as well.

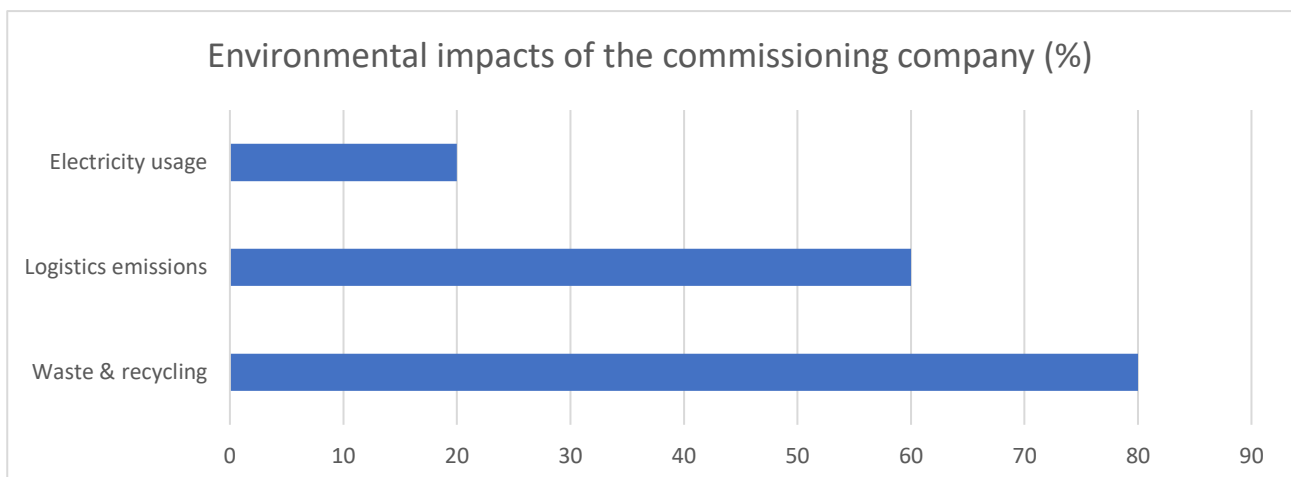


Figure 3. Environmental impacts of the commissioning company mentioned by interviewees

As identified in the above figure, the environmental impact of the company is particularly relevant in emissions, waste sorting and the effects of transportation.

Waste sorting and recycling were highlighted in the results as 80% of the interviewees specifically mentioned this in their responses when asked on what kind of environmental impacts does the company have. This indicates that the company has invested in waste management, as it is a key

environmental issue recognized by the employees. Waste reduction was also mentioned by some as a specific way to minimize the company's environmental impact.

60 % of the interviewees mentioned the transportation of goods and the associated fuel consumption as a significant environmental impact. Logistics play a major role in the company's environmental footprint and optimization of logistics can provide opportunities to reduce emissions.

Energy consumption was also mentioned by few, particularly regarding electricity use. Even though energy efficiency has been identified as part of the company's environmental impact, it is not as prominent of a concern as logistics and waste management. One also mentioned company-sponsored bicycles as part of the company's environmental initiatives. There have been talks of the company supporting sustainable commuting options, but as they have not yet been implemented, they are not recognized as key aspects of environmental responsibility compared to waste sorting or transportation.

The company's sustainability work is best known in terms of environmental responsibility. The broader picture and ongoing development efforts towards sustainability are not as widely understood. The data also suggests that the environmental impact of the company is centred around transportation emissions, waste management and energy consumption. The company already has various environmental initiatives in place, however the understanding of its environmental impact and potential improvements are not equally well known among employees.

### **5.1.1 Conceptions on how sustainability is viewed within the company**

Interviewees were asked about how their colleagues view sustainability work, to evaluate how sustainable the company is now and what works especially well in the sustainability context. Based on the results, the approach to sustainability work varies significantly across teams, with many highlighting initial uncertainty and challenges related to the change process. Some noted that sustainability has been a distant topic, having received only a little attention as the focus was primarily on factors such as cost and deadlines. Over time, attitudes have become slightly more positive, as sustainability initiatives have been integrated as part of daily operations.

Sustainability efforts within the company are seen as evolving towards a positive direction. Many stated that sustainability is starting to influence decision-making. This is especially noticeable in supplier selection and procurement area, where sustainability factors play a significant role. Recycling was frequently mentioned as a well-functioning area of environmental sustainability work, reflecting that environmental practices such as waste sorting and material recycling are already well established. However, according to some, the more technical aspects of sustainability and broader development efforts are still in their early stages, suggesting there is room for further improvement.

Internal sustainability efforts were also highlighted, with employee well-being seen as something that the company is focusing on. Employee satisfaction and recommendation levels were reported to be low in the past, indicating that more attention could be given to improving workplace well-being. While the company's service to customers was perceived as strong, there is still room for improvement in communicating sustainability efforts externally.

The company is seen to be on the right path with its sustainability efforts, with positive developments in decision-making, supplier selection and environmental practices such as recycling and waste management.

### 5.1.2 Obstacles to sustainability initiatives

Potential hindrances or obstacles that could affect the company's sustainability efforts were explored. Interviewees identified several challenges that could hinder sustainability initiatives, particularly supply chain complexities, the availability of resources and lack of sustainability communication. Many pointed to a lack of time and resources, as well as uncertainty about who is responsible for driving sustainability initiatives forward. One also mentioned heavy workloads as a factor, that can make it difficult to follow sustainable practices and adopt new processes.

Table 6. Potential obstacles to sustainability initiatives within the commissioning company

Themes	Quotes
Supply chain complexities	"Suppliers are not providing the traceability information and leaving us to conduct a lot of work"
Availability of resources	"These matters always include the cost factor" "Taking these initiatives forward requires time and resources"
Reducing logistics emissions	"We are not able to affect incoming transport flow" "Transports must happen, goods must come in and go out"
Lack of sustainability communication	"Everything works better if information is passed along inside the company"

Several different themes were identified as potentially creating obstacles to the commissioning company's sustainability initiatives, as presented above in Table 6. Supply chain complexities were identified as an obstacle, with the willingness and ability of suppliers to produce traceability information. As the information is not received from the suppliers, it cannot be communicated to the

customer, affecting the entire supply chain. Achieving sustainability targets is difficult if suppliers are not prepared to make the necessary changes. Ensuring supply chain sustainability is particularly challenging, as it depends on external partners such as suppliers and logistics providers, whose practices the company cannot directly control.

Additionally, reducing emissions from transportation was highlighted as challenging, due to the complexity of logistics optimization or the higher costs of more sustainable transport options. The overall financial burden of sustainability was also mentioned, as implementing more sustainable solutions requires investments that are difficult to justify from a business perspective.

Internal processes and company culture also impact the progress of sustainability efforts. Communication challenges make it harder to achieve sustainability targets, as employees are not aware of them or are unsure how to affect them in practice. Some noted a lack of confidence in driving sustainability initiatives forward, with uncertainty about how changes should be executed. Inconsistent adherence to sustainability practices and oversight gaps were also seen as risks that could weaken the overall impact of these efforts. Employee engagement and resistance to change can also create challenges. Adopting new sustainability practices takes time and effort and according to some responses, not all employees welcome these changes positively. Some mentioned the existence of change resistance as prevalent in the company.

For some, sustainability work was initially perceived as an additional burden that took resources away from other tasks. However, as awareness has increased and sustainable practices have become part of everyday operations, perceptions have shifted. Many now see sustainability as a natural aspect of their work, particularly in environmental areas such as waste reduction and recycling. While sustainability is not explicitly discussed within teams, there is a general recognition of its importance.

Addressing challenges related to supply chain cooperation, resource allocation and internal communication will be essential for ensuring the continued success of sustainability initiatives across the company.

