



How to make effective sustainability communication in the changing world

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Abstract

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<p>Sustainability communication can have significant value for the company reputation. Growing requirements for companies' sustainability performance increase the need for sustainability communication and the importance of it. As the sustainability field is evolving rapidly, the objective of this thesis was to investigate sustainability as a phenomenon and find out requirements and recommendations that today support effective management and implementation of sustainability communication. The thesis concentrates on sustainability communication in the mode of external corporate communication on digital channels.</p> <p>Theoretical framework of the thesis covered definitions and perspectives of sustainability and responsible business, communication management and sustainability communication. Based on the literature review, sustainability communication should flourish from inside the organization and have a strategic approach. To avoid pitfalls, it should be built on real achievements, trust and transparency. Engaging top management, knowing target audiences, and setting clear and measurable objectives are important. Digital platforms have changed the communication landscape and companies should be ready to react and discuss to enable dialogue through which they can engage their audiences and get feedback for further development of their sustainability communication approach.</p> <p>This thesis has a constructive research approach with qualitative research methods. Data was firstly collected through a theoretical framework. Key recommendations for effective sustainability communication derived from it were compiled in a table which was used in preparation for the empirical part. The table was completed with the data collected through semi-structured interviews among sustainability experts. The qualitative data was analyzed by using deductive and thematic content analyses.</p> <p>The results of the study show that management and implementation of sustainability communication is a specialty that requires paying attention to many factors. In the empirical part a broad understanding of the constantly evolving sustainability field including increasing impact of regulation was highlighted as well as importance of communicators' internal networks and getting involved to sustainability projects early enough. Communicators should also ensure understandable messaging that is relevant for the target audiences and touches them. The work requires high ethics and even courage. Guidance for company spokespersons and all employees as sustainability ambassadors was found important.</p> <p>This thesis was commissioned by a large B2B company operating in Finland. Description of the target organization has been excluded from the published version. The study was started in the beginning of November 2022 and completed in early June 2023. As a concrete output of the thesis a structure of recommendations for successful sustainability communication was produced.</p>
Keywords Sustainability communication, communication management, corporate responsibility, sustainability, CSR

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1 Introduction

Today, sustainable business is both a strategic target of a growing number of companies and a requirement for them.

Humans' actions are threatening Earth's capacity and living systems (Robertson 2018, 4) and it is commonly acknowledged that climate change is reality (Hill 2020, 3). Also, adequacy of energy and natural resources require new thinking.

Growing number of investors, both institutional and individuals, pay attention to environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors (Hill 2020, 2–3) and incorporating those into the company strategy and operations is becoming more and more crucial for businesses. Value should be created not only to companies themselves but also to broader communities.

Organization's social responsibility behavior influences on many things starting from its reputation. It also impacts on relations with stakeholders, such as suppliers, customers and communities, and potential high-performing employee candidates' willingness to apply for the organization's open positions. (ISO 2018, 4.) For example, to meet their own goals, customers cannot necessarily do business with vendors who do not fulfil certain requirements for sustainability performance, and the requirements are becoming higher and higher. Also, sustainability goals that companies have published must bear scrutiny.

According to Whitfield and McNett (2014, 131), to ensure business continuity for the long run, organizations are expected to fulfill high level requirements for their sustainability performance and constantly strive for improving in sustainability.

As much as 99 % of the world's largest companies' CEOs find sustainability matters important for their business' future success (Taticchi & Demartini 2020, 86). Hence it is likely that the largest companies must develop their sustainability performance and even shield for superiority in this area.

This is naturally a good evolution. When referring to the Megatrends 2023 report, where the big picture of change is described related to nature, power, people, technology and the economy, Katri Vataja, Director Foresight and Strategy at Sitra (Sitra 2023) highlights that the economy and technology should be developed and utilized in a fair and sustainable way, reminding, "if we do not take the future seriously, we will face these issues later in a crisis mode".

Luckily, the challenging situation also offers possibilities. Helena Soimakallio, Executive Director, Sustainable Development at Technology Industries of Finland, points out that successful companies provide sustainable solutions to human, environmental and social problems and create a wide range of economic and social value. Innovations are required to solve environmental challenges and climate change. Many Finnish technology companies are pioneers in this area, helping the world to tackle these global problems. (Soimakallio 29 May 2023.)

In the picture of aforementioned factors, it is evident that companies have growing expectations to act and thus, also needs to communicate about their sustainability approach, solutions and achievements to guarantee their business continuity.

However, old communication methods may not be sufficient for sharing information because companies' stakeholders have become more demanding and technological development has changed the media landscape. Digital platforms easily enable dialogue between organizations and their audiences in good and bad.

Organization is in interaction with its stakeholders who are parties that the company is dependent on either directly or indirectly and thus wants to impact on them. It is a mutual connection: the stakeholders may also want to influence on the organization because they are dependent on it. (Juholin & Lahnalammi-Vesivalo 2022, 128.)

The need to be able communicate about social and environmental topics has evolved rapidly and communication professionals are expected to have in their skills ability to handle purpose-driven communication – and make it effectively. Digital channels offer significant opportunities for brands for communication about their corporate behavior, but on the other hand, the rise of social media holds them more accountable than earlier and false claims will hit back. (Reed 2020, 19, 27.)

Younger generations who will live on this planet still for decades are very keen on sustainable development. Millennials, born in 1980–2000, and Generation Z, usually referring to people born after the turn of the 21st century, pay more attention to responsible consumption and investments and use social media for sharing values that they find important (Hill 2020, 1–3; Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 7; Finto 2022).

Millennials represent the largest population group in the world and impact in politics, business and financial sector and are looking for greener solutions in societies (Hill 2020, 3). In their world, successful implementation of sustainability can be seen to bring competitive advantage for companies.

Also, as the companies are in different communication channels with their other topics, they should also be there with sustainability topics in an impactful way.

Sustainability communication is not very easy for companies though as it can be found uninteresting and incredible and companies may easily be accused of greenwashing, for example.

The need to deepen understanding of sustainability communication's current drivers and characteristics and finding effective ways to manage and implement sustainability communication in local markets were recognized in the target organization of this commissioned study and set the basis for the research. Studies related to sustainability reporting seemed to exist more commonly, but approach with above-described targets was seen to require research.

The author delved into exploring the subject with great enthusiasm as she had decided to make a sustainability related study, inspired by Minna-Maari Harmaala's Responsible Business and Sharing Economy course which she had completed as part of her master studies in January 2022.

1.1 Scope, objectives and structure of the study

Organizations show their commitment to environmental and social subjects and build relationships in communities they act through corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, integrated reporting and community activities (Cornelissen 2020, 256). Of these ways of execution, this thesis concentrates on sustainability communication.

The thesis is commissioned by Country Communications of a large global company, mainly concentrating on B2B and employing thousands of people in Finland. The target organization is described in Appendix 1. The country communication team's ambition is to show company commitment and progress in sustainability in an impactful manner, focus being on local achievements, and improve on it constantly. Organization's key target audiences are current and potential customers and potential employee candidates. The communications team is responsible for internal and external communication and marketing in the country while not having a dedicated sustainability communication person. The author belongs to the team and is taking over more responsibility for sustainability communication along her other duties. This thesis is one initiative to increase the author's and the team's knowledge of sustainability communication context and recommended approaches to strengthen management and implementation of sustainability communication.

Initially the study had a development-oriented case study approach, but it evolved to the mode of a constructive research as learning the theme widely and deeply and producing general guidance were seen needed before going to concrete assessments and development ideas. Thus, emphasis

changed toward a foundation – which must be in order with any construction. Additionally, in discussions with the thesis supervisor, sustainability communication guidance and an output that could be used by many companies and organizations to ensure they have basics in place or can improve in sustainability communication was seen useful.

Thus, the main target of this research-oriented constructive study is to widely investigate sustainability communication as a phenomenon and clarify how companies and organizations should and could make effective sustainability communication in the changing world and what factors impact on it. The study aims to map requirements and recommendations that support effective management and implementation of sustainability communication. Without a sufficient knowledge of the wider sustainability context and all aspects that impact on sustainability communication, it may be ineffective.

The thesis consists of seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the reader to the thesis topic and reasons for choosing it. The theoretical framework is discussed in the second, third and fourth chapter. Those cover definitions and perspectives of sustainability and responsible business, communication management and sustainability communication. In the fifth chapter, research approach is opened and in the sixth chapter the author shares research findings. The last chapter covers conclusions.

The theoretical framework covers sustainability context and communication domain. It is quite comprehensive for a reason as the study also aims to open the topic to those target organization members who are the communication team's stakeholders to harmonize knowledge of the topic to all parties. Additionally, it is useful for any readers who want to familiarize themselves with sustainability communication as a phenomenon. The theoretical framework also provides a basis for empirical research of this study.

As a concrete outcome the study results to a structure that can be used as a tool for managing and implementing sustainability communication. It helps to assess, plan, implement and develop sustainability communication. In addition to the target organization, it can be used as a guideline for any large company's sustainability communication to ensure that all recommended elements or those found relevant for the company are in use. Thus, outputs of this thesis will benefit wider audiences than the target organization. The outcome is meant to support communicators' work, but it can be useful for anyone who is interested and/or involved in sustainability communication related work. The outcome is based on the wide theoretical framework and empirical research.

The thesis concentrates on sustainability communication in the mode of external corporate communication on digital channels. Sustainability reporting, media relations, community activities and corporate activism are excluded. Also, assessment of the target organization's current sustainability communication approach and development of it are excluded but this study will work as a guideline and inspiration for those activities to be completed later.

The study also excludes internal communication. However, it is good to keep in mind that external sustainability communication should start from inside the organization. It also serves internal audiences and impacts on organization's sustainability and employer image among employees.

References of the thesis are built with the help of Mendeley referencing system, using the Cite Them Right 12th edition – Harvard. In-text references and references list have been aligned with the Haaga-Helia reference requirements where required.

1.2 Research questions

The thesis aims to map requirements and recommendations that support effective management and implementation of sustainability communication. The research concentrates on factors that influence the credibility and efficiency of organizations' sustainability communication and reasoning behind them. It aims to clarify how to strengthen organization's sustainability image through sustainability communication and what practices help sustainability communicators' work.

A deep dive in the theoretical framework provides a framework for the study. Additionally, the key recommendations and reasoning for them are investigated through an empirical study.

Research questions are the following:

Q1. What characteristics and methods make sustainability communication effective today and why?

Q2. What are the biggest challenges in today's sustainability communication environment and how to manage them?

The research should give a good understanding of the sustainability as a phenomenon and the most effective ways for managing and implementing sustainability communication.

2 Responsible business

As there are several concepts and definitions around sustainability and responsible business, key terms related to them are opened in this chapter. As an example, Finnish companies tend to use terms such as “corporate responsibility”, “responsible business”, “good corporate citizen” and “sustainable business” when they describe their performance and goals in terms of economic, social and environmental aspects (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 16).

This chapter also introduces milestones of responsible business and sustainability-related concept creation that have relevancy also today such as Corporate Social Responsibility, Triple Bottom Line, Environmental, Social and Governance, Creating Shared Value and Purpose. That is to investigate sustainability as a phenomenon and create understanding of the wide sustainability context that is essential in creation of successful sustainability communication.

2.1 Sustainability

Sustainability is a very topical subject today, but experts started to pay attention to it already several decades ago. Definitions of sustainability and how to manage it have evolved over the past 70 years, alongside the debate on the role of business in promoting sustainable development (Taticchi and Demartini 2020, 65).

In 1987, United Nation’s World Commission on Environment (1987, 16) defined sustainable development as humanity’s ability to meet current needs while ensuring that also future generations can meet theirs. The statement has acted as a stimulus for sustainable development (Ympäristöministeriö 2022). It compresses the core of the sustainability subject so well that this definition is much referred to even today.

Ministry of Environment in Finland describes sustainability as a societal transformation that is happening globally, in regions and locally. It is both managed and continuous, targeting at proper circumstances for existing and next generations. Decision making and activities must be based on a triangle that pays attention to economy, environment and human beings. (Ympäristöministeriö 2022.) So, sustainable development does not only cover responsibility for environment but also for economic and social dimensions.

Ingaliil Aspholm (Suomen Tilintarkastajat 2023), Head of Regulatory Affairs at Finnish Association of Auditors, describes sustainability to cover firm’s impact in society and environment as well as its governance, ESG factors being dimensions of sustainability. When financial institutions and investors are planning an investment decision, they use the abbreviation ESG when they refer to

environmental, social and governance related aspects (Suomen Tilintarkastajat 2023). In this study the term sustainability is used to describe the overall sustainability performance of organizations.

2.1.1 Sustainability agreements and initiatives

In 2000s several agreements have taken place to accelerate sustainable development in nations and organizations. As these are significant steps toward concrete actions to mitigate climate change and they generate actions, it is good to have a look to some of them. Also, because awareness of this context will help in sustainability communication activities.

The Paris Agreement started a new chapter in how seriously climate change must be taken and has increased the pace how different parties in nations act. Being in force since November 4, 2016, the agreement urges close to 200 nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The preferred global warming target of 1.5 degrees Celsius is also pushing companies in these countries to set targets for their carbon emissions, collaborate with those countries who do not have same possibilities for actions and develop low- and zero-carbon solutions for markets. (UNFCCC 2023.)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) by United Nations has published several assessment reports on climate change, its impacts and risks for the future. Summary made for policymakers on October 8, 2018, concerning Global Warming of 1.5 °C have been one of the significant drivers to accelerate actions for sustainable development. (IPCC 2023.)

On December 19, 2022, in the UN biodiversity conference in Montreal, the world's nations agreed on addressing loss of biodiversity and protecting ecosystems (Convention on Biological Diversity 2022). With its goals and targets towards 2030, the package is yet another significant move that affects companies. It was the private sector that hoped for strong rules and goals from states which proves that change in attitudes is happening (Miettinen & Sairanen 21 December 2022). Mari Pantsar (2023, 78), states that biodiversity loss related activities will increasingly become business issues, alongside corporate responsibility issues. She also encourages organizations to communicate about actions taken in companies to grow people's understanding of what is already done for nature and how companies will pay attention to this topic from now on (Pantsar 2023, 80).

The European Parliament and Council agreed in June 2022 on the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) which came into effect on 5 January 2023. It will change reporting of social and environmental information for around 50.000 large companies as of financial year 2024, reports to be published as of 2025. That is to provide information to investors and other stakeholders to help them estimate investment risks that relate to climate change and sustainability. The

new rules enable creation of transparency culture so that companies' impact on human beings and the planet's environment will be visible. The new approach will also cut reporting costs for companies in the medium and long run. (European Commission website 2023.)

A CEO-led organization of over 200 leading companies, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), has set a "Vision 2050: Time to Transform" which concentrates on nine transformation pathways that companies should take because they can lead the change. It includes essential areas to society such as "energy; transportation and mobility; living spaces; products and materials; financial products and services; connectivity; health and wellbeing; water and sanitation; and food." The vision is to enable over 9 million people to live on this planet well but there are only a couple of decades left for action. (WBCSD 2023.)

The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) – a partnership between CDP, the United Nations Global Compact, World Resources Institute (WRI) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – drives ambitious climate actions in the private sector (Science Based Targets 2023a). It offers a framework for setting clear science-based targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to meet the Paris agreement's goals (Science Based Targets 2023c). Close to 5.000 companies have either set science-based targets or committed to developing targets (Science Based Targets 2023b).

These agreements and initiatives are examples of significant ambitions to drive sustainable development globally and at least large companies must pay attention to them and develop their business to a more sustainable direction strongly and rapidly. This naturally raises expectations for increased sustainability communication of companies. It must become more transparent, and companies may also need to find new ways to open sustainability related topics to attract target audiences' interest and show how they are meeting the growing requirements.

There are several global sustainability methods of assessments, such as Dow Jones Sustainability Index or Edelman Trust Barometer, that evaluate companies' sustainability performance to show and provide information on the best performers. At least for the largest companies it is valuable to reach a good position in these ratings as a proof of their direction and accomplishments in sustainability.

