



BI Norwegian Business School - campus Oslo

GRA 19703

Master Thesis

Thesis Master of Science

The Role of Human Resource Management in Creating Sustainable Organizations

Navn: Hannah Lowsky, Flavie Marquet

Start: 15.01.2021 09.00

Finish: 01.07.2021 12.00

Study Program: Leadership and Organizational Psychology

Title: The Role of Human Resource Management in Creating Sustainable
Organizations

Name of Supervisor: Wajda Wikhamn

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Literature Review</i>	<i>3</i>
Sustainability, Sustainable Development Goals and Government Regulations	3
Sustainable HRM	6
Sustainability Paradoxes	8
A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective - The Internal and The External	10
Sustainable HRM and COVID-19	12
<i>Research Methodology</i>	<i>13</i>
Interviews	14
Participants and Design	14
Procedure	15
Interview Guide	15
Sustainability Reports	16
Data and Design	16
Procedure	17
Analysis Approach	17
<i>Results – Interviews</i>	<i>18</i>
SDGs	18
The Three Pillars (People, Planet, Profit) of Sustainability	18
Balance, Struggles and Challenges Between The Three Pillars	22
Sustainability Paradoxes.....	22
Coping with Sustainability Paradoxes.....	24
Multi-Stakeholder Perspective – Internal and External.....	25
Collaboration Between HR and Sustainability Departments	27
COVID-19.....	28
<i>Results – Sustainability and Annual Reports</i>	<i>29</i>
Sustainability Reports of Companies Interviewed	29

SGDs	29
The Three Pillars (People, Planet, Profit) of Sustainability	30
Balance, Struggles and Challenges Between The Three Pillars	30
Multi-Stakeholder Perspective – Internal and External	31
COVID-19	31
Sustainability Reports of All Companies	31
SDGs	31
The Three Pillars (People, Planet, Profit) of Sustainability	32
Balance, Struggles and Challenges Between The Three Pillars	33
A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective.....	36
Impact of COVID-19.....	37
<i>Discussion</i>	38
Summary of Results and Theoretical Implications	38
Practical Implications.....	41
Limitations and Future Research	42
<i>Conclusion</i>	44
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	45
<i>References</i>	46
<i>Appendix</i>	51
Appendix A: Interview Questions	51
Appendix B: Descriptives of Companies.....	52
Appendix C: Sustainability and Annual Report References	54
Appendix D: Coding Table of Interview Transcripts	59
Appendix E: Coding Table of Sustainability and Annual Reports	64

Abstract

Sustainability is a thoroughly discussed topic in research. The UN define sustainability based on three pillars: environment, finance and society (Bansal & Des Jardine, 2014; Ehnert et al, 2016). So far, most organizations have mainly focused on the first two pillars and less on the third pillar. Society (or people) is mainly taken care of by human resource management (HRM). With the increasing importance of sustainability, a new branch of HRM developed – Sustainable HRM (Ehnert et al., 2016). This type of HRM takes a broad stance on the topic of sustainability, integrating the environmental, economic and societal perspective. It is of interest to companies to examine the role Sustainable HRM plays in fostering sustainability in organizations. Previous research discussed possible tensions between the three pillars of sustainability, a phenomenon called the Sustainability Paradox (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Hahn et al., 2014; Rosati & Faria, 2019). However, there is a lack of research concerning how organizations deal with this paradox. This qualitative study examines how organizations perceive sustainability, which role HRM takes regarding sustainability, and how tensions arising from opposing goals of the three perspectives of sustainability are resolved. The analysis is based on two types of qualitative research and data, which are categorized and examined based on codes. The main data source are ten semi-structured interviews conducted in five companies (five HR and five sustainability departments) and the second data source are 52 sustainability/annual reports. The results indicate that sustainability is mostly defined in terms of the environmental pillar. The social pillar is increasing in relevance, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. When it comes to the role of HRM, it becomes clear that it functions more as an enabler rather than an active contributor to sustainability strategies. So far, HRM is often too limited in resources to create an active change. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed and directions for future research given.

Introduction

“Sustainability” – many perceive this term by now as a buzzword (Cummins, 2021). The term frequently gets overused by companies and “green-washing” appears to be increasingly common. On the one hand, this topic can be associated with a feeling of uncertainty and fear of climate change and its consequences. On the other hand, it can be associated with the urge for change and the opportunity to make an impact. In general, the term sustainability is defined as the urge to fulfill the needs of the current society, without diminishing the needs of future generations (“Sustainability | Academic Impact”, 2020). All of us can take a part in changing our behavior and acting more sustainable. However, not only individuals and governments can make an impact, but also organizations and companies. While governments are setting guidelines on how organizations and societies should act in order to be more sustainable (Rosati & Faria, 2019), organizations have the power to create a change. They can have a large impact on how sustainable a country is and on the mindset of a society (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Rosati & Faria, 2019). Therefore, it is important that organizations develop clear and efficient sustainability strategies which are long-term and not only short-term focused. Nonetheless, it is not always easy to develop clear and efficient sustainability strategies. Every country has different regulations and differs in how sustainability is defined (OECD, 2021-a; OECD, 2021-b). Generally, however, sustainability is based on three pillars: social, environmental and economic (Ehnert et al., 2016).

Nowadays, sustainability strategies are developed on a corporate level and often in sustainability departments. It seems that so far, organizations have mainly focused on the economic and environmental perspectives and less so on the social pillar. This research aims at examining how sustainability is perceived by companies and which pillars are included in their strategies. More specifically, it will take Sustainable Human Resource Management (Sustainable HRM) into consideration, a type of HRM which has become more relevant over the past years (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014). HRM is mainly focused on the people (social) side of sustainability and it is of interest to examine how sustainability is perceived in HRM nowadays. Sustainable HRM supposedly takes into consideration all three pillars of sustainability. However, it is unclear which role Sustainable HRM takes

in the development and implementation of sustainability strategies on a corporate level. There are no clear guidelines for organizations on how to develop Sustainable HRM strategies. Furthermore, there exists only little literature on how sustainability is defined in HRM and if Sustainable HRM integrates all three perspectives of sustainability in practice (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Ehnert et al., 2016; Ren & Jackson, 2019; Rosati & Faria, 2019). Research shows that the balancing of all three pillars bears potential conflicts, arising through opposing goals (Ren & Jackson, 2019). Until now, the research related to this so-called Sustainability Paradox is quite rare. This thesis project is aimed at determining if organizations are aware of the three pillars underlying sustainability (on a corporate level and from an HRM perspective), what type of challenges occur when trying to balance all three pillars, how (and if) these issues are resolved, and which role HRM takes regarding sustainability in organizations. More specifically, the following research questions will be examined:

1. *“How do organizations in general and HRM specifically define Sustainability and manage the challenges related to the Sustainability Paradox?”*
2. *“What role does HRM play in the development and implementation of sustainability strategies?”*

To answer these research questions, the following topics will be examined. First, it is of interest to see if organizations base their sustainability strategies on the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, if they do, which ones specifically, since the SDGs include all perspectives of sustainability (Rosati & Faria, 2019; "THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development", 2021). Second, it will be examined whether organizations in general and HRM specifically take(s) all three perspectives of sustainability into consideration or if they mostly focus on one or two of the pillars. Third, it is of interest to determine if there exist sustainability paradoxes on corporate and HR levels and how the related challenges are dealt with. Fourth, it will be analyzed whether sustainability strategies are focused mainly inside the companies or also outside (taking a multi-stakeholder perspective). This topic is of interest since it reflects a potential sustainability paradox: the struggle to balance actions taken inside and outside organizations. Fifth, since the main focus lies on Sustainable HRM, it is of interest

which role HRM takes with regards to corporate sustainability strategies and if HR and sustainability departments collaborate to reach their sustainability ambitions. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic will be taken into consideration. Since the world is currently in a state of emergency due to the ongoing pandemic, it is of interest to analyze this topic in the frame of a crisis situation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies struggle to maintain their routines and work situations have changed drastically (Alexander, De Smet, & Mysore, 2021; “Coronavirus: How the world of work may change forever”, 2021). The thesis project will aim at determining how this crisis impacts Sustainable HRM strategies and outcomes in organizations. The analysis of these topics will be based on two types of qualitative research and data sets. One analysis will use data collected through semi-structured interviews with five companies who are located in Scandinavia (in total 10 interviews; five interviews with HR departments and five with sustainability departments). The second analysis includes sustainability/annual reports of 52 companies – including the reports of the five companies interviewed – to strengthen the results of the interviews. The research and analysis methods will be further discussed at a later point.

Literature Review

Sustainability, Sustainable Development Goals and Government Regulations

Sustainability is not a new research topic and has been of interest for researchers, organizations and governments for a while now (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014). The term sustainability is defined as a development which takes into consideration both current and future needs, based on three so-called pillars: economic, environmental and social needs (Bansal & Des Jardine, 2014; Ehnert et al., 2016). The aim of sustainable development is to ensure the use of resources – environmental, economic and social – in a feasible manner, considering short-term and long-term goals of governments, organizations and societies. When sustainability started to become a focus in organizations’ business strategies, most companies relied heavily on short-term goals and financial targets (Bansal & Des Jardine, 2014). Sustainability strategies therefore, represented a trade-off between long- and short-term goals and between the three pillars. Due to government regulations and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, Rosati & Faria,

2019), companies' sustainability goals and strategies are more long-term focused nowadays.

However, research also shows that there exist only a few leading companies that incorporated sustainability into their strategy and do not only talk about being more sustainable, but act upon it (Kiron et al., 2017). These companies use sustainability to strengthen their business, foster innovation and create value. Other companies do not invest as much into sustainability for several reasons. They, for example, do not see the business value, lack the capital, or their governments do not set strict laws regarding this topic. Another reason for the lack of incorporation of sustainability on a corporate level is that there exists conflict between sustainable actions and the business strategy (Hengst, Jarzabkowski, Hoegl & Muethel, 2020). This can be connected to Bansal and Des Jardine's (2014) statement that sustainability has to be seen in the context of time. Businesses struggle to balance their short-term (financial) interests with long-term aspirations. Sustainability is a concept which focuses mostly on long-term goals and does not per se lead to short-term benefits. Since businesses compete with each other, they set their focus often on the short-term outcomes of strategies. For these and many more reasons, there are still companies who do not incorporate sustainability into their business strategy.

Nowadays, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and government regulations have an influence on sustainability strategies of companies (Rosati & Faria, 2019). The SDGs were developed by the UN and various countries with the purpose to foster a global collaboration and setting a focus on urgent matters related to sustainability ("THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development", 2021). The 17 goals aim at balancing the three pillars of sustainability and therefore, represent goals related to sustaining the planet, strengthening the economy and improving human life. The aim is to create a change by 2030, fulfilling the targets set for each goal. The adoption of the SDGs considers four main areas: the climate and planet, poverty and inequality, justice and human rights, and gender equality ("Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals", 2021). The UN provide to all these areas suggestions and clear guidelines on what has to change. The question for companies remains, how to take action, on which goals to focus and

how to incorporate these goals into their business strategy. In order to support organizations, the UN developed frameworks, including responsibilities, actions that have to be taken and how to report on these (“Development Reform | United to Reform”, 2021; “Reporting on the SDGs | UN Global Compact”, 2021). These guidelines and sustainability reports are aimed at supporting organizations with their sustainability ambitions, communicating their efforts to stakeholders and creating value for the organizations and stakeholders. Companies that follow these guidelines and report on sustainability are enabled to develop clear, reachable sustainability strategies which comply with the law. However, these benefits also come with an increased pressure to deliver on the goals (Ehnert et al., 2016). The pressure and increased competition lead to organizations setting a stronger focus on sustainability. It furthermore creates the need for organizations to go beyond government guidelines to develop a sustainable competitive advantage.

Since the SDGs are recommendations and not fixed laws for all member states, each government has to consider how to implement the SDGs. To reach these goals, most governments – at least those who are part of the UN – started to develop guidelines and laws (“Getting Governments Organized to Deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals”, 2021; OECD, 2021-a; OECD, 2021-b). These laws help companies to set sustainability targets. However, since the regulations vary per country, multinational companies have to consider these differences between countries when developing and implementing sustainability strategies; an example would be the regulations and laws regarding CO₂ emission levels. A company could therefore either decide on one global strategy, based on the strictest policies, or adapt the strategy per country. This freedom gives companies the possibility to set up locations in countries with loose or no guidelines, in order to bypass limitations they would otherwise have (“Multinational Corporations in International Law”, 2021). Consequently, companies have to carefully consider which actions they want to take, on which SDGs to set their focus and how to apply the strategy to the different locations. Furthermore, companies have to take into account the increasing pressure from internal and external stakeholders to act more sustainably (Kerrigan & Kulasooriya, 2021).

As mentioned, sustainability does not only include the environment and economy, but also social matters and people (Ehnert et al., 2016). Since organizations are built, developed and sustained by people, it is of interest to take a closer look at the department in companies which deals with matters related to people: the human resource (HR) department. It is relevant to examine how sustainability is incorporated not only in the general business strategy, but specifically into the strategies of HR departments and their actions. This topic presents the main focus of the thesis, since there is a lack of literature regarding Sustainable HRM, which role HRM takes in balancing the three pillars of sustainability in organizations and how large the focus is on the people pillar in comparison to the other two pillars (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Ehnert et al., 2016). The next paragraphs will discuss the current literature on Sustainable HRM.

Sustainable HRM

As stated by the UN, humans are the key to tackling the challenges related to the SDGs, taking action and fostering change (“Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals, 2021”). Organizations are created by people and people represent their key asset. Since people is one of the areas of the SDGs, companies started to set a stronger focus on HR strategies and how to incorporate sustainability into HR practices. As a consequence, companies have started to rely more on their human resource departments to fulfill the SDGs. A new branch of HRM developed: Sustainable HRM (Ehnert et al., 2016; Ren & Jackson, 2019). Sustainable HRM is defined by Ehnert et al. (2016, p. 90) as the “*adoption of HRM strategies and practices that enable the achievement of financial, social and ecological goals, with an impact inside and outside of the organisation and over a long-term time horizon while controlling for unintended side effects and negative feedback*”. Therefore, Sustainable HRM includes all three pillars of sustainability, focuses on balancing them and implementing actions not only inside but also outside of organizations. Since this concept is relatively new, no common structure, strategy or approach has been developed (Kramar, 2013). Looking at a range of research articles and reviews, the most important aspects of Sustainable HRM are that it focuses on strengthening the organization’s resources – specifically human resources – (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Mazur & Walczyna, 2020), is based on strategic HRM (Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičiene, 2018) and

takes a long-term perspective. In comparison to the other types of HRM, Sustainable HRM supposedly takes into consideration all three factors of sustainability; being profit, planet and people (the so-called triple bottom line; Aust, Matthews, & Muller-Carmen, 2020; Ren & Jackson., 2019). The purpose of focusing on all three factors is to create a HRM and an organization which does not only take a one sided focus, but sustains itself through a broad perspective, greater flexibility and adaptability. Sustainable HRM points out that HRM plays an important role in organizations, fostering positive organizational outcomes that do not merely focus on the financial aspects (Wikhamn, 2019).

In the past years, the importance of HRM, especially in connection to company sustainability, has grown (Ehnert et al., 2016; Wikhamn, 2019). As mentioned, Sustainable HRM can have not only a positive impact on HRM outcomes, but also on corporate outcomes in general (Wikhamn, 2019). Potentially, this could be a driver for organizations to invest more into Sustainable HRM practices. Sustainability reports show that companies set a larger focus nowadays on data regarding Sustainable HRM practices and performance, hinting at the increased relevance of Sustainable HRM (Ehnert et al., 2016). Nonetheless, research shows that HR practices do not always align with their Sustainable HRM strategies (Katarzyna, 2021). The practices, especially regarding the people part of sustainability, seem to be rather short-term focused than long-term focused. The question arises whether Sustainable HRM strategies are effective, and if and how they are implemented. The challenge occurs for HR departments to incorporate sustainability without limiting the other focus areas of their strategies (Aust, Matthews, & Muller-Camen, 2020). This can be linked to Bansal and Des Jardine's (2014) research on the time aspect of sustainability. To survive, organizations rely on short-term rather than long-term strategies. The same can be seen in the organizations' HR departments. The conflict occurs when aiming at improving short-term outcomes while developing long-term sustainable goals and practices. In order to maintain a balance between the various goals, it is important to gain a better understating of the conflicts occurring when developing and implementing sustainability strategies in HR and organizations in general.

