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ASSOCIATING SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES WITH HIGHER MATURITY LEVELS

Proposed framework and actions for maturing and incorporating sustainability strategies

Master's thesis in Quality and Operations Management

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SUMMARY

The term sustainability has become a recurrent buzzword for organizations as organizations have realized the importance of sustainability as it can enhance an organization's competitive edge (Bateh et al., 2013). However, due to the complexity that the concept of sustainability entails, it is virtually impossible to standardize sustainability to a particular definition or for an organization to understand all its perspectives (Bateh et al., 2013). In order to assess these discussions, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) propose distinct sustainability maturity levels of sustainability, which concern the extent to which firms address sustainability on organizational levels and in their operations. However, the maturity levels of sustainability are insufficient as an organization has to understand the importance of incorporating sustainability into business, becoming an integral part of the business strategy.

However, the literature does not address how to associate a sustainability strategy with the higher levels of sustainability maturity levels, which led to the formulation of the first research question, *How can a sustainability strategy be associated with a higher sustainability maturity level?* Furthermore, conducting a literature review revealed the importance of incorporating the sustainability strategy into the business strategy and making it an integral part of the business strategy. Thus, the second research question was derived, *How can a sustainability strategy with a higher sustainability maturity level be incorporated to become an integral part of the business strategy?*

In order to answer these research questions, the thesis conducted a case study research at Varsego Sweden AB, a Swedish wholesaler company operating primarily within sales and distribution of ice cream, providing the market-leading ice cream brand. As Varsego is mainly a distributor of products, it has to make its distribution sustainable on all accounts, as increased social awareness demands that. Thus, Varsego's big challenge is how to make their distribution sustainable within all three dimensions that sustainability encompasses. The data collection included sixteen interviews based on the semi-structured interview structure. All interviewees are associated with managerial positions within the organization. The analysis utilized a thematic analysis approach to identify repetition and patterns in the data.

This thesis identified several findings based on the collection and analysis of data. In terms of the first research question, a framework is presented, which serves as guidance for managers to transform sustainability strategies to a higher level of sustainability maturity. The framework contains several steps, where the first step is to establish a central sustainability focus. Firms should incorporate this central focus into the three sustainability dimensions and the strategic views. Lastly, is decisions regarding the strategic approach, where it is beneficial to utilize the dynamic approach. This thesis further proposes three critical actions for incorporating the transformed sustainability strategy into business strategy to make it an integral part of the business strategy. The first action is to understand the relationship between the business strategy and sustainability strategy. The second action is to incorporate the transformed sustainability strategy into the business strategy in practice. The last action is to make sustainability an integral part of the business strategy.

Keywords: Sustainability Strategy, Association, Sustainability Maturity Levels, Strategy Incorporation.

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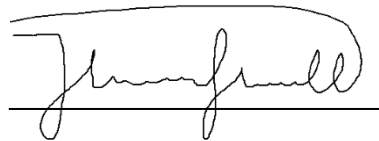
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Johannes Lindvall

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1. Introduction

This chapter presents the background, purpose, delimitations, and outline of the report in that sequential order.

1.1 Background

The term sustainability has become a recurrent buzzword for organizations (Bateh et al., 2013). The recurrence can be associated with the fact that sustainability has become a significant driver in developing management concepts and innovative technologies. Thus, organizations are increasing their focus on sustainability as carbon emissions, waste, and pollutants released are ever-growing, running the risk of the human species drawing on the world's resources faster than the restoration of those resources. Therefore, if organizations do not consider sustainability, the whole ecosystem that the earth represents is at risk (Oertwig et al., 2017). Based on the risk for the ecosystem, Oertwig et al. (2017) state that a new sense of responsibility towards future generations has emerged. Moreover, this evolution of responsibility toward internal and external stakeholders has forced organizations to adapt strategic orientation and operative value creation according to this responsibility toward future generations (Oertwig et al., 2017). Bateh et al. (2013) even state that sustainability has become the strategic imperative of the second millennium. Phrases such as corporate sustainability, which refers to firms incorporating sustainable development, corporate social responsibility, corporate social performance, and the triple bottom line, have become recurrent in business settings (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). These concepts refer to organizations enhancing their long-term environmental, social, and economic performance (Bateh et al., 2013). Thus, the role, relation, and importance of sustainability regarding organizational development and markets have been extensively discussed (Galpin, Whittington & Bell, 2015; Bateh et al., 2013). However, due to the complexity that the concept of sustainability entails, it is virtually impossible to standardize sustainability to a particular definition or for an organization to understand all its perspectives (Bateh et al., 2013). Atkinson and Hatcher (2001) even propose that no precise definition of sustainability exists. Fibuch and Van Way (2012), on the other hand, state that due to the continuous revision of sustainability, there are at least 50 definitions present in the literature. However, sustainable development has gained interest in conjunction with the definition: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." presented in Brundtland Commission's report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987 p. 41). The Brundtland definition is the most recurrent in the literature to that scale.