2.1.2 Megatrends

To draw an even more comprehensive big picture of the sustainability context, attention is also paid to global megatrends as they very much relate to sustainable development of the world and the challenges it is facing and will face.

The megatrends are the most remarkable long-term changes the world is already encountering and will face in the coming years and decades, and they affect many areas (Juholin & Lahnammi-Vesivalo 2022, 11; Sitra 2023).

Sitra describes the impact of the megatrends through five themes that are linked with each other: nature, people, power, technology and the economy. A big picture drawn through them helps prepare for the future and make better decisions in helping societies transform in a more sustainable way. Even though the challenges are significant, the new era also offers opportunities, and it is important to influence to development of the trends. (Sitra 2023.)

Juholin and Lahnammi-Vesivalo (2022, 11) advise that communication professionals should be aware of the megatrends and adapt communication activities to the big picture of the change that the world is facing.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

According to Harmaala and Jallinoja (2012, 15) corporate responsibility refers to voluntary activities that companies take to fulfill stakeholders' expectations in corporate social responsibility (CSR). They describe corporate social responsibility as division of duties between corporates and societies on how they contribute to welfare of environment and citizens (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 13).

ISO 26000 defines social responsibility as a critical performance measurement covering an organization's impact to society and the environment based on its decisions and activities. Behavior is expected to be transparent and ethical and impact on sustainable development, also covering society, pay attention to stakeholders' expectations and follow law and global norms. The organization should ensure that responsible behavior is implemented throughout the organization and cover all relations it has. (ISO 2018, 3.)

A well-known social responsibility related concept, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), was created 70 years ago as Howard Bowen pointed out in 1953 how important the moral and ethical side of business in company operations towards the society and stakeholders is. He also emphasized how CSR should be part of strategic planning and decision-making of the management. (Taticchi & Demartini 2020, 65–66.)

There are tens of definitions for CSR though (Carroll 2016, 2). Carroll's Pyramid of CSR from 1991 based on four categories has been heavily revisited since its creation. Profitable business is the basic requirement so that the business can survive and benefit the society. Companies must comply with laws and regulations, but they are also expected to follow ethical norms that are not written

in law but still exist. Corporate philanthropy is desired but voluntary. (Carroll 2016, 2–5, 7.) These four categories are described in the figure below (see figure 1).

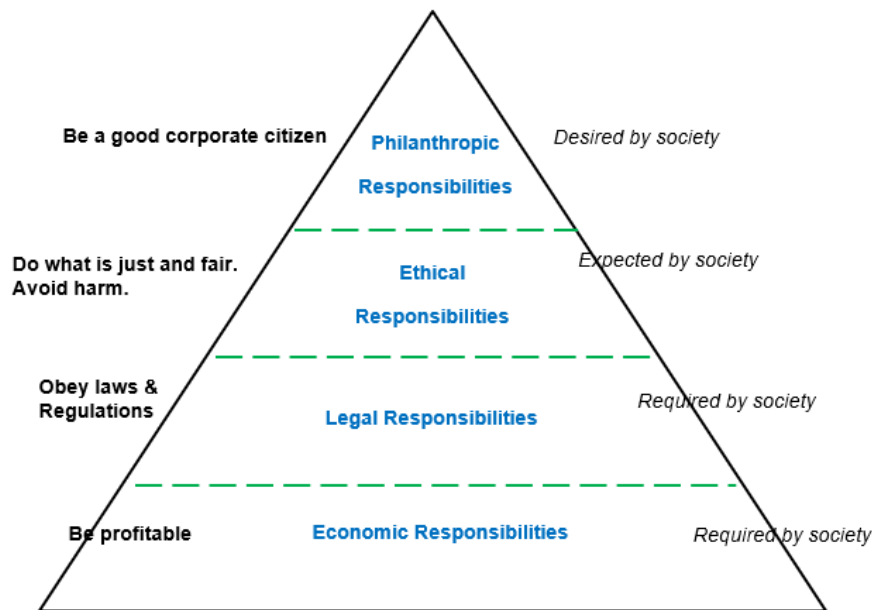


Figure 1. Carroll's Pyramid of CSR from 1991 (adapted from Carroll 2016, 5)

Carroll (2016, 1) says that CSR has spanned through the decades and is even raising its position what comes to its importance or impact. The Pyramid has been criticized though for being not so useful outside the United States or for smaller firms (Carroll 2016, 7).

2.3 Triple Bottom Line

In 1994, John Elkington published the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept which paid attention to three dimensions of responsibility performance: the economic, environmental and social, meaning taking care of profit, planet and people with long-term goals. The different dimensions overlap, as can be seen in the figure on the next page (figure 2). Based on this concept, a company was considered as a sustainable player only if it was able to handle all these dimensions. The TBL approach emerged companies provide sustainability reports in the 1990s. (Taticchi & Demartini 2020, 68–69.) That was a good step forward but after a couple of decades requirements have increased and to convince stakeholders, communication on sustainability topics must be more regular throughout the year.

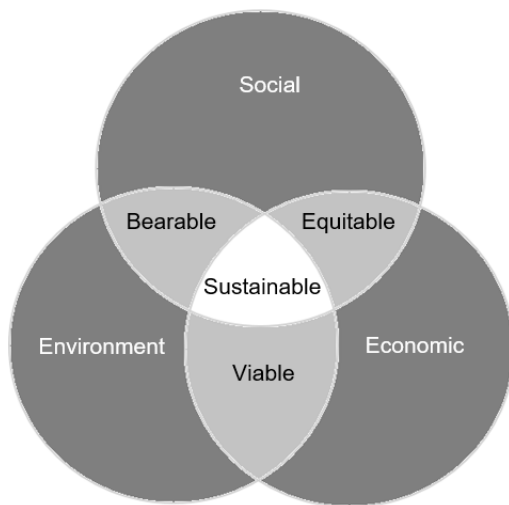


Figure 2. Elkington's triple bottom line framework (adapted from Taticchi & Demartini 2020, 69)

Taticchi and Demartini (2020, 69) say that in the modern world, there are many concepts that have impacted definition of Corporate Responsibility, the following three concepts being the dominating ones: Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), Creating Shared-Value (CSV), and Purpose. Next, an overview of these three concepts is given.

2.4 Environmental, Social and Governance

The very commonly used ESG principle was formed in 2004 as a framework and a concept for environmental (E), social (S), and governance (G) dimensions. ESG factors have an interactive relation, and the concept aims to generate and accelerate sustainable development of businesses. The ESG framework has evolved as a pattern for sustainable development since its creation. As a concrete and comprehensive method, it has become a widely used mainstream concept to provide long-term value. (Li, Wang, Sueyoshi & Wang 2021, 1–3.)

The concept brings sustainability into companies' concrete actions: environmental, social and governance aspects are part of investments-related thinking and decision-making, strategy design and the criteria for rating company management. The idea is that including ESG factors in the business does not benefit only environmental, social and governance aspects but incorporating them provides also better financial results. (Taticchi & Demartini 2020, 70–71.)

Investors use the ESG principle to estimate organizations' outlook in corporate behavior and financial performance and further in decision making (Li et al. 2021, 1–3). Sustainability and ESG strategies have become a core element of businesses' growth strategies and management of risks and this trend is growing (Pagitsas 2022, 1).

2.5 Creating Shared Value

The Creating Shared Value (CSV) model is possibly the most extensive approach to sustainability.

In CSV companies are encouraged to take a broader view to value creation. Social responsibility should be in the heart of the business so that creating economic success would generate value also to communities, not only pure financial profit. (Kramer & Porter 2020, sec. Creating Shared Value.)

Porter and Kramer (2020, sec. Creating Shared Value) emphasize, “Shared value is not social responsibility, philanthropy, or even sustainability, but a new way to achieve economic success”.

Porter and Kramer expect the CSV model to transform business thinking and capitalism. That is because challenges in societies are increasing and stakeholders and new generations living in them are looking forward to businesses to use their full potential in helping communities. (Kramer & Porter 2020, sec. Creating Shared Value.)

To build the CSV approach in the core of companies requires new thinking and competences both from business leaders, governments and non-profit organizations. The most beneficial local programs so far have involved cooperation between all of them. Things need to be thought in a new way from the beginning as the model does not mean sharing the value that has been already earned but generating it through the way the business operates while paying attention to progress of social and economic aspects. (Kramer and Porter 2020, sec. Creating Shared Value.)

What comes to firms, for full integration of the CSV model they will need to rethink their offering and markets, define productivity in a new way in their value chain and support establishment of local clusters. And to set cost both to economic and social side of company's impact naturally requires expertise. (Kramer and Porter 2020, sec. Creating Shared Value.)

Porter and Kramer say that the shared value approach will benefit societies in a more effective and sustainable way. At the same time, it will boost innovation and generate growth for companies through new possibilities for value creation. When companies realize the CSV model it both helps communities and enhance companies' business, also in the form of respect from the society. (Kramer and Porter, 2020 sec. Creating Shared Value.)

One of the first stakeholder scholars, R. Edward Freeman highlighted in the early 1980s that business is based on relationships with different parties, such as employees, customers, suppliers, communities, financiers and management. Managers of the company are responsible for taking care of these relationships and business success is dependent on how these group interact and

can create value. A key of this concept called Managing for Stakeholders is to realize that all these groups matter in establishing and sustaining successful business and all stakeholders should benefit in the long run. This means instead of just maximizing shareholder value managers must cleverly pay attention to all stakeholder relations. (Freeman, Harrison & Wicks 2007, 3–4.) Freeman emphasizes that each stakeholder group is important for success because the groups can create together something that they could not make alone (Freeman 1 October 2009, min 2:20–2:57).

It has taken decades to see this approach finally gain momentum.

2.6 Purpose

Today, it is more and more common that companies describe their existence with a concise purpose statement. It is one concept to share the core idea of the business and can be used for reflecting sustainability ambitions.

In essence, purpose replies to the questions why the company exists, what it stands for and what it aims to accomplish, also in the legacy point of view. Purpose makes it easier to understand how the company serves and inspires its stakeholders. (Freeman et al. 2007, 80–86.) Juholin and Lahnammi-Vesivalo (2022, 303) say that purpose needs to be completed with a company direction. Naturally values of the company should serve the purpose.

Especially younger generations are looking for purpose in their work and purchasing from companies whose values they can relate to. Therefore, defining a company purpose can help building a more attractive employer brand and generate more sales and better financial results. (Taticchi & Demartini 2020, 72–73.)

However, as purpose and values have been misused by some companies, stakeholders and audiences can be skeptical about them. Therefore, it is important to take purpose seriously and honestly live company purpose (and values) in practice. (Freeman et al. 2007, 85–86.) If the performance does not meet the promises, it can rather harm the sustainability image and brands of the company.

2.7 Summary of responsible business

The second chapter opened the sustainability topic and what kind of developments, concepts and expectations relate to responsible business and how companies and organizations should perform in the modern world.

Cornelissen (2020, 260) summarizes well how organizations' approaches and stakeholders' expectations concerning CSR have changed in the course of time. **Instead of narrow approaches** when

CSR is defensive, charitable or promotional, successful CSR performance is at least **strategic** or even transformational which is also called CSR 2.0. (Cornelissen 2020, 260–262.)

In that approach CSR is included in business models, managerial responsibility of it is spread throughout the entire organization and corporate communication is involved. Audience is not only primary stakeholders but even **generations**, both current and future ones. The starting point for businesses is to see how the business should be developed that it **better meets** needs of the **society** and the **planet** and adopt the business to that instead of looking things from the organization point of view and very locally. That approach shall lead to **innovative**, more sustainable solutions that enhances sustainable development. (Cornelissen 2020, 260–262.)

A contemporary definition by Taticchi and Demartini (2020, 73) describes corporate sustainability being an **integral part of business** which increases competitiveness and profitability and happens through a **combination of several concepts**: creation of shared value, co-creation practices with stakeholders and integrating ESG factors in decision-making.

To summarize concepts opened in this chapter, responsible thinking has expanded over the years to cover and benefit societies and the planet and the future of them. Expectations from stakeholders have grown and sustainability should be paid attention to already when developing business models. Understanding the importance of the sustainable approach should cover the entire organization. At the end, sustainable business ensures better financial performance which should encourage companies to act.

Communicating organization's sustainability approach and achievements is increasingly important to ensure successful business outlook and seriously taken corporate communication among stakeholders.

3 Communication management

In addition to the sustainability context, in this study it is important to explore communication framework as it forms the basis for the other side of the sustainability communication theme.

In this chapter communication principles and corporate communication's role as well as strategic communication and digital communication related aspects are opened to introduce through them communication principles and how to today effectively manage communication which requires understanding of communication's character, operating environment, methods and impact. Content production and messaging without understanding how it should be managed as a whole in the digital era is not sufficient. Later in the chapter 4 the communication scope expands to characteristics that especially relate to sustainability communication.

3.1 Communication principles

All human activity is based on communication, and it is a prerequisite for existence of organizations. It is used to impact on people's thinking and actions as well as values and attitudes. (Juholin & Lahnalammii-Vesivalo 2022, 15.)

However, communication does not necessarily lead to results the communicator aims to. Its impact may differ from what was expected because messages can be misunderstood, ignored or the receiver may disagree with the message, for example. To minimize risk of that it is good to learn to know organization's key stakeholders and other target audiences as it helps to tailor messages that could meet their needs and expectations. Multichannel approach that digital development has enabled may also help convey messages to different audiences even though that may also lead to negative reception due to repetition. (Juholin & Lahnalammii-Vesivalo 2022, 16–17.) Also, it is more and more difficult for companies and organizations to pick people's attention in the middle of so many messages in digital channels.

Communication is crucial for organizations to run business though. Failed communication can cause significant consequences for example in terms of reputation and economic losses. (Conaway & Laasch 2012, 17.)

Ethical guidelines for communication help creating the foundation for messaging. The guidelines by the Council of Ethics for Communication in Finland were updated in April 2023 since the previous update in 2015. Those define that communication should be open, honest, reliable and respectful. (ProCom – Viestinnän ammattilaiset ry 2023.)

Because operational environment has changed a lot during last decades and is constantly changing, communication is increasingly confronted with impact from both the environment and organization. It is important to think how the organization can success in the changing world and what kind of communication supports the organization. (Juholin & Lahnammi-Vesivalo 2022, 302.)

3.2 Corporate communication

Social systems are founded on relations between different parties. Social contract between a stakeholder group and an organization is based on relationship between them. Corporate communication is needed for stakeholder engagement and reputation management, also toward society (Lerbinger 2018, 7.).

Stakeholders have right to get information from organizations and the organizations have an obligation to be transparent meaning sharing information and interacting with their stakeholders (Juholin & Lahnammi-Vesivalo 2022, 35).

As communication issues tend to be complex, especially in large companies, due to wide range of products, business areas and divisions as well as sites around the world, corporate communication ensures that the company has an integrated and strategic communication approach. Corporate communication's role is to take care of the entire organization's interests and how it shows to all key stakeholders that it depends on socially and economically. That is important because when people appreciate a company and its reputation, they purchase company products, like to work there, or invest in the company, and at the end, individuals will become ambassadors and supporters for the company. (Cornelissen 2020, 5, 10, 12, 16.) Because businesses are nowadays expected to be sustainable, one important role for corporate communication is to share sustainability related messaging.

Communication is increasingly objectives-lead, and it also has a role in management of organizations. Communication provides **intangible or tangible value**. Tangible assets, such as brand value, sales, market share or savings reached, can be measured. (Juholin & Rydenfelt 2020, 81.)

Intangible assets are also very valuable because they also strongly impact the success of business. Those cover trust, reputation, stakeholder relations, justification for existence, competences of personnel, and engagement of stakeholders and personnel (Juholin & Lahnammi-Vesivalo 2022, 30). Both assets can provide competitive advantage – or disadvantage if not taken care of or communicated properly.

As good sustainable performance and transparent communication of it can increase trust and build better reputation, it is important to understand its value as an intangible asset. On the other hand, sustainability performance is a tangible asset as its progress can be measured.