### **5.1.3 Sustainability targets**

Employees' awareness of the company's sustainability targets varied as many didn't know or couldn't recall the targets. While some recall that sustainability targets have been discussed, these have not left a lasting impression or have not been communicated effectively. This suggests room for improvement in both communication and the practical application of these goals to ensure employees understand the company's sustainability direction. Based on the results, 80% of the

interviewees had either no information or only a very minor amount of information related to the commissioning company's sustainability targets. The below figure demonstrates this finding.

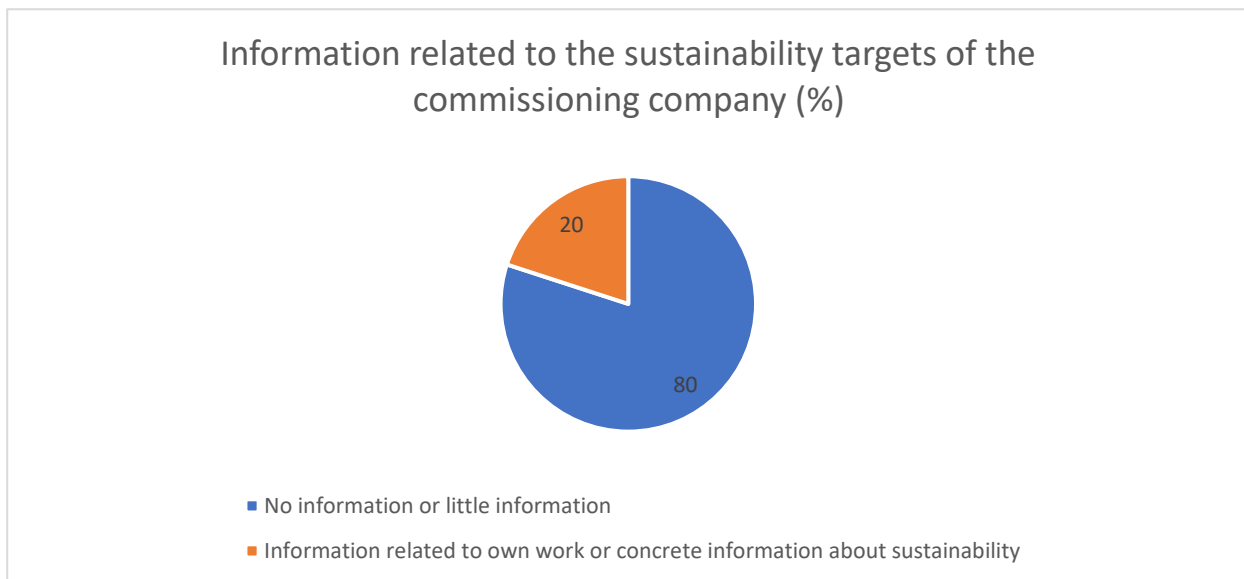


Figure 4. Information related to the sustainability targets of the commissioning company

However, few have a clearer understanding, particularly regarding objectives directly linked to their roles. Knowledge of sustainability targets is stronger in areas where sustainability is directly integrated into daily tasks. Although not all are fully aware of the targets, the company's efforts in the area are progressing. Several mentioned practical implementation efforts, such as the work of dedicated sustainability teams, demonstrating that sustainability initiatives are in an active development phase.

Potential obstacles that the company could face when trying to achieve the sustainability targets were also explored. Based on the data, the company faces several challenges, including cost of the initiatives, resource availability and employee engagement. Maintaining the sustainability program requires continuous investment and time, which will put pressure on the company's budget and resource allocation. Additionally, there is uncertainty about whether the set targets are realistic with current resources and timelines.

The visibility of the company's sustainability targets in the interviewees daily work was inquired. The extent to which the targets are reflected in daily work varies significantly across roles. For some, these goals are an integral part of their tasks, while for others, they remain abstract. Those who see sustainability as part of their daily responsibilities emphasize the importance of including these targets into their team's workflows. Concrete examples include researching product sustainability data, calculating carbon footprints and incorporating sustainability into product design.

However, many feel that sustainability targets are not visible in their work, which suggests that these initiatives have not yet been effectively integrated into all job functions or that some employees do not recognize their relevance to their roles. Few also believed that the lack of knowledge regarding the sustainability targets could be caused by the limited communication regarding these.

The monitoring of sustainability targets is still in development and many lack a clear understanding of how progress is tracked. Several indicate that they are either unaware of monitoring efforts or that these efforts are still in the early stages. Where monitoring mechanisms were identified, the results mentioned strategic reviews by dedicated teams, employee surveys and audits. The mention of audits suggests that systematic evaluation methods do exist, but their visibility among employees remains limited. Other monitoring activities include analysing supplier pricing structures and setting collaboration requirements for suppliers. Sustainability is actively evaluated within procurement and supply chain management.

Potential future sustainability targets that the interviewees would like the company to embrace were explored. Employees' expectations for the company's future sustainability efforts fall into three main areas: environmental responsibility, employee well-being and the monitoring and communication of sustainability targets.

Many emphasize the need for stronger environmental initiatives. Specific suggestions include more efforts towards energy conservation, waste sorting and reducing plastic and packaging materials. Improving the traceability of products and components to ensure responsible sourcing was also mentioned as a specific future target, even though it related to the current sustainability efforts as well. Sustainable logistics and transportation solutions were also highlighted as areas for improvement.

Sustainability is not only seen as an environmental issue but also as a matter of social responsibility. Company is expected to invest in employee well-being, fair wages and responsible HR policies, reinforcing the link between sustainability and workplace conditions. Some emphasize the importance of translating sustainability targets into concrete actions and ensuring transparent monitoring of the progress towards these targets. Majority call for clearer communication to help employees understand how the company is advancing its sustainability initiatives. Employees hope that sustainability will not stay as a high-level strategic goal but would result in concrete actions that positively impacts the environment, employee well-being and the company's reputation and competitiveness.

### 5.1.4 Leadership commitment

Leadership commitment towards sustainability topics among the workforce was investigated. Specific actions that the leadership team could embark on to improve the commitment of the workforce towards sustainability matters were also explored. The level of leadership commitment in the commissioning company as perceived by the interviewees is presented in Figure 5 below.

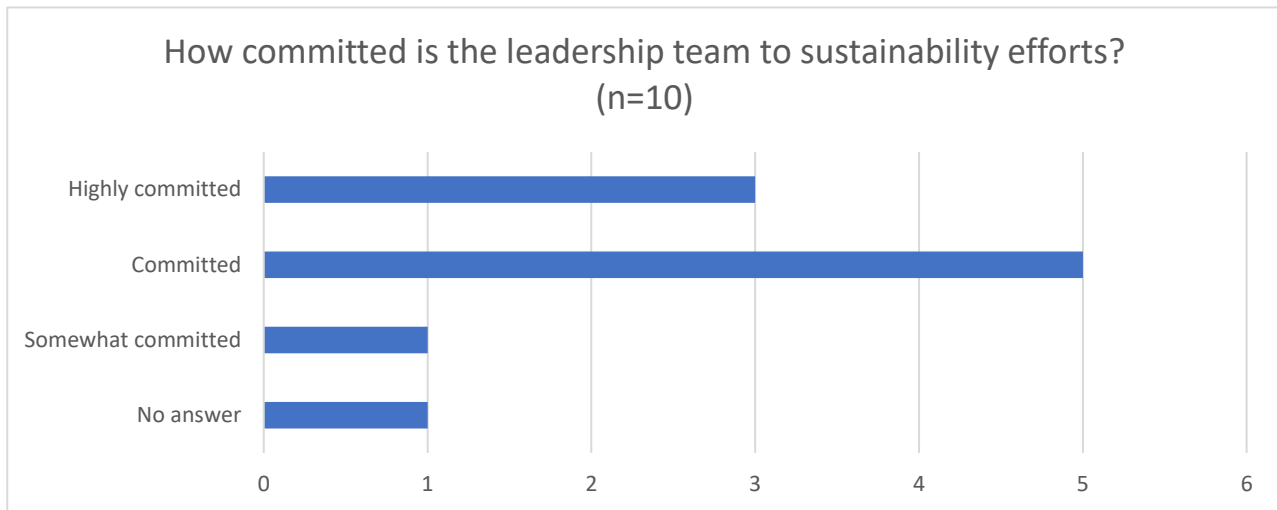


Figure 5. Perceived commitment of the leadership team towards sustainability efforts.