As strategies are situation-based by nature, each strategy demands individual and situation-specific design. In other words, strategy is the core content of the policies and plans that decide how an organization positions itself in the markets in which it competes with the value proposition of its rivals (Andrews, 1971). On a global scale, many organizations have adopted sustainability strategies to enhance productivity and obtain a competitive advantage (Bateh et al., 2013). Both the change in climate and eco-sustainability are critical to the degree that

affects the growth, the long-term success, the strategic positioning, and the market competitiveness of public and private companies (Teh & Corbitt, 2015). Furthermore, a survey presented by KPMG in 2008 showcased that almost half of the sampled companies considered sustainability and corporate responsibility as essential drivers for innovation (KPMG International, 2008). The increasing importance for corporate sustainability is stressed because organizations have repackaged corporate reports, earlier referred to as, e.g., environmental reports and corporate social responsibility reports, as sustainability reports (Aras & Crowther, 2012). However, the increasing importance of sustainability issues, combined with improved awareness of their nature and source, has inflicted a risk of damaging the reputation of businesses (Long, 2019).

Although many companies have established sustainability management and publish sustainability reports, the main focus often remains unclear within sustainability endeavors. Therefore, the sustainability issues are instead pursued coincidentally than based on a clear strategy (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). The complexity of sustainability explains the pursuit of issues and is increasing due to constantly evolving and changing meaning. Due to the complexity of sustainability, organizations tend to narrow their view of sustainability and limit their sustainability work to solely consider aspects directly related to performance (Bateh et al., 2013). Therefore, it was not unexpected that the survey conducted by KPMG in 2008 showcased that most companies struggle to understand how to make their businesses more sustainable (Bonn & Fisher, 2011). Based on the sample, 80 percent of the companies faced their most utmost challenge in identifying and prioritizing sustainability issues, developing sustainability strategies and policies, and measuring sustainability performance (KPMG International, 2008). This overwhelming majority is not unexpected, as discussions regarding sustainability strategies demonstrate various approaches for sustainability and the orientation of how firms can focus on corporate sustainability. Nevertheless, such discussions do not result in distinct actions and designs regarding corporate sustainability. However, to concretize these discussions and adopt the restrictions that sustainability imposes, firms should consider the three views, market-based, resource-based, and institutional-based. The reason is that successful sustainable firms demonstrate long-term performance amid the restrictions imposed by sustainability. As a result, firms aiming to become more sustainable need to consider all these three views as only then they can establish an awareness of the conditions under which they may lose or generate value (Lloret, 2016).

But the discussions regarding sustainability strategies cannot fully be addressed based on considerations of the strategic views. As a reason, to elaborate on addressing these discussions regarding sustainability strategies, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) propose that an organization has to analyze its impacts and interrelations concerning the three dimensions that sustainability embeds to become sustainable. To guide firms undertaking this process, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) propose the concept of sustainability maturity. The authors present different levels of sustainability maturity, where each level represents specific progress toward corporate sustainability. These maturity levels describe generic possibilities to deal with sustainability challenges imposed within the three dimensions. The poor or low sustainability maturity levels

represent a low or a poor level of sustainability maturity where an organization is in the beginning stages of considering sustainability aspects, considering only mandatory laws and rules. The sufficient or medium sustainability maturity level represents a sufficient level of sustainability maturity where sustainability considerations within organizations comply with sustainability related-laws while taking sustainability-related concerns slightly further. The satisfying or higher sustainability maturity levels represent a satisfying consideration and maturity associated with the sustainability aspects within the three dimensions of sustainability, often higher than the industry average. The sophisticated or highest sustainability maturity levels implicate an exceptional effort toward sustainability where firms consider all the sustainability dimensions and aspects within the organizational boundaries and outside the organization itself. In general, sustainability maturity represents the capability to address sustainability issues within these dimensions (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). However, making the sustainability strategy associated with a higher or the highest sustainability maturity level is complex because it is challenging for organizations to grasp how to achieve this in practice, leaving organizations in no man's land.