Reputation goes hand in hand with trust, continuity of the business and justification for existence which is challenged especially in case of change and crisis situations. Therefore, good reputation and trust strengthen organizations. (Juholin & Lahnammi-Vesivalo 2022, 44.). It is easier to cope in crisis situations when the organization has an established position as a good citizen. When media, stakeholders and other audiences are aware of good aspirations and accomplishments, hit of a crisis is probably not that impactful.

Corporate communication professionals build, maintain and protect company's reputation with its key stakeholders as their core responsibility. Communication practitioners take care of different areas of communication in the organization covering both external and internal communications. Corporate communication manages as a function all the work so that it is coordinated, effective and efficient. (Cornelissen 2020, 3–5.) Corporate communication as a function must work together with a company CEO and other top management so that all are aligned how to preserve and strengthen company reputation. (Lerbinger 2018, 9, 11–12.) This also concerns sustainability topics.

Corporate communication ensures that the organization could engage its stakeholders. It does not mean controlling opinions but performing transparently, being loyal to corporate identity and living the company values. When stakeholders genuinely experience authentic behavior from the company, they start to trust on it and behave as advocates. Honest performance is important also because media easily pays attention to company behaviors that differ from what the company says to represent. (Cornelissen 2020, 13.) This angle was also handled when discussing about purpose earlier.

According to Lerbinger (2018, 7), one discipline of corporate communication called **public relations (PR)** is founded on two-way communications which covers organization's definition on what information it can share, and to which extend it expects stakeholders' input based on its communications. Corporate PR activities cover communication with investors, governments, the media, communities and personnel of the company (Cornelissen 2020, 23). It is important to determine how much power is given to different stakeholder groups, such as employee relations and activists, for example. Public relations also manage communication of social responsibility activities of the company for its stakeholders and in the society. (Lerbinger 2018, 7–8.) In practice PR is operated by communication professionals.

Public relations aim to enhance relationships and lead to four key results: mutual satisfaction, trust, loyalty and harmony (Lerbinger 2018, 8). Trust consists of integrity, dependability and competence and is the most crucial of the communication outcomes. Similarly to Cornelissen, Lerbinger highlights that trust builds on how fairly the company operates. It also should have ambition and competences to accomplish its promises. Open communication helps create trust – which creates credibility. However, trust cannot be created through PR campaigns, but it is always earned and based on company accomplishments. (Lerbinger 2018, 8–9.) This is particularly true in sustainability related themes.

So, organization's reputation needs to be built, developed and preserved in the eyes of stakeholders and key entities in society. Reputation means the image and awareness in people's minds which is based on company actions and can create goodwill. It can be assessed by familiarity, favorability and attributes. Even though goodwill is an intangible asset, it can have great financial value. Therefore, companies should determine what they want to be and realize their strategy on every occasion. That way they can be recognized for their actions with the targeted reputation. (Lerbinger 2018, 9–11.)

Blows in reputation can also have significant financial value, and crises that link to reputation are becoming more common. The world's largest companies see them currently as the most important risk threats. Reputation also goes hand in hand with sustainability of the company: those companies that pay attention to their reputation are probably good corporate citizens who cause less harm and have ability to cope with adversity, also because good reputation offers buffer in case of crisis. (Lerbinger 2018, 9–10.)

PR and marketing, which is another important communication discipline, have been merging under corporate communication since the 1980s as it was realized that they deal with common ground. Traditional PR content deliverables such as press releases, videos or articles have been complemented with new content types. Since the 2010's, digital platforms have helped generate approach called "branded content" which combines general information related to the topic and products related content. It can mean e.g., useful quality content which primarily educates audiences even though the products or solutions are attached. This combination has been found to enhance engagement to the brand. (Cornelissen 2020, 20–21.) The target organization has used this kind of approach in B2B marketing by sharing sustainability related science-based information to educate people to the current state, how the difference can be made and what measures the company itself has taken. The company products are shown as one solution to solve the challenge based on their features that provide better efficiency.

Nowadays integration of PR and marketing disciplines under corporate communication is recommended as they complement each other, and the integrated approach provides a holistic view for communication management and more consistent, strategic and efficient messaging for the benefit of the whole organization. The reasons for integration arise from three important drivers that are market- and environment-based, communication-based or organizational. (Cornelissen 2020, 24.)

The market- and environment-based drivers relate to transparency: internal and external communication of the company must be alike as one individual can represent different roles as a stakeholder and conflicting messages would be confusing. The communication-based drivers relate to consistent messaging which increases possibilities to stand out among a large mass of messages from different companies. In the digital era there also are much cheaper ways to reach target audiences compared to traditional media and advertising. Digital channels enable publishing complementing messages in different forms and channels that increases possibilities to reach the target audiences and be remembered. Organizational drivers are based on internal efficiency and communications that benefits the entire organization. Consolidated communication function in an organization means lower cost, better accountability and strategic direction for communication. Bringing together all communicators from different disciplines and units help share goals, expertise, tools and tasks. (Cornelissen 2020, 25–27, 35.) It probably also makes the organization a more resilient operator in the hectic communication landscape and helps team members cope in everyday work.

Integration of disciplines depends on the organization. In the target organization Communications and Marketing are administratively separated but work together in practice to ensure efficiency and holistic and consistent messaging on the local market.

3.3 Strategic communication

Strategic approach ensures consistent communication. A communication strategy is needed to manage corporate communication as it provides direction for the organization. Strategy also includes activities that are required to keep or strengthen the reputation in the eyes of organization's stakeholders. (Cornelissen 2020, 109.)

Cornelissen (2020, 110) summarizes meaning of communication strategy as follows: "A communication strategy involves the formulation of a desired position for the organization in terms of how it wants to be seen by its different stakeholder groups". Next, communication's strategic approach is explained.

Earlier communication was seen more as organizational communication, public relations, communications management or integrated communication. In the 2010s, communication's strategic role

has been found as a topical theme in research, and strategic communication has come alongside earlier concepts and partly even replaced them. This is because in organizations strategic role of communication is seen essential and important – communication should convey company strategy. Corporate communication strategy is a result of strategic thinking process of an organization. On the other hand, strategic messaging should not be seen as communication's only duty. (Juholin & Rydenfelt 2020, 79–80; Camilleri 2021, 164.)

According to Holtzhausen, Fullerton, Lewis and Shipka (2021, chap. 1) dramatic development of media technology before the turn of the millennium significantly lead to the emergence of the strategic communication because the shift required a new way of thinking from organizations and individuals on how to convey messages on new digital platforms.

Strategic communication supports a wider strategy of an entity, such as corporations or governments, for example, and is considered, purposeful, planned and public – and conducted by a communications professional. Holistic messaging is required to reach target audiences in fragmented communication landscape caused by digital technologies. (Holtzhausen et al. 2021, chap. 1.)

Strategic approach helps build, protect and maintain public image (Holtzhausen et al. 2021, chap. 1), and it is important to create reputational capital proactively, before it is needed for example in case of crisis, as it was also earlier mentioned.

Strategic approach in communication can be translated as objectives-lead communication. Those objectives relate both to the organization and its business environment as well as organization's stakeholders. (Juholin & Lahnammi-Vesivalo 2022, 14.)

Juholin and Lahnammi-Vesivalo (2022, 28) say that strategic communication can be seen from three perspectives:

- In management-centric approach communication is a management function where communication and its objectives are based on organization's strategy. Communication implements the organization strategy.
- In community-centric approach communication has a role in creation and evolvement of the organization and its strategy from creation to implementation and assessment. Communication interacts with stakeholders to make these happen.
- In a combined-approach communication has all the above-mentioned roles and it is crucial for organization's success.

The latest approach called strategic communication's paradigm sees communication as part of organization's strategic processes. Communication concentrates on recognizing and classification of organization's stakeholders and audiences, medias and publicity, reputation management,

communication results and communicator roles. Attention is paid to resources, unsecure and complicated operational environment and challenges at hand and in the future. (Juholin & Lahnalammi-Vesivalo 2022, 28.)

Sustainability communication should be based on sustainability strategy or at least sustainability should be part of the overall strategy of the company. In that way, sustainability communication will have a strategic role which is essential for its success.

3.4 Communication in digital world

Digital platforms have changed the media landscape and impact significantly to organizations' communication. Therefore, this chapter includes a short review of digitalization of communication.

Majority of communication content today is shared through digital platforms; audiences are active there and communications and marketing teams are recommended to work closer together to utilize these channels for strategic and objectives-lead content.

Digital marketing term covers all marketing that require electronic equipment or the Internet. Digital platforms are used for digital marketing. (Lahtinen, Pulkka, Karjaluoto & Mero 2022, 17.) According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022, 5–6), digital marketing aims to achieve marketing objectives alongside traditional marketing through digital media, data and technology.

Digital marketing can be implemented in different ways. Five key options are company websites, social media marketing, search engine and web marketing, content marketing and customer relationship marketing which includes e.g., marketing automation and email marketing. (Lahtinen et al. 2022, 160.)

Digital platforms can naturally be used for the purpose of corporate communications, CSR being one of suitable topics for sharing information and verbal, visual or vocal content. Digital channels also allow engagement with users in the digital media and enable enhancing stakeholder relations. (Camilleri 2021, 2.) That requires successful dialogue.

3.4.1 Social media

Social media covers different channels, communities and discussion forums (Lahtinen et al. 2022, 161). It has remarkably changed the way how information is shared which has also required new skills from individuals and organizations. It has impacted on people's thinking, communication styles and lives. (Camilleri 2021, 163.)

Based on Statista (2022), Facebook is the most popular social media channel having 2.9 billion active users monthly. YouTube has 2.5, WhatsApp 2.0, Instagram around 1.5, WeChat 1.2 and TikTok 1 billion active monthly users (Statista 2022). LinkedIn which has 875 million users (LinkedIn 2023) is found by B2B marketers worldwide the most productive marketing channel (79 %) on social media, following with Facebook (54 %) (Statista Research Department 2023).

Social media users can follow other users and organizations on social media platforms, for example due to same interests and values. Users' activity through sharing and liking can enable content to go viral across digital platforms. (Camilleri 2021, 163.) This can naturally cause both positive and negative consequences. Organizations need to consider what they share and how they react to engage their audiences and on the other hand, prevent negative consequences.

Opportunities and challenges that social media can offer have been noticed by corporates and social media has already advanced corporates' digital presence and communications (Camilleri 2021, 164). Social media's character as an enabler of dialogue has brought in a new way to engage with stakeholders and build trust through transparency (Ihlen, van Ruler, Smit & Romenti 2017, 124).

Social media also offers corporates a cost-efficient way to target and build connections with stakeholders; it is more probable to reach potential stakeholders through social media compared to traditional media or marketing campaigns because relevant people can be found more easily – social media followers of the organization are interested in the organization and thus a potential group of people for their messages. (Ihlen et al. 2017, 124.) Therefore, it is a valuable channel also for sustainability topics.

3.4.2 Content strategy

As earlier mentioned, the web has changed business communication culture. Content strategy is explained next as it is a necessary tool for ensuring successful digital communication in the long run.

Companies are publishers who are expected to communicate continuously with content that touches and engages target audiences (Hakola & Hiila 2012, 137).

As Facebook was opened to everyone in 2006, anyone could share their opinions with anyone. Content strategy model emerged in the United States after that because of the exceptional rapid growth of web platforms and how people started to use them. This social platform changed the media field, and large-scale enterprises realized that they are publishers as well and need new tools, resources and approach to successfully produce, manage and develop their communications in the new environment with multiple channels. (Hakola & Hiila 2012, 10, 22, 66, 68, 70.)

It is essential to understand the two-way character of social platforms. Business communication on the web should encourage to discussion and co-create experiences that enhance the relationship with customers. (Hakola & Hiila 2012, 67.)

Content strategy helps enterprises manage business communications on the web so that it is strategic, continuous, consistent and planned from target audience's point of view and also supports organization's business strategy. It helps create communications that matters to organization's target audiences and engages them and enables further-development of digital communications. (Hakola & Hiila 2012, 66–67, 72.)

A content strategy includes boundary conditions that ensure effective, engaging and consistent communication in those channels where company's target audiences are. Therefore, those people who prepare content strategies need to define the company's target audiences on the web and clarify how they communicate about the company. Then it needs to be considered what kind of messaging could help the company meet these customers on the web. At the same time, planned communications shall support the company's business targets and brand. (Hakola & Hiila 2012, 81.)

Content production should be based on themes that target audiences find interesting and want to share. This way the company also avoids advertising related marketing content that only relates to own products and services. Wider themes and phenomenon engage audiences much better. (Hakola & Hiila 2012, 138–141.)

Content strategy differs from social media strategy. Content strategy is based on research that aims to find out motives of audiences on the web based on what and how they behave there. Communications is developed based on these results. (Hakola & Hiila 2012, 82–84.)

To iterate crystallization by Hakola and Hiila (2012, 66–67, 72), content strategy helps manage communication on digital platforms and ensures it is strategic, continuous, consistent and planned – most importantly from target audiences' point of view – supporting also organization's business strategy and further-development of digital communication. For these reasons content strategy can be considered as a critical tool also for ensuring successful sustainability communication on digital platforms.

4 Sustainability communication

In the chapter 3 communication domain was described. With many relevant aspects it laid the ground for this chapter's subject, sustainability communication.

There is a growing need for companies to communicate about their sustainability approach and progress. This chapter opens characters that especially relate to sustainability communication.

4.1 Key principle is truth

Effective CSR communication and marketing is critical for company success because otherwise stakeholders and the public cannot know how well the business is performing in environmental, economic and social aspects. However, communication and marketing activities must be balanced, i.e., in line with real sustainability achievements. Misleading activities are considered as greenwashing and can lead even to accusations as they create undeserved value for companies. (Conaway & Laasch 2012, 21–22.)

Green washing means sharing such information on sustainability performance that is a lie or only partly true (Eettisen kaupan puolesta ry 2023). Also, it is not acceptable to highlight one side of the business that is sustainable, especially if it is a minor element, if many other deliverables of the company are lacking standards. Therefore, certain sustainability level of the entire business should be reached first. When attention is paid to something that is not so remarkable in the entire business, it can be seen as greenwashing and cause more harm than brand value. It is good to remember that greenwashing is not only easily revealed but consequences of it can be harmful as false image will not easily vanish from people's mind (Ruola 2021, 70).

In the same way, companies can also be accused of purpose wash or woke wash, for example. To avoid this, it is crucial to remember share positive news about social and environmental topics only if those can be proved to be facts. (Reed 2020, 41–42.) Communicators are in a key position to prevent accusations of different "washes" so they should have knowledge of sustainability as a concept and confidence to take a role of a strategic gatekeeper avoiding risks (Reed 2020, 28, 46). Nowadays it also is more and more common that companies' sustainability targets are carefully followed. Therefore, publishing only great targets is not sufficient either because those are expected to be reached, too.

At least large companies should be aware of the risk of different washing types, but misleading communication is still seen. Thus, it seems that more education is needed.

4.2 Impacts on brand

Companies perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication complex because they are afraid of revealing shortcomings and lack of trust among customers. On the other hand, if a company can position its brand as a responsible one through its actions, it will receive economic benefit from it. (Pohl & Tolhurst 2010, 130–131.) So, company's sustainability image impact on its brands.

That is because associations are the core of a brand. Brand identity consists of specific associations related to the brand, what it stands for, and builds the relationship to customers through a value proposition with benefits. Brand identity has four perspectives: brand-as-product, organization, person and symbol. Strong brands have extensive brand identity with a strategic approach, and they have been created with external and internal focus. (Aaker 2014, chap. 3.)

Environmental, innovation and localness related viewpoints are linked to an organizational brand identity. Competitive advantage created by organizational attributes is more difficult to beat than products-related because those are harder to copy, beat in all portfolio areas as well as assess and communicate. Organizational attributes help create value for the company as they can bring along positive emotional linkage, such as admiration, respect and credibility. (Aaker 2014, chap. 3.) In B2B, the corporate brand is usually the brand that is seen the most important (Taiminen & Rana-weera, 2019). Therefore, it is important also from the brand image point of view how organizations communicate about their sustainability approaches and achievements. The corporate brand can be strengthened with successful sustainability communication, but communicators need to know how to do it.