The commitment of the company's leadership to sustainability work is generally perceived as strong. 8 out of 10 feel that management is either committed or highly committed to sustainability efforts, with some emphasizing that such dedication is essential for the company to advance its sustainability targets. While the overall sentiment is positive, a few view the commitment as moderate or are unsure about leadership's level of engagement. The visibility of sustainability efforts and management's role in driving them may not be entirely clear to all employees.

There is particular concern identified through the data about how leadership's commitment translates to lower organisational levels. This highlights the need for more effective communication and ensuring that sustainability efforts are embedded throughout the organisation. Overall, the company's leadership is largely seen as committed to sustainability, but its impact and visibility in employees' daily work could be strengthened.

Few concrete actions for the company leadership to improve overall sustainability awareness among employees were provided. Employee commitment to sustainability efforts can be improved by integrating sustainability into daily operations and strategy while reinforcing everyone's role and responsibility in sustainability work. Leading by example is viewed as crucial, as when the

management demonstrates responsible and consistent behaviour, it encourages employees to follow the same principles.

Sustainability efforts can also be strengthened through clear guidelines and easy-to-understand communication. Additionally, direct involvement from leadership, such as visiting teams personally emphasize the importance of sustainability and could improve employee engagement. Personal visits also demonstrate that sustainability work and efforts of the company go beyond mere obligations that have been given by an outside force. Leadership team should actively participate in staff meetings and communicate regularly about sustainability through various channels. It is essential to ensure that sustainability initiatives are effectively implemented and that employees receive the necessary support and information to fulfil their responsibilities.

## 5.2 Benefits of improving sustainability work to company and personnel

Reasons behind the company's ambition to engage in sustainability work were explored. In addition, potential benefits that sustainability work could offer to the company and to interviewees themselves in their daily work were inquired about. As presented in Table 7 below, three key themes relating to the motivation for the company's sustainability efforts were identified: competitive advantage, regulatory compliance and securing long-term business viability.

Table 7. The reasons behind the commissioning company's sustainability initiatives

Theme	Description	Quotes
Competitive advantage	A set of attributes or capabilities that allows an organization to outperform its competitors	"So that we get sales in the future, money talks first and foremost, it is a competitive advantage"
Certifications, laws or directives	Formal standards, legal requirements or regulatory frameworks that organizations must comply with to ensure lawful and ethical operations.	"Of course, it is regulated by the law" "All sorts of certifications and other similar impact this"
Long-term business viability	The ability of a company to sustain its operations and growth over time by adapting to market changes managing risks and maintaining stability.	"So that we have customers in the future as well" "Protecting ourselves from potential future threats"

Many emphasize legal requirements, such as laws, directives and voluntary certifications, as primary reasons for the company's sustainability initiatives. Regulatory pressure forces the company to integrate sustainability into its operations, ensuring compliance with certifications and reporting obligations.

Several benefits related to sustainability practices are revealed, which can be categorized into customer relationships, financial advantages, brand image and operational improvements. Transparency and sustainable operations strengthen trust with stakeholders, improving customer acquisition and loyalty by clarifying product origins and ethical commitments. Financially, sustainability efforts can lead to increased orders, cost reductions and efficiency improvements. Sustainability practices also provide a competitive edge, potentially opening new international market opportunities. Additionally, customer and stakeholder expectations highlight sustainability as a key selling point, with many identifying it as a tool to enhance customer satisfaction and brand perception.

Based on the results, a strong sustainability strategy enhances the company's external reputation. A responsible corporate image attracts customers and simplifies recruitment, making the company appealing to top talent. Internally, it improves employee commitment and strengthens workplace cohesion.

According to some, a structured sustainability program clarifies supplier selection, makes procurement processes more efficient and improves transparency and reliability in supplier relationships. This can lead to a more focused supplier base and stronger partnerships. Internally, structure helps employees understand how sustainability affects their roles and increases sustainability awareness.

Additionally, one highlighted the fact that sustainability initiatives could enhance customer communication, making it easier to convey sustainable business practices in sales discussions. Clear policies and documented sustainability efforts strengthen customer relationships and can serve as a competitive advantage.

### **5.3 Improving sustainability awareness**

As discussed in the previous chapter, enhancing sustainability awareness is a key challenge for the commissioning company to fully realize its benefits. This chapter explores strategies for improving employee awareness through sustainability communication and training. Additionally, it examines how motivation and reward systems can support these efforts.

### **5.3.1 Sustainability communication**

Current perceptions on how the company communicates sustainability matters towards the employees were investigated. Additionally, preferences to how they would like to see the company communicate in the future were explored. According to the data, the company primarily communicates sustainability efforts to employees through quarterly briefings, which serve as regular information sessions covering sustainability-related topics, in addition to other timely topics as well. Line managers play a role in explaining the received information within their teams and sustainability themes are discussed at both department and team levels. Microsoft Teams is a central communication tool as half of the interviewees mentioned it as tool used for sharing of materials, discussions and meetings on sustainability matters. Presentations and reports help distribute information, but communication can feel fragmented and difficult to follow. Additionally, many called out the need for clear and consistent communication in sustainability matters for their answers to several different questions.

Based on the data, sustainability communication should be straightforward and easy to understand, especially when simplifying complex topics. It must be fact-based, credible and avoid overly technical or consultant-style language. The company's website should provide up-to-date and reliable sustainability information for both internal and external stakeholders. Internally, Teams channels should remain used for ongoing communication and discussion. Digital display screens in the workplace can improve visibility and emails could be utilized more effectively for timely updates. Managers and subject matter experts should play a crucial role in sharing information with their teams and visits from sustainability specialists could enhance employees' awareness of key themes.

Employee training sessions would help deepen knowledge of sustainability issues, while discussion forums could create a space for open dialogue. Communication should be continuous, with new information shared as it becomes available. Additionally, leveraging social media could strengthen sustainability messaging externally towards customers and other external stakeholders.

### **5.3.2 Sustainability training and other ways to improve awareness**

The data highlights several common themes regarding the needs and expectations of the employees for sustainability training. These themes are presented below in Table 8.

Table 8. Implementing sustainability training within the commissioning company

Theme	Description	Quotes
Subject matter experts	Subject matter experts provide specialized knowledge on sustainability topics, ensuring that training content is accurate and relevant.	“Some individuals look further in the topic and then let everyone else know”
Workshops and on-site training	Workshops and on-site training offer hands-on learning experiences that engage participants, enhance collaboration and practical problem-solving.	“Face-to-face matters are clearer; it is easier to ask questions and discuss the topic”
Continuous communication	Reinforcing sustainability goals and training outcomes through regular updates and reminders, embedding sustainable practices into everyday operations and culture.	“More information about these themes would be needed at the moment” “I could read our sustainability programme again”

First, internal knowledge sharing and a structured training approach through subject matter experts are emphasized. Many suggest that few certain individuals could deepen their expertise in sustainability topics and then train others. Additionally, creating summaries, guidelines and improving internal communication are seen as ways to integrate sustainability training into the organisation’s daily operations.

Second, many prefer learning methods that focus on practical and hands-on approaches. Workshops, on-site training and learning through sustainability projects are among the most favoured methods. Remote training is considered less effective, with a preference for interactive and engaging formats.