However, regardless of the sustainability maturity level, the sustainable strategy content by itself is not sufficient. Organizations must understand the importance of integrating it within the business, mainly as its importance increases. Competitive success requires a constant awareness of the conditions under which an organization may lose or generate value. The integration is vital as a company's competitiveness reflects its long-term performance and relationships within the industry (Lloret, 2016). Therefore, to successfully integrate sustainability into the organization, it must be integrated into organizational culture and business strategy (Fibuch & Van Way, 2012). For organizations to achieve sustainability integration, they should develop strategies that accommodate the accelerating sustainability reporting requirements, while these strategies should proactively address sustainability considerations (Shields & Shelleman, 2015). These business strategies must also be customized to meet an organization's core competencies and the sustainability challenges of the specific business strategy (Placet, Anderson & Fowler, 2005). However, the process of integrating sustainability strategies is complex. Thus, Bonn and Fisher (2011) developed a framework that addresses this complex issue of integrating sustainability strategy. The framework proposes making sustainability an integral part of the business. Sustainability as an integral part refers to that sustainability is broken down throughout the organization and is present in the culture and decision-making processes. As a result, organizations generate sustainability initiatives organically (Bonn and Fisher, 2011).

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to investigate how a sustainability strategy can be associated with a high sustainability maturity level that incorporates the three dimensions of sustainability combined with strategic views, based on the work of Baumgartner and Ebner (2010). Furthermore, to examine how a sustainability strategy associated with a high sustainability maturity level can become an integral part of an organization's business strategy by elaborating on the framework developed by Bonn and Fisher (2011).

1.3 Research questions and outline of report

RQ1: How can a sustainability strategy be associated with a higher sustainability maturity level?

RQ2: How can a sustainability strategy with a higher sustainability maturity level be incorporated to become an integral part of the business strategy?

This thesis includes a literature foundation, methodology, case description, results and analysis, discussion, and conclusion, presented in that sequential order. The literature review presents literature regarding corporate sustainability strategy and its dimensions, planning and developing sustainability strategies and its phases, modeling sustainability strategies and sustainability in relation to the business strategy to derive the research questions. Then the methodology used in this research is presented and explained. The initial subchapters introduce the research strategy and research design used in this research. The next subchapters present the collection and analysis of data. The methodology chapter concludes by discussing the research quality and ethical aspects. After the methodology chapter, a case study description chapter outlines the studied firm. Then the result and analysis chapter presents the findings from the data collection. After that, the discussion chapter discusses the findings to address the research questions. The thesis ends with a conclusion, summarizing and presenting findings and implications based on the discussion.

2. Literature foundation

This chapter will present the theoretical foundation based on the three subchapters, corporate sustainability strategies, planning and developing sustainability strategies, and sustainability in relation to business strategy. Figure 1 illustrates an overview of the three identified areas, their relation to each other, and their underlying dimensions.

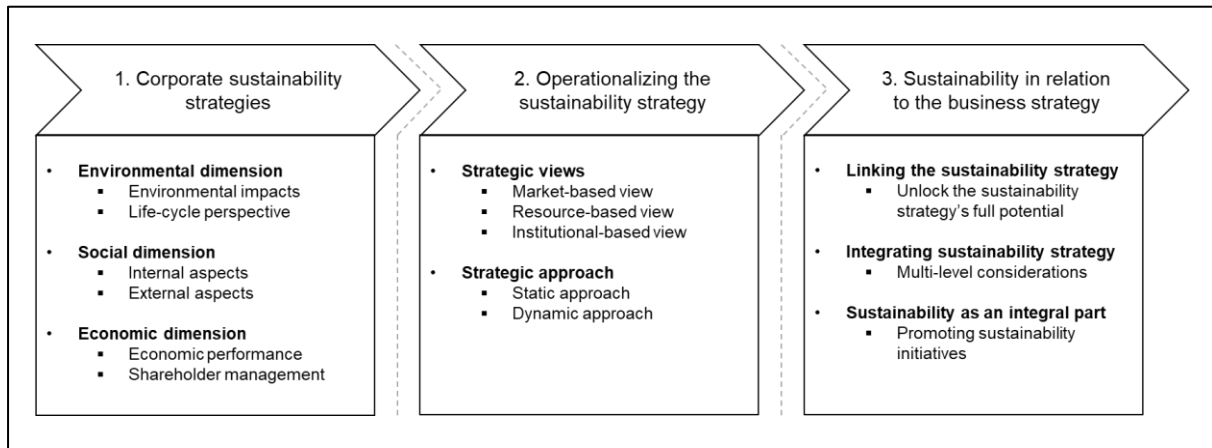


Figure 1, the three identified areas constituting the literature foundation.