Gutterman describes that some companies limit their sustainability communications only to the content that regulators are especially requiring whereas in the other end there are companies who have chosen a much more open disclosure approach. This is because they have realized that in addition to investors also ordinary people around the globe pay attention to the environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance. Companies' performance in these areas affects people's consumption habits and willingness to apply to open positions. That is why it is important to communicate about corporate social responsibility and the sustainability targets and how those are achieved. (Gutterman 2021, 154–155.)

4.3 Making it happen

Reed (2020, 53–54) advises to clarify first why the organization wants to communicate about sustainability issues. Is it to attract customers, fans or allies; to minimize reputation risks or handling

some issues in the past; to position the organization as a leader or is it just to combine the organization's values and vision to its social and environmental activities? (Reed 2020, 53–54.)

Gutterman recommends companies to incorporate corporate responsibility performance into their corporate communications strategies as well as to communication and marketing activities. Regular communication of sustainability topics as part of corporate communications provides transparency and information on progress towards sustainability targets helps different stakeholders in their decision making. (Gutterman 2021, 161–162.) This naturally requires that the company has relevant sustainability news to be shared.

Robertson (2018, 26) advises to convey sustainability related messages by using a multi-channel approach which should help reach a wide range of audiences. Different audiences typically follow different channels – and different topics are important to different audiences.

To reach audiences, Robertson also recommends introducing several viewpoints and sharing specific examples and explaining them through stories and metaphors. She highlights importance of focusing on solutions instead of problems because sustainability related challenges the world is encountering and will encounter may appear too big to be solved and look unengaging. Thus, it is important to help audiences understand how they can contribute to way out of the challenges. Local examples should bring sustainability topics closer and encourage people to act. (Robertson 2018, 26.)

Lastly, as a communicator it is good to remember that stakeholders are just real people. Realizing that can help add authenticity, empathy and creativity to messaging, especially if communicator adds her or his own humanity to the work. (Reed 2020, 96.)

Next are introduced a couple of frameworks that may help in starting and implementing sustainability communication.

4.3.1 The UN Global Compact framework

Gutterman (2021, 161) reminds that it is important to choose which topics companies from several options communicate even though it may require tough decisions. Communication overload may confuse receivers besides informing and educating. One option that may help in decision making is The UN Global Compact framework, and when using it, Gutterman recommends communicating about those subjects that are valuable both to company's stakeholders and its business. (Gutterman 2021, 161.)

The UN Global Compact recommends to organizations delivering understandable sustainability communication that meets the needs of stakeholders and is based on real, measurable achievements. Content should be easily found and used and cover both progress and areas where more work is still needed. It is also important to share up-to-date information and react to issues without delay. (Gutterman 2021, 161.)

The framework consists of 10 principles for responsible action covering human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption (United Nations Global Compact 2023). As part of it, in 2015, United Nations published the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which is a plan for people, planet and prosperity to take action and strengthen peace globally and covers 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015). At the launch, 169 nations committed themselves to these goals (ISO, 2018). A collection of the goals is visible in the Figure 3.



Figure 3. 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by United Nations (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015)

When topics are seen as material for the business but not so much to company's stakeholders, the most attention should be given to communication of impacts. In the opposite case, when stakeholders highlight an issue as an important one which is not considered as such in the organization, communication should be started from organization's approach and policies related to the topic. (Gutterman 2021, 161.)

A wide array of communication methods from events and reports to videos and blogs, to mention a few, can be used for sustainability communication around SDKs (Gutterman 2021, 161).

All communications approaches should enable dialogue and engagement with stakeholders and serve as feedback opportunities. Through the feedback organizations can develop their communication and set new priorities for communication activities in the future. (Gutterman 2021, 161–162.)

4.3.2 ISO 26000, Guidance on social responsibility

For organizations of all sizes and locations, a standard ISO 26000 was launched in 2010 by the International Organization for Standardization to help communicating about social responsibility. The guidance consisting of seven core areas has been developed by around 500 experts and covers “organizational governance, human rights, labor practices, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues and community involvement and development”. (ISO, 2023.)

When organizations act according to the ISO 26000 guidance, they also automatically contribute to the SDGs (ISO 2018, 8) but naturally only to those SDGs that relate to social responsibility side.

4.4 Digital sustainability communication

Digital communication was shortly opened in the chapter 3.4. Its character naturally also impacts on sustainability communication.

Before the latest development of information and communication technology which brought along social media, companies have mainly concentrated communicating about their sustainability aspects via CSR reports, websites and public relations. (Glozer & Hibbert 2017, 40–41.)

Now they are in a different situation as social media attracts as a potential tool where also CSR topics should be visible but on the other hand, companies are not certain how they should use it. Social media works as a part of channel mix for communicating about CSR and even offers possibility for stakeholder engagement. But companies are also aware of the fact that social media cannot be controlled very well and are not sure how to use it for CSR. (Glozer & Hibbert 2017, 40–41.) Guidance on how to ensure successful performance in social media is explained next.

According to Thomas and Barlow (2011, 118) communications should have a multi-channel approach including several social media channels.

Kaplan and Haenlein advise companies to choose such social media applications where they can be open and active because participation requires sharing information and/or content as well as interaction, and handling too many channels is impossible. Selection of channels also depends on target groups and the message to be conveyed to them and in which channel the customers are. Building corporate image and to get best out of marketing ideas require integrating messages to several channels. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 64–67.)

Barlow and Thomas (2011, 114–115) advise to be real, honest, transparent and open on social media to ensure that the company is seen credible. According to Kananen (2013, 115) building trust is the most important success factor to keep and grow communities in social media. This

comes back to the communication's key principles (presented in the chapter 3) that help create intangible value.

Community members should be respected. They expect benefits, such as information, new content or responses to questions. Regular activity is required. Messages should be consistent and relevant for target audiences and measurable targets link to existing company strategy. It is essential to be patient with results because achieving a decent number of followers takes time in any social media channel. (Thomas & Barlow 2011, 114–115; Kananen 2013, 115–117.)

4.5 Best practices and recommendations

Earlier in this chapter characteristics and guidance for sustainability communication have been explained. This section complements the chapter by introducing recommendations for sustainability communication from three different sources in a list or table format.

Reed (2020, 43) emphasizes seven simple key principles for effective sustainability communications as follows:

- Knowledge of sustainability is the starting point.
- Next it is good to define targets for the communication, why it should be done.
- Understanding the content to be communicated and knowing key stakeholders are essential.
- Risks should be mapped in advance.
- Too complicated language will not work but it should be understandable instead.
- Lastly, it should be planned how to maximize the visibility.

Finland-based sustainability communications agency Rodina's managing director (Rajainmäki, 2022) shared the following tips for sustainability communication for the year 2022:

- It all starts with honesty and reliability, take sustainability seriously, set brave but realistic targets; sustainability reporting is also becoming more common and even mandatory.
- Stakeholders are eager to have dialogue and listening to them and collaboration is worthwhile; brands are expected to have purpose and make statements; consider what is the added value that can be offered.
- How are values seen in concrete actions inside and outside the company? Communication through visual elements helps convey achievements.
- Value chains are more transparent; corporate social responsibility and sustainability communication will be complemented with biodiversity strategies; media is interested in circular economy.

Pohl and Tolhurst (2010, 131–141) have defined ten rules for successful CSR communications. Those are introduced below in a table (see Table 1) which the author has compiled to summarize their recommendations in an easily readable format.

Table 1. Ten rules for successful CSR communications

1	Base on real actions	Actions should precede communication. Groundless CSR related statements will cause harm instead of building a good brand image.
2	Create a framework	Companies should have a framework for their CSR presence. Stakeholders should find information on how responsibility is integrated into company's operations and priorities. Mission statement and CSR road map should be often visible in CSR communication as those help the stakeholders understand companies' decisions and activities and see the scope for them.
3	Communicate about core operations	Companies should be prepared to communicate about their core operations as a key building block for CSR communications.
4	Require commitment from the top management	To ensure credibility, company's top management needs to be committed to CSR activities throughout the company. CSR is not something that communication function solely communicates about.
5	Start from inside the company	To build credibility, CSR communication needs to start from inside. Employees must be informed about company's CSR targets and activities so that they are aware, understand and take action. If they are convinced, it supports company's progress in CSR and messaging outside the company.
6	Pay attention to clear and credible communications that is relevant to stakeholders	As CSR is a complex topic and bad news get easily more attention than good, companies should pay attention to CSR topics' business relevance and importance for their stakeholders. Communication should be clear and credible.
7	Define target groups, use all channels, have a dedicated CSR contact person	CSR communication target groups must be defined as well as suitable channels for conveying messages to them depending on their expectations. However, the overall CSR approach should be part of all communication channels. Organization should have a dedicated CSR communication contact to create trust and stability.
8	Enable dialogue and choose topics to be covered	CSR communications should be based on dialogue. Companies should know what CSR topics their stakeholders are interested in and what they expect from the company so that they can find such topics for discussion that inspire both parties. Areas for dialogue should be specified in advance as it is not realistic and reasonable to cover all topics.
9	Create expertise foothold through digital channels	It is wise to use modern technology for creating foothold as a good CSR performer. If a company shows to have expertise in this area, it can influence as an opinion-maker. If visibility is left to traditional media, such as print or TV, it is journalists who choose examples and angles to be shared and they may turn to a small group of experts they already know.
10	Use sustainability of the brand as a selling point widely	CSR should be considered to be used as a selling argument as it impacts on willingness to purchase and helps attract even new customers. All touch-points and channels should be used for promoting sustainability of the brand.

These tree summaries for recommendations rather complement each other than have a lot of similarities but there are some.

Reed and Rajainmäki emphasize target setting. Rajainmäki, Pohl and Tolhurst all emphasize importance of honesty and reliability, enabling dialogue and relevant content for stakeholders. Both also remember to give a thought to how things are communicated among employees.

Reed, Pohl and Tolhurst pay attention to clear, understandable messaging, knowing target groups and key stakeholders as well as multi-channel approach and maximizing visibility. Understanding sustainability and showing expertise are also mentioned.

Only Reed reminds of mapping risks, and Pohl and Tolhurst of management's commitment, creating framework and communication about core operations. Rajainmäki highlights listening in the context of dialogue. She alone also mentions topical sustainability communication themes and the direction that is expected.

5 Research approach

In this chapter the research approach and methods are explained. Constructive research is a suitable method when the objective is to produce a new practical solution to a real problem of an organization or a company. The output can be, for example, a plan, model, system, technique or even a new product. The output aims to improve status of an existing structure by changing organization or company practices or operations with a new solution. It is essential that the practice-oriented problem is solved with the help of theoretical knowledge and new data is gathered through empirical methods. Typical for constructive research is that outputs of the research will help not only the target organization, but also other organizations and results can be generalized. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2022, 65–66.)

I found a constructive approach ideal for this thesis task as the primary objective was to produce new knowledge to support the target organization's aspirations to grow as sustainability communication performers. Additionally, the study aimed to a concrete outcome that could benefit any organization that wants to improve in sustainability communication. The research followed principles of constructive study by first exploring theoretical knowledge which was complemented by gathering new data through an empirical method.

The study is theory-oriented research with qualitative research methods. For the research project I applied deductive content analysis process with qualitative data. The preparation required understanding of the theoretical framework and selecting themes based on it for a structure to be analyzed. The structure was created to compare and test it with findings from the empirical research. Finally, the results were reported. (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 107).

5.1 Applying the theoretical framework

After reviewing the theoretical framework for sustainability and responsible business, communication management and special characters of sustainability communication, I summarized my key observations in an easily readable format in a table (table 2).

When preparing the structure, I realized that the recommendations can be divided into four different categories, all covering about the same number of factors. I chose to the table a process-oriented approach and defined the areas as Preparations, Planning content, Content approach and Channels related. Next, I shortly describe key findings derived from the theoretical framework that are also visible in the table (table 2).

First, I listed factors that help **prepare**. Knowledge of sustainability as a phenomenon and requirements related to it is essential for managing sustainability communication successfully in the

changing world. Sustainability communication should be based on a framework that includes sustainability targets for the business and the added value the company can provide to sustainable development. Like any communication has become more strategic and objectives lead, the same applies to sustainability communication, and it should be part of the overall communication strategy. Mapping risks related to the sustainability communication approach is important. Sustainability communication management benefits from a content strategy which helps define target audiences and choose suitable strategic themes for them which through feedback received supports further development of communication. Communicators and their internal stakeholders must be familiar with their company's sustainability approach to ensure commitment and consistent messaging through different channels. Also, employees should be engaged that all speak the same language externally.

Planning content requires holistic approach. Themes should be chosen as too many topics cannot be managed. It is good to remember that the organization should have readiness for dialogue which requires familiarity with the themes to be published. Ideally the topics are valuable both to the target audiences and the company. They also should make people feel how sustainability related challenges can be solved and how they can be part of it.

Content approach highlights key characteristics of sustainability content. It should be based on real achievements, and be transparent, honest, credible, understandable, up-to-date and show progress in a measurable way. Local and specific examples are recommended to be shared as well as showing progress but also areas where development is still needed. Content production clearly requires consideration and good management of the news flow and information published in different channels.

The last entity found were **channels** related elements. In digital era a multi-channel approach with regular publishing, easily found materials and interactive attitude is recommended to reach the audiences and get feedback. Ability to react quickly is also important. Communication is a possibility show expertise in the field and can build reputation as a good performer. Results should be measured like in all communication to ensure further development.

Managing and implementation of sustainability communication clearly requires taking into consideration several factors. Many of them are typical for communication management in general but I see sustainability communication requiring even more preparation as the field is complex and there are lot of requirements and expectations for companies and organizations.

The structure drew an overall picture of important sustainability communication elements which helped me prepare for interviews in the empirical part. Based on the deductive approach, I aimed

to see through the interviews how well the listed factors derived from the theoretical framework are realized in practice and if any new information to complement the table could be found.

The process-oriented presentation style was chosen to the table (see Table 2) as it helps see the full cycle required to manage and implement sustainability communication.

Table 2. Recommendations for sustainability communication management and implementation based on theoretical framework

	A process-oriented approach	
	Categories	Notes
1	PREPARATIONS	
	Familiarize yourself with sustainability as a phenomenon	
	Know your organization's sustainability approach	
	Clarify first why the organization should communicate about sustainability issues	
	Know your stakeholders, remember also society, pay attention to newer generations -> define target groups	
	Have framework for CSR communication; what is the added value your organization can provide; cover environmental, social and governance topics	
	Ensure strategic approach: realize corporate strategy, corporate identity & values (+ purpose) when they relate to sustainability; incorporate corporate responsibility performance into corporate communications strategies as well as to communication and marketing activities -> create a content strategy that supports organization's business and sustainability targets and brands	
	Consider using 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by United Nations as a baseline	
	Set brave but realistic targets	
	Map risks	
	Convince and engage top management and employees	
2	PLANNING CONTENT	
	Choose which topics to communicate, avoid overload as it is impossible to cover everything	
	Avoid green wash, purpose wash, woke wash and other misleading messaging	
	Ensure holistic messaging	
	Choose subjects that are valuable both to company's stakeholders and its business	
	Choose wider themes and phenomenon that target audiences find interesting and want to share; follow the era and be aware of the latest hot topics in sustainability; avoid advertising related marketing content that only relates to own products and services	
	Consider making statements and conveying purpose	
	Think how audiences could contribute to the way out of challenges	
	Remember that stakeholders are real people	
	Make stories and metaphors, use visual elements to convey your message; use a wide array of communication methods	

	A process-oriented approach	
3	CONTENT APPROACH	
	Share real achievements	
	Share measurable achievements	
	Be transparent, honest and credible	
	Be clear and understandable	
	Share up-to-date information	
	Show progress	
	Show also areas where more work is still needed	
	Introduce several viewpoints	
	Share specific examples	
	Share local examples	
	Focus on solutions instead of problems	
	Develop communication approach further	
4	CHANNELS RELATED	
	Share information regularly throughout the year	
	Take multi-channel approach; choose social media applications where audiences can be open and active; maximize visibility	
	Consider using sustainability as a selling point in all touchpoints and channels for promoting sustainability of the brand	
	Interact, dialogue -> feedback opportunity to develop communication	
	React to issues without delay	
	Create foothold as a good CSR performer	
	Make materials easily found	
	Follow results through statistics	

In the chapter 6.8 a complemented version of the table (Table 5) is presented, following findings from the empirical research.