Third, understanding sustainability concepts and their significance is seen as essential. Many stress the importance of educating employees on sustainability terminology and reinforcing the awareness on sustainability programs and targets. The need for a clear understanding of what sustainability means in practice and how it can be measured and promoted is highlighted. Continuous communication and follow-up to the initial communication are considered crucial. Based on the data, sustainability training should not be a one-time event but an ongoing process where progress is monitored, and results are transparently shared. Some also emphasize the importance of utilizing all available training opportunities. To sum up, the data suggests that sustainability training

should be practical, continuous and easy to integrate into daily workflows, supporting both internal knowledge sharing and employee engagement.

Two main themes regarding how the company can support employees in acting more sustainably emerge from the answers. First, knowledge-sharing and training are seen as important. Many emphasize the need to improve understanding and ensure access to relevant sustainability information. Keeping operational models up to date is also highlighted, underlining the importance of training employees to meet evolving requirements and expectations.

Second, practical support measures play a role. Benefits such as subsidized commuting and company-provided bicycles are mentioned as concrete ways to promote sustainability, particularly in encouraging eco-friendly transportation choices.

Some do not provide any additional ideas, which suggests that sustainability is already well addressed or that employees do not see the need for further initiatives. However, this could also signal an opportunity for the company to further develop sustainability-related support measures and awareness. In summary, the company can best support employees in adopting more sustainable practices through training, continuous knowledge sharing and maintaining up-to-date practices. Additionally, practical incentives, such as eco-friendly transportation benefits, can encourage sustainable choices in everyday life.

### **5.3.3 Employee motivation and rewards**

The data reveals several common themes regarding how to motivate employees to achieve sustainability goals. Integrating sustainability into daily work and making its significance clear to employees is essential. Many emphasize that sustainability should be a natural part of operations, like safety measures. Additionally, giving employees the opportunity to influence sustainability-related decisions can improve commitment and motivation.

Increasing knowledge and training employees is an important factor. Understanding the background and importance of sustainability targets helps employees understand their relevance to their work and encourages them to align their actions accordingly.

Rewards also play a role in motivation. Financial incentives are seen as effective, but non-monetary benefits, such as workplace well-being initiatives and recreational events, are also considered valuable for boosting engagement. Some feel that no additional motivation is needed, suggesting that sustainability is already embedded in the company's values and operations or that employees might not care about sustainability to an extent that they would like to be motivated related it.

Regarding the specific role of rewards in achieving sustainability goals, the data indicates that while incentives are possible, implementing a reward program can be challenging. The difficulty of tracking progress and the need for clear metrics are common concerns. To ensure fairness, reward structures must be well-defined and transparent. Some also believe that sustainability should be an inherent part of work rather than something requiring separate incentives.

A variety of reward types are suggested. Monetary incentives are seen as effective but difficult to implement fairly in a way that everybody would have an opportunity to reach them. Alternative approaches, such as team-building activities or friendly competitions are also considered viable incentives. Opinions differ on how rewards should be distributed, with some favouring equal recognition for all employees and others supporting individualized incentives.

Developing a reward system is seen as timely and necessary, indicating a need for well-designed programs that align with the organisation's values and goals. Some highlight that the overall remodelling of the reward program is currently taking place within the company, making this an ideal time to include sustainability factors directly into the reward program.

Overall, the data suggests that the most effective ways to motivate employees toward sustainability goals include integrating sustainability into daily operations, increasing awareness and training and offering both financial and non-financial incentives. Rewarding sustainability efforts is seen as possible, but it requires careful planning, fair implementation and a diverse range of incentive methods to be truly effective.

#### **5.3.4 Other ways to improve awareness**

Personal improvement thoughts about the sustainability efforts of the company were also explored. The answers highlight several key themes on responsible business practices that can be promoted within the company.

Communication and training are seen as essential tools. Many further emphasize the importance of educating employees, sharing information and clarifying the significance of sustainability. Continuous communication and engagement are necessary to create a sustainable organisational culture.

Practical actions such as recycling, energy conservation and waste reduction are also frequently mentioned. These tangible initiatives are easy to implement and have a direct impact on the company's sustainability goals.

Additionally, integrating sustainability into daily business operations is a recurring theme. Assessing supplier responsibility and making procurement decisions accordingly demonstrate that sustainability extends beyond internal practices to the entire supply chain. Even though sustainability has been implemented to the daily work of some teams within the company, many would like to see their own sustainability responsibilities clarified.

Initiatives like company-provided bicycles and employee well-being programs highlight the potential role of sustainability in supporting workplace health and engagement. Teamwork and collaboration are also seen as effective ways to advance sustainability. Establishing dedicated working groups and breaking sustainability efforts into smaller and more manageable tasks can help the company achieve meaningful progress.

Finally, research and continuous learning through non-work-related studies or job-related projects are also mentioned. This highlights the importance of deepening individual knowledge and bringing fresh insights into the company's sustainability efforts. Overall, the data suggest that promoting sustainability within a company requires a combination of information sharing, concrete actions, collaboration, responsible business development and individual contributions.

## 6 Discussion

The goal of the thesis was to investigate the current level of sustainability awareness within the commissioning company and what benefits would the commissioning company receive by improving their sustainability work. The case study aimed to offer recommendations for the commissioning company to increase its employees' awareness of the environmental impacts of its operations.

The goal of the thesis is reached by answering the following research questions during the thesis:

Q1: What is the current level of employee awareness related to sustainability matters in the case company?

Q2: What advantages can a company achieve by implementing sustainability in their everyday business?

Q3: How can the commissioning company improve the awareness of their employees related to the company's environmental impact?

### 6.1 Main findings

Based on the results, the current level of sustainability awareness among the employees is relatively low. The results point out that employees are somewhat aware of sustainability efforts when these are related to their area of expertise, such as procurement, however the larger picture remains unclear. Moreover, some employees know very little about the topic of sustainability. This inconsistency could originate from the lack of a universal definition of sustainability within the organisation, which suggests that clearer communication and alignment of sustainability targets are needed. This lack of knowledge is understandable, since during the time that the interviews were conducted, the sustainability program of the company had just been presented to the employees as part of their company-wide quarterly meeting. The time that had passed since the initial rollout of the sustainability program was around 1-2 months during the conducting of the interviews.

The uneven level of knowledge between the employees suggests that sustainability efforts are not being communicated effectively across all departments. Smith et al. (2012, 115) point out several tactics to effective communication strategies. Analysing the data with these tactics in mind reveal that the communication regarding sustainability matters in the commissioning company has not been clear, simple and consistent over time.

Another key issue identified in the current level of awareness is the limited knowledge of the company's sustainability targets. While some employees recall discussions on sustainability targets, many do not have a clear understanding of what these targets include. This suggests that

sustainability targets are not effectively communicated or integrated into everyday work processes. Employees whose roles directly involve sustainability initiatives are more aware of specific targets, such as carbon neutrality and emissions reductions. For those who do not encounter sustainability initiatives often, these targets remain abstract concepts. Both Wolk et al. (2009) and Zoysa et al. (2020) define the importance of creating performance management systems for sustainability initiatives, even if they approach the issue from a slightly different perspective. Companies should create well-thought-out performance measurement systems to make sure that the targets of the sustainability initiatives are reached. By having these measurement systems in place, the company can expect better performance from their sustainability initiatives.

Leadership commitment to sustainability is generally perceived as strong, yet there is a gap between high-level strategy and employee-level implementation. Some employees feel disconnected from leadership's sustainability efforts, suggesting that communication could be more direct and inclusive. Leadership visibility and engagement in sustainability initiatives could reinforce the importance of these efforts and encourage a company-wide commitment. According to Metcalf and Benn (2012), sustainability leadership requires strong skills from the leaders in areas such as problem-solving, change management and emotional intelligence. As some employees feel disconnection from the leadership team's decisions, efforts could be made to bridge the gap between the leadership team and the employees. The leadership team should integrate sustainability into daily operations and decision-making processes while ensuring all employees understand their role in achieving sustainability goals to improve sustainability awareness across the company. Clear guidelines, regular communication and direct leadership involvement can help bridge existing knowledge gaps and create a more engaged workforce.