Sustainability Paradoxes

Nowadays, most organizations reached the understanding that, in order to strengthen their sustainable competitive advantage, they must set a focus on sustainability (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Rosati & Faria, 2019). However, research shows that organizations struggle to implement sustainability strategies that include all aspects of sustainability; the three pillars and internal as well as external stakeholders (Hahn et al., 2014). These struggles to balance the various elements of sustainability are defined as so-called sustainability paradoxes. On a corporate level, the main paradox includes the tensions between the opposing goals of environmental, societal and financial concerns. Based on the general definition of sustainability, companies need to focus on all three pillars of sustainability at the same time. The problem is that these pillars are not working always towards the same direction and include sometimes different criteria. Hahn et al. (2014) stated that tensions between the three pillars can occur on all levels – *individual, organizational and systemic* –, within *temporal and spatial* aspects and due to *changes* that sustainability requires. To name a few, the conflicts emerging on the organizational levels occur between the *organizational* and the *systemic* perspectives. Companies have to balance the pressure from internal and external expectations (from societies). This tension will be discussed later, in relation to the internal and external aspects of sustainability. *Temporal* aspects include the conflicts between short-term and long-term ambitions, and *change* addresses the issue of the change that is necessary for companies – for example technological or structural changes – to fulfill sustainability ambitions. When developing sustainability strategies, organizations have to consider all these tensions on a corporate level.

Since this research is focused on Sustainable HRM, it is of interest to discuss paradoxes specifically related to Sustainable HRM. As with corporate sustainability, research shows that HR departments have difficulties to develop Sustainable HRM strategies which include all aspects of sustainability and balance them (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Ren & Jackson, 2019). Overall, the struggle to balance profit, planet and people in sustainable HRM is defined as the Sustainability Paradox (Ehnert, Harry & Zink, 2014). Ehnert, Harry and Zink (2014) distinguished three main struggles of organizations wanting to implement a

Sustainable HRM. The first paradox they describe is the *Efficiency-substance-paradox* (p. 263), the struggle to balance the efficient use of human resources on the one hand and maintaining them on the other hand. More specifically, it is based on the historical definition of successful HRM – increasing financial performance and implementing actions for the current workforce and not focusing on sustaining resources for the future – and highlights the issue of overcoming this traditional definition and focusing on both the short-term success and maintaining resources in the long-term. HR managers have to decide how to allocate their resources, which leads to the conflict between using their sources for increasing efficiency or for sustaining future resources. The second paradox is the so-called *efficiency-responsibility-paradox* (p. 264), the conflict between social obligations and economic goals. This paradox points out that acting in a socially responsible manner does not always align with economic goals. HR managers have to secure the efficient use and development of resources and at the same time take care of internal and external stakeholders' expectations and needs. If those social and economic ambitions do not align, managers have to decide which goal has a higher priority. Finally, the third paradox described is the *present-future-paradox* (p. 264), which represents the tensions between short-term and long-term effects. HRM has been criticized to be too focused on short-term goals, not taking into consideration long-term needs. HR departments are required to decrease costs (for example requirement costs, labor costs, etc.) and increase short-term revenue. This requirement takes away the focus on long-term ambitions (for example employee development, future stakeholders needs, etc.) and puts HR managers in a dilemma when allocating resources to long-term ambitions while having to keep the short-term goals in mind.

Since these struggles are common in organizations (on a corporate and HRM level) they have to find ways to overcome these challenges. Van der Byl and Slawinski (2015) propose four ways to analyze the described paradoxes. Each of the four methods – win-win, trade-off, integrative and paradox lens – takes a different stand on how to handle the conflicts and leads to different outcomes. The win-win method aims at finding a common solution for the three pillars of sustainability and therefore, at overcoming the conflicts. Opposing to that, the trade-off method does not take into consideration all three pillars, but calls for a

decision to be made on which pillar to focus on. The integrative method is more similar to the win-win method and seeks a balance between profit, planet and people. Finally, the paradox lens analyzes the conflicts and aims at developing new approaches to clear the tensions, taking all three pillars into consideration.

In addition to the four methods of analyzing sustainability strategies and conflicts, there exist four coping strategies to resolve the paradox (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014). These strategies – opposition, spatial separation, temporal separation, and synthesis – aim at dealing with the conflicts arising from the sustainability paradox. Each strategy uses a different technique to handle the conflicts. While opposition is focused on balancing the various goals and strategies of the three pillars, the two separation coping strategies focus on avoiding the conflicts and postponing them. Synthesis is a method which aims at integrating the three pillars into all HRM strategies, goals and processes. In comparison to the other three coping methods, synthesis can be seen as a more advanced one: focusing on all three pillars, not only accepting the conflicts or avoiding them, but actively working towards resolving them. As with the four ways to analyze sustainability paradoxes (Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015), it is of interest to determine how organizations cope with the sustainability paradox. In order to reach a balance between the sustainability pillars, the business and sustainability strategies, and short- and long-term goals, companies have to allocate resources over time (Bansal & Des Jardine, 2014). The question remains how organizations perceive this tension and how they handle it.

A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective - The Internal and The External

Another relevant aspect, when analyzing sustainability strategies in organizations and specifically HRM, is the extent to which the focus of the strategies lies on internal versus external aspects and stakeholders. Research suggests that most organizations mainly focus on internal aspects and do not consider external ones (Ehnert et al., 2016; Hahn et al., 2014), meaning that the strategies are mainly aimed at strengthening sustainability internally and not externally. On a corporate level, this suggests that sustainability strategies do not take into consideration the consequences of actions taken on external stakeholders, for example economic growth of communities, impact of external stakeholders on the environment, or

protection of local communities. Hahn et al. (2014) state that, so far, organizations have taken a symbolic sustainability approach, complying with regulations rather than taking an active approach. In their multi-stakeholder framework Hahn et al., integrate both internal and external stakeholders into sustainability and thus, take a broader stance on how to define, analyze and approach the sustainability paradox.

Concerning HRM, research findings indicate that organizations are more concerned with, for example, their main workforce, rather than focusing also on their suppliers or communities in non-native production countries (Ehnert et al., 2016). The research of Stahl et al. (2019) highlighted the need to integrate and balance both environmental, economic and social perspective of sustainability, and to take a broader stakeholder perspective when working with Sustainable HRM. Similarly, the UN goals state that organizations should set their focus on both internal and external stakeholders (Alcaraz et al., 2019). Sustainability does not only include strategies to ensure the future of the organization itself, but also for its external stakeholders. Some authors describe this lack of focus on the external factors of sustainability as lost opportunities (Alcaraz et al., 2019). Organizations who develop sustainability strategies for both external and internal stakeholders are seen to create a larger sustainable competitive advantage and as being able to resolve challenges related to sustainability better. The question arises if organizations have changed to a broader approach and more balanced strategies during the past years. The issue of taking sustainable actions both internally and externally of organizations could thus be interpreted as another sustainability paradox. The literature indicates that organizations struggle to set both an internal and external focus and therefore a tension arises between the allocation of resources to internal and external stakeholders; for example supporting employee well-being or investing into supplier training.

So far, literature related to the topic of the sustainability paradox and how organizations cope with it is scarce. Existing gaps in scientific evidence regarding this topic give rise to the opportunity to conduct further studies. Current research suggests to investigate: how various organizations define sustainability, how they develop their strategies, if they are aware of the sustainability paradox and if yes,

how to resolve it, what kind of challenges the separation of HRM and sustainability department bears, how HRM and sustainability departments could potentially cooperate to overcome these challenges and how organizations can potentially integrate external dimensions into the sustainability framework (Ehnert et al., 2016; Hahn et al., 2014; Ozanne et al., 2016; Podgorodnichenko, Edgar, & McAndrew, 2020; Ren & Jackson, 2019; Stahl et al., 2019; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). This thesis project aims at analyzing some of these research opportunities, being: how sustainability is defined by corporations and HR departments; if organizations encounter challenges when developing their sustainability strategies or tensions between the three pillars; if organizations set an internal rather than an external focus; and if HR and sustainability departments work together to overcome potential challenges.

Sustainable HRM and COVID-19

Developing sustainable strategies is a fluent progress (Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė, 2018). Organizations face continuous challenges, not only related to the sustainability paradox, but also due to changing contexts and conditions. The past year, and likely also for the next years, the pandemic situation (COVID-19) emerged as a large challenge for our societies. Organizations faced and still face various challenges due to the current situation. Researchers already started to look at the impact that COVID-19 has on organizational strategies (Caliguri et al., 2020; He & Harris, 2020). This pandemic highlights the importance of international HRM, clear strategies and multi-shareholder frameworks. Furthermore, it shows that events – like the pandemic – can have a significant impact on societal expectations and organizational decision making. This pandemic changed in many ways how organizations and employees think about their workplace and environment (Manuti et al., 2020). Many employees had to switch to remote work, while others were not able to work from home and consequently, were exposed to an increased health risk. This gap between different types of workers existed already before the pandemic, for example health risks for office versus factory workers, and were highlighted due to the extreme situation (Amis & Janz, 2020; Millard, 2021). Furthermore, organizations had to reduce their workforce, decrease production rates, or close sights due to outbreaks of the virus. All this had a large impact on organizations' economics, employees'

well-being and decision-making processes. Due to the pandemic, many people were confronted with some form of self-isolation, higher levels of stress and uncertainty.

Especially during this type of crisis, organizations rely on their employees. Consequently, organizations rely on their HR departments to manage conflicts and ensure smooth processes. It is unclear however, if and how such a crisis impacts the sustainability strategies of organizations and HR departments. Since the pandemic had a large impact on the world's economy (The World Bank, 2021-a), it is likely that most organizations set a large focus on the economic pillar of sustainability. It could also be possible that organizations increased their attention on the people pillar of sustainability. Considering these facts and open questions, it is of relevance to determine if and how such an event impacts how sustainability is handled, what long-term consequences it will have on HRM strategies and how organizations treat people in their workforce and externally. It is of interest to see how sustainability was perceived in organizations before, during and after the pandemic.

Research Methodology

Since research on the sustainability paradox approach is relatively new and constantly evolving, there is no specific quantitative measurement tool available which one could use to study the given research question. Therefore, this thesis project was based on a qualitative research design, since it also provides flexibility and richer data than quantitative data. More specifically, two types of qualitative methods and two types of data were used: semi-structured interviews and an analysis of sustainability and annual reports. The main source of data were the interviews, since semi-structured interviews provide a greater breadth of data and enable the researchers to set a specific focus compared to, for example, participants observations (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). Qualitative data has the disadvantage of bearing the risk to be less trustworthy than quantitative data. The issue of trustworthiness includes, for example, the questions of how credible the data is, *credibility*, and whether the researchers allow own beliefs to influence the outcome of interviews and interpretations of results, *confirmability* (Lincoln, Guba, & Pilotta, 1985). To overcome the issue of trustworthiness, interview

participants were ensured that the data will be treated anonymously and cannot be traced back to them or their company. Furthermore, it was tried to be objective when interviewing the participants – to ensure this, an interview guide was used – and when analyzing the transcripts. As a second method, sustainability or annual reports (depending on the availability) were used to strengthen the results of the interviews and compare statements made in interviews with data reported in the sustainability and annual reports. It was decided to analyze these reports as an addition to the data collected through the interviews, since it seemed of interest to gather a broader range of data (for example from different industries) and determine whether they support the results of the interviews. While analyzing the reports, it was also tried to stay objective, to strengthen the trustworthiness of the results.

Interviews

Participants and Design

As mentioned, half-structured open-ended interviews were used as a main data source. In total, 10 interviews were conducted in five large sized companies, with an office location in Norway. The sample included four global organizations and one operating in Northern and Eastern Europe regions, with an employee number ranging from approximately 4.000 to 250.000. The industries included were: retail, IT, energy, consumer goods and metals. This selection of companies was a convenience sample, since those companies were chosen based on their approachability. Due to data protection reasons, the organizations were treated anonymously. To be sure, the test form on the Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata (NSD) webpage was filled out ("Notification Form for personal data | NSD", 2021). The results confirmed that a request is not necessary. All organizations and interviewees participated voluntarily, they were informed that the organization's data were treated anonymously, that they could stop the interview at any point and that it was not mandatory to answer all the questions. Therefore, both legal and ethical regulations were fulfilled and it was not necessary to notify NSD. Interviews were conducted in both the HR and the sustainability departments of the companies.

Procedure

Companies were contacted via email or LinkedIn. HR and sustainability departments were approached separately and each asked to take place in an interview. Due to the pandemic situation, the interviewees were contacted digitally. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Since in most organizations HR department and sustainability department are separated units, both departments were interviewed. Therefore, in each company, two interviews were conducted: one in the HR department and one in the sustainability department. The reason behind interviewing both departments was to get a deeper insight into the companies' sustainability strategies and being able to examine possible difference between strategies in the HR and the sustainability departments. It was of interest to examine the different viewpoints between the departments to get a clear and complete picture of the sustainability paradox phenomenon, the challenges related to it, and how organizations solve it. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were informed that the data was going to be treated confidentiality and anonymously. Furthermore, participants approved being recorded. After each interview, the transcripts were typed and coded, as described later.

Interview Guide

In order to collect relevant data, half-structured interviews were used, based on an interview sheet (Appendix A). The interview sheet was developed, considering the literature review and the topics which appeared to be most important to reach a conclusion to the research question. The interview sheet included five categories with 21 items. The categories were: general questions, sustainability, current situation, future strategy and HR versus sustainability department. The items included in "general questions" were related to the organization size, industry, internationalization and department. The "sustainability" items included questions regarding: how sustainability is defined by the organization, how they handle it (their strategy), what their main focus is, which actions are taken, how organizational culture is used to support sustainability, which SDGs are being targeted, if there is a differentiation between sustainability strategies for the various locations, what the main challenges are, and finally, it was examined if the interviewee is aware of the three pillars and the related paradox. The category

“current situation” considered the current COVID-19 pandemic, by including items regarding the possible effects of the pandemic on the organization’s sustainability strategy. The fourth category “future strategy” examined questions regarding the organization’s short- and long-term sustainability goals, their implementation, possible changes in the future (new strategies versus exploitation of old ones) and why the focus might change in the future. Finally, the items included in the “HR versus sustainability department” examined whether the HR and sustainability departments cooperate or if this would be feasible in the future. After collecting the data, a qualitative data analysis was conducted. The interview transcripts were coded based on the following general topics: a) mentioning of SDGs and types of SDGs, b) mentioning of three pillars (people, planet, profit) and set focus, c) balance, struggles and challenges between pillars, d) multi-stakeholder perspective of sustainability strategies, e) collaboration (or none) between HR and sustainability departments, f) changes in strategies due to COVID-19.

Sustainability Reports

Data and Design

In order to get a deeper insight into the topic and collect data on a larger range of companies, sustainability reports (or annual reports) were analyzed. These reports included data on the sustainability strategy and implemented actions of companies. In total, 52 reports were examined (including the reports of the 5 companies interviewed). A full list of the companies is provided in the Appendix (see Appendix B and C). The companies were chosen based on if they have their headquarters or additional locations in Scandinavia. It was decided to use only companies who also operate in Scandinavia, in order to set a focus and be able to compare the data to the results from the interviews in a meaningful way. The sample included 36 global organizations (the other being either European, Nordic or Norwegian), of which all were large-sized with employee numbers ranging from 1.200 to >500.000. The companies operating in 25 different industries. Since the reports were available online – on the companies’ websites – and contained no personal data, it was not necessary to consult NSD regarding data protection issues. Legal and ethical regulations were fulfilled.

Procedure

As mentioned, the companies were chosen based on the fact that they have a location in Scandinavia. Furthermore, they had to have some form of sustainability reporting (either as an own report or included in the annual report). The reports were examined based on the codes also used for the interviews and the questions supporting the research question (see Theory section). First a general overview above the companies' strategies, their take on sustainability and actions taken was provided. Secondly, it was more specifically examined which of the three pillars were directly or indirectly mentioned. The results were then summarized based on the codes.