5.2 Conducting interviews

The research started with a broad literature review that resulted to a structure (Table 2) summarizing key findings from the theoretical framework.

In the deductive research the aim of the empirical part was to see how similar factors will be found through interviews with sustainability experts and if any opposing or complementing views emerge.

Ideally the structure would be complemented to ensure that the concrete output of the study is as comprehensive as possible.

I chose semi-structured interviews as an empirical research method. They represent qualitative methods. Qualitative research methods are typical when the purpose is to find out a lot of information on a restricted target which should provide an improved and a wider understanding of the research topic (Ojasalo et al. 2022, 105) which was exactly the case in this thesis.

Different interview types can be used as a data collection method. Semi-structured interviews that were chosen for this research concentrate on certain well-planned themes, but they are not too structured to ensure that room is left for interviewees' approach. Semi-structured interviews can be conducted in different ways what comes to order of questions, for example, and even content of interviews can be amended before the next interview when found needed. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2014, 41, 105.)

I found the semi-structured interview method ideal for the research in question because I wanted to allow the interviewees a possibility to share their views widely. That I thought to help receiving a comprehensive amount of data.

I chose to interview four sustainability/sustainability communication experts representing three different organizations to hear what factors they emphasize and how well the factors raised from the theoretical part have realized in practice in their work. Additionally, I hoped to find angles that possibly had not come across through the literature review and which could widen and deepen the knowledge of sustainability communication management and implementation. The first version of the table (Table 2) was not presented or explained for the interviewees. Instead, they were only told that my target is to create as a final output a structure that could enhance the target organization and anyone else interested in sustainability communication management and implementation.

The interviews covered two key themes: the current state of sustainable development and key success factors for management of sustainability communication. In the first theme there were four questions and the latter theme consisted of six questions.

The questions (Appendix 2) included the following topics:

- Current and future needs for sustainability communications and factors behind.
- Current elements of successful and regular sustainability communication.
- Current biggest challenges and ways to avoid pitfalls.
- The most topical sustainability communication themes globally and in Finland.
- Successful sustainability communication examples including justifications.
- Benefits of global sustainability assessments.

Themes and questions were prepared mainly based on findings derived from the theoretical framework. Additionally, I aimed to find more information on some other areas to complement the table.

I did not want to directly ask for example about recommendations for communicators' work but hoped that different aspects come across through wider questions.

The interviewees represented the following organizations:

- Sitra, a fund for the future aiming to help Finland succeed as a pioneer in sustainable well-being (The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra 2023).
- TBWA\method Helsinki, an international and most award-winning agency in Finland that wants to bring brands to modern culture (TBWA\Helsinki 2023).
- UPM, a forest industry company investing in sustainable growth and innovating for a future beyond fossils (UPM 2023).

The interviewees were told, at the same time as they were contacted, that the names of their organizations would be mentioned in the thesis. That was also mentioned when they were contacted by email and after the interviews. I found sharing the organization names useful because they show the variety of chosen organizations which I considered to ensure different viewpoints to the research. I saw Sitra to be able to provide broad perspectives from the society point of view, TBWA\Helsinki experiences through their impactful customer projects and UPM as business representative views from the industry while having received several recognitions in international responsibility indices.

Four interviewees were found a decent starting point because of their expertise in sustainability communication, understanding of B2B and different organization types. The interviewees represented sustainability executives, sustainability expertise and/or sustainability communication expertise, and I chose them from the chosen organizations based on their sustainability related work profiles. I considered them as high-level interviewees that could provide interesting and useful views to sustainability and sustainability communication and also, broaden the knowledge gathered from the theoretical framework. All interviewees were Finnish as the target organization operates in Finland and also because one target of the research was to find local aspects.

I wanted to respect interviewees' privacy so I suggested that the names of the interviewees will not be published. Thus, quotes picked to the thesis cannot be identified to the interviewees either. I believe that this decision supported a trustful atmosphere in the interviews.

A personal register with four interviewee names and their employer names was created based on Haaga-Helia master thesis guidelines (Appendix 3). Personal data was processed just for having

the record available at the time of the evaluation of the thesis. The register was destroyed after the evaluation and not moved to the commissioner of the study or published.

I contacted the interviewees by phone and introduced them the themes that will be covered in the interviews. All interviewees found the thesis topic very important and interesting and warmly pledged themselves to support this research with their views in interviews which I much appreciated.

The interviews took place on April 20 and 21, 2023. Two interviewees from the same organization participated in the same interview. In two other interviews there were only one interviewee. A detailed table of interviews' timings and lengths is available below (see Table 3).

Table 3. Semi-structured interviews

	Interviewee	Organization	Date	Booked time	Length of the interview
	A	TBWA\Helsinki	April 20, 2023	60 min.	55 min.
	B	Sitra	April 21, 2023	45 min.	50 min.
	C, D	UPM	April 21, 2023	60 min.	43 min.
Total	4	3	2	165 min.	148 min.

Sustainability was asked to cover environmental, social and governance aspects. The questions were encouraged to be thought both from the interviewee's organization point of view and more widely, depending on the role and knowledge of the interviewee and the organization's operative environment. It was also mentioned that the research concentrates on communication in digital channels.

Ten questions (see Appendix 2) were sent by email to the interviewees in advance to ensure better quality of answers. Some of the interviewees also asked if it is possible to receive the questions beforehand as it would help them prepare.

In the interviews it was advised that a semi-structured interview can partly turn toward a conversation which was also realized. However, all questions that were sent beforehand to the interviewees were also asked from them.

The interviewees were also willing to meet in person, but the interviews were held through Microsoft Teams as it helped save everyone's time and allowed to have the interviews earlier. Most importantly, Teams enabled automatic transcriptions as the software provides a transcription when a meeting is recorded. All interviewees allowed recording. As the interviewer and interviewees were Finnish the interviews were conducted in Finnish. It was agreed that recordings will be removed once the thesis is published.

5.3 Analysis of interviews

Document analysis can be used as an analysis method for transcribed interviews. This method helps making reliable inferences from the research data as the data is first transformed to a concise mode which enables systematic analysis approach. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 136.)

Content analysis and content specification are key methods in the document analysis. Both methods can be used in analyzing the research data. Content analysis is useful when the target is to find out and identify meanings in the data. Content specification targets at quantitative results including figures. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 137.)

Content analysis was found as the most suitable data analysis method for this study as the aim was to find common themes and recommendations from the data.

Of the content analysis methods which are called data oriented, theory directed and theory oriented, a data-oriented approach was used in this research. It covers three stages: reducing, clustering and abstracting the data. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 139.)

Content analysis starts with reading the data, in this case transcriptions, carefully for several times. Then the data is reduced; to enable decision-making, it is a good practice to present key observations in a summarized format. Unnecessary data is removed, and research topic related simplified expressions are picked. The reduced material is clustered for example by themes to groups to find similarities and connections between viewpoints provided by interviewees. Then the simplified data can be classified under certain concepts. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 110, 137–139; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 91–94.)

The data needs to be examined by comparing it to the theory collected. Reverting to the interviews, theory and interpretations are important. All stages of the analysis should be carefully completed to avoid distortions and ensure quality of the research. It is also valuable to try to search outliers in the data to draw a full picture of the research topic. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 110–111, 136–139.)

Data analysis results cover categories and concepts created by classification of the data and as a result, for example a model, concept or theme created, is presented as well (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 140).

I analyzed all interviews at the same time. That was practical as all the interviews were conducted in two consecutive days. As Teams' transcriptions were not perfect Finnish despite Finnish language option chosen for recording transcriptions, I listened to the recordings for several times to complete the transcriptions by hand.

After that I simplified the data under the questions presented. Next, I clustered them under the topics presented in the chapter 5.1.2. Then I highlighted the most informative comments and keywords and picked them to a new column to find similarities and differences more easily in the data. Through the comparison the target was to find reinforcement for the theory, new information and key themes.

As certain similar themes were raised up in different points during the interviews, I decided to present the findings partly under interview topics and partly under key themes that raised up in interview responses. Lastly, I defined final themes, moved key findings under them and translated the material. I paid attention to accuracy in all stages to respect the interviewees viewpoints and ensure high quality results.

6 Interview findings

This chapter presents the interview findings. Findings of the interviews are grouped by themes. The interview topics listed in the chapter 5.2 were used as a starting point for the themes. Some of the themes were replaced as the findings resulted to some new themes. This reflects the themes that the interviewees found important.

Aim of the interviews was to find proof for the theoretical framework and more information on the thesis topic from sustainability/sustainability communication professionals.

Quotes from the interviews have been translated and original Finnish expressions are available in the footer. Original quotes have been slightly modified so that they follow written language.

6.1 Theme 1: Importance of sustainability communication

Concerning current and future needs for sustainability communication and what factors contribute to those, all interviewees emphasized that importance of sustainability communication continues to grow and there are several factors causing it, a key stimulus being the **change** that the entire sustainability field is going through.

"...sustainability as a theme, its importance and weight are constantly growing. It is changing rapidly, and the scope perhaps becomes more widespread than before, and it probably happens already in the next few years..."¹

"- - need for communication is big and growing, and it is important to see the change how this field will be regulated."²

"...need for reliable and fact-based messages is constantly increasing in marketing and communication and attention needs to be paid to that increasingly..."³

As the first reason for the growing importance was seen the groundwork during decades. Since the IPCC report (2018) when climate change made its breakthrough to "discussion agendas" in societies importance of sustainable development has spread and accelerated.

¹ "...kestävyys teemana, sen merkitys ja painoarvo kasvavat jatkuvasti. Se (kestävyys teemana) muuttuu nopeasti ja lavenee ehkä aiemmasta, ja se tapahtuu varmaan nyt ihan lähivuosina..."

² "...se (viestinnän tarve) on iso ja kasvava, ja se mikä on tärkeää huomata, on se muutos, miten tämä kenttä reguloituu."

³ "...viestien luotettavuuden ja faktapohjaisuuden tarve kasvaa koko ajan markkinoinnin ja viestinnän osalta, ja siihenkin pitää kiinnittää koko ajan entistä enemmän huomiota..."

Additionally, political framework, law, regulation, EU directives, Rio contract, biodiversity strategy, new international targets from the Montreal biodiversity conference, cultural requirement level and social pressure were mentioned as drivers that more attention has been started to pay to sustainable development. As a result of political framework, investors and treasurers have realized that sustainability is a significant financial issue. That was also noted in the introduction of this thesis.

The following factors mentioned by the interviewees link to the theoretical framework of this study: growing importance and pressure (chapter 2.1.1 and 2.5), accelerating rate (chapter 2.1. and 2.4), reliability (chapter 3 and 4.1), fact-based qualities (chapter 4.1) and considered messaging (chapter 3.3.2, 4.1 and 4.5).

Impact of law and regulation side came through much more strongly from the interviewees compared to the literature review of the study but the progress in this area is so fast that even in relatively new references this may have not been recognized in the same way yet.

As an additional note related to the first theme it was pointed out that sustainability communication is not a separate stream, but it should be part of the entire business and organization and flourish from those, as well as that sustainability covers ecological, economic and social sides and communication of those should be **strategic** and in the core of communication. This all is very much in line with findings in the literature review of the study (e.g., Gutterman in the chapter 4.3).

In the theoretical framework, for example Bowen (chapter 2.2) and Cornelissen (chapter 2.7) emphasize CSR's strategic approach. In the chapter 3.2. Pohl and Tolhurst (chapter 4.5) advise how responsibility should be integrated into company operations and priorities. Juholin and Lahnalammii-Vesivalo state that strategic approach in communication can be translated as objectives-lead communication. Those objectives relate both to the organization and its business environment as well as organization's stakeholders.

As a different note, one interviewee pointed out that when sustainability work becomes even more concrete, biologists as ecology experts are needed even in listed companies. As one aspect, this example inspired me to think even more broadly about the scale of the change. Also, this was something that I did not find through the literature review.

According to the interviewees, communicators should be prepared for an increasingly faster pace of development in the field, growing requirements and impacts of regulation, constantly growing need of sustainability communication as well as ensuring strategic approach and reliability of messaging.

6.2 Theme 2: Topical sustainability themes

Themes were discussed mainly in general but some of them were seen special to Finland. It was also noted that different topics interest in different sectors.

According to the interviewees there is a **wide variety of relevant themes** that interest audiences. One interviewee highlighted that a sustainability expert can talk about very different sustainability topics which also reflects the change that is going on.

“...the field has become wider and more complex all the time.”⁴

Themes mentioned by interviewees are presented in a table underneath (see Table 4). Majority of the themes linked to climate and nature and there was a wide array of them.

Table 4. Topical themes raised from the interviews

Environmental	Social & economic	Metrics related
acceptability of forest use	economic responsibility	calculation rules
biodiversity, biodiversity-enhancing company activities, biodiversity loss	diversity, equality, fair treatment, human rights, inclusion	measurement, measuring the natural footprint of your own activities and value chains
carbon footprint, from carbon neutrality to carbon negativity, ecological compensation	tax footprint	science-based verification standards
climate change, climate issues	wage, wage vs. inflation	sustainability as part of financial reporting
circular economy		
food and nutrition		
nature footprint, nature positive,		
energy investments, hydrogen economy		
microplastics		

I see the responses describe the change that is ongoing. The selection shows how wide and complex issues are topical in sustainability. This increases pressure for communicators to keep themselves updated on big themes which is essential to keep their own communication relevant.

⁴ “...kenttä on laajentunut (ja) monimutkaistunut koko ajan.”

Even though environmental footprint may be a more relevant theme on the sustainability reporting side, which is excluded from this study, I found it a relevant development to be mentioned here as it probably will affect on other sustainability communication deliverables, too.

“...for companies measuring environmental footprint of own operations and value chains will be a super important theme already in the next few years.”⁵

“Nature loss and activities to stop it...and how it all will be changed so that company operations could even strengthen biodiversity.”⁶

“...ecological compensations as market mechanisms that may be used as an attempt to strengthen nature – meaning that in case harm is caused for the nature it can be in some way compensated – will probably be a truly big theme soon.”⁷

University of Jyväskylä announced on May 10, 2023, that their researchers have developed a pioneering solution for counting companies' nature footprint which companies have been lacking even internationally. The research is a collaboration project with the S Group and Sitra. In the future large companies must show disadvantages they cause to the nature, and this kind of solutions are important tools in the effort of stopping biodiversity loss. (Jyväskylän yliopisto 2023.) This project also shows how important the theme is.

The energy transformation covering intelligent energy systems and hydrogen economy was also notified as one of the important themes, and how big change in the industrial structure it will cause. This is clearly a theme of significant importance in Finland as the goal is to be a pioneering carbon-neutral country already by 2035. It means a massive growth in the share of renewable energy which will require new technical solutions to be exploited and bring investments to the country.

Energy is also part of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)'s “Vision 2050” where energy is included as one of the essential areas to society (as mentioned in the chapter 2.1.1). Otherwise, energy did not come through so well in the theoretical framework but on the other hand, the energy landscape has changed dramatically only lately.

There were only a couple of themes related to Finland: everyday challenges and forests related discussion that was seen very special in Finland and untypical in any other countries.

⁵ “...yrityksille oman toiminnan ja arvoketjujen luontojalanjäljen mittaaminen on varmaan ihan super tärkeä teema tässä nyt ihan lähivuosina.”