Based on the results, the company can achieve several advantages through sustainability work. These advantages can be categorized into improved customer relationships, financial advantages, enhanced brand image and operational improvements. The data also reveals the motivation behind the company's sustainability work. Gaining a competitive advantage through sustainability initiatives is a strong motivator for the company. These advantages are also visible through surveys relating to a wider business landscape, as employees are measured to be more engaged when they perceive their company as genuinely committed to sustainability. The company can gather the benefit of overall better organisational performance than their counterparts, that are not perceived as committed to sustainability. (Culture Amp 2024; Deloitte 2023.) Moreover, Cheng et al. (2022) have identified that socially responsible organisational supply chain can operate with a higher profit than the socially irresponsible supply chains, resulting in a competitive advantage.

The company can improve the sustainability awareness of their employees in several different ways. Sustainability communication is an area where the findings reveal definite room for improvement. While the company provides quarterly briefings and uses Microsoft Teams to share information, employees feel that communication can sometimes be fragmented or difficult to follow. This indicates a gap between sustainability initiatives and how they are perceived at different levels of the organisation. The emphasis on making communication clearer, more structured, and easily digestible is a crucial insight. Similar thoughts on communication strategies have also been presented by Smith et al. (2012, 115). If sustainability is to become a core part of the company's identity, it must be communicated in a way that resonates with employees, avoiding overly technical or corporate jargon. The suggestion to use digital displays, email updates and direct engagement from sustainability specialists is practical and aligns with best practices in internal corporate communication. Additionally, managers should be trained on communication skills before moving forward with the communication improvement plans.

Sustainability training also emerges as a development theme from the results. The employees express a preference for interactive, hands-on training methods over passive or remote learning. This is a significant finding, as it highlights a disconnect between how sustainability knowledge is currently shared and how employees prefer to engage with it. If training is to be effective, it must be integrated into daily workflows, using real-life scenarios and case studies to make sustainability tangible. The findings also suggest that sustainability training should be an ongoing process rather than a one-time event, reinforcing the idea that continuous learning and adaptation are essential for long-term success. Zacher et al. (2023) have expressed the importance of offering sustainability education and training as part of personal development opportunities for promoting sustainability awareness among the employees. Moreover, Law et al. (2015) have stated that sustainability awareness training can change employee's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainability factors, especially environmental factors.

The topic of employee motivation is also evident from the results. The data suggests that while many employees recognize sustainability as an important part of their work, there are differing opinions on whether additional incentives are necessary to motivate employees. Some see financial rewards as an effective motivator, while others believe that sustainability should be an inherent part of the company's culture, requiring no extra incentives. Even though some interviewees do not recognize the need for rewards in sustainability matters, the existing theories highlight the importance of rewarding systems in motivating employees. Zacher et al. (2023) point out that rewarding positive behaviour and penalizing unwanted behaviour are effective tactics for improving sustainability awareness. A well-designed reward system that recognizes meaningful contributions to

sustainability, whether through monetary benefits or non-financial incentives such as team-building activities, will enhance engagement without reducing sustainability to a purely transactional effort.

Additional consideration can be given to the four different types of employees when it comes to sustainability presented by Greene et al. (2014). Based on the topic of motivation, a variety of these types are present in the results. There was a difference in opinions on how the rewarding and motivation of employees should be organised, as some were for monetary incentives, and some were against them. Both the pragmatist and the libertarian types are pro-financial rewards, while housekeeper and campaigner types are seeking motivation through environmental goals either on a community or on a personal level.

The discussion on reward structures is timely, as the company is in the process of updating its overall incentive system. This presents an opportunity to align sustainability goals with employee recognition programs in a way that reinforces long-term engagement. However, the findings suggest that any reward system must be carefully structured to ensure fairness and transparency, addressing concerns about measuring and tracking sustainability contributions. If done correctly, including sustainability into the reward system could reinforce its importance without making it feel like an imposed corporate mandate.

## **6.2 Conclusions and suggestions for development**

The sustainability awareness improvement model is presented earlier in this thesis (Chapter 3.6), There are several different factors that influence the sustainability awareness among employees presented in the model. As the current level of awareness among the employees is relatively low, the commissioning company is recommended to take the sustainability awareness improvement model into use. Based on the model, several recommendations can be made to the commissioning company to improve the sustainability awareness within their organisation. The recommendations are presented below in Figure 6.

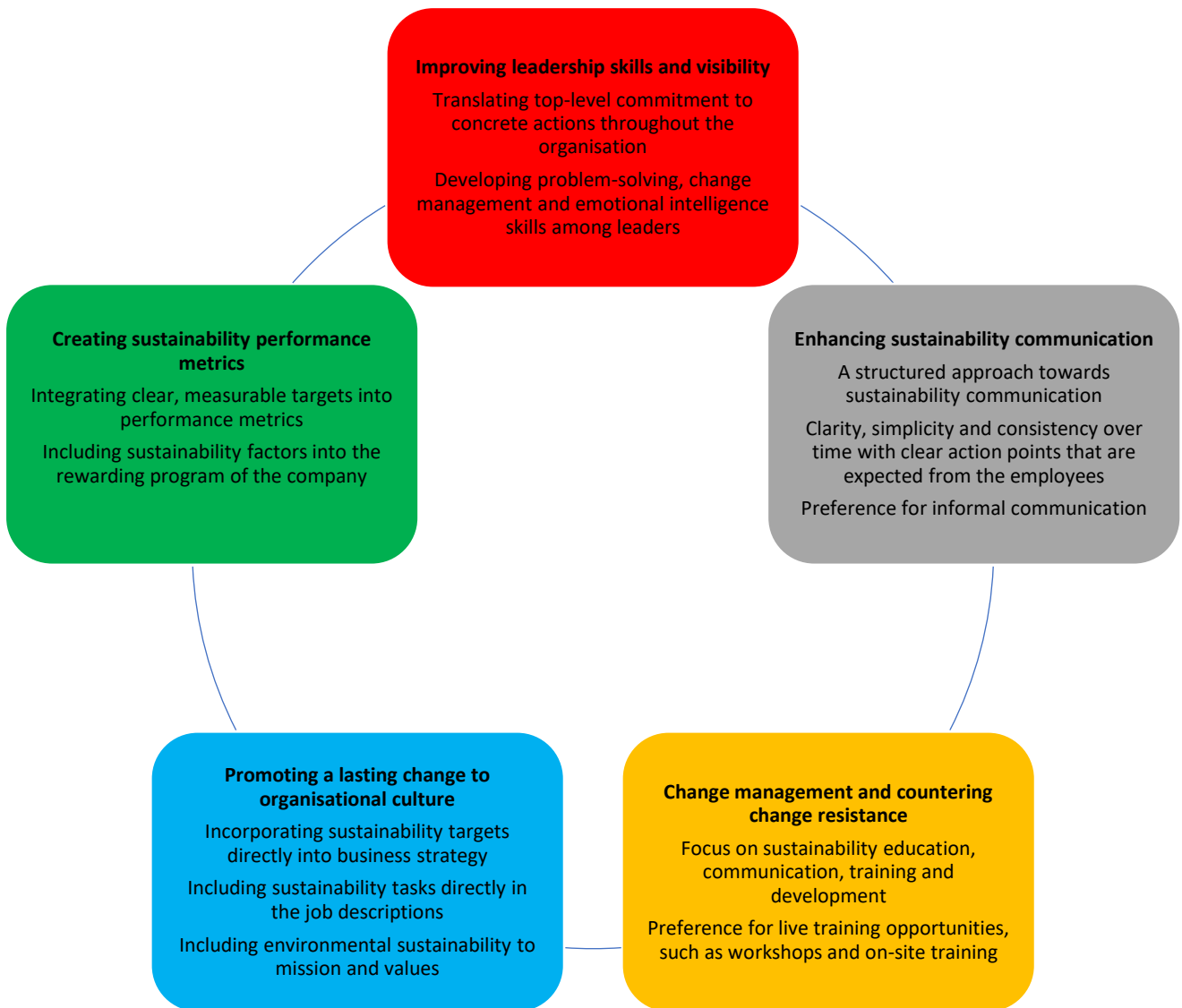


Figure 6. Recommendations to improve sustainability awareness within the commissioning company according to the sustainability awareness improvement model

Leaders should actively work towards sustainability initiatives, ensuring that top-level commitment translates into concrete actions throughout the organisation. The results show that employees are willing to buy in to the sustainability initiatives, however they would like to hear about concrete actions that they should take to enable the company to reach their sustainability targets. Research by Metcalf and Benn (2012) highlights that effective sustainability leadership requires expertise in various areas. By developing key skills such as problem-solving, change management and emotional intelligence, leaders can better navigate emerging challenges and drive meaningful progress.