Analysis Approach

In order to collect relevant data supporting the data collected in the interviews, the same categories as for the interviews and the same codes as for the analyses of the transcripts were used. The purpose of this was to gain a better insight into the topic and determine if the reports support the statements made by interviewees from HR and sustainability departments. Since the reports could not answer all questions used in the interviews, for example the comparison between sustainability and HR departments, the categories and codes were slightly adapted. Consequently, the categories used – to answer the research question – were: General information, sustainability, current situation and future strategy. General information including data on organization size, industry and being a global company or not (see Appendix B). Sustainability included data on definition of sustainability, sustainability strategy, main focus, actions taken (internally and externally), organizational culture regarding sustainability (if applicable), focus on SDGs, differentiation between strategies for different locations, mentioning of the three pillars (directly and indirectly), and challenges related to sustainability and the balancing of the three pillars. For the category “current situation” information on how the pandemic impacted the company and how it was handled were collected. This data was, as for the transcripts, coded based on the topics a) mentioning of SDGs and types of SDGs, b) mentioning of three pillars (people, planet, profit), set focus and HR related sustainability practices, c) balance, struggles and challenges between pillars, d) multi-stakeholder perspective of sustainability strategies, e) impact of COVID-19.

Results – Interviews

An overview of the coding results can be found in Appendix D.

SDGs

The interview results showed that all five companies integrate the SDGs into their sustainability strategy and build actions around them. A participant stated for example that the company:

“Looked at these goals and tried to map our activities and our strategies towards achieving a certain number of goals . . . I have seen very clear links between strategies, activities and which goals these will fulfill in the sustainability goals”.

However, the SDGs seem to be used mostly as a general theme or starting point rather than specific targets as stated by several participants, for example:

“We have picked eight SDGs that we kind of focus on but the target is kind of a cross between several SDGs” and

“There are elements that are reflected . . . theme wise yes, but not word for word”.

The interviewees did not mention the specific goals but rather referred to the companies' websites (SDGs will be described more deeply based on sustainability and annual reports in the next section).

The Three Pillars (People, Planet, Profit) of Sustainability

When asking the participants to state what comes into their mind when hearing the term sustainability, the main buzzwords were *environment, climate, green, people, human, and social*. Consequently, the main topics mentioned were planet and people. Only two participants (sustainability department) stated:

“It is of course economic, environmental and also social sustainable topics” and

“So there are three aspects in the term that the UN uses and that we use as well when we talk about it [sustainability] . . . the first is climate and environment . . . the second is social conditions . . . and the third is finance, economics”

and included the third pillar, profit, into the answer. Both HR and sustainability departments included planet and people related words and themes into their

definition of sustainability. Only one participant (HR) mentioned only planet related terms when defining the term sustainability. Another interesting observation was that some participants stated that only when starting to be involved in sustainability related topics, they took the people pillar more into consideration:

“I have learned a lot more when I started working here because the first thing that came to my mind before I worked here was environment, just environment, but now I understand that there is a lot more into it, to have peace in the world, to have safety in the work environment . . . ”;

“You generally think of the environment, you think of the planet, energy, pollution, and I think more recently also what comes to mind is more the connection to politics, because I think sustainability is now becoming a core topic of discussion when it comes to policy in different countries . . . to concern about especially the future and also then the population as well” and

“It is very important to include the human part of sustainability . . . I think the human part is really important to move forward”.

Consequently, the planet pillar and related topics were always an important part of sustainability and sustainability strategies in organizations, but the people pillar becomes more and more important when moving forward:

“I think that perspective [people] is coming more and more . . . I think it is really tapping in what you expect from big companies . . . but it is still difficult since it bears many challenges”.

After taking a more specific look at the three pillars of sustainability and the results of the interviews, it became clear that there exist some differences between the sustainability strategy defined by sustainability departments and HR departments. In general, both mentioned people and planet related subjects and after some follow up questions also financial aspects. The sustainability departments made more statements regarding the planet, for example being *“climate positive”*, having *“zero emission”*, *“become 100% circular and planet positive”* and so on, than the HR departments. Participants from the HR departments also mentioned various planet related topics, for example *“targets for reducing CO₂ emission”*, *“recycling and reuse”*, *“renewable growth”*. When presenting the various aspects of their company’s sustainability strategy,

participants from the sustainability departments took a broader stance, integrating the pillars into one strategy:

“It [the strategy] is divided into three sections . . . one pillar is the fair and inclusive agenda, then we have one that goes for healthy and sustainable living and the third one is the circle of climate positive”;

“It is really important to have sustainability as part of your values, it is nothing you can add on top . . . because sustainability interfaces with all your . . . products to operations to priorities to investments” and

“Sustainability . . . is part of what we call corporate development, which includes business development and strategy, technology and sustainability”.

These statements show that, in the companies interviewed, sustainability is seen as an integrated part of the business strategy. Sustainability is not anymore a nice to have, but a must have in order to achieve sustainable growth and become a market leader. The interview transcripts showed that, even though not always directly associated with sustainability, the profit pillar seems to play an important role in the strategy:

“We are putting products on the market, low-carbon products, where we try to achieve a premium for this . . . this is the best kind of way to ensure . . . sustainability is part of the business development as well” and

“Sustainability goes hand-in-hand with profitability . . . this is good business”.

However, as the following quote shows, it became also clear that profitability is not always seen as a direct part of sustainability, since participants separate for example the terms profitability and sustainability when talking about the topic:

“Profitable from an economical perspective and also from a sustainability perspective” and

“Fostering profitability and . . . driving sustainability”.

Participants also mentioned short- and long-term investments into the planet and people. Next to these financial and environmental aspects, most participants from the sustainability departments also mentioned terms related to the people pillar. Common topics were equality, diversity and inclusion (*“equal pay for equal jobs”*; *“fair and inclusive agenda”*), corporate social responsibility, setting a social focus and training:

(for example *“Improve skills . . . , everything from taking in apprentices towards all the local initiatives supporting school and education”*).

As mentioned, participants from the HR departments also mentioned planet related topics. However, it became clear that HR departments have a larger impact on the people pillar and set their focus on people:

“In HR we might prioritize the people part”, it “requires different kinds of mindsets, different kinds of perspectives in order to become more innovative and we believe that is sustainability from a people perspective”.

Sustainability in HR can have different meanings. Some participants saw the role of HR more as an enabling one:

“I would not exactly explicitly say that we have a sustainability goal as such in HR, but it is more enabling us to reach the business goals of sustainability”.

This includes to empower employees to take action, gain knowledge and change behaviors (for example types of coffee cups used, lights with movements sensors, company cars with a specific level of CO₂ emission, etc.):

“Want to ‘teach’ one million people about sustainability within 2025”;

“We had a meeting with our CEO . . . after the meeting we all went out and picked up collected trash in the nature”;

“We have one day off where we get paid to volunteer work “ and

“It is about for me engaging the many coworkers around the strategy and actually allowing our coworkers to take ownership for actually influencing the strategy”.

Other actions are taken within people processes, such as employer branding or reducing bias in recruitment, providing internships or apprenticeship programs, and providing education and training. Another aspect that was mentioned by several participants in the HR departments was providing employees with a purpose as an important aspect of sustainability. Finally, a topic mentioned by all participants was the topics of diversity, equality and inclusion. This aspect of sustainability only emerged recently, or got a larger attention, and seems to be an important aspect when moving forward. Participants stated that:

“Diversity and inclusion is part of sustainability as well”;

“We have talked about it for a while but now there is work being done”;
“Another thing is to expand the concept of sustainability also from an HR point of view, looking at that in terms of diversity, inclusion and belonging” and

“Now we are going to focus on . . . equity, diversity and inclusion”.

It seems that the importance of the people pillar of sustainability might increase in the future. The financial aspect of sustainability was not mentioned directly by the participants. However, one can see that the actions taken are based on investments of the company. Developing new recruitment tools to reduce bias, providing trainings, giving employees days off to volunteer, or providing eco-friendly company cars to all employees are all investments into the future of people, the planet and the companies.

Balance, Struggles and Challenges Between The Three Pillars

Sustainability Paradoxes

The outcomes of the interviews gave an interesting insight into the challenges related to the sustainability paradox. While most participants stated that they see the three pillars as balanced, they nonetheless mentioned several challenges. These challenges were described in both sustainability departments and HR departments in the same manner, but participants from the HR departments saw some additional challenges, specifically regarding the people pillar. Participants from the sustainability department stated that it can be difficult to prioritize between different actions:

“I think all those pillars are pulling in the same direction . . . I think the challenge is more to prioritize all good initiatives”;

“The challenges we have in Norway will be solved, the markets are somehow similar but they have also huge differences, so the challenges are, we are present in a lot of . . . markets and . . . the challenges are not the same all over” and

“Important to analyze as well to see what will really matter in the long run and then maybe work on how you can solve those kinds of challenges”.

These statements can be linked to the *present-future-paradox*, the tensions between short- and long-term ambitions and effects. An additional challenge that was highlighted by the participants from the sustainability departments was the

efficiency-responsibility-paradox, the conflict between social or environmental obligations and economic goals. Participants stated that:

“Yes of course there are conflicts because there is . . . always an opportunity to do more on sustainability area . . . but it is extremely costly and if we would implement such technology we would be out of business [talked about a specific technology]”;

“That is a general challenge for all businesses . . . you can always do more, but what you need to find is this kind of optional combination of, and drive towards solutions that are both profitable from an economical perspective and also from a sustainable perspective”;

“We have quarterly reports to the market and the stock price is going to be affected if we do not make money a quarter . . . we will always have to have this in the back of our minds” and

“How can we make money and also transition into a green economy”.

It became clear that some companies struggle to balance their ambitions to become more sustainable in an environmental and social sense, while securing economic growth.

From an HR perspective, the challenges mentioned could also be linked back to some of the paradoxes discussed in the literature section. As discussed by participants from the sustainability department, businesses need to be financially stable in order to reinvest money into sustainability ambitions. That means, in order to be sustainable in the future, companies need to generate profit in the short- and medium-term, reflecting the *present-future-paradox*. A specific issue, stated by participants from the HR departments was the budgeting in HR.

“It is always hard to get HR on the agenda because we are not kind of profit generating . . . so it is having people kind of support and invest in these initiatives and they are not profit generating, that is always a challenge” and

“We have to allocate our resources and I can see that we are not allocating enough resources on sustainability because we have a lot of other priorities . . . a budget in employer branding and we do not have a recruitment budget in terms of recruiting women”.

Consequently, HR departments have a harder time to invest into sustainability strategies, since they are cut short on budget in general. Until now, people have not been a focus in sustainability strategies and investments. These statements highlight the struggle of the *efficiency-responsibility-paradox* from an HR perspective. Recently, companies started to implement strategies regarding diversity, equity and inclusion, leading to new challenges. HR departments have to invest into fair and unbiased requirement strategies and aim at increasing, for example, gender equality.

“In HR we might prioritize the people, and the challenges with people is the gender equality”.

Therefore, even though HR prioritizes the people pillar, they experience challenges to implement sustainable actions for people and the society.

Coping with Sustainability Paradoxes

After examining the reports regarding the sustainability paradox and reporting the results, it became visible that companies experience various challenges when dealing with sustainability. Nonetheless, the results also indicated that companies strive towards balancing the three pillars and increase their aims to include all three aspects of sustainability. Participants from both the sustainability departments and HR departments stated that they see the three pillars as interconnected:

“I think all those pillars are pulling in the same direction”;

“I see them as definitely working towards the same goals, they are not in conflict”;

“I think there is a good balance now . . . over the years there has been a development . . . maybe five years . . . we talked more about that we sell a product . . . whereas now I think we have more balance in the three areas”
and

“I do not think that we should see these three pillars as completely separate, in my mind it is all mixed together”.

These statements point towards an *integrative* or *paradox lens* analysis of the companies' sustainability strategies. In order to overcome the tensions between the three pillars, these companies aimed at a *synthesis approach*, integrating the three pillars in one strategy and resolving the issues. As stated by several

participants, sustainability has to be integrated into the business strategy to be successful:

“What is important is that . . . the sustainability strategy is integrated into the business strategy . . . what gets measured gets done”.

Nonetheless, the challenge remains to implement those strategies on a global scale, with markets being very different, stakeholder expectations and government regulations varying.

Participants from the HR departments stated that they see people as an enabler for the other two pillars. Even though people has not been focused on in the past years, the attention on this pillar increases and was described as gaining in relevance in corporate strategies:

“I do not think that the people element has been highly focused on in this respect, but I would say that is a key enabler to both profit and planet”.

It became clear that HR sees people as a highly relevant resource, which can increase profit and drive sustainable innovation. To leverage the advantage gained through the people in an organization, companies have to invest in them and take care of their employees. Investments in people can be seen as a cost, but in the long-run it pays-off:

“If you have a strong purpose, you have engaged people, you have a high emotional commitment level, which means you have a much higher discretionary effort level of your employees, which means you perform better financially”.

The results indicate therefore, that the people pillar of sustainability will increase in importance in the coming years and is a key element in fulfilling sustainable strategies, while developing sustainable competitive advantage.

Multi-Stakeholder Perspective – Internal and External

Both, participants from the HR and sustainability departments, talked about a large variety of actions taken outside the company, taking into consideration external stakeholders. These actions include initiatives on a compliance level and some that go beyond compliance. From a compliance perspective, actions include for example supply chain code of conducts and regulations of supply chain footprints or corporate social responsibility. Participants mentioned supply chain

responsibility as one of the main impacts the companies have and take actions beyond compliance, for example trainings and investments. The aim is to empower societies to take action, educate people about sustainability and to take a step further rather than only complying with governmental regulations. Though most companies developed a global sustainability strategy, they acknowledged that there is no “one-size fits all” solution when operating in different markets and cultures:

“In Europe there is quite a lot of regulations, but of course . . . if we are buying raw materials from China, from India, . . . Brazil, we have a . . . risk-based focus . . . , potential problems” and

“Different cultural parameters, there are different environmental situations, different financial models, [...] that is why it is important to have like the global picture and . . . ‘a’ degree of localization”.

Therefore, there exist global ambitions to include external stakeholders into the sustainability strategies, as well as initiatives on a local basis. The need to differentiate between various initiatives depending on the country and culture could be seen as a paradox. It shows an unbalance between the ambitions towards different stakeholders and struggles to set global goals due to local challenges.

Opposing to the statements made in literature, participants stated that HR related initiatives also apply to external stakeholder. Local initiatives include, for example, support of farmers, improving education, providing work (for example to refugees), supporting social entrepreneurship, collaborating with UNICEF and the Red Cross and volunteering. Education, training and work play a key role to foster sustainability externally of the organization:

“We can support local communities for instance for education or local suppliers” and

“Providing internships, providing apprenticeship programs just to support the community”.

The results indicate that, opposing to the theoretical implications of the literature, companies take actions – on a corporate and HR level – not only with regards to internal stakeholders, but also externally. Taken from the statements made in the interviews, one can say that large businesses acknowledge their responsibility towards societies and the impact they can have to create positive change.

Therefore, even though companies struggle to set global ambitions, but rather adapt them to local contexts, they work towards including all stakeholders into their sustainability strategies.

Collaboration Between HR and Sustainability Departments

Since both HR and sustainability departments were interviewed and, as the results highlighted, HR departments have a larger impact on the people pillar of sustainability, it was of interest to determine the level of collaboration between those departments. Not all companies have had sustainability departments for a long time, but HR departments have a long history in companies. The results showed that four of the five companies encourage a close collaboration between the two departments:

“Sustainability is very much also within our communication department, and communication and HR is also always really close, so absolutely” and “You only make strategy come to life through the people, we work very closely together”.

The two departments collaborate for example on activities such as training, talent acquisition for the right talents, people and culture and other projects. However, one of the companies stated that, even though there might be some bridges between the departments, since sustainability is part of HR, the units work separately. Even though only one company made this statement, it appears that HR often rather follows the sustainability strategy than influences it:

“Especially the HR side of sustainability, it cannot be just HR driven, . . . it has to be driven from the top or else it is going to have limited impact” and

“We have common goals and we cooperate a lot together . . . we follow the sustainability strategy and not like making our own”.

Therefore, it remains unclear how closely these departments actually cooperate. It might be that, with the increasing focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, the influence of the HR departments on sustainability strategies will increase:

“That [due to discussions about UN goals] is also why ED&I (equity, diversity and inclusion) has become such a big topic now . . . we will see more, much more on that part”.