⁶ “Luontokato ja sen pysäyttämiseksi tarvittavat toimet...ja kuinka kaikki käännetään niin päin, että yrityksen toiminta voisikin olla jopa luonnon monimuotoisuutta vahvistavaa.”

⁷ “...ekologiset kompensatiot, joiden avulla voidaan yrittää luonnon vahvistamista – eli jos joudutaan aiheuttamaan luonnolle haittaa, niin pystytään se sitten jossain jossain kohtaa hyvittämään – tulevat varmaan olemaan tosi isoja teemoja lähitulevaisuudessa.”

I see the forest discussion as a good example of local importance. It describes how people pay attention to themes that relate to long traditions and have importance in the country, and to which inhabitants have a personal connection due to economic or mental reasons, for example. Local aspects are important, as explained in the chapter 4.2 where Aaker says localness related viewpoints linking to an organizational brand identity. In the chapter 4.3 Robertson reminds that local examples should bring sustainability topics closer and encourage people to act which also make them important. The localness is a relevant point also for the target organization as it represents a global company but has a remarkable local presence.

The second theme provided a lot of information and confirmed that communicators need to be awake to many kinds of sustainability themes that are arising, naturally partly depending on the sector they operate in.

6.3 Theme 3. Target groups

When talking about interest in themes from the organization, customers and the public one interviewee well recalled one of the important communication principles, target groups.

”But there are differences how these (themes) are communicated to different target groups...”⁸

As the target groups related viewpoints were mentioned also during some other questions, I chose it as one of the themes for the Findings chapter.

Also, in the theoretical framework target groups – and stakeholders – were emphasized. As described in the chapter 2.5 by Freeman, business is based on relationships with different parties and all should be paid attention to. As they may have different expectations, they may require different messaging. In the chapter 3 Juholin and Lahnalammii-Vesivalo advise that learning to know target audiences helps minimize risk of misunderstanding because it helps tailor messages that can meet their needs and expectations.

When talking about target groups I understood interviewees mean with them different current stakeholders of the companies (or organizations) but generations, both current and future ones, were not highlighted, unlike Cornelissen (chapter 2.7) explains them to be part of the CSR 2.0.

⁸ ”Miten niitä (eri teemoja) sitten viestitään näille eri kohderyhmille, niin siinä toki sitten on eroja...”

One interviewee reminded that majority of communicators are highly educated and have great language competencies but e.g., in Finland there are 700.000 people whose mother tongue is not Finnish, and the number will probably significantly increase.

This comment also relates to target groups. Many times, sustainability issues are complicated, and communicators have an important role in interpreting them so that also broader audiences could be educated. The UN Global Compact (in chapter 4.3.1) recommends to organizations delivering **understandable** sustainability communication, and Reed, Pohl and Tolhurst (chapter 4.5.) pay attention to clear, understandable messaging so this notification is very much in line with the findings in the theoretical framework. Even though communication does not necessarily lead to results the communicator aims to (chapter 3), the target should always be understandable messaging – and especially in this area that is wide, seen complicated and evolving rapidly.

One interviewee found it important that communicators **challenge** experts. It is communicators' expertise to make messaging understandable, but it may require persistence and explaining to the sustainability experts how and why themes should be communicated in a certain way. I link this to courage, communication expertise and sustainability knowledge. Sustainability communicator needs all these qualifications.

As one locally relevant aspect it was noted that Finnish communicators should enhance their knowledge of terms that generate e.g., from the United Nations and English and find out what is included in them as well as pay attention to translations of them. There are a lot of terms, and it was seen important to know what they mean and how to talk about them in Finnish. This is a very relevant aspect in the target organization where global sustainability materials are translated and localized for internal and external communication in Finland. This issue was addressed in the chapter 4.5 where Reed emphasizes knowledge of sustainability being the starting point for sustainability communication and understanding the content to be communicated as an essential asset.

As a general note it was told that interest in how companies perform in sustainability is huge and it may be hard to satisfy audiences no matter how much information is available and shared. I consider that there naturally are differences in how much people pay attention to different businesses' and organizations' sustainability approach which affects to the amount and desired quality of sustainability communication.

Gutterman (chapter 4.3.1) encourages to choose which topics from several options to concentrate even though it may require tough decisions. Communication overload may confuse receivers besides informing and educating. Also, Pohl and Tolhurst (chapter 4.5.) say that companies should

know what CSR topics their stakeholders are interested in and what they expect from the company so that they can find such topics for discussion that inspires both parties. Areas for dialogue should be specified in advance as it is not realistic and reasonable to cover all topics. Of course, stakeholders may not be happy with the chosen topics or on the other hand, expect more than it is delivered even though the company would share all it can and use a lot of resources to meet the needs. It probably requires a lot of balancing to meet the needs of both sides.

In short, these findings remind that good results in sustainability communication link to understandable, targeted and relevant communication.

6.4 Theme 4: Relevance of global sustainability assessments

This theme is relevant for large companies only. Success in assessments, such as indices, barometers and certificates, requires fulfilling certain criteria, which again requires systematic sustainability performance from the business and careful sustainability communication. I was interested in hearing how this sustainability communication “channel” is seen by the interviewees.

As third-party assessments, one interviewee saw them to provide a good possibility to stakeholders **for comparing** companies’ performance, which is important when many sustainability themes may be found abstract and difficult to measure, and especially because companies may communicate their targets and performance in different ways. Some others found indices proof company performance and work as **supportive tools for responsible investors** in decision making even though the investors also make analysis of their own.

In this context, a note about **purpose** at work came through highlighting impact of communicator’s work as success in assessments requires a lot of visibility e.g., through reference cases.

“...linkage between the work and the success of the company is exceptionally big in this area. If investors trust on a company based on these ratings, communicators must have done something right.”⁹

Different frameworks and networks e.g., between science-based organizations and businesses were seen by one interviewee help especially **sharing information** between different parties and help communication about sustainability topics. Also, their **impact on sustainable development** in general was discussed.

⁹ “...työn linkitys yrityksen menestykseen on kyllä harvinaisen suora näissä hommissa. Jos yrityssijoittajat luottavat yritykseen näiden kautta, niin silloin on ehkä jotain tehty oikein.”

By one interviewee the assessments were seen as a tool to create brand value. In the chapter 2.5 it was mentioned that associations are the core of a brand and in the chapter 3.2 that goodwill as an intangible asset can have great financial value. On the other hand, it was advised to clarify the quality of certificates before joining them because not all of them necessarily improve company reputation.

Even though recognition typically feels good and relevant measurements were seen to partly help sustainable development go to the right direction in the big picture, one interviewee saw even more important the possibility to **get feedback** outside the own bubble:

“...more importantly, I see this as an opportunity to look in the mirror...I respect the assessments if I see relevant frames and questions used because they help me see what we do right and what wrong.”¹⁰

I see this as an important insight. As always, feedback offers possibility to develop performance. As Gutterman says in the chapter 4.3.1, through the feedback organizations can develop their communication and set new priorities for communication activities in the future.

As a summary of the theme, assessments can add brand value depending on the frame used and results of the company. Success in relevant assessments is valuable also because responsible investors use them as part of their tool selection, but the success requires a lot of work from the company. They can also be seen to enhance sustainable development in a broader context, help comparing large companies' sustainability performance and serve as good feedback channels for own work.

6.5 Theme 5: Success factors

First, by several interviewees successful implementation of sustainability communication was seen to follow **same principles than any communication**. In the chapter 3, ethical guidelines determine it to be open, honest, reliable and respectful. Some saw it require even more attention.

“...it feels that importance of communication principles is even more important in this theme compared to others as it is linked with so big tensions and passion.”¹¹

¹⁰ “...mutta minua ehkä kiinnostaa enemmän katsoa peiliin...jos minun mielestäni joku käyttää relevanttia freimiä (kehystä) ja siellä on järkevät kysymykset, niin kyllä minä niitä arvostan, koska se auttaa minuakin näkemään, että mitä me tehdään oikein, mitä väärin.”

¹¹ “...tuntuu että viestinnän perusjutut ovat vielä tärkeämpiä tässä kuin muissa teemoissa, kun siihen liittyvät niin isot jännitteet ja intohimot.”

One interviewee pointed out that sustainability communication must also live in time which I found a great note. It once again reminds how important it is to follow the field and stay relevant to make successful communication.

Two interviewees advised to **start with target groups**, understanding them and investigating interests of them to make communication relevant. The field which is approached should be understood and **objectives** set. Relevance of topics was also emphasized.

“...I believe it starts from talking about sustainability topics when there are big and impacting changes instead of tiny steps. Sharing truth and validating facts and concentrating on those themes that are honestly natural for a company or an organization.”¹²

Rajainmäki (chapter 4.5) has partly similar view: it all starts with honesty and reliability, taking sustainability seriously and setting brave but realistic targets. Interviewees also raised up the **strategic** sustainability angle of the entire business that is the ultimate starting point.

“Has the firm transformed on a strategic level and in the core of its business to that side, that it (sustainability) is not just about cut and paste actions to minimize negative environmental impact on a small area...Is the company really part of the solution? And that is naturally not anymore, a communication question but a strategic business question.”¹³

Dialogue as a success factor was discussed by all interviewees. As sustainability themes are very sensitive and partly polarized, sustainability communication should be carefully planned and considered and stand relatively tough public judgement in social media. But exposing it also to dialogue and critique was seen to offer a chance to learn. One interviewee mentioned that transparency also means readiness with the topics brought into the discussion which can then enable dialogue.

At least large companies were advised to have **internally clear guidelines** how sustainability themes are handled in communication and marketing. Also, internal stakeholders must be educated. This is to ensure consistent messaging toward common sustainability goals despite which function, or business line of the company is sharing information. It was emphasized that it is not reasonable to publish something without ability to participate in that discussion and that the discussion is not a simple task to be taken care of successfully. This reminds on the fact that it is not only

¹² “...kyllä se varmaan lähtee siitä, että puhutaan niistä asioista, kun on oikeasti suuria ja tuntuvia muutoksia, että ei olla lillukanvarsissa kiinni. Puhutaan totta ja validoidaan faktat ja ollaan kiinni juuri niissä teemoissa, jotka ovat oikeasti sille yritykselle tai organisaatiolle luontevia.”

¹³ “Onko se firma strategisella tasolla ja siellä liiketoiminnan ytimessä oikeasti kääntynyt sille puolelle, että se (kestävä kehitys) ei ole leikkaa ja liimaa (-tyyppistä) ympäristöhaitan vähentämistä jossain pienellä (alueella). Onko se yritys oikeasti osa ratkaisua? Ja sehän ei ole enää viestinnällinen, vaan liiketoiminnallinen ja strateginen kysymys.”

communication's business to take care of sustainability communication. I find internal guidelines as an important tool to prepare and ensure that messaging from spokespersons and the whole company is coherent and consistent and there is readiness for discussion.

"...it is so important that common guidelines and guidance to the work exist...I kind of see it even as a ground for successful sustainability communication."¹⁴

However, it was mentioned by a couple of interviewees that discussion easily stops if people in the audience only have one strict opinion and things cannot be seen from other angles. Dialogue could end up to better results when all parties would have a mindset of developing a more sustainable world together instead of confrontation.

Gutterman reminds in the chapter 4.3.1 that all communications approaches should enable dialogue and engagement with stakeholders and serve as **feedback** opportunities. Through the feedback organizations can develop their communications and set new priorities for communications activities in the future.

One interviewee advised that it would be good to realize that companies are part of the solution, explaining that even though greenwash judgements are given at times for a reason, companies try make progress, have a role of bringing solutions and are even expected to boost political decision makers. Two other interviewees emphasized the same thing.

"Corporate citizenship is expected and requested...when political decision making may be difficult...pressure toward firms is growing so that even corporate activism type of approach is expected. The situation offers also exciting possibilities (for companies)."¹⁵

"Role of companies in the sustainability field and making it progress is actually very critical, and when consumers trust on it that the companies take care of that field even more than states or decision makers, there also is a great chance for companies to take that role."¹⁶

Some companies especially in the consumer field, such as Finlayson, have taken a more active corporate role to show the impact of companies. Ability to stand out and disrupt even in sustainability communication was raised up. Finding own space and area of importance which could be used

¹⁴ "...se on tosi tärkeää, että on yhteiset ohjeet ja ohjaus siihen tekemiseen...näen sen tavaltaan ihan onnistuneen kestäväen kehityksen viestinnän perustana."

¹⁵ "Yrityskansalaisuutta odotetaan ja vaaditaan...kun poliittinen päätöksenteko saattaa olla vaikeata...paineet kasvavat firmoja kohtaan, että niitä odotetaan jopa yritysaktivismityyppistä tyyppistä hommaa. Huima mahdollisuus myös saada asioita eteenpäin."

¹⁶ "Yritysten rooli vastuullisuuskentässä ja vastuullisuuden eteenpäin viemisessä on itse asiassa todella kriittinen, ja kun kuluttajat luottavat siihen, että yritykset hoitavat tätä tonttia jopa enemmän kuin valtiot tai päättäjät, niin siinä on hieno mahdollisuus myöskin yrityksille ottaa sitä roolia."

in messaging and combining there **rational and emotional** sides of the topic were mentioned as success factors. I think that in sustainability topics emotion could rather mean interesting and relevant content for target groups and emotional touchpoints should be rather carefully considered. On the other hand, also another interviewee pointed out that successful communication and marketing is something that a person can relate to, and it leaves an emotional connection. People should realize, how sustainability topics affect personal life and how the behavior should be changed and why.

“...marketing and communication that you can relate to, and you belong to the target group. When it touches emotionally and leaves a sense of emotion, in my opinion it is always successful. Such a linkage that, by the way, this impacts on my life. When I do this or that way, I make a difference and I understand why I make it in a different way.”¹⁷

In the chapter 4.3. Reed also reminded that stakeholders are real people and authenticity, empathy and creativity could be used in messaging.

As a new idea it was considered how companies could share more actively information even before sustainable projects have been fully completed. There are so many interesting beginnings going on which could be useful information to be shared even though they would not ever turn to new business cases. A question of **courage** was discussed in this context. However, when a general opinion allows only “perfect” sustainability communication cases and communicators only target at success in sustainability communication, it was felt difficult to take risk. Companies more widely had also been heard to be afraid of getting negative or even inappropriate feedback.

“...we all could probably have even more courage.”¹⁸

“No too big or wrong statements. No polishing so that it is honest. On the other hand, at the same time it (communication) cannot be too diluted. That kind of message is not interesting.”¹⁹

¹⁷ “...markkinointi ja viestintä, jossa sinä voit jollain tavalla samaistua, että olet sen kohderyhmää, niin silloin se on aina minun mielestäni onnistunutta, kun siitä syntyy joku tunnekokemus, tunnejälki. Joku sellainen linkki, että niin, tähän vaikuttaa minun elämäni. Näin tai noin kun minä teen, niin minä teen jotain toisin ja minä ymmärrän, miksi minä teen toisin.”

¹⁸ “...rohkeutta pitäisi olla varmastikin vielä enemmän...varmaan meillä kaikilla.”

¹⁹ “Ei liioitella, ei väaristellä. Ei kaunistella, että ollaan rehellisiä. Toisaalta samanaikaisesti ei myöskään tietenkään liian häveliäitä. Se viesti ei ole kiinnostava.”

“...communicators know all possible pitfalls, what can go wrong, but at the same time it is a really big challenge how to create courage to the (sustainability) communication...finding balance there sets big requirements.”²⁰

Courage also relates to corporate activism and using emotions which were discussed earlier in this chapter.

However, even if companies and their communicators would have will to be more experimental, it is good to remember the risk of green washing even with honest attempts to make interesting new content. UPM openly shared their experience as they had been awarded a third prize in the Vuoden huiputus 2023 public vote organized by Greenpeace with their “Huominen” social media campaign with influencers.