A structured approach to sustainability communication could bridge the knowledge gap across different teams. Smith et al. (2012, 115), Zacher et al. (2023) and the results from the interviews point out that effective communication is key to improving sustainability awareness in a way that is accepted by the employees. Additionally, as defined by Kataria et al. (2013), sustainability communication is best received through informal, face-to-face meetings rather than e-mails or memos. Communication should be organized in a simple and structured way, with clear actions rather than long presentations with countless action points. This was also identifiable from the results, as even though all employees had participated in the quarterly company-wide presentation regarding the sustainability program of the company, only very few were able to recall meaningful information from that presentation. Promoting clear and simple communication towards sustainability matters and keeping the communication consistent over time will yield the best results when the company is trying to improve the sustainability awareness among their employees (Smith et al. 2012, 115).

Based on the gathered data, some feel that resistance to change exists within the company, as some employees do not welcome change positively. As defined by Smith et al. (2012, 115), companies have several different strategies to overcome resistance towards change. Soft tactics such as education, communication, training and development are preferred to counter resistance, allowing employees to change their viewpoints on their own. These themes are also evident in the data, as employees generally hope for more communication and training regarding sustainability matters. Sustainability training could be organised in the physical workplace of the employees to promote engagement towards the training, as some expressed concern about the effectiveness of remote trainings. This approach could contain ways such as workshops or on-site training that promote hands-on approaches. Focusing on the clarity of communication is also an important part of managing change. The commissioning company should attempt to avoid coercion and disciplinary tactics in relation to sustainability change management, as these are not seen as an effective way to promote long-lasting change. (Smith et al. 2012, 163)

Currently, the level of sustainability awareness at the commissioning company is relatively low. The broader picture of sustainability and ongoing development efforts towards it are not widely understood. Zacher et al. (2023) have defined several options to improve environmental awareness within organisations. Some of these ways directly affect and aim to change the present organisational culture. Incorporating sustainability targets directly into business strategy and sustainability tasks directly in the job descriptions promotes a sustainable culture change. Additionally, the company can include environmental sustainability to their mission and values to enhance an environmental organisational culture. Additionally, as presented by Law et al. (2015) employee's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainability, especially environmental factors of sustainability, can be changed through education and awareness training. By focusing on these factors, the

commissioning company can promote a lasting change to the organisational culture, to enhance sustainability awareness.

Employees engage better when sustainability is directly tied to their tasks. Currently, employees are largely unaware of what the sustainability targets of the company are and how they are being monitored. Additionally, the employees would like to know more on how they could affect these targets through their own actions. Integrating clear, measurable targets into performance metrics may increase participation in these initiatives. The commissioning company is currently undergoing the remodelling of their reward program, so now would be a great opportunity to include sustainability factors into the program. As demonstrated by Zoysa et al. (2020), well-thought management systems related to sustainability had a significant effect on the overall corporate sustainability performance of the company. Sophisticated management systems also influenced the level of sustainability awareness within organisations. Creating and tracking sustainability performance metrics is also an important part of creating a lasting organisational culture change as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

### **6.3 Evaluation of thesis**

The goals of the thesis were reached, as the results answered the research questions. The results also raise several development suggestions for the commissioning company, which can now be addressed. These development suggestions are based on the theoretical framework, which can be further used during the actual development. The commissioning company received several progress updates during the thesis and has provided an evaluation that is summarized below.

The commissioning company acknowledges that the findings and action proposals from the thesis have not yet been implemented. Despite this, they express confidence that acting on these suggestions will lead to improvements in results and improve their competitiveness. Moreover, they believe the proposals are scalable and could be applied broadly across all change management initiatives within the organisation.

They also highlight a challenge regarding the complexity and length of the thesis. To make the work more accessible and practical, the company suggests that the student prepares a few PowerPoint slides summarizing the key themes, findings and recommendations. This would facilitate internal communication and make it easier for employees to engage with the content. Summarizing the work would also benefit the student, as it would encourage them to condense their findings into clear, actionable insights. The overall sentiment from the company is that the thesis is excellent.

After the commissioning company had provided the feedback regarding the thesis, it was agreed that key themes and findings from the thesis would be presented to the company by the student.

The presentation is organised for the team leaders and managers of the company. The presentation will focus on the specific actions that the team leaders could take to improve sustainability awareness within the company.

The theoretical framework is comprehensive. The sources that were used consisted of key theories and information provided by intergovernmental organisations such as United Nations and European Commission, relating to the topic of sustainability. Reliable research literature was used to support the research. A large part of the sources were peer-reviewed international research articles, that provided relatively recent findings on the topic. However, some of the sources used were relatively old, which could affect the relevance of the information. The data from these sources were nevertheless included in the thesis, to provide reliable and historically accepted information relating to the topic, in addition to providing a historical background on the topic.

The research process was well-structured and aligned with the aim of understanding how environmental sustainability awareness can be enhanced within the workplace. The selected methods, which included semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis, proved suitable for gathering relevant data and exploring employee attitudes and organisational practices. The interview questionnaire was tested before the data gathering, to ensure the understandability of the questions. However, some challenges were encountered during the data collection, particularly in securing responses from a sufficiently diverse employee base. More interviews with enhanced variety between the interviewee's roles could have been organised. Moreover, even though the research questionnaire had been tested, some interviewees had trouble understanding the questions, requiring additional clarification during the interviews. Additional time and resources could have been utilised in the creation and testing of the questionnaire, to make it clearer and more consistent for the interviewees. Despite this, the research produced useful findings that contribute to the understanding of sustainability communication and engagement of employees.

While the thesis achieved its main objectives, it also had a few limitations. The study was limited in scope, focusing on a certain medium-sized Finnish company operating in the manufacturing industry area. This may affect the generalizability of the results. Moreover, due to time constraints, the interviews were only conducted for ten individuals, which may have limited the diversity of perspectives. Additionally, the study primarily focused on awareness rather than measurable behaviour change, which could be addressed in future research.

Future studies could broaden the scope by including multiple organisations across various industries to provide a more comprehensive view of effective sustainability engagement strategies. It would also be valuable to examine the long-term impact of awareness initiatives on actual employee behaviour, or to explore the role of leadership and incentives in creating an organisational

culture focusing on sustainability. Moreover, incorporating a mixed-methods approach could enrich the analysis by combining quantitative impact measurement with qualitative insights.

#### **6.4 Evaluation of one's learning**

Working on this thesis has been an interesting and rewarding journey. Even though over five years had passed since my previous studies, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the core theories and the overall thesis process hadn't changed all that much. That being said, writing a master's thesis has been a deeper and more demanding experience compared to my bachelor's thesis.

Before I started, I didn't have much more than a surface-level understanding of sustainable development and corporate sustainability. I quickly realized just how complex and layered these topics are. Gaining a deeper understanding of these topics took large amounts of time and commitment before I could even start planning the thesis.

The thesis process officially started on May 7th, 2024, with an initial meeting with the commissioning company. At that point, the exact topic was still to be determined, and several different options were being explored. By autumn of 2024, we had narrowed it down to focusing on how to improve environmental sustainability awareness within the company.