Consequently, it might be that even in the companies where HR and sustainability are separate units until now, there will be a closer collaboration in the future.

COVID-19

The results showed that participants from both HR and sustainability departments agreed upon the fact that the pandemic did not have a large impact on sustainability strategies. However, one aspect that got highlighted due to COVID-19 was the people pillar:

“It is people that will be affected by the COVID-19 . . . it is the people agenda that is more affected”;

“HR is getting on the table more and more and it should and COVID-19 has helped that”;

“Massively changed things, those things [support employees, support communities and societies] were just again nice to have before . . . I think we are going to see a permanent shift and . . . what is the definition of looking after your people and making sure they are safe, healthy and engaged” and

“We have seen sustainability is much more than environment or carbon footprint, or . . . climate change, it is about health and wellness, it is about remote working, it is about engaging, it is about so much more, the human experience of our employees . . . I think those things are suddenly very much in our consciousness and they were not so much before”.

This shows that the people aspect of sustainability might not have been as important before the pandemic, but has and will increase in importance.

Companies were reminded of the social responsibility they have towards internal and external stakeholders. During the pandemic, these companies have supported local communities with protective and home office equipment, education, training, donations, health and safety measures. The safety of employees was in most companies the number one priority. Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted difference between various employee groups, for example white collar employees being able to work from home while blue collar employees did not have this option. It also sets a focus on organizational culture, since companies experienced difficulties to maintain their culture when employees are not coming to the office:

“It is hard to create a work culture during the pandemic . . . we need to . . . make sure everyone feels comfortable and that everyone feels safe to go back to work and interact with people”.

Additionally, HR departments experienced difficulties to reach their equality ambitions, since it was harder to recruit people:

“It is harder to recruit and follow the gender equality . . . it is easier to just recruit the men than to use our energy and strategy on recruiting women”.

Therefore, trade-offs had to be made between different priorities and the main focuses were to keep employees safe and the business running. On the positive side, a long-term effect will probably be that employees will have more flexibility in their work arrangements.

Results – Sustainability and Annual Reports

The result section regarding the sustainability reports has been split into two sections. First, sustainability reports of the companies interviewed and second all sustainability reports. This section functions as a support of the results of the interviews. In the following, it will be focused on the most interesting results which provide additional data on top of the interview results. An overview of the results can be found in the Appendix in the coding table (see Appendix E).

Sustainability Reports of Companies Interviewed

SGDs

As stated before, all five companies integrated the SDGs into their sustainability strategy. The reports showed that one company mainly stated SDGs related to the planet and the profit pillar. One company integrated all SDGs into its strategy. The other companies integrated SDGs related to all three pillars. The balancing of the three pillars can be seen in the most frequently mentioned SDGs: Goal 13 (climate action) was mentioned by all five companies and the goals 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 8 (decent work and economic growth) each by four companies. These three goals can be linked to the pillars environment, people and profit.

The Three Pillars (People, Planet, Profit) of Sustainability

The interviews showed that the five companies mostly associated environmental and climate topics with sustainability and that the focus on the people pillar is slowly increasing. An analysis of the reports supported these results and highlighted that sustainability is mostly defined through the planet pillar. However, the reports also stated that environmental practices are seen as part of profit generation and sustainable growth, for example through investments in new environment focused business branches, products and services. Furthermore, several sustainable actions regarding the people pillar were also mentioned – for example training and development of employees, responsible wage practices or decent work (all HR practices). Since the reports are based on standards and guidelines, it is not always clear which actions are mentioned for compliance reasons and which are having a high priority on the companies' agendas.

Balance, Struggles and Challenges Between The Three Pillars

The reports underlined the challenges mentioned by the interviewees. One additional challenge that was mentioned, on a corporate level, was the development of sustainable and/or healthy products that are still affordable. This challenge does not only present the *efficiency-responsibility-paradox*, but highlights the tensions between all three pillars. Producing more sustainably involves higher costs, but to make it affordable for a broader range of the society and foster sustainable behaviors of people, the products need to be sold at a cheaper price. Therefore, the goals require opposing actions. Regarding the balancing of the three pillars, the reports added an aspect related to sustainable HR practices. Some companies stated that they use bonuses to foster innovation and initiatives which support safety, social responsibility, leadership, environment and climate targets: *"Targets relating to safety, environment and climate change, social responsibility, compliance and leadership expectations constitute a substantial part of the annual bonus plan"*. Consequently, this supports the statement made by participants from the HR departments – stating that people (employees) can serve as enablers for the other two pillars – creating a balance between the three pillars.

Multi-Stakeholder Perspective – Internal and External

The reports highlighted a range of actions taken inside and outside of the organization, therefore supporting the results of the interviews. It seemed that most external actions mentioned in the reports have a compliance focus, for example actions taken along the supply chain (supplier code of conduct, etc.). Nonetheless, actions beyond compliance are also listed, being for example the education and empowerment of communities or partnerships with non-profit organizations.

COVID-19

In general, the reports supported the statements made by the interviewees. One aspect differed however between the results of the interviews and the reports. The participants in the interviews stated that COVID-19 did not have a severe impact on the companies' sustainability strategies and initiatives. In the reports more challenges regarding financial, social and environmental aspects were mentioned. The reports stated for example: "*Covid-19 created significant social, operational and market challenges*", "*the pandemic put us all to the test. It challenged our operations, our employees, our customers and the world around us*". Therefore, the question arises how these different results emerged. One possible explanation is that the reports are not always written by the same people which develop and implement sustainability strategies (stated by an interviewee after the interview).

Sustainability Reports of All Companies

SDGs

Examining the sustainability reports of all companies, five out of 47 (since the other five reports belong to the companies interviewed) (12.8%) did not mention SDGs. Six companies integrated all SDGs prioritizing a few. As for the five companies interviewed, the most frequently mentioned goals were 8 (decent work and economic growth, 29 companies/62%), 13 (climate action, 28 companies/60%) and 12 (responsible consumption and production, 19 companies/40%). An additional goal that appeared more frequently than others was goal 5 (gender equality, 20 companies/43%). Considering the types of goals,

one can say that there seems to be an equal share of goals related to the three pillars; planet, people and profit.

The Three Pillars (People, Planet, Profit) of Sustainability

The analysis of the various reports showed that most companies do not mention the three pillars of sustainability consciously. Some companies used all three terms “environment” or “planet”, “social” or “people”, and “economy” or “profit” to describe their sustainability strategy, for example Deloitte, DNV, H&M, Hapag-Lloyd and KPMG. Deloitte, was the only company mentioning the term “triple bottom line”. KPMG stated that for the first time, environmental, social and governmental (ESG, including prosperity) ambitions were integrated in one strategy. Nonetheless, indirectly, most companies stated actions taken related to all three pillars.

As the five companies interviewed, the other 47 reports showed that the reporting mostly sets a focus on sustainability with regards to environmental aspects. The most common actions mentioned were: reducing emission, using renewable energy, foster sustainable production and packaging, develop new sustainable products and services and circular economy. Especially interesting were the actions taken in companies which operate in industries which are not sustainable. An example would be the transportation industry (shipping, airlines, etc.). In order to become more sustainable (from an environmental perspective), companies in this industry invest into research and development of green shipping, alternative fuel sources and so on. This underlines the statements made by interview participants, that sustainability is a must have in order to compete in the market.

Regarding the second pillar – profit – most companies did not include a specific section on financial actions taken, which is in line with the results of the interviews. However, an analysis of the reports showed that companies indeed set a focus on the financial pillar. Most frequently, reports mentioned green financing through long-term investments in sustainable products, production and growth, and responsible purchasing. Furthermore, investments are made in employees and newly graduates, to develop in the future needed skills and foster innovation. Additionally, employees are supported by initiatives to ensure fair compensations,

economic stability and to reduce the pay-gap between men and women. To encourage sustainable thinking and innovation, some companies integrated sustainable value creation as a factor in the compensation system (for example in form of bonuses).

Actions taken for people within the companies (HR focused) were similar to the ones mentioned by the five companies that were interviewed (e.g. health and safety measures; training and development; human rights; anti-corruption). Another topic that was frequently mentioned was diversity, equality and inclusion (D, E & I). Since interviewees stated that D, E & I is a new topic in the agenda, it was interesting to notice that a large amount of companies reported on initiatives or goals regarding this topic. An examination of a few old reports showed that D, E & I started to be integrated in the reports around three years ago (references are included in Appendix C). The question arises if these companies do not only report on it due to given reporting standards, but also take increasing actions. Either way, it could be interpreted as a sign of the increasing focus on the people pillar of sustainability and a larger focus of HRM on sustainability.

Balance, Struggles and Challenges Between The Three Pillars

Sustainability Paradoxes

Not all companies made statements regarding the balancing of the three pillars of sustainability and tensions between goals and actions taken. Nonetheless, the reports included a range of relevant data which could be linked to some of the sustainability paradoxes in organizations in general and HR specifically, and which supported the results from the interviews. On a corporate level, the data from the results can be linked to the struggle between short-term and long-term ambitions. Reports stated, for example, that they *“Must consider long-term risks and opportunities, not just short-term gains”*, or talked about the struggle between the *“failure to ensure sufficient investment in future growth areas and reinvestment in existing services”*. Therefore, the challenges include the tensions between short-term needs of the organization (day-to-day business transactions, maintaining the business) and long-term ambitions (new energy resources, new sustainable innovations, future skills). They only have a certain share of their profit that they can reinvest into long-term ambitions and depending on the level

of uncertainty in the business environment, the focus lies on either securing the current business needs or future needs. Another challenge that appeared in the reports was the conflict between, offering sustainable products and services at a price that increases the revenue, while creating affordable solutions. An example would be creating more sustainable fashion products while selling them at an affordable price. Therefore, companies seem to experience tensions between the goals of the three pillars.

Challenges that companies mentioned and could be linked to the *efficiency-responsibility-paradox* are the following. As stated by participants in the interviews, the reports showed that in order to be able to support social and environmental goals, companies have to be financially stable and have a large capital which can be used for investments. A company stated for example: “*our ability to deliver on our strategic ambition rests on our ability to ensure robustness and profitability in all business areas, freeing up cash and allocating fresh capital where we see potential for greatest return*”. Consequently, companies struggle to fulfill their social obligations while at the same time reaching their economic (growth) goals or maintaining their business results: “*Overall our business activities have a positive impact, but may also at times have a negative impact on people, communities and nature*”. Making investments into environmental and social actions bears a certain financial risk for some companies and therefore, needs to be carefully considered. However, to stay in business, meet environmental challenges, drive sustainable development and meet societal expectations, companies need to become and act sustainable. Another HR-related aspect was that the balancing between investments in products and investments into employees provides a challenge for companies. While investments in research and development of products and services are seen as a direct link to profitable growth, investments into employee development are more long-term focused. Even though most reports mentioned investments into training and development of employees and their well-being, it did not appear as one of the main factors in the financial reporting. Finally, since the focus on diversity, equality and inclusion increased in most companies during the past years, companies aim to increase (for example) the female share of employees. While the conditions to fulfill those ambitions are good in some countries and industries,

they are more unfavorable in others. One company stated, for example, that they operate *“in critical competence areas that usually correspond to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) areas of education, there is a short supply of women, both as fresh graduates as well as experienced leaders. Additionally, we have operations in geographies with a historic shortage of women in the corporate sector”*. Increasing the share of women requires resources – financial, time, effort – and consequently, presents a tension between economic and social goals in companies.

Coping with Sustainability Paradoxes

Analyzing the data in the reports, a range of companies seemed to use the paradox lens analysis to develop solutions to overcome tensions between the various organizational goals and integrating them into one strategy. The focus of a large share of companies is to find a balance between achieving the long-term objective of sustainable economic growth and social responsibility while reducing the impact on the environment. Some companies stated the ambition to use their products and services to be more sustainable and simultaneously create value for the organization and its shareholders. Therefore, to balance the pillars of environment and finance, companies set the goal to make sustainability profitable. Additionally, companies mentioned people as their most important asset. To integrate people into the sustainability strategy, organizations empower them to solve sustainability challenges, take action and making them a part of the solution: *“an inclusive culture, which values diversity, leads to better decision-making, drives greater creativity and innovation, better meets the needs of our clients and is more motivating for our people”*, or *“despite the economic challenges of the past few months, we have continued to invest heavily in the training and development of our people, new products and services, technology and in enhancing the quality of the work that we do”*. A recurrent topic in the reports was that being sustainable is not a choice anymore *“being sustainable is a must”*. Only a few companies reported explicitly on the importance of balancing of the three pillars. Equinor devoted a section in its report on what it means to balance the pillars and stated that one has to move from only focusing on economic growth towards *“focusing on human wellbeing and the environment”*. Deloitte used the term “triple bottom line” to highlight the relevance of all three pillars. In general,

it could be distinguished between companies which see sustainability as a potential cost factor and companies which see it as an investment into the future, an opportunity and value creating. On the one hand, companies seeing sustainability as a risk or cost stated that the *“energy transition is high risk”* or talked about *“new technologies that could disrupt energy markets over time, or list business opportunities due to political decisions”*. On the other hand, companies seeing sustainability as an opportunity said that *“we’re setting out to prove that sustainability not only benefits people and planet, but that it also drives superior business performance”*, *“by emphasizing climate, environment, integrity and social responsibility, as well as by developing greener business and product offerings, . . . will reduce risks and create new profitable opportunities for the future”*, or *“safety and human rights make up the foundation for prosperity”*. Some companies even stated that the industry leaders of tomorrow have an integrated sustainability strategy. Companies stated that *“looking ten years into the future, we believe that sustainability is a pre-requisite for doing business”* and *“By emphasizing climate, environment, integrity and social responsibility, as well as by developing greener business and product offerings, . . . will reduce risks and create new profitable opportunities for the future”*.

A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective

The analysis of the reports supported the results of the interviews that companies take actions both internally and externally. While some organizations state in the reports that they take extensive actions to support sustainability for all stakeholders, others mention the broader stance on sustainability as a newer approach and as something that still needs to be improved: *“must consider the impact we create beyond our own company. We must support our nearly 1.5 billion consumers in making sustainable choices, and continuously empower our suppliers and customers to become more involved in this dynamic”*. As with the reports of the five companies interviewed, it seemed that the focus lays on compliance (for example supplier code of conduct). Actions taken beyond compliance include, for example, trainings for suppliers, employment of people from underprivileged communities, volunteering of employees in various projects, education of consumers and clients regarding sustainability. Furthermore, investments are taken to support suppliers, communities and non-profit

organizations: *“mentor members of their communities, connect with nonprofit organizations focused on education”*. These investments can also include pro-bono work. The reports also show that companies experience challenges when having to take all stakeholder perspective into account. Companies which operate globally are, for example, sometimes located in countries with political tensions and instabilities. In those countries it can happen that societies are suppressed and human rights are breached. Companies operating in those countries have to consider the needs of the business (e.g. resources), the needs of external and internal stakeholders and their social responsibility.

Impact of COVID-19

The results of the analyses of the reports showed that COVID-19 had a large impact on most organizations. This impact was mainly financial, but also societal. Employees had to be laid off in some companies, while others tried to avoid it. Considering the financial aspect, many organizations had to take cost reduction measures, especially in industries like air transportation, shipping, or hospitality. However, companies took actions to support all stakeholders. As highlighted in the interviews, one of the main priorities was to protect the workforce and ensure health and safety measures. A large share of the companies stated that the pandemic has highlighted the focus on people and on the importance of sustainability. Furthermore, while ensuring the stability of the businesses, companies supported stakeholders with donations, investments, bonds, grants and technology. To ensure the well-being of their employees, companies set a focus on work-life balance, provided more flexibility, gave health (also mental) support and provided office supplies. Organizations also collaborated with, for example, UNICEF or the Red Cross to support communities. Next to challenges, the pandemic also offered opportunities. Companies stated that it opened up a new way of working – more flexible work arrangements – and gave the opportunity to rethink responsibilities and initiatives to act more sustainable. The reduced traveling saved companies money and time and provided some environmental benefits: *“there also are tangible cost and environmental benefits to working remotely; reduced commuting, for example, can save families money and time, and reduce CO₂ emissions”*. While report stated that the pandemic *“highlighted the fundamental role that companies must play, alongside public authorities and*

civil society, to help build a more responsible, sustainable and inclusive world" and taking actions to support all stakeholders, it also had an impact on ongoing sustainability initiatives. Specifically, some companies stated that the pandemic led to setbacks in, for example, sustainable development, slowed down human rights initiatives and trainings. The reports showed that global collaboration is essential to create a sustainable future.