Also, general sustainability requirements may direct sustainability communication resources to basics; one interviewee had heard from a lecturer that 80 % of time used for sustainability communication should be used to keep company **website** up to date instead of producing all the time new content. This is a question of balance. I anyway think that as the field and people’s attitudes towards sustainability evolve, sustainability communication also needs to evolve and there should be room for new approaches. In the chapter 4.3.1 Gutterman advised that content should be easily found and cover both progress and areas where more work is still needed so the thoughts above are in line with the findings in the theoretical framework.

To summarize factors for successful sustainability communication found from the interviews, it should start from general communication principles ensuring openness, honesty, reliability and respectfulness. Knowing target groups and setting objectives including a strategic approach set the ground. Communicators should familiarize themselves with current and upcoming sustainability themes so that they know what those mean and can communicate about them by using good and understandable language.

Communication should also enable dialogue, but company/organization should prepare its spokespersons and employees for it so that they are able to join and react while ensuring coherent and consistent messaging. Internal guidelines and guidance help prepare for that. Dialogue is recommended to be seen as a possibility to get feedback which will help develop communication approach. It is also good to understand the power and responsibility companies nowadays have and how they can accelerate the change toward a more sustainable world and try to get that message

²⁰ “...viestijät tietävät ne kaikki mahdolliset sudenkuopat, mikä voi mennä pieleen, mutta samanaikaisesti kuinka luoda sitä rohkeutta siihen viestintään, se on tosi iso haaste... tasapainon löytäminen siinä asettaa tosi isoja vaatimuksia.”

through in different contexts. Messages should include the rationale and emotion to make impact. Having a more courageous approaches could be considered while not forgetting the risk of green-washing (or other washes related) accusations. Communicators' role includes challenging internal experts to ensure production of understandable messaging. Enough quality information on web-sites is something that should not be forgotten either.

Many of these factors are also included in recommendations listed by Pohl and Tolhurst in the chapter 4.5 (point 1. Base on real actions, 3. Communicate about core operations, 6. Pay attention to clear and credible communications that is relevant to stakeholders, 7. Define target groups, and 8. Enable dialogue and choose topics to be covered).

6.6 Theme 6: Ensuring regularity

Many interviewees stated that when sustainability is in the **core of the business**, sustainability communication is **strategic**, part of overall communication. Then it is naturally regular.

Communication **objectives** were mentioned to help seeing the way forward and ensuring planned, regular and topical communication. Sustainability communication should be part of the overall careful planning and not a sidetrack which also support daily work.

“...so that communicators do not need to think in the middle of hectic workdays that what should we then do on the sustainability communication side...”²¹

It was also pointed out that **reporting structures** should support sustainability communication. When sustainability is integrated for example in quarterly reporting, it provides a systematic approach and increases credibility. All other sustainability communication comes on top of that.

When talking about practical work it was highlighted that **working structures** should be in order and that good collaboration between communication and sustainability experts supports work of both. When communication is integrated to daily work of businesses and sustainability communication representative is part of the leadership team, both sides know what is going on, what is in the horizon and together it is easy to discuss and brainstorm. Regular discussion appointments with key contacts certain times per a year also help. All in all, **good networks and holistic collaboration** in the organization was seen to help share information and reach better results. It was also emphasized how valuable it is to **know about themes as early as possible** because there is so much that need to be understood, considered and planned when preparing communication.

²¹ “...ettei joudu sitten siinä viestinnän kiireisessä työarjessa (miettimään), että no mitäs me nyt sitten tästä kestävyysviestintäpuolesta...”

“...part of themes is rather difficult, truly complex. Thus, it is important to be involved in the theme from the beginning. It will not work out if you jump in in the last minute to a difficult theme and its communication.”²²

To summarize, based on the interviews regular sustainability communication starts from sustainability being in the core of the business and strategic communication approach, setting objectives and having reporting and working structures and collaboration in the organization in place.

I was especially delighted of that internal networks, collaboration and structures were highlighted as those are crucial for communicators. The substance mainly comes from businesses' sustainability experts from the organization and without this connection it is very difficult to communicate anything. Especially when in this area requirements and expectations are very high and still growing.

In my mind this leads also to a question of resources. Successful sustainability communication requires sufficient resources with relevant skills both in the business and in the communications department. Also, in strategic communication's paradigm attention is paid to resources (chapter 3.3).

6.7 Theme 7: Examples of successful approaches

Lastly, the idea was to learn about different successful approaches and factors behind them to see sustainability communication from different angles. Both own and other companies' and organizations' success stories were asked to be shared. The four interviewees presented altogether seven examples that are presented in this last theme.

First, it was reminded by one interviewee that successful cases are not quick wins as successful sustainability communication starts from pure company transformation toward more sustainable approach in its core.

Neste was seen by one interviewee as a good example of a company which was mentioned having transformed from a traditional oil company to a producer of renewable products and chemicals. Without knowing details of their communication approach, the interviewee found their attitude and long-term business transformation impressive and credible as it also has been a success.

On the start-up side interesting ideas were seen as the firms have been able to show that simultaneously it is possible to solve the most important challenges of the world and make good business and change current conventions to accelerate transformation. **Solar Foods** was mentioned as one

²² “...aika vaikeita on osa teemoista, oikeasti kompleksisia. Siten on tärkeätä olla alusta saakka mukana, koska jos hyppää viime metreillä vaikeaan teemaan, ja sen viestimiseen, niin se ei tule onnistumaan.”

example of those companies. They have introduced a new way of food production by making food out of thin air which was seen very inspirational. When the business idea is pioneering, it may also help make interesting communication.

Green Lahti project of the city of Lahti to become a European green capital 2021 – which they also won – was seen having a clever sustainability communication approach with nice talking points and great continuity. In general, it may have been a bit surprising that Lahti would be recognized as an environmental city, but they had prepared their project well, made efforts and had all the data to show why it is the leading green city. The work they had done and do for this status was seen impressive and their long-term communication approach have been seen well planned.

That follows Holtzhausen's (chapter 3.2) idea of strategic communication that supports a wider strategy of an entity, such as corporations or governments, for example, and is considered, purposeful, planned and public. Holistic messaging is required to reach target audiences in fragmented communication landscape caused by digital technologies. Gutterman (chapter 4.3) says regular communication of sustainability topics provide transparency and information on progress towards sustainability targets help stakeholders in their decision making which may have helped Lahti win.

From the social side **World Vision Finland campaign** about importance of girls' literacy in the biggest Finnish cities with a very exceptional approach was raised up. Even though sustainability communication is not really about campaigns, this marketing campaign with its different approach including painted ads in cities was found worth of mentioning and as an example of how sustainability topics can be marketed. The campaign made people realize how different life is without literacy because not being able to see the content causes same kind of experiences than illiteracy. The campaign was a success as it touched people and made them think and act. This is a proof of emotions' impact that was discussed in the chapter 3.4.

A well-known example of building the whole business from the sustainability viewpoint instead of making money as the priority, **Patagonia**, was shortly mentioned as one example.

Ikea's People and Planet concept was seen to have a great sustainability approach for a huge company. They have brought their sustainability messages to the level which every customer can understand and that makes it impactful. This kind of umbrella theme was seen to help people understand where different sustainability messages belong to.

UPM's commitment to UN business ambition for 1,5 C program related to Science Based Targets was told to have been a significant project and required internally a lot of preparations, research and actions before its launch. It was a big communication and education effort that helped

people inside and outside understand the company's strategic approach and objectives more widely. It has also helped leaders and employees to talk about the company direction.

This example relates to internal ability and readiness which was raised up by several interviewees in the chapter 3.4. In the theoretical framework Pohl and Tolhurst emphasized starting sustainability communication from inside the company (point 5) and commitment from the top management (point 4). Cornelissen says (chapter 2.7) that in CSR 2.0 managerial responsibility of it is spread throughout the entire organization. This can also be seen to link to Aaker's view (chapter 4.3) on strong brands having extensive brand identity with a strategic approach, and which have been created with external and internal focus. According to Aaker (chapter 4.2), environmental, innovation and localness related viewpoints are linked to organizational brand identity. Competitive advantage created by organizational attributes is more difficult to beat than products-related because those are harder to copy, beat in all portfolio areas as well as assess and communicate. Organizational attributes help create value for the company as they can bring along positive emotional linkage, such as admiration, respect and credibility. Taiminen and Ranaweera say (chapter 4.2) that in B2B, the corporate brand is usually the brand that is seen the most. Based on the findings in the theoretical framework, this internal guidance related sustainability communication initiative can be seen to have a good possibility to strengthen the company's sustainability image and its corporate brand.

The different examples of successful sustainable communication (and marketing) cases presented in this chapter I see to increase understanding of features that can lead to successful sustainability communication.

6.8 Summary of interview findings

I considered the quality of interviews high, and they provided more data than I expected. After a careful content analysis, I compared the findings to the earlier created structure which was based on the theoretical framework and presented in the chapter 5.1.

To show the findings in a summarized form, I complemented the structure (see Table 5) by using two colors. Blue text in the structure refers to factors that were found both in the theoretical framework and in the interviews. That proves that many findings from the theoretical framework are also applied in practice.

Green text introduces additions that arose from the interviews. All additions are explained later in this chapter.

The factors I left in black were such that did not come out directly in the interviews. Opposite opinions, i.e., viewpoints that would have not confirmed the theoretical considerations did not emerge in the empirical research.

Table 5. Recommendations for sustainability communication management and implementation based on theoretical framework and interview findings

A process-oriented approach		
	Category	Notes
1	PREPARATIONS	
	Familiarize yourself with sustainability as a phenomenon	
	Know your organization's sustainability approach	
	Clarify first why the organization should communicate about sustainability issues	
	Keep in mind general communication principles and ensure your sustainability communication will be open, honest, reliable and respectful as the starting point	
	Know your stakeholders, remember also society, pay attention to newer generations -> define target groups	
	Have framework for CSR communication; what is the added value your organization can provide; cover environmental, social and governance topics	
	Ensure strategic approach: Realize corporate strategy, corporate identity & values (+ purpose) when they relate to sustainability; incorporate corporate responsibility performance into corporate communications strategies as well as to communication and marketing activities -> create a content strategy that supports organization's business and sustainability targets and brands	
	Consider using 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by United Nations as a baseline	
	Familiarize yourself with current and upcoming sustainability themes so that you understand them and the wider context	
	Have a look at with different (global) assessments and certificates to find more information on sustainability and consider how those could benefit your company	
	Set brave but realistic targets keeping in mind the company's common strategic sustainability goals	
	Ensure reliability of messaging, map risks	
	Ensure reporting structures are in place	
	Convince and engage top management, spokespersons and employees; prepare internal guidelines and guidance for them	
	Ensure good networks for communicators and holistic collaboration in the organization; set regular meetings with key stakeholders	
	Ensure communicators are taken into projects to be communicated in an early phase	
	Be prepared for an ever-faster pace of development of the sustainability field, growing requirements and impacts of regulation and constantly growing need of sustainability communication	
2	PLANNING CONTENT	
	Choose which topics to communicate, avoid overload, it is impossible to cover everything	
	Avoid green wash, purpose wash, woke wash and other misleading messaging	
	Ensure holistic messaging; consider umbrella themes	
	Choose wider themes and phenomenon that target audiences find interesting and want to share; follow the era and be aware of the latest hot topics in sustainability; avoid advertising related marketing content that only relates to own products and services	

	A process-oriented approach	
	Choose subjects that are valuable both to company's stakeholders and its business	
	Consider making statements and conveying purpose	
	Try to explain companies' role in sustainable development of the world	
	Think how audiences could contribute to the way out of challenges	
	Remember that stakeholders are real people; think how to touch their emotions	
	Ensure quality translations from global terms	
	Challenge internal experts and stakeholders with whom messaging is prepared to ensure understandable storylines	
	Make stories and metaphors, use visual elements to convey your message; use a wide array of communication methods; take care of balance between different themes	
	Consider if there is room for more courageous approaches	
3	CONTENT APPROACH	
	Share real achievements; ensure data behind	
	Share measurable achievements	
	Be transparent, honest and credible	
	Be clear and understandable	
	Share up-to-date information, ensure themes live in time	
	Show progress	
	Show also areas where more work is still needed	
	Introduce several viewpoints	
	Share specific examples	
	Share local examples	
	Focus on solutions instead of problems	
	Develop communication approach further based on feedback	
4	CHANNELS RELATED	
	Share information regularly throughout the year	
	Take multi-channel approach; choose social media applications where audiences can be open and active; maximize visibility	
	Ensure that company website has a comprehensive amount of sustainability related information and keep it updated	
	Consider using sustainability as a selling point in all touchpoints and channels for promoting sustainability of the brand	
	Interact, dialogue -> feedback opportunity to develop communication	
	React to issues without delay	
	Create foothold as a good CSR performer	
	Make materials easily found	
	See every now and then how others are doing sustainability communication for your inspiration and to ensure you are aware of the latest trends and discussions	
	Follow results through statistics	

The blue color shows that in all the categories most recommendations based on the theoretical framework also emerged from the interviews. This can be considered to prove the validity of the theoretical findings.

Also, a lot of new remarks from interviewees were brought in, especially in the preparations category, which shows that in the working life there are dimensions that did not come through in the theoretical sources. This may relate to the rapidly changing sustainability and communication landscape. It can also be interpreted as an indication that the interviewees considered the preparations very important for good management and implementation of sustainability communication.

Additions made to the Preparations category (1) mainly concerned following ethical communication principles (even though some same type of qualifications were found also in the theoretical framework), being prepared for constantly growing requirements, impacts of regulation and constantly growing need of sustainability communication, ensuring good networks and work practices and engaging internal stakeholders. Getting on board in an early phase on sustainability projects was also highlighted.

In the Planning content category (2) additions mainly concerned using courage, challenging and emotions as "tools" for generating engaging content. Also, a reminder of balance between different topics and considering umbrella themes and explaining companies' role in sustainable development of the world were added. Good translations of terms are also important.

In the Content approach category (3) additions related to basing content on data and ensuring themes live in time. Also, availability for feedback that helps develop communication was added.

In the Channels related category (4) ensuring up-to-date sustainability information on websites was added as well as checking every now and then how others are performing in sustainability communication to keep the touch on the latest trends and discussions.

The complemented structure shows that successful sustainability communication is a specialty that requires paying attention to many aspects. It includes factors that relate to knowledge, management, work practices, content qualifications and implementation.

To ensure accessibility of the table it has been added to the appendices (Appendix 4), where all table elements are shown in black font. This also enables easier printing of the table.

7 Conclusions

This chapter includes key results of the study and conclusions, suggestions for future research, validity and reliability of the study and reflection of personal learning.

Sustainability is a complex and demanding area of communication, and many companies are uncertain how to manage it. The objective of this thesis was to clarify how to make effective sustainability communication in the changing world as the need for sustainability communication and its importance are constantly growing.

The research questions were the following:

Q1. What characteristics and methods make sustainability communication effective today and why?

Q2. What are the biggest challenges in today's sustainability communication and how to manage them?

The research consisted of a comprehensive literature review and an empirical study. The literature review on sustainability context and communication domain created a framework that was simplified to a structure of recommendations for sustainability communication management and implementation. Findings from semi-structured interviews confirmed most theoretical findings. Additionally, the interviews provided many new aspects which added a lot of value to the research and complemented the structure. The created structure as a concrete output of this constructive research shows that successful sustainability communication requires paying attention to many factors.

In the empirical research growing requirements for sustainability communication were emphasized. The sustainability field is becoming more demanding due to regulation and stakeholders' growing interest in companies' sustainability performance. Also, sustainability themes are sensitive in nature. In addition to growing requirements communicators should be prepared for an increasingly faster pace of development, constantly growing need of sustainability communication as well as ensuring strategic approach and reliability and comprehensibility of communication. These can be recognized also as challenges.

Sustainability communication should flourish from the inside of the company and be driven by the strategic sustainability approach of the business. Sustainability communication must be based on real achievements that are relevant compared to company's overall sustainability performance. Otherwise, it can lead to e.g., greenwashing accusations that can be harmful for the company

reputation. Despite awareness of this it may be difficult to understand all aspects that can be seen as different washings. Therefore, sustainability communication requires both a wide knowledge and careful consideration.