2.1 Corporate sustainability strategies

Sustainability strategies are advantageous, as they provide organizations with a competitive advantage. The competitive advantage stems from the fact that organizations with a sustainability strategy will have a more accurate direction, a sharper focus on what is essential, and an improved understanding of the rapidly changing environment. These aspects can eventually lead to the firm improving its performance (Galpin et al., 2015). However, this depends on the firms' definition of sustainability and its sustainability scope. In terms of scoping and defining sustainability, Borgert et al. (2019) state that this process usually refers to identifying sustainability issues associated with certain project activities, where the sustainability issues are refined and prioritized. Furthermore, the critical purpose of scoping and defining sustainability is to ensure considerations regarding the effects that will influence proposed decisions (Borgert et al., 2019). As a result, organizations that scope and define sustainability appropriately, which derives a sustainability strategy, will not solely consider the economic gains but also the social and environmental gains. Considering all three aspects will enhance an organizational understanding that financial gains are not the only vital goals (Galpin et al., 2015). Organizations that can implement sustainability will achieve multiple benefits. These benefits increase corporate reputation, brand value, and competitive advantage (Herzig & Schaltegger, 2006). However, sustainability strategies require leadership, strong values, and ethics deeply embedded in the culture. Without a rigorous attempt to ensure that organizational infrastructure supports a sustainability strategy, the organization's efforts to implement the sustainability strategy hampers severely. Consequently, organizations who intend to provide long-term value through sustainability efforts must integrate sustainability into their core competencies both on a societal and organizational level, ensuring that sustainability

complements its goals and missions (Galpin et al., 2015). Moreover, to capture the benefit that sustainability implies, organizations must integrate sustainability into daily operations (Lubin & Esty, 2010). Firms can integrate sustainability into daily operations by recasting the way they operate by expanding capacity with new management structures, methods, executive roles, and processes tailored to sustainability demands. In more practical terms, top management leadership, publicly available sustainability policies, identification and response to the emerging sustainability challenges, creation of capacity for transformational innovation, and long-term planning for sustainability achieves an integration of sustainability (Kashmanian, Wells & Keenan, 2011). It is further not uncommon for companies to integrate sustainability into their business by using their environmental management systems as core fundamentals to decision-making, representing a high maturity level of sustainability (Lubin & Esty, 2010).

For a complete corporate sustainability strategy, firms must consider the multiple dimensions of sustainability regarding their different impacts and their interrelations. Therefore, when developing a sustainability strategy that represents a distinct sustainability maturity level, it is necessary to be aware of the range of sustainability issues that the specific sustainability strategy aims to deal with (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Furthermore, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) propose different types of sustainability strategies based on the level of maturity of the sustainability strategy within an organization. The sustainability maturity level refers to what extent an organization has addressed and incorporated sustainability issues within its operations. A high sustainability maturity level encircles internal efficiency, e.g., eco-efficiency and cleaner production, where the focus lies on the processes. Furthermore, commitment to investment in appropriate technology and sophisticated health and safety for employees is crucial (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). The human potential and care for the planet are considered the only aspects that matter (Van Marrewijk & Werre, 2003). Thereby, other sustainability aspects are not considered necessary (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). However, an even higher sustainability maturity level encircles substantial integration of sustainability, focusing on sustainability issues within all business activities, thereby obtaining competitive advantages from differentiation and innovation. Strategies associated with the highest sustainability maturity level can either be oriented toward the impact of the market or oriented toward combining outside-in and inside-out perspectives to achieve a unique competitive position (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). All beings and phenomena are mutually interdependent, and therefore sustainability is the only alternative (Van Marrewijk & Werre, 2003). Therefore, organizations aiming to achieve corporate sustainability strategies with the highest sustainability maturity must consider all three dimensions and their impacts and interrelations. Firms must also consider the external influences that affect the orientation on corporate sustainability (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). The three pillars of sustainability that firms need to consider are environmental, social, and economical, and they interact with each other (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006).

2.1.1 Environmental dimension of corporate sustainability

The environmental dimension of corporate sustainability refers to the environmental impacts caused by corporate activities. Therefore, the environmental dimension of corporate

sustainability mainly measures environmental impacts. Nevertheless, within the corporate sustainability strategies, the focus is on the effects caused by the impacts, where higher maturity levels of corporate sustainability are usually more concentrated on the causes rather than on the effects (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Furthermore, an increasing maturity level of corporate sustainability implies an increasing chance that organizations will minimize and neutralize their environmental impact (Van Marrewijk & Werre, 2003).