Discussion

Summary of Results and Theoretical Implications

The purpose of this research was to examine how organizations perceive sustainability, if and how they manage to balance the three pillars of sustainability, and which role HR takes regarding the development and implementation of sustainability strategies. Concretely, the research was based on the questions *"How do organizations in general and HRM specifically define Sustainability and manage the challenges related to the Sustainability Paradox?"* and *"What role does HRM play in the development and implementation of sustainability strategies?"*. In short, the results indicate that sustainability is mostly defined in terms of the environmental pillar. However, the people pillar is increasing in relevance. The financial aspect is often not directly associated with the term sustainability. Nonetheless, finance plays an important role when it comes to investments made to support sustainable initiatives. Organizations in general and HRM specifically experience various challenges when it comes to the Sustainability Paradox, but the results lead to the assumption that strategies increasingly aim at balancing the three pillars and integrating all aspects of sustainability. When it comes to the role of HRM, it becomes clear that it functions as an enabler rather than an active contributor to sustainability strategies. HRM takes mostly care of the people pillar of sustainability and is so far often limited in resources to create an active change.

More specifically, the analyses led to the following conclusions. The results indicate that most companies integrate the UN SDGs into their sustainability strategies. The SDGs are used as starting points to develop strategies. Moreover, it seems that companies choose SDGs related to all three pillars. The interviews showed that companies associate mostly the term planet with sustainability, which

was supported by the reports. However, interview participants stated that the importance of the people pillar of sustainability is slowly increasing and was highlighted due to the pandemic. The results also highlight the relevance of the financial aspect of sustainability. Even though finance is most of the time not directly mentioned as being a part of sustainability, both the results of interviews and reports suggest that finance is a key pillar of sustainability. Businesses must have a stable financial situation and large capital in order to make green investments. Companies who do not have a large budget, experience it as challenging to invest, for example, in research and development of green products and sustainable solutions. Consequently, even though sustainability might not always be defined with all three terms – planet, people and profit – all three pillars are relevant when it comes to sustainability strategies in organizations. The question remains however, to what extent organizations talk more sustainability than take actual actions.

Regarding Sustainable HRM, the results indicate that HR departments play in general more an enabling function than a strategic one with regards to sustainability. HRM has mainly an impact on the people pillar, developing strategies and implementing initiatives to support internal and external stakeholders with, for example, trainings, knowledge, fair treatment, or investments into their future. However, HR departments also have an impact on the other two pillars. The data of the interviews and reports shows that HRM uses, for example, bonuses and wages to rewards employees who contribute to sustainable innovations or inclusive behaviors. Furthermore, employees are encouraged to learn and think about the environment and climate, use more eco-friendly means of transportation and reduce waste. Finally, the HR department takes care of employer branding and recruitment processes. Therefore, HRM provides organizations with the skills that are needed to foster sustainable innovation and communicate the importance of sustainability to external stakeholders. It can be said that, even though HRM might not always be a direct part of corporate sustainability strategies yet, they have a large impact on the implementation of sustainability initiatives and enable organizations to become more sustainable. These results support the findings of earlier literature that organizations set an increasing focus on HRM and specifically sustainable HRM

(Ehnert et al., 2016, see literature review). However, as stated by earlier literature (Katarzyna, 2021; Kramar, 2013), there exists no common structure and strategy on Sustainable HRM and HR departments see their roles as enablers of corporate sustainability strategies rather than developing own sustainability strategies. According to the interviews and reports, the importance of sustainability and sustainable HRM got especially highlighted due to COVID-19. The pandemic led to companies to set a stronger focus on the people pillar of sustainability and take care of organizational stakeholders. Consequently, the pandemic has increased the relevance of sustainable HRM. It is not clear though if this focus will stay after 2021.

This research was especially interested in the challenges that organizations and HR departments experience when setting sustainability goals and implementing actions to reach their ambitions and how they handle these challenges. On a corporate level, the results show that organizations experience various struggles with taking all aspects of sustainability into consideration. These struggles occur between short- and long-term ambitions, internal and external expectations, and especially financial goals and environmental or social initiatives. Therefore, the results confirm Hahn et al.'s (2014) model of the different dimensions of tensions between the three pillars of sustainability. However, the data also shows that organizations work towards balancing the three pillars and integrating all of the aspects of sustainability into their strategies and actions taken. From a Sustainable HRM perspective, the results can be linked to several paradoxes described in the literature (Ehnert, Harry & Zink, 2014). Most common were tensions between financial and social or environmental aspects, the *efficiency-responsibility-paradox*. Since HR departments do not have large budgets, they struggle to balance investments made to increase the profitability of organizations versus investments in people and environmental initiatives.

Another reoccurring paradox was the *present-future-paradox*, indicating that HR manager experience difficulties to balance the need to increase short-term efficiency and revenue while planning for future needs of the organizations and its stakeholders (internally and externally). The interviews with the HR departments confirmed that HRM is sometimes too short-term oriented (Ehnert, Harry & Zink,

2014), due to the fact that they have little financial capital and need to invest a part of it into short-term focused actions. Therefore, the results confirm that there exist various challenges due to the sustainability paradox in HRM. Nonetheless, the results highlight that companies are working towards integrating all three pillars and aim to balance them. Organizations increasingly see the value of balancing all three pillars and using HRM to foster sustainability. Due to the increased focus of HR departments on sustainability, the importance of the people pillar in fulfilling sustainability ambitions got emphasized. Furthermore, the results indicate that organizations increasingly are taking actions internally and externally. Since internal and external stakeholders have high expectations towards companies, regarding all aspects of sustainability, companies experience a higher pressure to take care of the needs of all stakeholders (Ehnert et al., 2016). Most actions taken outside organizations are due to compliance reasons, but the results indicated that companies are taking increasingly actions beyond the compliance level. Hence, the results do not confirm statements made in literature about the one-sided (internal) focus of sustainability strategies (Ehnert et al., 2016; Hahn et al., 2014), but rather highlight the need to integrate all stakeholder perspectives into the strategies (Alcaraz et al., 2019; Stahl et al., 2019). This can also be related to the Freeman's (2010) stakeholder theory, which argues that organizations should not just create value for shareholders, but also for internal and external stakeholders.

Practical Implications

As stated by an interview, being sustainable “*is not just a nice to have, it is a must have*”. The data and research highlights that to stay in business and lead the market, companies have to integrate sustainability into their core business strategies (Berns et al., 2009). Based on the interviews and reports, the following implications can be derived. Organizations have to integrate not just environmental and financial aspects of sustainability, but also set a larger focus on the people pillar and balance the three pillars of sustainability. Furthermore, HR departments have to develop clear definitions of what Sustainable HRM means in their organization and which role they play in the corporate sustainability strategy. Organizations have to acknowledge the potential positive impact that Sustainable HRM can have on their sustainability ambitions and should include HRM into

strategical decision-making processes on a corporate level. Specific actions that HRM could take are, for example, determining skills needed in the future, develop their employees and also the future workforce (taking care of communities, student, etc.). Developing future skills will increase the flexibility and adaptability of organizations and help them to cope with crises. Furthermore, long-term investments (e.g. in green solutions, training, employee well-being, etc.) should not be seen as cost factors and risks, but as opportunities to secure the long-term survival of companies. In HRM this includes, for example, also investments into diversity, equality and inclusion (D, E & I) programs. Nowadays, D, E & I is a nice to have, but as the interviews showed, it will become a must have. These programs highlight the importance of taking care of people internally and externally of organizations. At the end, organizations are built by people. Without employees, communities, clients and societies, organizations could not survive (“Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals, 2021”). Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to acknowledge the people pillar of sustainability and the impact it has on the long-term survival of companies and societies. External and internal stakeholders have high expectations towards companies and their responsibilities (“Alcaraz et al., 2019). Hence, organizations have to take into consideration more than just shareholder needs, but set a larger emphasis on balancing internal and external stakeholder needs.

Limitations and Future Research

This research had several limitations which could have influenced the outcome. As mentioned before, using qualitative data bears the issue of trustworthiness, which contains four dimensions: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* (Lincoln, Guba, & Piotta, 1985). First, even though the interview participants were ensured that the data would be treated anonymously, there is the risk that they stated what they thought sounds best (regarding the image of their companies), which influences the *credibility* of the findings. Additionally, it was aimed at being objective when interpreting the data. However, it cannot be fully excluded that own values influenced the analysis, implying an issue of *confirmability*. Furthermore, the reports are based mostly on reporting buildings and therefore, some of the actions stated are potentially only included on a compliance level. Consequently, future research should consider to develop

quantitative analysis (surveys, etc.) to analyze the sustainability paradox and the balancing of the three pillars in organizations and Sustainable HRM. Second, the data only included large companies, limiting the *transferability* of results. Small businesses still make up a large share of the global market (The World Bank, 2021-b) and therefore, it might be relevant to take their perspective into account. Since small businesses often have not the financial capital to foster sustainability, it could be of interest to see how they perceive sustainability, what type of challenges they experience with regard to the sustainability paradox and how they solve these challenges. A hypothesis would be that very small businesses do not consider sustainability in their strategies (at least not consciously), due to their lack of resources. Third, the data only included companies who operate (next to other locations) in Europe and Scandinavia, also limiting the *transferability* of results. Hence, it would be relevant to look at data from, for example, Asian or South American companies. Europe has very strict regulations regarding the environment and human rights issues (etc.), while countries in other continents have fewer regulations. Consequently, there could be a difference between actions taken by European and American companies and, for example, Asian companies. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic situation has had a large impact on societies and companies. Since the pandemic continues beyond the year 2020, the data does not include a long-term perspective of the consequences of the pandemic and how it changed companies' perspectives on sustainability and specifically, their perspective on the people pillar. This suggests a potential *dependability* of the results on the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, future research could examine whether the pandemic has long-term effects on sustainability strategies and the increased relevance of actions taken in HRM (taking care of people inside and outside the organizations).

Conclusion

Sustainability is a topic that got on the agenda of organizations more and more during the past years (Berns et al., 2009; Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014). As the interviews showed, companies slowly move from mainly obeying to government guidelines towards taking actions beyond a compliance perspective and aim at becoming markets leaders in acting sustainably. As indicated by the results and literature (Berns et al., 2009), it is not enough anymore to take small actions to stay on top of the competition, but companies have to foster sustainable innovations and lead with good examples. Since organizations employ the people in societies, they have a large responsibility to act responsibly and be sustainable. Organizations are able to have an impact on societies, due to the products they sell, the knowledge they spread, how they take care of people inside and outside the organization, and how they invest their capital. Therefore, it is essential that companies are aware of the fact that sustainability contains three aspects: care of the planet, care of people and investments (profit) (Ehnert et al., 2016). For most companies, it is challenging to balance the three pillars and integrate all of them equally into their strategies (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Hahn et al., 2014). Nonetheless, it is essential that organizations tackle these challenges and broaden their stance on sustainability. This research showed that some companies already started to increase their focus on all three pillars and managed to integrate all three perspectives into one strategy. However, it also showed that often it is not acknowledged which important part HRM and Sustainable HRM can play to reach sustainability ambitions. Interviews showed that, unfortunately, HR departments are often low on budget and struggle to set a large focus on sustainability. They rather follow the corporate sustainability strategies than develop own strategies. Sustainable HRM could potentially have a large positive impact since HR can acquire the talent needed to foster innovation, train employees and develop future skills, spread knowledge internally and externally of the organization, increase equality and empower communities (to name a few actions). The future will show if the pandemic increased the focus on the people side of sustainability and if more companies will aim to integrate all three pillars into their ambitions. Organizations can create a positive change in societies and Sustainable HRM can act as an enabler for these ambitions.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank our thesis supervisor Wajda Wikhamn, who supported us during the whole process and gave us great feedback and advice. We appreciated all the input and constructive critique she gave us; it helped us to develop our research topic and questions. Furthermore, we would like to thank our families, our partner in crimes (significant others), and friends who supported us throughout the past year. They motivated us, with humor, food, and energy. This has been a great experience. Thank you very much for putting all the time and effort.

References

- Alexander, A., De Smet, A., & Mysore, M. (2021). Reimagining the postpandemic workforce. Retrieved 14 April 2021, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-postpandemic-workforce>
- Amis, J., & Janz, B. (2020). Leading Change in Response to COVID-19. *The Journal Of Applied Behavioral Science*, 56(3), 272-278. doi: 10.1177/0021886320936703
- Aust, I., Matthews, B., & Muller-Camen, M. (2020). Common Good HRM: A paradigm shift in Sustainable HRM?. *Human Resource Management Review*, 30(3), 100705. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.100705>
- Alcaraz, J. M., Susaeta, L., Suarez, E., Colón, C., Gutiérrez-Martínez, I., Cunha, R., Leguizamón, F., Idrovo, S., Weisz, N., Correia, . F., & Pin, J. R. (2019). The human resources management contribution to social responsibility and environmental sustainability: explorations from Ibero America. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(22), 3166–3189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1350732>
- Bansal, P. & Des Jardine, M. (2014). Business sustainability: It is about time. *Strategic Organization*, 12(1), 70–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127013520265>
- Bell, E., Bryman, A., & Harley, B. (2019). *Business research methods* (Fifth ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berns, M., Townend, A., Khayat, Z., Balagopal, B., Reeves, M., Hopkins, M., & Kruschwitz, N. (2009). Sustainability and Competitive Advantage. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 51(1). Retrieved from https://image-src.bcg.com/Images/MIT_Sustainability_tcm56-125057.pdf
- Caligiuri, P., De Cieri, H., Minbaeva, D., Verbeke, A., & Zimmermann, A. (2020). International HRM insights for navigating the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications for future research and practice. *Journal Of International Business Studies*, 51(5), 697-713. doi: 10.1057/s41267-02000335-9

- Coronavirus: How the world of work may change forever. (2021). Retrieved 13 April 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201023-coronavirus-how-will-the-pandemic-change-the-way-we-work>
- Cummins, K. (2021). Sustainability is more than just a buzzword | The Engineer. Retrieved 23 June 2021, from <https://www.theengineer.co.uk/sustainability-is-more-than-just-a-buzzword/>
- Del Giudice, M., Khan, Z., De Silva, M., Scuotto, V., Caputo, F., & Carayannis, E. (2017). The microlevel actions undertaken by owner-managers in improving the sustainability practices of cultural and creative small and medium enterprises: A United Kingdom–Italy comparison. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 38(9), 1396–1414. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2237>
- Development Reform | United to Reform. (2021). Retrieved 22 April 2021, from <https://reform.un.org/content/development-reform>
- Ehnert, I., Harry, W., & Zink, K. (2014). *Sustainability and Human Resource Management : Developing Sustainable Business Organizations* (1st ed. 2014. ed., CSR, Sustainability, Ethics & Governance). Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg : Imprint: Springer.
- Ehnert, I., Parsa, S., Roper, I., Wagner, M., & Muller-Camen, M. (2016). Reporting on sustainability and HRM: a comparative study of sustainability reporting practices by the world's largest companies. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(1), 88–108. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.bi.no/10.1080/09585192.2015.1024157>
- Freeman, R. E. (2010). *Stakeholder theory:the state of the art*. Cambridge University Press.
- Getting Governments Organised to Deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals. (2021). Retrieved 24 April 2021, from <https://www.oecd.org/gov/SDGs-Summary-Report-WEB.pdf>
- Hahn, T., Pinkse, J., Preuss, L., & Figge, F. (2014). Tensions in Corporate Sustainability: Towards an Integrative Framework. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 127(2), 297–316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2047-5>

- He, H., & Harris, L. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy. *Journal Of Business Research*, 116, 176-182. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.030
- Hengst, I., Jarzabkowski, P., Hoegl, M., & Muethel, M. (2020). Toward a Process Theory of Making Sustainability Strategies Legitimate in Action. *Academy Of Management Journal*, 63(1), 246-271. doi: 10.5465/amj.2016.0960
- Katarzyna, P.-S. (2021). Human resources development as an element of sustainable HRM – with the focus on production engineers. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 278, 124008–124008. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.124008>
- Kerrigan, S., & Kulasooriya, D. (2021). The sustainability transformation. Retrieved 23 June 2021, from <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/strategy/sustainable-transformation-in-business.html>
- Kiron, D., Unruh, G., Reeves, M., Kruschwitz, N., Rubel, H., & Zum Felde, A. M. (2017). Corporate Sustainability at a Crossroads. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 58(4).
- Kramar, R. (2013). Beyond strategic human resource management: is sustainable human resource management the next approach? *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(8), 1069–1089. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.816863>
- Lincoln, Y. S., Guba, E. G., & Pilotta, J. J. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4), 438–439. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Manuti, A., Giancaspro, M., Molino, M., Ingusci, E., Russo, V., & Signore, F. et al. (2020). “Everything Will Be Fine”: A Study on the Relationship between Employees’ Perception of Sustainable HRM Practices and Positive Organizational Behavior during COVID19. *Sustainability*, 12(23), 10216. doi: 10.3390/su122310216
- Mazur, B., & Walczyna, A. (2020). Bridging Sustainable Human Resource Management and Corporate Sustainability. *Sustainability*, 12(21), p.8987.