Successful management and implementation of sustainability communication should start from following ethical guidelines of communication. In the empirical part also a good knowledge of the sustainability field, including active follow-up evolving requirements and themes was highlighted to ensure that sustainability communication is relevant and valid and lives in time. It also requires good knowledge of company's sustainability approach and target audiences, ensuring strategic approach with measurable objectives, incorporating specific sustainability communication characteristics in content production, such as understandable, clear and transparent messaging, and having a regular, coherent and consistent flow of information in multiple channels. Creation of a content strategy supports sharing impactful content to target audiences. Ability to quick reaction and receiving feedback through dialogue in digital channels is also important and expected especially by younger generations. Feedback and measurement of results help develop the chosen communication approach further.

These key features of successful sustainability communication set the bar for communicators, and organization's management and sustainability spokespersons should also be engaged, not forgetting all employees as sustainability ambassadors. In the theoretical framework involvement and convincement of the top management and employees was a recommendation but in the empirical research spokespersons and internal guidance were additionally highlighted. Organizations should ensure that company's representatives from top management to spokespersons and employees can manage sustainability communication requirements in their respective roles. Communicators can support this by preparing and sharing guidance together with the management.

Good networks and working structures including early involvement of communicators to projects were seen to help and be essential for the communicators' work and help gaining good communication results. In the empirical research it was also found out that communicators should challenge internal sustainability stakeholders to jointly target at understandable messaging, consider having more courage in their approaches and keeping in mind that too secured and diluted message is not interesting either. As all topics cannot be covered, choosing the most relevant to make impact and finding balance between different themes is important.

In addition to key challenges and success factors for effective sustainability communication management and implementation the study outlined the sustainability communication process which can be used as a tool for effective communication. The final structure for recommendations helps looking at sustainability communication in different phases. By reviewing company's current

sustainability communication approach by going through all the factors in the structure helps assess current communication approach and ensure that all the most relevant elements have been considered or included. When the described process is followed step by step it should help management and implementation of sustainability communication and at the same time reduce the risk of being accused of greenwashing (and other washings). The review will probably also generate new ideas for development.

The results of this research are applicable to the target company. They highlight key elements in successful sustainability communication and management and help all communication team members and their stakeholders outline the requirements for the overall approach. It will be easier to collaborate and prepare a new content strategy and communication activities with the help of the guidance provided in the study. The study ensures the same information for everybody, and all can complement their understanding based on these findings which should help the same direction. The results also show that the organization is on the right path which encourages to drive the work further. The guidance sets a framework and platform for a common objective of developing the current sustainability communication approach and make it more regular. The target organization's head of Country Communications will review the final thesis as part of the performance evaluation for the first half 2023.

In addition to communicators and stakeholders of the target organization the study and the structure as its concrete output are useful for any other large organization in the similar way and in principle to anyone who wants to familiarize oneself with sustainability communication principles and how to manage and implement it well. This meets the requirements of generalization that are typical for constructive research.

The research reminded on the strategic importance of sustainability communication and communicators' work. Sustainability communication is not a sidetrack. Its growing need and requirements should also encourage companies to ensure adequate resources for successful management and implementation of sustainability communication.

7.1 Recommendations for future research

The thesis provided a solid foundation for effective sustainability communication's key principles. However, as sustainability is a wide theme, there are a lot of valid angles that could be researched further. Even many single factors in the created structure could be investigated in more detail, such as green washing and other washing types to broaden understanding of pitfalls and how to avoid them in communication deliverables.

The changing landscape of the sustainability field and impact of regulation came so strongly through from the empirical research that I find that area the most important to be followed and researched further to strengthen competencies of communicators and organizations. Knowing the requirements in detail helps defining sustainability approach of companies and communication of it.

The structure of recommendations could also be presented by dividing the findings, for example to the following categories: sustainability field, company, target groups and communications function. When factors were divided under these categories by “operators”, some people could find reading the structure as well as internalizing its content easier compared to the process-oriented approach which was built more from communicators’ viewpoint. The factors could also be expressed in a more simplified manner. Also, a simplified structure with less factors could be useful especially for smaller firms.

As mentioned in the introduction, assessment of the target organization’s current sustainability communication approach and development of it are excluded from the study. Those will be completed later with the help of findings provided in this research. After I have together with our team tested the structure for the target organization’s current sustainability communication approach, we will see how it works in practice. Experience gained from that exercise will probably generate additional ideas for future development of the structure.

7.2 Reliability and validity of the study

Reliability of a research means the assessment of the independence of the results of a study. Researcher should consider irrelevant and random factors and provide criteria to verify the reliability of the research. In a qualitative research reliability is estimated by considering the framework of the research and methods used. The researcher should recognize personal subjectivity and values that could impact the research or the results. Reliability increases in qualitative research when these are recognized, and viewpoints related to them shared as well as the path of deducting is transparently described along the study. Validity in qualitative research concerns integrity of the research subject and that the research should respect the nature of the phenomenon and stick to chosen topic and describe that. (Puusa & Juuti, 2017, chapter 11.) I concentrated on the scope of the thesis topic and research questions during the research. I have also explained in detailed manner how the research was built and complemented in two phases.

As typical for a qualitative research, research questions were relatively clear before exploring the literature (Puusa & Juuti, 2017, chapter 11). Based on the questions, I read a remarkable amount of literature and paid a lot of attention to relevant sources and which subjects to include in the study. The questions were finalized when the scope was clarified along the study, and I ensured

that I have covered all aspects to the theoretical framework that are required to answer the research questions.

I did not know the interviewees, nor had I had any contact with them before, got recommendations on them or used any personal contacts to find them which I found to add reliability of the interviews and research results. Data from interviews was handled in a detailed manner and logic of simplifying the data was went through for several times as well as the interview recordings. All in all, I followed all the good practices in the thesis project I had familiarized myself with to achieve quality results.

Saturation point of interviews means that no relevant new information for the research is found anymore and no more interviews are seen needed (Ojasalo et al. 2014, p. 111) . As in many themes the views supported each other and the theory as well, I saw the four interviews sufficient. Additionally, new viewpoints compared to the theoretical framework were presented. It was also reasonable to be conscious of time as additional interviews and analyzing them would have needed more time and my target was to finalize the thesis so that I will graduate in spring 2023. However, I cannot say that the saturation point would have been reached. Additional interviews with different interviewees could have provided different aspects and new information.

The interviews were conducted among Finnish experts for a reason, but the results could have been different if my interviewees were from another country or countries because in some other parts of the world views on sustainable development and its challenges may differ from the Finnish or European ones. As the sustainability field evolves so rapidly, the findings could have been different also if I had conducted interviews for example six months earlier or later. However, I think that the interviews provided a good status update of the current environment and factors that need to be paid attention to today in a large company operating in Finland.

The target organization did not guide me with the scope of my thesis, but I got free hands to produce a work that I found useful for the organization and my own learning, so the impact of the organization was very small. However, I kept the commissioner updated of the status of the study along the project.

My work experience as a communications professional probably helped prepare the research questions and structure findings from the literature and the entire thesis. Also, the knowledge gained through the target organization's global and local sustainability approaches over the years and some personal experience in sustainability communication helped me reflect on some factors. Despite that I do not see myself as a sustainability communication expert yet and it was easy to stay as neutral as possible and dive into the topic with humility and eagerness. I also tried to think

that I write the study for someone who is not at all familiar with the sustainability topic or communication management principles to make it useful also for wider audiences.

The research produced knowledge that increases understanding of the research subject and opened experiences of the interviewees which are targets of a qualitative research (Puusa & Juuti, 2017, chapter 11). I believe that targets of the research were well reached as challenges and a wide selection of factors that influence the efficiency of organizations' sustainability communication were found and explained. I was also able to provide guidance on how to strengthen organization's sustainability image through sustainability communication management and implementation and what practices help sustainability communicators' work. The study and the concrete output of it will help understanding best practices for sustainability communication management and implementation and support communicators' work and staying relevant – as well as all of them who want to improve their performance in this area.

7.3 Reflection on personal learning

The biggest challenge of the thesis project was defining the scope of work. Sustainability is a very wide topic, and it could have been reviewed from many different angles and through different research approaches. First, I wrote the theoretical framework for another approach, but my supervisor recommended to consider another scope. This may not be very unusual, but it was still quite demanding to restart the study after a three-month effort of literature review. The new scope impacted on many things in the theoretical framework that had been drafted until that point and I naturally had to make reconsiderations concerning the entire study's approach. However, there was only one way forward: forgetting the previous approach and moving on with determination. On the other hand, the new scope clarified many things and helped progress with the study.

I am pleased that I first chose the research questions and then genuinely reviewed literature and built the theoretical framework. This was quite demanding but also rewarding as I followed an honest research approach starting with an induction to theoretical sources and the empirical part was planned based on the findings from that and to complement it and not vice versa which may sometimes be the case.

As I got the freedom to produce a work that I found useful for the organization and my own learning, I needed to take full responsibility of the project and use my own thinking and learning as my guidelines. My thesis supervisor at Haaga-Helia was a great interlocutor though toward the end of the project which was inspiring and helpful.

The thesis project ended up to a relatively demanding experience as I did not take any study leave, but the thesis was written in free time alongside a busy full-time job. Interruptions to the flow of thinking and writing due to the work week required restarting the thesis every weekend all over again. With this approach I had to concentrate on studying every single weekend for seven months which taught me perseverance and how to stretch myself to the limit while ensuring at least some recovery from work and the thesis project along the process. However, I continued with determination toward graduation. At the end of the project some working hours were possible to be used for finalization of the study though to ensure graduation before the summer period.

During the project, I learned a lot about scientific research approaches and methods and how to build connections through a wide amount of theoretical information and empirical research findings. I believe that the work also reminded on importance of critical thinking.

Most importantly, the thesis work strengthened my knowledge of qualifications required in sustainability communication and presented new insights to be internalized and implemented. The findings also inspired me to follow the sustainability field more actively to be prepared for its growing requirements. Continuous learning and curiosity are especially important in this area – as well is courage. This project also further strengthened my external communication competences which is valuable because I have shifted only four years ago from a long career in internal communication to a role with a focus on external communication.

Naturally it feels rewarding to complete a demanding project with concrete results that has potential to help the target organization, fellow communicators and all who are interested in sustainability communication.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Target organization

Appendix 2. Interview questions

Kestävän kehityksen tilannekuva

1. Kuinka kuvailisit kestävän kehityksen viestinnän tarvetta yrityksissä/organisaatioissa tällä hetkellä, seuraavan kolmen vuoden aikana ja pidemmällä tähtäimellä? Mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat tarpeeseen?
2. Mitkä kestävän kehityksen teemat ovat mielestäsi tällä hetkellä ajankohtaisimpia?
3. Onko Suomessa erityisesti joitain ajankohtaisia teemoja, joista viestiminen on yrityksille/organisaatioille ja yhteiskunnassa tärkeää ja hyödyllistä juuri nyt sekä tulevaisuutta ajatellen? Mitkä teemat kiinnostavat täällä asiakkaita ja suurta yleisöä B2B- ja/tai B2C-puolella?
4. Mikä merkitys kestävästä kehityksestä arvioivien tahojen luokituksilla on yrityksille?

Onnistunut kestävän kehityksen viestintä

5. Mitkä tekijät varmistavat mielestäsi onnistuneen kestävän kehityksen viestinnän tänä päivänä?
6. Mitkä ovat kestävän kehityksen viestinnän suurimmat haasteet/työtä teettävät seikat, joita olet itse joutunut pohtimaan tai tiedät yritysten ja organisaatioiden yleisemmin pohtivan?
7. Millä keinoilla voi parhaiten varmistaa, ettei yritys/organisaation syyllisty viherpesuun?
8. Oletko itse tai onko yrityksenne/organisaationne onnistunut erityisen hyvin tietyn kestävän kehityksen aiheen viestinnässä? Mitkä tekijät vaikuttivat tähän?
9. Tuleeko mieleesi onnistuneita toteutuksia muilta yrityksiltä/organisaatioilta, jotka ovat jääneet mieleen erityisen asiantuntevina/kiinnostavina/uudenlaisina viestintätapoina digitaalisissa kanavissa?
10. Millä keinoilla mielestäsi varmistetaan säännöllinen kestävän kehityksen aiheiden viestintä? Onko omasi tai jonkun muun yrityksen/organisaation kestävän kehityksen viestintä mielestäsi ollut säännöllisesti onnistunutta? Miksi?

Appendix 3. Personal register of interviewees

Appendix 4. Structure for sustainability communication best practices

	A process-oriented approach	
	Category	Notes
1	PREPARATIONS	
	Familiarize yourself with sustainability as a phenomenon	
	Know your organization's sustainability approach	
	Clarify first why the organization should communicate about sustainability issues	
	Keep in mind general communication principles and ensure your sustainability communication will be open, honest, reliable and respectful as the starting point	
	Know your stakeholders, remember also society, pay attention to newer generations -> define target groups	
	Have framework for CSR communication; what is the added value your organization can provide; cover environmental, social and governance topics	
	Ensure strategic approach: Realize corporate strategy, corporate identity & values (+ purpose) when they relate to sustainability; incorporate corporate responsibility performance into corporate communications strategies as well as to communication and marketing activities -> create a content strategy that supports organization's business and sustainability targets and brands	
	Consider using 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by United Nations as a baseline	
	Familiarize yourself with current and upcoming sustainability themes so that you understand them and the wider context	
	Have a look at with different (global) assessments and certificates to find more information on sustainability and consider how those could benefit your company	
	Set brave but realistic targets keeping in mind the company's common strategic sustainability goals	
	Ensure reliability of messaging, map risks	
	Ensure reporting structures are in place	
	Convince and engage top management, spokespersons and employees; prepare internal guidelines and guidance for them	
	Ensure good networks for communicators and holistic collaboration in the organization; set regular meetings with key stakeholders	
	Ensure communicators are taken into projects to be communicated in an early phase	
	Be prepared for an ever-faster pace of development of the sustainability field, growing requirements and impacts of regulation and constantly growing need of sustainability communication	
2	PLANNING CONTENT	
	Choose which topics to communicate, avoid overload, it is impossible to cover everything	
	Avoid green wash, purpose wash, woke wash and other misleading messaging	
	Ensure holistic messaging; consider umbrella themes	
	Choose wider themes and phenomenon that target audiences find interesting and want to share; follow the era and be aware of the latest hot topics in sustainability; avoid advertising related marketing content that only relates to own products and services	
	Choose subjects that are valuable both to company's stakeholders and its business	
	Consider making statements and conveying purpose	
	Try to explain companies' role in sustainable development of the world	
	Think how audiences could contribute to the way out of challenges	

	A process-oriented approach	
	Remember that stakeholders are real people; think how to touch their emotions	
	Ensure quality translations from global terms	
	Challenge internal experts and stakeholders with whom messaging is prepared to ensure understandable storylines	
	Make stories and metaphors, use visual elements to convey your message; use a wide array of communication methods; take care of balance between different themes	
	Consider if there is room for more courageous approaches	
3	CONTENT APPROACH	
	Share real achievements; ensure data behind	
	Share measurable achievements	
	Be transparent, honest and credible	
	Be clear and understandable	
	Share up-to-date information, ensure themes live in time	
	Show progress	
	Show also areas where more work is still needed	
	Introduce several viewpoints	
	Share specific examples	
	Share local examples	
	Focus on solutions instead of problems	
	Develop communication approach further based on feedback	
4	CHANNELS RELATED	
	Share information regularly throughout the year	
	Take multi-channel approach; choose social media applications where audiences can be open and active; maximize visibility	
	Ensure that company website has a comprehensive amount of sustainability related information and keep it updated	
	Consider using sustainability as a selling point in all touchpoints and channels for promoting sustainability of the brand	
	Interact, dialogue -> feedback opportunity to develop communication	
	React to issues without delay	
	Create foothold as a good CSR performer	
	Make materials easily found	
	See every now and then how others are doing sustainability communication for your inspiration and to ensure you are aware of the latest trends and discussions	
	Follow results through statistics	