Looking back, the work has progressed quite smoothly overall. There were a few changes to the original timeline here and there, but I managed to stick with my goal of finishing in spring of 2025. The active support from both the commissioning company and my thesis supervisor helped me stay on track. Balancing this project with a full-time job, ongoing studies and personal life wasn't always easy, but with some careful planning, I was able to make it work.

Throughout this thesis, I gained a deeper understanding of environmental sustainability within organisational contexts, particularly in relation to employee behaviour, awareness-building strategies and the role of internal communication. Additionally, the process of creating the theoretical framework deepened my knowledge on sustainable development, corporate sustainability and engaging employees in sustainability initiatives. The thesis also improved my skills in research planning, stakeholder interaction and data analysis. It also highlighted the importance of adaptability, especially when managing timelines and navigating unforeseen challenges such as limited participant availability and time constraints.

This thesis has deepened my appreciation for the complexity of organisational change, especially when it comes to sustainability culture and employee engagement. It has demonstrated that while awareness is an essential first step, lasting impact requires strategic communication, inclusive practices and long-term commitment. The experience has been both professionally and personally

rewarding and it has equipped me with skills applicable to future roles in sustainability and organisational development.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions in English

#### Theme 1 – Current Situation

1. What does a responsible company mean to you?
2. What do you know about the company's sustainability work and program?
3. What kind of environmental impacts does the company's operations have?
4. What sustainability practices of the company are you familiar with?
5. How are sustainability work and related matters perceived in your team?
6. How responsible is the company's current operation?
  - a. What is done particularly well?
  - b. What kinds of things hinder responsible operations?
7. What do you know about the company's sustainability targets?
  - a. How do you perceive the company's sustainability targets?
8. How are the company's sustainability targets reflected in your own work?
9. How is the monitoring of sustainability targets implemented in the company?
10. What sustainability targets would you like the company to pursue in the coming years?
11. How committed is the company's leadership to sustainability work?

#### Theme 2 – Advantages of Sustainability Work

12. Why does the company engage in sustainability work?
13. What benefits does sustainability work, and the sustainability program bring to the company?
14. What benefits do you see the company's sustainability program bringing to your daily work?
15. What challenges do you believe the company may face in implementing the sustainability program?

#### Theme 3 – Improving Sustainability Awareness

16. How does the company communicate about sustainability to its staff?
  - a. In what ways and through which channels should the company communicate about sustainability?
17. How could company leadership promote staff commitment to sustainability work through their own actions?

18. What kind of training do you need or want related to sustainability in order to act more responsibly?
19. In what other ways could the company support and help staff act more responsibly?
20. How could staff be motivated to achieve sustainability goals?
21. How should the achievement of sustainability goals be reflected in rewards?
22. How would you personally promote sustainability work in the company?

## Appendix 2. Interview questions in Finnish

### Teema 1 – Nykytilanteen kartoittaminen

1. Mitä vastuullinen yritys tarkoittaa mielestäsi?
2. Mitä tiedät yrityksen vastuullisuustyöstä ja -ohjelmasta?
3. Minkälaisia ympäristövaikutuksia yrityksen toiminnalla on?
4. Mitä yrityksen vastuullisuustyön käytäntöjä tunnet?
5. Miten vastuullisuustyö ja siihen liittyvät asiat nähdään tiimissäsi?
6. Miten vastuullista yrityksen toiminta on tällä hetkellä?
  - a. Missä onnistutaan erityisen hyvin?
  - b. Minkälaiset asiat estävät vastuullista toimintaa?
7. Mitä tiedät yrityksen vastuullisuustavoitteista?
  - a. Millaisena koet yrityksen vastuullisuustavoitteet?
8. Miten yrityksen vastuullisuustavoitteet näkyvät omassa työssäsi?
9. Millä tavalla vastuullisuustavoitteiden seuranta toteutuu yrityksessä?
10. Mitä vastuullisuustavoitteita haluaisit yrityksen tavoittelevan tulevina vuosina?
11. Miten sitoutunut yrityksen johto on vastuullisuustyöhön?

### Teema 2 – Vastuullisuustyön hyödyt

12. Miksi yritys tekee vastuullisuustyötä?
13. Mitä hyötyjä yritykselle on vastuullisesta toiminnasta ja vastuullisuusohjelmasta?
14. Mitä hyötyjä koet yrityksen vastuullisuusohjelman tuovan päivittäiseen työhösi?
15. Mitä haasteita uskot, että yritys voi kohdata toteuttaessaan vastuullisuusohjelmaa?

### Teema 3 – Vastuullisuustietoisuuden kehittäminen

16. Millä tavalla yritys viestii vastuullisuudesta henkilöstölleen?
  - a. Millä tavoin ja missä kanavissa yrityksen tulisi viestiä vastuullisuudesta?
17. Miten yrityksen johto voisi omalla toiminnallaan edistää henkilöstön sitoutumista vastuullisuustyöhön?
18. Millaista koulutusta tarvitset tai haluat vastuullisuuteen liittyen, jotta voit toimia vastuullisemmin?
19. Millä muilla tavoin yritys voisi tukea ja auttaa henkilöstöä toimimaan vastuullisemmin?
20. Miten henkilöstöä voisi motivoida vastuullisuustavoitteisiin pääsemiseksi?

21. Miten vastuullisuustavoitteisiin pääsy pitäisi huomioida palkitsemisessa?
22. Miten edistäisit itse vastuullisuustyötä yrityksessä?

### Appendix 3. Interview invite in English

Subject: Interview for Thesis – Sustainability management

My name is Aleksi Paajanen, and I am currently working on my thesis at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in the \*Strategy Work in Organizations\* degree program. The aim of my thesis is to explore how awareness of environmental responsibility can be improved within an organization and to develop concrete action models to support the company's sustainability program.

As part of my thesis, I will be conducting interviews to hear employees' perspectives and experiences related to the topic. The interviews will be conducted via Teams and will last approximately 45 minutes. The discussion will cover, among other things, the importance of environmental responsibility at work, current practices and development ideas. No preparation is required for the interview.

All interviews will be handled confidentially, and responses will be anonymized in the thesis. Participation in the interview is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time if you wish.

I would be very grateful if you could take part in an interview. Your input is a valuable part of my research and will help improve how environmental matters are addressed within the company.

We can agree on the interview time flexibly. Would you be available, for example, on <DATE>? If these times don't work for you, please feel free to suggest a time that suits you better.

Thank you in advance for your time and contribution to my thesis!

Best regards,

Aleksu Paajanen

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

<EMAIL>

<PHONE NUMBER>

#### Appendix 4. Interview invite in Finnish

Otsikko: Haastattelu opinnäytetyötä varten - Vastuullisuusjohtaminen

Olen Aleksi Paajanen ja suoritan opinnäytetyötäni Haaga-Helia Ammattikorkeakoulussa Strategia-työ organisaatioissa - koulutusohjelmassa. Opinnäytetyöni tavoitteena on selvittää, miten ympäristövastuullisuuteen liittyvää tietoisuutta voidaan parantaa organisaation sisällä ja kehittää konkreettisia toimintamalleja yrityksen vastuullisuusohjelman tueksi.

Osana opinnäytetyötäni toteutan haastatteluja, joissa haluan kuulla henkilöstön näkemyksiä ja kokemuksia aiheeseen liittyen. Haastattelut suoritetaan Teamsin kautta, ja niiden kesto on noin 45 minuuttia. Keskustelussa käsitellään muun muassa ympäristövastuun merkitystä työssä, nykyisiä käytäntöjä sekä kehitysideoita. Sinun ei tarvitse valmistautua haastatteluun millään tavalla.

Kaikki haastattelut käsitellään luottamuksellisesti, ja vastaukset anonymisoidaan opinnäytetyössä. Haastatteluun osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista, ja voit halutessasi keskeyttää sen milloin tahansa.