- Millard, J. (2021). Impacts of COVID-19 on social development and implications for the just transition to sustainable development. Retrieved 27 April 2021, from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/Impacts-of-COVID-19-on-social-development-and-implications-for-the-just-transition-to-sustainable-development-4-8-20.pdf>
- Multinational Corporations in International Law. (2021). Retrieved 24 April 2021, from <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199796953/obo-9780199796953-0049.xml>
- Notification Form for personal data | NSD. (2021). Retrieved 6 January 2021, from <https://www.nsd.no/en/data-protection-services/notification-form-for-personal-data/>
- OECD. (2021-a). Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets. Retrieved 24 April 2021, from <https://www.oecd.org/sdd/measuring-distance-to-the-sdgs-targets.htm>
- OECD. (2021-b). OECD and the Sustainable Development Goals: Delivering on universal goals and targets. Retrieved 24 April 2021, from <https://www.oecd.org/dac/sustainable-development-goals.htm>
- Ozanne, L. K., Phipps, M., Weaver, T., Carrington, M., Luchs, M., Catlin, J., Gupta, S., Santos, N., Scott, K., & Williams, J. (2016). *Managing the Tensions at the Intersection of the Triple Bottom Line: A Paradox Theory Approach to Sustainability Management*. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 35(2), 249–261. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm.15.143>
- Podgorodnichenko, N., Edgar, F., & McAndrew, I. (2020). The role of HRM in developing sustainable organizations: Contemporary challenges and contradictions. *Human Resource Management Review*, 30(3), 100685. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.04.001>
- Ren, S., & Jackson, S. E. (2019). HRM institutional entrepreneurship for sustainable business organizations. *Human Resource Management Review*, 30(3), 100691. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.100691>
- Reporting on the SDGs | UN Global Compact. (2021). Retrieved 22 April 2021, from <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/take-action/action-platforms/sdg-reporting>

- Rosati, F., & Faria, L. G. D. (2019). Business contribution to the Sustainable Development Agenda: Organizational factors related to early adoption of SDG reporting. *Corporate Social-Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 26(3), 588–597. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1705>
- Stahl, G. K., Brewster, C. J., Collings, D. G., & Hajro, A. (2019). Enhancing the role of human resource management in corporate sustainability and social responsibility: A multi-stakeholder, multidimensional approach to HRM. *Human Resource Management Review*, 30(3), 100708. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.100708>
- Stankevičiūtė, Ž., & Savanevičienė, A. (2018). Designing Sustainable HRM: The Core Characteristics of Emerging Field. *Sustainability* (Basel, Switzerland), 10(12), 4798. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10124798>
- Sustainability | Academic Impact. (2020). Retrieved 8 June 2020, from <https://academicimpact.un.org/content/sustainability>
- Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals. (2021). Retrieved 22 April 2021, from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- The World Bank. (2021-a). The Global Economic Outlook During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Changed World. Retrieved 27 April 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/06/08/the-global-economic-outlook-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-changed-world>
- The World Bank. (2021-b). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) Finance. Retrieved 23 June 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/smefinance>
- THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development. (2021). Retrieved 22 April 2021, from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Van der Byl, C. A., & Slawinski, N. (2015). Embracing Tensions in Corporate Sustainability. *Organization & Environment*, 28(1), 54–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026615575047>
- Wikhamn, W. (2019). Innovation, sustainable HRM and customer satisfaction. *International Journal Of Hospitality Management*, 76, 102-110. doi: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.04.009

Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Category	Item
<i>General questions</i>	Which Industry is the company in?
	What is the company size?
	Is the company an international/global one or national?
	Which departments do you work in?
<i>Sustainability</i>	When hearing the term sustainability what comes into your mind?
	How incorporated is sustainability into the business strategy?
	How would you describe the organization's sustainability strategy?
	What is the main focus of the sustainability strategy?
	Which actions are taken inside and outside the company?
	What challenges occur when developing a sustainability strategy and how do you resolve them?
	How do you define the pillars of sustainability? (Relevant if it is unclear whether the interviewee is aware of all three pillars)
	How do you use the organizational culture to support sustainability?
	Does company have a strategy and aim to fulfill the SDG's? If so, which and ones and how?
	(If a global company) Do you differentiate the sustainability strategy between various locations of the company? If so, how?
<i>Current Situation</i>	Does the current situation (COVID-19) affect the company's sustainability strategy?
	How does current situation (COVID-19) affect the company's sustainability strategy?
<i>Future strategy</i>	How do you define the organization's short-term and long-term sustainability goals?
	How are you going to implement future strategies?
	Do you think the focus of the strategy is going to change in the future? If so, how?
<i>HR vs sustainability department</i>	Does the HR-department / sustainability department work together with sustainability / HR department? If so, how?
	(If no current collaboration) Could you imagine to collaborate in the future?

Appendix B: Descriptives of Companies

Company	Global or not	Size (Employee number)	Industry
ABB	Global	110,000	Technology
Accenture	Global	537,000	Consulting
Atea	Europe	7,400	IT
Avinor	Norwegian	3,000	Airport operator
Bama	Norwegian	1,700	Wholesale
Bayer	Global	99,000	Pharmaceutics
Capgemini Invent	Global	270,000	Consulting
Coca-cola	Global	700,000	Beverage
Color line	Europe	2,300	Shipping
Coop	Norwegian	18,000	Retail
Deloitte	Global	330,000	Consulting
DNB	Global	9,000	Financial services
DNV	Global	11,500	Consulting
Elkj�p	Nordic	11,000	Retail
Equinor	Global	21,000	Energy
EY	Global	300,000	Consulting
H&M	Global	153,000	Retail
Hapag - Lloyd	Global	13,000	Shipping
Helly Hansen	Global	1,200	Retail
Hydro	Global	36,000	Metal
IKEA	Global	217,000	Retail
Jotun	Global	9,800	Chemicals
Kongsberg	Global	11,000	Technology
KPMG	Global	227,000	Consulting
K�hne & Nagel	Global	78,200	Transport
L'or�al	Global	88,000	Cosmetics
McKinsey	Global	30,000	Consulting
Nestl�	Global	273,000	Consumer goods

Norsk Gjenvinning	Norwegian	1,750	Recycling
Norwegian air shuttle	Global	9,388*	Airline
Orkla	Global	18,000	Consumer goods
Ovako	Global	3,000	Metal
Porsche	Global	36,000	Manufacturer
PWC	Global	284,000	Consulting
Schibsted	Europe	5,000	Media
Sparebank	Norwegian	1,600	Finance
Statkraft	Global	4,500	Energy
Storebrand	Nordic	1,824	Insurance
Stressless/Ekornes	Global	2,100	Manufacturer
Telenor	Global	18,000	Tele-communications
Tine	Global	4,200	Consumer goods
UMOE Restaurants (Peppes Pizza, Starbucks, TGI Fridays, Blender)	Nordic	1,600	Hospitality
Unilever	Global	149,000	Consumer goods
Veidekke	Nordic	8,100	Construction
Vinmonopolet	Norwegian	1,800	Retail
Visma	Europe	8,500	IT
Volvo AB	Global	96,000	Manufacturer
VY	Norwegian	11,577	Transport
Wilhelmsen	Global	8,700	Shipping
Yara	Global	16,000	Chemicals
Yinson	Global	1,300	Energy
Zalando	Global	15,000	Fashion E-commerce

*before pandemic

Appendix C: Sustainability and Annual Report References

Company	Reference
ABB	ABB. (2021). <i>Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://sustainabilityreport.abb.com/2020/
Accenture	Accenture. (2021). <i>The Power of Change, Annual Report 2020</i> . https://www.accenture.com/no-en/about/responsible-business/people
Atea	ATEA. (2021). <i>Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://www.atea.com/corporate-responsibility/sustainability/
Avinor	Avinor. (2021). <i>Annual and Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://avinor.no/globalassets/_konsern/om-oss/rappporter/en/avinors-annual-and-sustainability-report-2020.pdf
Bama	Bama. (2020). <i>Annual Report 2019</i> . https://www.bama.no/siteassets/bama/om-bama/presserom/arsrappporter/bama-annual-report-2019.pdf
Bayer	Bayer. (2021). <i>Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://www.bayer.com/sites/default/files/2021-02/Bayer-Sustainability-Report-2020.pdf
Capgemini Invent	Capgemini. (2020). <i>Capgemini Environmental Sustainability Performance Report 2019/20</i> . https://www.capgemini.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Capgemini-Environment-Report-19-20.pdf
Coca-cola	Coca Cola. (2021). <i>2020 Integrated Report and Form 20-F</i> . https://s24.q4cdn.com/897379916/files/doc_financials/2020/ar/updated/CCEP-2020-Integrated-Report.pdf Coca-Cola. (2020). <i>2019 Business & Sustainability Report</i> . https://d1io3yog0oux5.cloudfront.net/_d601296e9b6ada7c6ecfc813ef8575b4/cocacolacompany/db/734/7242/annual_report/coca-cola-business-and-sustainability-report-2019+%281%29.pdf Coca-Cola. (2019). <i>2018 Business & Sustainability Report</i> . https://d1io3yog0oux5.cloudfront.net/_d601296e9b6ada7c6ecfc813ef8575b4/cocacolacompany/db/734/6024/annual_report/2018.pdf Coca-Cola. (2018). <i>2017 Annual Review</i> . https://d1io3yog0oux5.cloudfront.net/_d601296e9b6ada7c6ecfc813ef8575b4/cocacolacompany/db/734/6020/annual_report/2017.pdf
Color line	Color Group. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://www.colorline.no/polopoly_fs/7.134280.1616613882!/CG-CA21-01%20Årsrapport_2020_EN_spread.pdf

Coop	COOP. (2020). <i>Årsrapport 2019</i> . https://coop.no/globalassets/om-coop/arsmeldinger/2019/coop-arsrapport-2019.pdf
Deloitte	Deloitte. (2021). <i>2020 Global Impact Report</i> . https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/about-deloitte-global-report-full-version-2020.pdf
DNB	Dnb.no. (2021). <i>Sustainability library - DNB - Reporting 2020</i> . [online] Available at: < https://www.dnb.no/en/about-us/csr/sustainability-library.html > [Accessed 8 June 2021].
DNV	DNV. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://annualreport.dnv.com/2020#Overview
Elkjøp	Elkjøpnordic.com. 2021. <i>Why and how Sustainability, CSR, Culture Elkjøp Nordic</i> . [online] Available at: < https://www.elkjøpnordic.com/why-and-how#sustainability > [Accessed 8 June 2021].
Equinor	Equinor. (2021). <i>2020 Sustainability Report</i> . https://www.equinor.com/content/dam/statoil/documents/sustainability-reports/2020/equinor-sustainability-report-2020-LR.pdf
EY	EY. (2021). <i>EY Global Review 2020</i> . https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_gl/topics/global-review/2020/ey-global-review-2020-v3.pdf?download
H&M	H&M Group. (2021). <i>Sustainability Performance Report 2020</i> . https://hmgroupp.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HM-Group-Sustainability-Performance-Report-2020.pdf
Hapag - Lloyd	Hapag-Lloyd. (2021). <i>Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://website-mig.hlag.cloud/sustainability-report-2020/en/index.html
Helly Hansen	Helly Hansen. (2020). <i>Responsible Business Conduct 2019</i> . https://www.hellyhansen.com/content/dam/sustainability/helly-hansen-responsible-business-conduct-annual-report-2019.pdf
Hydro	Hydro. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://www.hydro.com/en/investors/reports-and-presentations/annual-reports/annual-report-2020/
IKEA	IKEA. (2021). <i>IKEA Sustainability Report FY20</i> . https://gbl-sc9u2-prd-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/aboutikea/pdfs/ikea-sustainability-reports/ikea_sustainability-report_fy20_.pdf?rev=51556c50bb594d1391e8a56f5ca05bed&hash=DFE0FADC2F7827888B421CACD310BB44

Jotun	Jotun. (2021). <i>Group Report 2020</i> . https://kunde.e-magasin.no/jotun/2020/groupreport/page_3.html
Kongsberg	Kongsberg. (2021). <i>Annual Report and Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://www.kongsberg.com/globalassets/corporate/investor-relations/annual-report/annual-report-and-sustainability-report-2020.pdf
KPMG	KPMG. (2021). <i>Our Impact Plan</i> . https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2021/01/our-impact-plan.pdf
Kühne & Nagel	Kuehne + Nagel. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://2020-annual-report.kuehne-nagel.com/sustainability/welcome-message-ceo
L'oréal	L'Oréal. (n.d.). <i>Our Sustainability Commitments for 2030</i> . https://www.loreal.com/-/media/project/loreal/brand-sites/corp/master/lcorp/documents-media/publications/14f/loreal-for-the-future--booklet.pdf L'Oréal. (2020). <i>2019 Annual Report</i> . https://www.loreal.com/-/media/project/loreal/brand-sites/corp/master/lcorp/documents-media/publications/annual-reports/lorealannualreport20193.pdf L'Oréal. (2018). <i>2017 Annual Report</i> . https://www.loreal-finance.com/system/files/2019-09/LOreal_2017_Annual_Report.pdf
McKinsey	McKinsey & Company. (2020). <i>Social Responsibility Report 2019</i> . https://www.mckinsey.com/~/_media/McKinsey/About%20Us/Social%20responsibility/Social-Responsibility-Report-2019-final.pdf
Nestlé	Nestlé. (2021). <i>2020 Annual Report</i> . https://www.nestle.com/media/pressreleases/allpressreleases/nestle-annual-report-2020
Norsk Gjenvinning	Norsk Gjenvinning. (2020). <i>NG Group Annual Report 2019</i> . https://translate.google.de/translate?hl=en&sl=no&u=http://www.nggroup.no/investor/&prev=search&pto=aue
Norwegian air shuttle	Norwegian Air Shuttle ASA. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://www.norwegian.com/globalassets/ip/documents/about-us/company/investor-relations/reports-and-presentations/annual-reports/annual-report-norwegian-2020.pdf
Orkla	Orkla. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://annualreport2020.orkla.com/assets/orkla/pdfs/2020/en/Orkla_Sustainability_Report_2020.pdf