Furthermore, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) propose different aspects of the environmental dimension of sustainability. The most relevant environmental aspects concern the environmental impacts caused by resource use, emissions in the air, the water, the ground, and waste, hazardous waste, and biodiversity. These are part of the environmental dimension of corporate sustainability, and they mainly focus on how an organization can improve its impact and footprint on its external environment. For example, resource usage concerns the energy usage an organization's offerings require and the material needed for the offerings. Thereby, organizations improving the energy usage of offerings will reduce their impact on the environment and their customers. As a result, the offering will require less energy to function, which likely will increase the product attractiveness perceived by the customer (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010).

However, solely focusing on individual aspects concerning offerings and their environmental impact is not sufficient. Not solely focusing on individual aspects is stressed by Baumgartner and Ebner (2010), who state that firms must consider impacts and environmental issues throughout the life cycle of the offerings. Kashmanian et al. (2011) elaborate, stressing the importance of improving the value chain performance to improve the environmental footprint of an organization. These improvements refer to recognizing the breadth of the environmental footprint caused by the firm and thereby the breadth of the firm's sustainability strategy. Therefore, organizations face the challenge of considering their offerings' environmental impact throughout their life cycle. In addition, Brady, Henson, and Fava (1999) state that life cycle management can contribute directly to an organization's economic and environmental performance. By doing so, organizations can identify business benefits, opportunities, develop a disciplined management approach for strategic decision-making and monitor progress toward environmental targets (Brady et al., 1999). Therefore, firms should integrate sustainability through the value chain where a company needs to consider the environmental contribution of its suppliers, customers, and transportation to prioritize sustainability activities (Kashmanian et al., 2011). As a result, the environmental impact, such as waste and pollution, of offerings can be treated jointly with its production (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Possible ways of improving the value chain performance are to assist suppliers in becoming more sustainable, improve offerings, and assist customers in reducing environmental impacts or reducing the footprint caused by transportation (Kashmanian et al., 2011). However, this can be challenging as most organizations have considered waste and pollution as an input to the production of offerings, rather than considering it as a simultaneous output to the production process (Boussemart et al., 2020).

2.1.2 Social dimension of corporate sustainability

Social sustainability is the firm's consciousness of responsibility for actions based on an authentic and credible commitment in all business activities while aiming to maintain long-term success in the market. Social sustainability focuses on the fulfillment of stakeholder needs in order to ensure stakeholder loyalty for the company. Therefore, social sustainability aims to positively influence both present and future relationships with stakeholders (Ebner, 2007). The stakeholder relationships also allow the stakeholders to track the corporate progress toward sustainability. Strengthened stakeholder relationships can be achieved through publicly available sustainability goals, public reports on sustainability goals and strategy, partnering with local communities, partnering with non-governmental organizations, and collaboration with other companies. Strong stakeholder relationships imply that the company is better informed of the current and emerging issues and evolving expectations. Furthermore, effectively engaging with internal and external stakeholders is a multi-dimensional effort that benefits the company and the stakeholders (Kashmanian et al., 2011). Effective internal and external stakeholder relationships often indicate that an organization has a higher maturity level of sustainability.

However, the social dimension of corporate sustainability depends on its definition to determine its included aspects. Therefore, it can be challenging for management to realize what social aspect to focus on when improving their impact on society. The challenge of social sustainability includes considerations regarding internal and external aspects. Both the internal and external aspects can vary in terms of focus. However, in general, they relate to the social dimension of corporate sustainability, and therefore their focus lies on how organizations can improve their impact on society (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). However, regardless of whether considering internal or external aspects, an increasing maturity level of corporate sustainability implies a greater chance that organizations will improve their impact on society (Van Marrewijk & Were, 2003).

In terms of the internal aspects, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) state that these aspects are corporate governance, motivation and incentives, health and safety, and human capital development. For instance, corporate governance is concerned with an organization increasing its transparency regarding all business activities to improve its relationship with its stakeholders (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). For example, organizations that publicly share data can improve their impact on society due to increased transparency. The increased transparency can lead to upturns in financial performance through increased revenue generation (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Furthermore, organizations improving employees' health and safety are likely to improve their impact on society, and the productivity of their employees is likely to improve (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010). Such initiatives will strengthen the internal stakeholders' relationship and foster higher maturity levels of sustainability.