Olisin erittäin kiitollinen, jos voisit osallistua haastatteluun. Yhteinen keskustelu on arvokas osa tutkimustani ja auttaa osaltaan kehittämään ympäristöasioiden käsittelyä yrityksessä.

Voimme sopia haastatteluajankohdan joustavasti. Olisitko käytettävissä esimerkiksi <PVM>? Jos nämä ajat eivät sovi, ehdota itsellesi sopivaa aikaa.

Kiitos jo etukäteen ajastasi ja panoksestasi opinnäytetyöhöni!

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Alexi Paajanen

Haaga-Helia Ammattikorkeakoulu

<SÄHKÖPOSTI>

<PUHELINNUMERO>

## Appendix 5. Content analysis

Below are examples of the content analysis performed on the answers from the interviews. The examples are in Finnish and the three examples chosen are provided to questions 1,6 and 11. The results that have been shown in the examples are randomized and anonymized.

<p>1. Mitä vastuullinen yritys tarkoittaa mielestäsi?</p>	<p>No siinähan tulee siis vastuullinen yritys. En tiedä sertifikaatit ja kaikki tälle, mutta siihen kuuluu myös sitten kaikki tuota ympäristö. Nämä nämä lajitteluhommat ja kaikki tämmöiset nää ja joka paikassa on. Meillä pitäisi olla tota. Olla tota nykypäivän mukainen juttu, mutta mulle se nyt ei sen kummemmin enemmän niin melkein tuota. Mitä mihin niin lajitellaan? Sitten jatko jatkojätteen metallit alumiinit kuparit, biojätteet, muovit, pahvit siinä vastuullisuutta niinku eteenpäin, mutta sitten en tiedä. Mennään viisaampi juttuihin sitten mitä on niinku. Mitä sitten on niinku muuta?</p>	<p>No. Tietysti tänä päivänä tuo. Ympäristö ja vihreät asiat on. Hirmu paljon esillä ihan joka puolella ja tietysti siellä liittyen niin ihan sitten se että. Sieltä alkuruudusta lähtien nämä yhteistyökumppanit. On. Valikoitui semmoiseksi, että näistä noudattaa niinku omassa tuotannossa näitä. Materiaalin henkilöstön oman tuotannon osalta niin hyvin kun nyt pystyy vihreitä arvoja ja siihen liittyviä asetuksia, säännöksiä ja lakeja. Ja tietysti sitten myös niin kun siltä puolelta se tiedon saanti. Että on varmistettu siellä. Nyt on en ala luettelemaan näitä. Mitä tikettejä siellä pitää olla, mutta joka tapauksessa niin niitähan siellä sitten tarvitaan. Tai niinku jos ajattelee tähän astisista toimintaa, niin. Sillä lailla on ollut että isommat yritykset mitä meilläkin on asiakkaana, niin sitten on välillä kysynyt näitä, että mistä tämä ja tuo tavara tulee ja siitä on pitänyt sitten laittaa niille tiedot, että mitä me on käytetty niissä. Kyllä ja sitten tietysti niinku se oman toiminnan vastuu ihan henkilöstössä lähtien Ja just nää tavoitteet. Mitkä siellä on sitten että täällä nyt laajene tuolla laatu järjestelmäkin, että siihenkin liittyen. Niitä joutuu huomaamaan.</p>
<p>Analyysi</p>	<p>Sertifikaatit, ympäristö, jätteiden lajittelu</p>	<p>Ympäristö, yhteistyökumppanit</p>

<p>6. Miten vastuullista yrityksen toiminta on tällä hetkellä?</p>	<p>No ei me ainakaan niinku tietysti meillä on. On tuota paljon ollut tässä muutoksia. Vuoden aikana yritysostot ja tehtaiden sulkemisia ja yhteenliittämistä ja tämmöisiä niin ei varmasti olla niinku menty huonompaan suuntaan siitä, että kyllähän se niinku on ollaan niinku oikealla tiellä siinä että tehdään valintoja niinku sanoin että ei pelkästään enääkään ole se, että meitä ohjaa niinku. Tota hinta olipa se nyt vaikka siivoustyön tai. Jätefirman tai sähköfirman tai mikä tahansa niinku muikin tekijä kuin pelkästään komponentti, niin meitä niinku yksi ohjaava tekijä on nyt jo se että onko se niinku vastuullinen se valinta tai onko se kestävä se valinta ja onko se niin kun niin kyllä me enää että ei missään nimessä olla varmasti siellä missä niinku mitä tavoitellaan vielä, mutta suunta on mun mielestä niinku oikein että se alkaa olla niinku puhekielessä enemmän eikä ole enää semmoinen. Vieras. Sana ja pelottava ilmiö, että mitähän tää nyt tuo meille tullessa. Että ollaan oikeassa suuntaan menossa kyllä.</p>	<p>Kyllähän me tähänkin asti oon niin kun. Tämä toimittajavalinta valinta siellä tehty, että siellähän on niin kun. Itse kullekin. Tuoteryhmälle. Niin niin niin. Päätoimittaja ja saattaa olla joillakin useampikin varatoimittaja, mutta ei sillä lailla niinku sillä puolella. Sitten nämä selvitykset on jo käytännössä tehty. Tehty että nyt vaan pitää niinku viedä kirjojen kansiinkin. Sitten tämä tieto. Mutta sitten myöskin niinku omassa työssäni. Kyllä sitä nyt pyrkii niinku. Toimimaan tehokkaasti ja omissa, että. Ja kun siitä työstä mitä tekee niin ei, ei sitten aiheudu mitään mitään semmoista että tuota. Olisi niinku. Väärin siihen vastuullisuuden näkökohtaan. Rinnastettu. Että kyllä ne kyllä niinku sillä lailla jos ajattelee niin. Voisi sanoa että niinku etukenessa on yritysmenossa siinä asiassa että. Pikkuhiljaa on tuotu sitä. Tietoa ja asioihin liittyviä käsitteitä ja niin edelleen, niin tietoisuuteen tää oli ihan niinku sanotaan. Joka tasolla. Että itsellä ainakin on niinku semmoiset. Positiiviset. Käsitteet siitä tuota niin tahtolasta sitä asiaa kohtaan.</p>
<p>a. Missä onnistutaan erityisen hyvin?</p>		
<p>Analyysi</p>	<p>Parempaan suuntaan menossa, vastuullisuus ohjaa päätöksiä</p>	<p>Vastuullisuus vaikuttaa toimittajavalintaan, yritys menossa hyvään suuntaan</p>

<p>11. Miten sitoutunut yrityksen johto on vastuullisuustyöhön?</p>	<p>Niin niin mitä nyt tuossa kvartaali infossa käytiin lyhkäisesti asioita läpi niin tuota. Kaikilta osin niin kun näytti lailla että se on niinku otettu vakavasti tämä asia ja tuota halutaan tehdä niinku asiat oikein.</p>	<p>Mä luulen että johto on ja sieltä se on varmaan lähtenytkin tämä homma niin tuota hyvinkin sitoutunutta siihen että. Se vielä pitää saada tänne alemmalle portaalle sitten tuota niin. Toimimaan se homma ja koulutuksia. Miksi siihen ja? Mitä se oikeasti tarkoittaa ja mitä me oikeasti pitää tehdä, niin siihen vielä paljon selvennyksiä tarvitaan. Mutta johtoryhmä on varmasti kyllä hyvin mukana jos.</p>	<p>No mä näkisin että hyvinkin sitoutunut, koska he on hyvin laajalla niinku rintamalla joka asiassa. Nyt ruvennut niinku kiinnittämään huomiota. Se tavallaan niinku aivan kaikkea mitä me tehdään niin. On tavallaan niinku työn alla, että miten sen saisi. Paremmaksi.</p>
<p>Analyysi</p>	<p>Sitoutunut</p>	<p>Hyvin sitoutunut, miten saadaan alemmalle portaalle myös</p>	<p>Hyvin sitoutunut</p>