Ovako	Ovako. (2020). <i>Sustainability Report 2019</i> . https://www.ovako.com/globalassets/downloads/sustainability/ovako-2019-sustainability-report.pdf
Porsche	Porsche. (2021). <i>Annual and Sustainability Report of Porsche AG 2020</i> . https://newsroom.porsche.com/dam/jcr:1bd57eb7-5be6-42c1-b7e8-39be8efb6a8c/Annual%20and%20Sustainability%20Report%202020%20Porsche%20AG.pdf
PWC	PWC. (2021). <i>Global Annual Review 2020</i> . https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/about-pwc/global-annual-review-2020/downloads/pwc-global-annual-review-2020-v2.pdf
Schibsted	Schibsted. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://static.schibsted.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/26152613/Schibsted-Annual-Report-2020.pdf
Sparebank1	SpareBank1. (2021). <i>2020 Annual Report</i> . https://annualreport.smn.no/2020/multimedia/1250/annual-report-2020.pdf
Statkraft	Statkraft. (2020). <i>Sustainability Report 2019</i> . https://www.statkraft.com/sustainability/our-reporting/ Statkraft. (2020). <i>Annual Report 2019</i> . https://www.statkraft.com/globalassets/0/.com/investor-relations/reports-and-presentations/2019/q4-2019/statkraft-as-annual-report-2019.pdf Statkraft. (2019). <i>Annual Report 2018</i> . https://www.statkraft.com/globalassets/0/.com/investor-relations/reports-and-presentations/2018/annual-report-2018/2018-annual-report-statkraft-as.pdf Statkraft. (2018). <i>Annual Report 2017</i> . https://www.statkraft.com/globalassets/0/.com/investor-relations/reports-and-presentations/2017/2017-statkraft-as-annual-report/statkraft-as-annual-report-2017.pdf Statkraft. (2017). <i>Corporate Responsibility Report 2016</i> . https://www.statkraft.com/globalassets/0/.com/sustainability/our-reporting/downloads-archive/2016/statkraft-corporate-responsibility-report-2016.pdf
Storebrand	Storebrand. (2021). <i>Årsrapport 2020</i> . https://www.storebrand.no/en/investor-relations/annual-reports/_/attachment/inline/071651e9-d8ed-4653-8df1-c3e8aecdb385:bf3b0cb6bc29c73f2f235e62dc13503c50a34008/2020-annual-report-storebrand-asa-270321.pdf

Stressless/ Ekornes	Ekornes. (2020). <i>Annual Report 2019</i> . http://ir.ekornes.no/presentations/reports
Telenor	Telenor. (2021). <i>Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://www.telenor.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TelenorAnnualReport2020ENG.pdf#page=62
Tine	Tine. (2021). <i>Årsrapport 2020</i> . https://www.tine.no/om-tine/baerekraft/TINE_aarsrapport_2020_baerekraft_interaktiv.pdf
UMOER Restauran ts	Umoerestaurants.no. (2021). <i>Health and Sustainability Strategy</i> . [online] Available at: < https://umoerestaurants.no/sustainability/?lang=en > [Accessed 8 June 2021].
Unilever	Unilever. (2021). <i>Unilever Annual Report and Accounts 2020</i> . https://www.unilever.com/reports-and-publications.html
Veidekke	Veidekke ASA. (2021). <i>Annual and Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://mb.cision.com/Public/17348/3314590/aae163d54e4d0470.pdf
Vinmono polet	Vinmonopolet. (2021). <i>Års- og bærekraftsrapport 2020</i> . https://www.vinmonopolet.no/vmp/content/vmp-om-oss/Ledelse/arsberetning
Visma	Visma. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://www.visma.com/globalassets/global/visma.com/annual_reports/visma_2020_annual_report.pdf
Volvo AB	Volvo Group. (2021). <i>Annual and Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://www.volvogroup.com/content/dam/volvo/volvo-group/markets/global/en-en/investors/reports-and-presentations/annual-reports/annual-and-sustainability-report-2020.pdf
VY	VY. (2021). <i>Annual and Sustainability Report 2020</i> . https://www.vy.no/en/the-vy-group/news-and-media/annual-and-sustainability-report-2020
Wilhelms en	Wilhelmsen. (2021). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://www.wilhelmsen.com/globalassets/investor-relations/annual-report/wilhelmsen-2020-annual-report.pdf
Yara	Yara. (2021). <i>Integrated Report 2020</i> . https://www.yara.com/investor-relations/latest-annual-report/
Yinson	Yinson. (2020). <i>Annual Report 2020</i> . https://www.insage.com.my/Upload/Docs/YINSON/Yinson%20FULL%20AR20_FINAL.pdf#view=Full&pagemode=bookmarks Yinson. (2019). <i>Annual Report 2019</i> . http://insage.com.my/ir/interactiveAR/YINSON/interactiveAR2019/

Zalando	Zalando. (2021). <i>Sustainability Progress Report 2020</i> . https://corporate.zalando.com/sites/default/files/media-download/Zalando_SE_Sustainability_Progress_Report_2020.pdf
---------	--

Appendix D: Coding Table of Interview Transcripts

Topic	Sub-Topics	Samples of coded transcripts
SDGs		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Looked at these goals and tried to map our activities and our strategies towards achieving a certain number of goals . . . I have seen very clear links between strategies, activities and which goals these will fulfill in the sustainability goals"; 2. "There are elements that are reflected . . . theme wise yes, but not word for word"; 3. "It is gender equality that I know we focus on"; 4. "We have picked eight SDGs that we kind of focus on but the target is kind of a cross between several SDGs"
Three pillars	All three pillars (SD)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "It is of course economic, environmental and also social sustainable topics"; 2. "So there are three aspects in the term that the UN uses and that we use as well when we talk about it [sustainability] . . . the first is climate and environment . . . the second is social conditions . . . and the third is finance, economics"; 3. "It [the strategy] is divided into three sections . . . one pillar is the fair and inclusive agenda, then we have one that goes for healthy and sustainable living and the third one is the circle of climate positive"; 4. "It is really important to have sustainability as part of your values, it is nothing you can add on top . . . because sustainability interfaces with all your . . . products to operations to priorities to investments", "Sustainability . . . is part of what we call corporate development, which includes business development and strategy, technology and sustainability"; 5. "It is not just a nice to have, it is a must have"
	Key words to describe sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Environment/climate, green, recycling, people/human/social, equality 2. One HR participant only mentioned the terms "circular economy", "reducing CO2 footprint". "Greener sources of energy", "electrification", "recycling", "natural resources", "reuse" to describe sustainability —> focus only on planet
	People	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Equal pay for equal jobs"; "fair and inclusive agenda" 2. "Improve skills . . . , everything from taking in apprentices towards all the local initiatives supporting school and education"; 3. "Going to provide sustainability training for 1 million people"; 4. "Human rights"; 5. "We have a social focus"; 6. "Have all products developed outside of New York by refugees"; 7. "We work with . . . social entrepreneurs, so businesses that need some support, not financial support, but more with how to run the business . . . "; 8. "Taking in apprentices"; 9. "We have automatic door openers, the lights go on and off, also the doors . . . make sure that they are electric so that if you were in a wheelchair you only have to push a button"
	Increasing importance of people pillar	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I have learned a lot more when I started working here because the first thing that came to my mind before I worked here environment, just environment, but now I understand that there is a lot more into it, to have peace in the world, to have safety in the work environment . . . "; 2. "You generally think of the environment, you think of the planet, energy, pollution, and I think more recently also what comes to mind is more the connection to politics, because I think sustainability is now becoming core topics of discussion when it comes to policy in different countries . . . to concern about especially the future and also then the population as well"; 3. "It is very important to include the human part of sustainability . . . I think the human part is really important to move forward"; 4. "I think that perspective [people] is coming more and more . . . I think it is really tapping in what you expect from big companies . . . but it is still difficult since it bears many challenges"
	Planet	Climate positive; zero emission; become 100% circular and planet positive; targets for reducing CO2 emission; recycling and reuse; renewable growth; "We can only get company cars to a specific level of CO2 emissions"

	Profit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "We are putting products on the market, low-carbon products, where we try to achieve a premium for this . . . this is the best kind of way to ensure . . . sustainability is part of the business development as well"; 2. "Sustainability goes hand-in-hand with profitability . . . this is good business" 3. "Building toilets in India"; 4. "Implementing a new recruitment technology . . . which significantly reduces biases"; 5. "Decided on which volunteer organization we wanted to support and sponsor"; 6. ". . . clear roadmap on all the investment and appraisal changes we need to do to reach those targets in 2030 . . . developing zero emission technologies"; 7. "Gonna accerlerate the investments when it comes to renewable energy . . . put an addition four billion euro investment"; 8. "Donated five million NOK to Red Cross . . . " 9. "Every business to survive needs to make profits, cause then you can reinvest the profit and you can reinvest the profit and you also become more sustainable in the long-term as well"; 10. "We moved the building in Oslo last year into a smart building"
	Profit & sustainability seperated?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Profitable from an economical perspective and also from a sustainability perspective"; 2. "Fostering profitability and . . . driving sustainability"
	The role of HR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "In HR we might prioritize the people part", it "requires different kinds of mindsets, different kinds of perspectives in order to become more innovative and we believe that is sustainability from a people perspective"; 2. "I would not exactly explicitly say that we have a sustainability goal as such in HR, but it is more enabling us to reach the business goals of sustainability"; 3. "Want to 'teach' one million people about sustainability within 2025"; 4. "We had a meeting with our CEO . . . after the meeting we all went out and picked up collected trash in the nature"; 5. "We have one day off where we get paid to volunteer work"; 6. "It is about for me engaging the many coworkers around the strategy and actually allowing our coworkers to take ownership for actually influencing the strategy"; 7. "Diversity and inclusion is part of sustainability as well"; 8. "We have talked about it for a while but now there is work being done"; 9. "Another thing is to expand the concept of sustainability also from an HR point of view, looking at that in terms of diversity, inclusion and belonging"; 10. "Now we are going to focus on . . . equity, diversity and inclusion"; 11. "That [due to discussions about UN goals] is also why ED&I (equity, diversity and inclusion) has become such a big topic now . . . we will see more, much more on that part"; 12. "HR is much more the very basic and fundamental things around behaviour, benefits and so on" —> mentioned providing sustainable coffee cups; 13. "Focus on sustainability in terms of our employer branding . . ."; 14. "We focus very much on purpose, that is super important so when I say that we all know X's purpose . . . we have run a workshop"; 15. "Sustainability is very much about prupose . . . we need to make sure that that purpose is reflected"
Sustainability Paradoxes	Present-future-paradox	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I think all those pillars are pulling in the same direction . . . I think the challenge is more to prioritize all good initiatives"; 2. "The challenges we have in Norway will be solved, the markets are somehow similar but they have also huge differences, so the challenges are, we are present in a lot of . . . markets and . . . the challenges are not the same all over"; 3. "Important to analyze as well to see what will really matter in the long run and then maybe work on how you can solve those kinds of challenges"; 4. "It is looking in the short-term, in the mid-term, in the long-term with it" —> when being asked if there exists challenges between people and planet

<p>Efficiency-responsibility-pradaox</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Yes of course there are conflicts because there is . . . always an opportunity to do more on sustainability area . . . but it is extremely costly and if we would implement such technology we would be out of business [talked about a specific technology]"; 2. "That is a general challenge for all businesses . . . you can always do more, but what you need to find is this kind of optional combination of, and drive towards solutions that are both profitable from an economical perspective and also from a sustainable perspective"; 3. "We have quarterly reports to the market and the stock price is going to be eaffected if we do not make money a quarter . . . we will always have to have this in the back of our minds"; 4. "How can we make money and also transition into a green economy"; 5. "What can we achieve, what is technologically possible, and also what are the expectations about from stakeholders but also from regulations"; 6. "Two years ago we did not see this, we did not see a customer asking [for sustainable products] so then it was I think more of a struggle to get big investments on this"; 7. "We first need to make sure that we are profitable and then explore sustainability, because sustainability will require a few investments. So you need to have the muscles, the financial muscles, to deliver on the sustainability agenda"
<p>HR specific Challenges</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "It is always hard to get HR on the agenda because we are not kind of profit generating . . . so it is having people kind of support invest in these initiatives and they are not profit generating, that is always a challenge"; 2. "We have to allocate our resources and I can see that we are not allocating enough resources on sustainability because we have a lot of other priorities . . . a budget in employer branding and we do not have a recruitment budget in terms of recruiting women"; 3. "In HR we might prioritize the people, and the challenges with people is the gender equality"; 4. "Yeah I am sure, yeah definitely . . . especially I am thinking about diversity and inclusion and environment . . . and culture" —> when being asked if there exist challenges between all three pillars; 5. "It is hard to get HR on the agenda because we are not kind of profit generating . . . it is having people kind of support and invest in these initiatives and they are not profit generating, that is always a challenge"
<p>Balancing/integrative or paradox lens/synthesis approach</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I think all those pillars are pulling in the same direction"; 2. "I see them as definitely working towards the same goals, they are not in conflict"; 3. "I think there is a good balance now . . . over the years there has been a development . . . maybe five years . . . we talked more about that we sell a product . . . whereas now I think we have more balance in the three areas"; 4. "What is important is that . . . the sustainability strategy is integrated into the business strategy . . . what gets measured gets done"; 5. "We measure the business in kind of four dimensions, so we have the company dimensions which is more the sales . . . profitability, then we have the customer dimension, . . . we have the people dimensions, . . . and then we have the planetary dimension . . . we do not see ourselves successful unless . . . those four performing together"
<p>The role of HR</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I do not think that the people element has been highly focused on in this respect, but I would say that is a key enabler to both profit and planet"; 2. "If you have a strong purpose, you have engaged people, you have a high emotional commitment level, which means you have a much higher discretionary effort level of your employees, which means you perform better financially"; 3. "You look after your people . . . then the profit will follow"; 4. "People is really the ingredient to both planet and profit . . . I do not think we should see these three pillars as completely seperate, in my mind it is all mixed together"; 5. "We do a lot on the people side but more indirectly"; 6. "Obviously in HR people are on top . . . our job is to look after the people and also make sure they have a clear purpose"

<p>External Perspective</p>	<p>External perspective</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "In Europe there is quite a lot of regulations, but of course . . . if we are buying raw materials from China, from India, . . . Brazil, we have a . . . risk-based focus . . . , potential problems"; 2. "Different cultural parameters, there are different environmental situations, different financial models, . . . that is why it is important to have like the global picture and . . . 'a' degree of localization"; 3. "Has to be led through the value chain . . . taking care of the farmers, make sure that we have zero . . . emission"; 4. "We have a social focus, which is more like taking care of, making sure that you girls mostly have self-esteem"; 5. "We have cooperation with businesses as UNICEF . . . we are building toilets in India"; 6. "Three areas that we focus on, . . . we are working with refugees, . . . we work with . . . social entrepreneurs, . . . work with maybe charities, or investments, so we work a lot with Red Cross in Norway"; 7. "Need to reduce emission by every year up until 2030, . . . So it is both external expectations but also external regulation"; 8. "Key target there is to improve skills for 500 000 people by 2030, . . . taking in apprentices, . . . local initiatives supporting school and education. We also have a strategic cooperation with UNICEF"; 9. "We have what is called a supplier code of conduct, . . . human rights aspects and so forth"; 10. "In Europe there is quite a lot of regulations, but of course when we are buying . . . raw material from China, . . . India, . . . We have a . . . risk-based focus so what area do we know that there are potential problems. . . . Climate carbon elements of suppliers"; 11. "Tracking . . . CO2 footprint from the suppliers"; 12. "Label [on products] . . . for people who are blind"
	<p>External perspective HR specific</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "We can support local communities for instance for education or local suppliers"; 2. "Providing internships, providing apprenticeship programs just to support the community"; 3. "Work in Red Cross"; 4. "Very large CSR responsibility in these local areas . . . taking care"; 5. "We have done a lot through our partners Red Cross when it comes to improving life conditions for young people, . . . collaborate with NAV and . . . and job training"; 6. "Engaging with the community and . . . social initiatives . . . providing internships, providing apprenticeship programs just to support the community, . . . giving young people work experience"; 7. "We want to learn [teach] one million people about sustainability"
<p>Collaboration HR and SD</p>	<p>SD</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Sustainability is very much also within our communication department, and communication and HR is also always really close, so absolutely"; 2. "You only make strategy come to life through the people, we work very closely together"; 3. "We have a good collaboration, I work with the HR director a lot and there's also one person in the HR working on employee engagement and also employer branding that we try to connect to sustainability . . . and we collaborate with HR on that"; 4. "Of course we are working together with HR . . . since it's kind of under the sustainability umbrella . . . but HR is a separated unit"
	<p>HR</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Especially the HR side of sustainability, it cannot be just HR driven, . . . it has to be driven from the top or else it is going to have limited impact"; 2. "We have common goals and we cooperate a lot together . . . we follow the sustainability strategy and not like making our own"; 3. "Sustainability is very much also within our communication department and communication and HR is also always very close, so absolutely" —> reply to the question whether the two departments work together; 4. "I was very quickly looped in the sustainability kind of work and also they reach out to me for data and insights related to what is important in considering an attractive company, where does sustainability come into the mix . . . works closely with me on what sponsorships and which partnerships we invest in"; 5. "We work closely together . . . a lot of trainings that is provided . . . sustainability competence training material"; 6. "When we are reporting on our sustainability agenda, they are asking about the people side of sustainability as well so that is kind of the bridge that is build up between the sustainability and the HR departments"