In terms of external aspects, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) state that these aspects are ethical behavior and human rights, no controversial activities, no corruption and cartel, and corporate citizenship. Firms integrating sustainability into the business strategy can achieve the external

aspects, as the firms will enhance their ability to be proactive to external changes rather than being reactive. Therefore, top-level management should set and communicate the strategy and its interdependencies across the organization. As a result, organizations must reconsider their business to obtain advantages from sustainability. Reconsidering the business will enable organizations to grasp the external importance from stakeholders related to sustainability (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). The reconsideration can be achieved, for example, by having a code of conduct that enables organizations to share the social importance toward external stakeholders. Initiatives like the mentioned ones will strengthen the external stakeholders' relationship and foster higher maturity levels of sustainability. Therefore, Epstein (2008) states that firms require to integrate sustainability needs into the way they do business in order for sustainability to be valuable to both the stakeholders and the organization itself.

2.1.3 Economic dimension of corporate sustainability

Discussions regarding the economic dimension of corporate sustainability often propose it as the generic dimension where economic sustainability embraces the general aspects of an organization that has to be concerned, besides the environmental and social aspects, to remain in the market in the long term (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) state that the usage of such generic aspects is meaningful, as favorable results positively correlate with the organization's financial performance and sustainability. Thus, the management should utilize such aspects to obtain economic success, rather than focusing on the aspects that only show financial results. Therefore, the economic dimension incorporates the shareholders of organizations, where management has to maintain shareholder satisfaction while focusing on the economic performance. Maintaining shareholder satisfaction can be challenging for managers as shareholders expect to maximize the return on their investment, which can pressure managers to maximize prices regarding offerings (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Therefore, the challenge managers have to deal with is finding the right balance between stakeholder and shareholder needs. However, organizations will display a higher level of sustainability maturity if balance is achieved (Van Marrewijk & Werre, 2003).

Furthermore, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) propose different aspects of the economic dimension of sustainability. These aspects are innovation and technology, collaboration, knowledge management, processes, purchase, and sustainability reporting. As these aspects are part of the economic dimension of corporate sustainability, they mainly focus on how an organization can improve its financial performance while simultaneously improving its environmental impact. For example, purchasing is concerned with an organization considering sustainability issues in purchasing and supply chain management while also focusing on sustainability regarding the relationship with suppliers (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Organizations focusing on sustainability issues in purchasing and supply chain management are likely to enhance their waste management while simultaneously cutting costs as excessive waste leads to unnecessary costs (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Focusing on sustainability issues in purchasing and supply chain management can be achieved by aligning management systems with the environmental performance strategies (Kashmanian et al., 2011).

The management of sustainability on a corporate level must be greater than the sum of the parts of facility-level sustainability management. Thus, certain essential sustainability management functions, such as strategic planning, R&D, design, and marketing, must be addressed by the corporate function. However, in reality, vital facility-level operational programs should ensure the maintenance of sustainability. The firm maintains sustainability through awareness and engagement among employees, the development of metrics for sustainability, the establishment of facility sustainability standards, and an understanding of the competitive landscape (Kashmanian et al., 2011). Maintaining sustainability is crucial to improve financial performance while simultaneously satisfying the shareholders' needs.

2.2 Operationalizing the sustainability strategy

In order to reach the highest maturity level associated with the sustainability strategy, firms should especially plan and analyze the factors that constitute their business strategy. These factors tend to vary based on the firm. Nevertheless, regardless of the factors, firms must plan and analyze how these factors contribute toward sustainability to ensure sustainable development. Therefore, Baumgartner (2014) proposes that planning and analyzing factors constituting the business strategy should be the starting point in planning a sustainability strategy. Firms understanding the constituting factors behind the business strategy can measure the effects different strategic alternatives have on the environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Thereby, firms can gain an enhanced understanding of how the environmental, social, and economic systems influence their value propositions (Baumgartner, 2014). However, the firm must clarify how sustainable development and sustainability align with the vision, mission, and culture. As a reason, when firms incorporate sustainable development, Lloret (2016) states that competitive companies prioritizing sustainability will generate an understanding of how to generate sustainable value through a strategy and thereby meet their organizational goals. Therefore, firms should rethink and challenge their assumptions (Werbach, 2011). Consequently, frameworks for sustainable strategic development are favorable as they provide shared understanding (Baumgartner, 2014). Lloret (2016) builds on the statement by Baumgartner by stating that in order for companies to model a sustainability strategy and subsequently achieve competitiveness in the long-term, they should utilize a strategically directed model. Werbach (2011) elaborates further by proposing seven principles for sustainability to consider each strategic alternative's effect on the environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The seven principles can serve as guidelines for considerations related to sustainability strategies. Firms that consider the following seven principles will gain benefits, e.g., higher customer satisfaction, enhanced brand image and reputation, and lower resource usage, to name a few (Werbach, 2011). The seven principles are:

1. Natural resources will become increasingly expensive and rare - Most firms rely on inexpensive natural resources and high-functioning ecosystem services to bring their products to the market. The resources and ecosystem services can benefit firms, but few firms consider these two benefits when formulating their strategy. Furthermore, most ecosystem services are in danger of being overwhelmed by people's desire for a higher standard of living. Therefore, firms have to explore the usage of sustainable resources

(Werbach, 2011). Firms that explore sustainable resource usage represent a high maturity level of sustainability.

2. Massive demographic change is happening – Firms have to integrate the changing consumer landscape into their strategies due to climate change and the rapidly growing population of the planet. Therefore, firms should look for opportunities to bring forward clean energy and eliminate climate-negative energy simultaneously. Furthermore, firms have to adapt to diversity, which is becoming an increasing problem. Maturing consumer markets implies businesses' challenge to adapt their business models to serve local markets (Werbach, 2011). Firms that adapt to diversity and the changing consumer landscape often display a high maturity level of sustainability.
3. People are the most important renewable source – Firms who commit themselves to sustainability have to invest in employee training to ensure that their employees understand that sustainability matters. Furthermore, firms have to avoid short-termism and have faith that their investment in the employees will lead to sustainability improvements (Werbach, 2011). By investing in their employees, firms can rapidly advance their sustainability maturity level as employee education regarding sustainability often changes the behavior within firms regarding sustainability.
4. Cash flow matters more than quarterly earnings – Firms that focus on quarterly earnings rather than cash flow are likely to be unsustainable due to lack of transparency. By focusing on quarterly earnings, firms can manipulate the appearance of their earnings and will thereby lack the linkage to growth in earnings per share and shareholder value. Furthermore, firms focusing on quarterly earnings will not consider additional capital needed for growth (Werbach, 2011). Transparency toward shareholders and stakeholders is one of the critical elements of corporate governance associated with internal social sustainability. Firms with transparency in financial reporting often showcase a high maturity level of sustainability.
5. The organizational operating environment will change as dramatically in the next three to five years as it has changed in the last five – Firms have to increase their operational flexibility to deal with changes happening in their organizational operating environment. Increasing operating flexibility can be done by firms making strategy a living organism and accepting that mistakes will happen. Therefore, firms that increase their operating flexibility will be more reactive to changes in their operating environment (Werbach, 2011). In terms of sustainability, firms that will be reactive to changes will more comfortably cope with emerging sustainability issues, resulting in a higher maturity level of sustainability.
6. Internal cohesion and flexibility will be needed as the external world is becoming more and more chaotic – Most firms' functionality is dependent on customer input regarding whether their offering is fulfilling the customer needs or not. Therefore, firms must be

flexible to change. Achieving flexibility entails that a firm's strategy must engage every part of the value chain, from supplier to customer, to achieve internal flexibility (Werbach, 2011). Firms who commit themselves to customer input regarding the functionality of their products and are prepared to react to the customer input represent a high level of sustainability maturity.

7. Only those who fully commit themselves to be transparent will survive – Firms who commit themselves to be sustainable must have relevant, accessible, and engaging information available to survive. In order to survive, firms must integrate a belief in transparency into their culture. Having good timely information within firms allows each individual to personalize the change initiative to match their own goals and objectives and is the foundation of organizational adaptation (Werbach, 2011). Firms that commit themselves to be fully transparent by following rules and giving relevant insights into data display a high sustainability maturity level.

2.2.1 Modeling a sustainability strategy

Firms can only reach the highest level of maturity when working with the environmental, social, and economic elements imposed on how they operate (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). In order to cope with the elements imposed on how firms operate, Lloret (2016) developed a conceptual model to achieve competitiveness through value creation generated by the sustainability limits. The framework embeds the three domains, market-based view, resource-based view, and institutional-based view (Lloret, 2016). Figure 2 illustrates the framework.