<p>COVID-19</p>	<p>Increased focus on people pillar</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "It is people that will be affected by the COVID-19 . . . it is the people agenda that is more affected"; 2. "HR is getting on the table more and more and it should and COVID-19 has helped that"; 3. "Massively changed things, those things [support employees, support communities and societies] were just again nice to have before . . . I think we are going to see a permanent shift and . . . what is the definition of looking after your people and making sure they are safe, healthy and engaged"; 4. "We have seen sustainability is much more than environment or carbon footprint, or . . . climate change, it is about health and wellness, it is about remote working, it is about engaging, it is about so much more, the human experience of our employees . . . I think those things are suddenly very much in our consciousness and they were not so much before"; 5. "I think the people, taking care of the communities where we operate . . . has been on top of the agenda . . . now with the pandemic . . . they are not just taking care of the employees, but they are taking care of the employees' families" —> mentioned "safeguard", "educate our people", "safety is on top", "giving extra pay"; 6. "Although we were coping with a worldwide pandemic, this is not stopping us from setting the direction on our strategic, sustainability and profitability agenda"; 7. "Mostly on the people side [affected by pandemic] . . . very important to us to take care of our coworkers . . . focusing on their tasks to improvement, learning, training, . . . scaled up our support to Red Cross"; 8. "Mental health"; "safety"; "How do we look after our employees in India in this like massive crisis"; "I think we are going to see a permanent shift . . . what is the definition of looking after your people and making sure they are safe, healthy and engaged"; "need to think about ergonomics in home offices"; 9. "Walk and talk"; 10. "The safety of our people is our number one priority"; 11. "Bought hospital beds, oxygen, we have even created ambulances as well, . . . hired doctors [in India], . . . should focus on staying safe"
	<p>Negative consequences</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "It is hard to create a work culture during the pandemic . . . we need to . . . make sure everyone feels comfortable and that everyone feels safe to go back to work and interact with people"; 2. "It is harder to recruit and follow the gender equality . . . it is easier to just recruit the men than to use our energy and strategy on recruiting women"; 3. "They are very occupied with managing the COVID crisis, . . . diversity and inclusion and belonging is perhaps not on top of their agenda because they are firefighting"; 4. "The way employees connect to their environment [changed due to pandemic]"; 5. "It is super difficult to be socially inter native when we were sitting at home"; 6. "It might be more challenging to reach some of those targets [sustainability targets]"

Appendix E: Coding Table of Sustainability and Annual Reports

General Topic	Sub-Topics	Samples of coded reports - only frequent occurring or highly relevant samples will be given
SDGs	Most frequently named goals	"we have integrated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)"; goal 13 (climate action), goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), goal 8 (decent work and economic growth); five companies did not mention SDGs; six companies = all SDGs
Three pillars	All three pillars	"we must balance the needs of society, the environment and the economy in our own operations and across our value chain"; "balance between the needs of society, the environment and the economy"; Deloitte: in table of contents they use the categories "people", "performance" and "planet" + "measured using a "triple bottom line" of people, performance and planet"; DNV: "purpose, to safeguard life, property and the environment, we empower our customers and their stakeholders"; "We want to achieve sustainable growth that makes a positive difference to people and the planet" (H&M); "ecologically, socially, qualitatively and economically" (Hapag-Lloyd); "actions across four important categories: Planet, People, Prosperity and Governance" (KPMG); "economic, social and environmental topics" (Kuehne + Nagel); "responsibilities that this involves - towards the environment, social issues and the economy" (Porsche); PWC: planet, people, prosperity; "Driving prosperity socially, environmentally and financially" (Volvo Group); "value creation along the three axes People, Planet, and Prosperity" (Yara)
	Key words to describe sustainability strategies/ambitions	Emission; recycling; "environmental and social performance"; compliance; business ethics; climate change; energy; circularity; customer privacy and data security; handprint; "profitability and sustainability"; "sustainability goals . . . key climate, environmental and social ambitions"; safety; "become people and planet positive"; "leading technology, responsible operations and responsible relationships"; resilience; prosperity; "The need to drive sustainable development and to grow within the planetary boundaries is greater than ever."; "Looking ten years into the future, we believe that sustainability is a pre-requisite for doing business"; "Being sustainable is a must."
	People	Security/safety; health and well-being; diversity and equality; fair and equal; gender-equal; non-discrimination; privacy; anti-corruption; training; social responsibility; decent work; human rights; "raising awareness of sustainable consumption"; healthy food; digital inclusion
	Planet	Climate; sustainably produced; circularity; carbon-neutral; reduce emission; recycling; renewable energy; greener products; sustainable sources (e.g. forestry); footprint; plant-based food; extended product life-cycle; agriculture; sustainable packaging; circular economy; "Shifting more freight from road to sea and rail results in less traffic, lower CO2 emissions, fewer accidents and far less wear and tear on road surfaces"; "The ship is the world's largest plug-in hybrid vessel and operates on battery power for part of the voyage"; green shipping; "further measures and new solutions will be required if the company is to be able to fulfil national and international emission reduction requirements by 2030"; "creating awareness of personal choices and changing behaviors—both within our organization and among those we influence—to reduce greenhouse gas emissions"; "more sustainable transportation routes"
	Profit	Clear revenue; "environmentally sustainable economic activities"; sustainable investment; "capital allocation framework"; "new growth opportunities in areas such as recycling, renewable energy and batteries"; "more than 1.5 million hours of volunteer and pro bono work"; responsible banking and investments; sustainable loans; "increased expectations from the authorities that the financial industry should contribute to achieving a 'green restart'"; "Economic performance is part of how . . . views sustainability"; "Safety, security and sustainability are embedded into our performance and reward framework"; "reduce structural costs and increase efficiency and is currently in a phase where focus is on organic growth and improved profitability through continuous improvement and innovation"
	The role of HR	Education and training; diversity and inclusion; employee career path; learning programs; leadership; "Targets relating to safety, environment and climate change, social responsibility, compliance and leadership expectations constitute a substantial part of the annual bonus plan"; gender equal pay; responsible recruitment; training and development; future of work; "Diversity and inclusion will be a key focus going forward"; "permanent employees benefit from health cover that reflects best practice in their country of residence"; "benefits to our employees, including disability coverage, flexible working hours, health care facilities, and life insurance"; "Step up investments in competence development, develop our learning programs, and exploit technology to expand the reach of our learning activities"
Sustainability Paradoxes	Present-future-paradox	" Must consider long-term risks and opportunities, not just short-term gains"; "Our long-term profitability is dependent on our customers integrating sustainability into their strategic choices"; "Failure to ensure sufficient investment in future growth areas and reinvestment in existing services"; "improve performance and invest for the future" --> talk about necessary steps to increase the short-term cash flow that is necessary to be able to make investments for the future; "Reaching our sustainability vision will require much more than just a few changes here and there. It will require us to transform the way our business and our industry operates."; "Whether in small steps or leaps, jobs change over time. Sometimes we initiate changes ourselves, while other times the world changes around us." --> short-term versus long-term skills

<p>Efficiency-responsibility-pradaox</p>	<p>"Our ability to deliver on our strategic ambition rests on our ability to ensure robustness and profitability in all business areas, freeing up cash and allocating fresh capital where we see potential for greatest return"; "Making healthy and sustainable living affordable and accessible to the many people"; "Overall our business activities have a positive impact, but may also at times have a negative impact on people, communities and nature. Renewable energy is critical for reducing global CO2 emissions. At the same time, our operations can impact e.g. on biodiversity, use of land and interests related to outdoor activities"; "Our growth should be consistent, competitive, profitable and responsible"; "The energy transition is high risk, regulatorily demanding and cross-sectoral – making it a good fit for the company’s knowledge and expertise to create value for customers"; "We recognise that the world’s energy systems must be transformed in a profound way to drive decarbonisation. At the same time universal access to affordable and clean energy must be ensured"; "The direct effects of climate-related risks are primarily through changes in the demand for our oil, natural gas and electricity production. The impact could be on both volume and price. Another potential effect is increased costs related to mitigating physical changes of climate change. Other elements influencing costs could for example be changes in carbon prices or new specific taxes & fees. More indirect effects are for example, new technologies that could disrupt energy markets over time, or lost business opportunities due to political decisions."; "A key part of our transition to a more circular fashion future is to make sustainable products and services more accessible, inspiring and affordable to our customers"; "Our vision is to accelerate our sustainability transformation to help ensure that our activities respect planetary boundaries, while contributing to addressing the social and environmental challenges facing our world"; "our economies are not delivering sustainable, inclusive outcomes for society"; "Failure to adequately plan for workforce related changes such as automation, to attract, retain and train the appropriate talent and to ensure resources can be deployed rapidly to meet opportunities"; "Among the main challenges to Telenor’s environmental management is a lack of infrastructure for waste management, in some of our Asian markets"</p>
<p>Balancing/integrative or paradox lens/synthesis approach</p>	<p>"Ensuring our customers both understand and choose the products and services that make a difference - both in terms of increased productivity and improved sustainability performance. There is no contradiction here."; "financial ambition is to lift cash flows and generate capital and shareholder returns through a combination of longer-term financial priorities supported by near-term financial targets"; "By emphasizing climate, environment, integrity and social responsibility, as well as by developing greener business and product offerings, . . . will reduce risks and create new profitable opportunities for the future"; In developing a more holistic approach to sustainability we have quantified a set of ambitions towards 2030 that will improve our performance on climate, environment, business ethics, and social responsibility."; "seek to understand and manage such dilemmas by taking a risk-based approach, carefully weighing different concerns, and implementing mitigating activities." --> in relation to paradoxes; "Win with our brands as a force for good, powered by purpose and innovation"; "Putting purpose at the heart of all our brands is not only the right thing to do, we know it drives superior performance and growth"; "Our Compass strategy puts sustainability at the heart of our business. We’re setting out to prove that sustainability not only benefits people and planet, but that it also drives superior business performance."; "we must balance the needs of society, the environment and the economy in our own operations and across our value chain"; "With our skilled people and leading technologies, we can make a strong contribution to a low-carbon society"; "balance between the needs of society, the environment and the economy"; "Ultimately, being a profitable company enables us to deliver on our strategic ambitions, develop our people by building their skills and competence, and invest in research and innovation to ensure that we remain relevant to our customers and deliver on our purpose"; "from prioritising GDP growth to focusing on human wellbeing and the environment" (Equinor rebalance scenario); "We are proving that it is possible to deliver economic performance while reducing our impacts on the environment"; "long-term objective of achieving meaningful growth in economic benefit and social responsibility while reducing the ecological footprint of its business"; "Sustainability equals profitability"; "Driving prosperity socially, environmentally and financially means striving for transport and infrastructure solutions that are: safe . . . fossil-free . . . more productive"; "Our strong financial position gives us the ability to continue to invest in our future in order to secure an even more competitive customer offering"; "Driving change does not come for free. However, we should view every euro and every minute that we spend on our sustainability vision not as a cost but as an investment to stay relevant for our customers, to further define our role in the fashion industry, and to attract the best talent globally"</p>
<p>The role of HR</p>	<p>"Target the fundamental drivers of long-term development and will contribute to education and capacity building for 500,000 people by end of 2030"; "an inclusive culture, which values diversity, leads to better decision-making, drives greater creativity and innovation, better meets the needs of our clients and is more motivating for our people"; "Given the irreversible move to a digital world, we continue to invest in reskilling people in emerging technologies"; "education is key to lifting people out of poverty and is one of the most powerful drivers of economic growth, social mobility and well-being"; "Despite the economic challenges of the past few months, we have continued to invest heavily in the training and development of our people, new products and services, technology and in enhancing the quality of the work that we do"; "in critical competence areas that usually correspond to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) areas of education, there is a short supply of women, both as fresh graduates as well as experienced leaders. Additionally, we have operations in geographies with a historic shortage of women in the corporate sector"; "People – because safety and human rights make up the foundation for prosperity"; "to invest in people, to grow talent, and to create an inclusive and people centric culture where everyone is encouraged to contribute"; "It is widely acknowledged that the fashion industry’s record on human rights, including labor rights and ethical standards, is not good enough. Moreover, the industry’s remediation actions often do not live up to expectations. Typical challenges relate to health and safety, poor working conditions, low pay, gender-based violence, and repression of unions and freedom of association."</p>

External Perspective	External perspective	<p>"Evaluator of supplier sustainability, including ethics"; fair trade; compliance (e.g. corruption; environmental; occupational health and safety; human rights); collaboration and partnerships; stakeholder dialogue; responsible sourcing, "reducing our climate footprint across the value chain"; "work to strengthen local community relations, communities and business partners through education and empowerment where we operate"; supplier code of conduct; outside-in perspective, social entrepreneurship; "Every day, millions of people enjoy our foods, tea and ice creams. It is our responsibility to make it easier for people to eat healthy, tasty and more sustainable foods."; "create superior value for all of our stakeholders", "efforts to develop job skills, improve educational outcomes and expand opportunities for 50 million people worldwide"; investments; volunteer and pro bono work; "mentor members of their communities, connect with nonprofit organizations focused on education"; "Solutions to these problems requires cooperation, collaboration and a willingness to do what is right across all parts of society, including business."; "must consider the impact we create beyond our own company. We must support our nearly 1.5 billion consumers in making sustainable choices, and continuously empower our suppliers and customers to become more involved in this dynamic"; "In many of our jurisdictions in Asia there is uncertainty related to legal framework and enforcement"</p>
COVID-19	Increased focus on people pillar	<p>"Focused on providing a healthy and safe work environment, maintaining operations and positioning for the future"; "top priority is the health and safety of our people and the communities where we operate"; "many plants across our global organization have supported authorities, local NGOs, institutions and organizations to address local needs"; "During 2020, . . . has published a revised Human Rights Policy and Supplier Code of Conduct, based on prioritized human rights risks to people"; protect health and livelihoods; "Limiting the effects of the pandemic especially impacting vulnerable groups"; "provided financial support to a number of external . . . suppliers to keep them financially stable during the pandemic"; "Our people have been our absolute priority throughout 2020, and because of them we've been able to meet the needs of consumers and grow our business"; donations; "the chance to make business and society better than before"; "moreflexible ways of working and increased awareness of the importance of mental health in the workplace", "importance of other issues—including trust, empathy, training and development, diversity and inclusion, and having a purpose beyond profit", "The pandemic has amplified the need for employers to actively invest in their people"; "working with partners including UNICEF and Plan to support access to education, provide digital literacy training and keeping children safe online"</p>
	Negative consequences	<p>"Covid-19 created significant social, operational and market challenges"; "the pandemic put us all to the test. It challenged our operations, our employees, our customers and the world around us"; "The COVID-19 pandemic is a people crisis – with devastating impacts on people's health and wellbeing. And with the loss of income and livelihoods, the crisis hit the most vulnerable in society the hardest, increasing inequality and insecurity"; "The economic toll from the pandemic will be deep and longlasting. We need to be prepared"; "2020 was a demanding year, not least because of the major operational challenges and constraints that accompanied the restrictions introduced by the authorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic"; "just over 2000 employees are laid off temporarily as a consequence of the cutting back of the company's operations"; cost reduction measures; "Climate change and sustainability were topics that fell off the radar for the first few weeks after the pandemic"</p>
	Other consequences	<p>"While Covid-19 has concentrated minds and efforts on the immediate global health crisis, it has also reminded us of the fragility of the world we all share with other big global challenges, like climate change and inequality, becoming even more pressing."; "COVID-19 pandemic that has disrupted all of our lives, but because it has focused further attention on issues that the world must address in the years and decades to come. In particular, the year's events have crystallized people's attitudes toward many of the most important aspects of sustainability", "There also are tangible cost and environmental benefits to working remotely; reduced commuting, for example, can save families money and time, and reduce CO2 emissions"; "Strong cost-saving measures, coupled with a switch to digital services at the start of the pandemic"; "the last 12 months have further highlighted the importance of sustainability and the need to accelerate this work"; "education is key to lifting people out of poverty and is one of the most powerful drivers of economic growth, social mobility and well-being"; "It also highlighted the fundamental role that companies must play, alongside public authorities and civil society, to help build a more responsible, sustainable and inclusive world"</p>