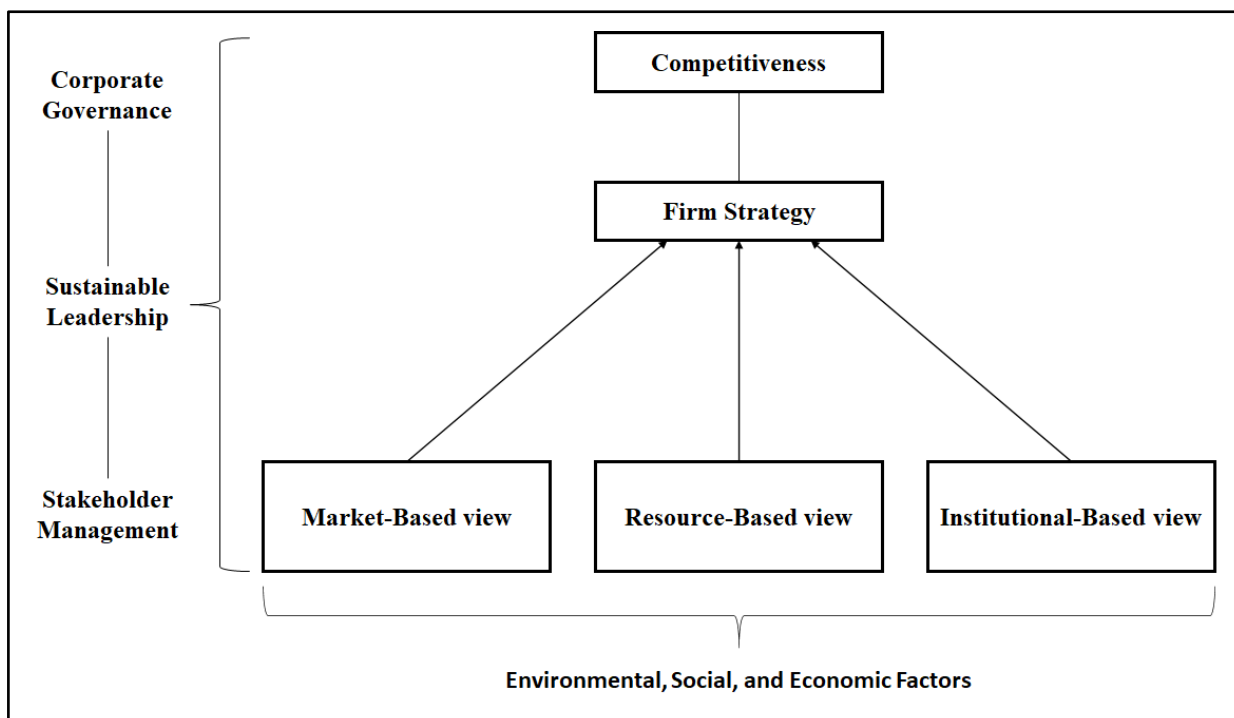


Figure 2, A conceptual model to achieve competitiveness through value creation generation by corporate sustainability. Source: Replication of Lloret (2016).

Firms using visionary sustainability strategies use sustainability issues to derive market advantages. Therefore, the sustainability issues are considered in strategic management and serve as inputs for strategy formulation, as the market-based view of the firm derives the sustainability issues (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Thus, firms developing a competitive strategy that incorporates sustainability have to consider the market-based view based on differentiation of companies and is often coherent with cost leadership (Porter, 1985). Further, the market-based view has roots in the laws regarding supply and demand in terms of the catalysts of individual preferences and the generators for operating margins. The demand is represented by the perceived benefits customers acquire when interfering with the offering. Consequently, companies who provide more perceived benefits than competitors will generate more value and grow (Lloret, 2016). As a result, the market-based view encircles the exploration of markets, products, and other opportunities. The competitiveness is relevant to the margins, where reducing costs increases the perceived value. However, the literature shows that companies improving their environmental performance also yield a positive financial return over time (Albertini, 2013; Orlitzky, Schmidt & Rynes, 2003). Porter and van der Linde (1995) state that lower pollution increases productivity, as pollution is considered a waste of resources. Lloret (2016) further states that sustainability is an element that enhances firm attributes and improves value through achieved differentiation. Firms that embrace sustainability are often exploring new markets and perceive that customers demand their offering to hold sustainable attributes. The findings of Lloret (2016) show that new market openings and cost savings are the main drivers for sustainability adoption. On the other hand, no support shows that the brand or corporate image was a driver for sustainability. However, assessing if a sustainable strategy is cost-effective has proven difficult (Orlitzky et al., 2003). Nevertheless, it is somewhat more relevant to understand when and how a sustainability strategy is cost-effective (Lloret, 2016).

Firms using sustainability strategies with the highest level of sustainability maturity combine the market-based view with an inside-out perspective. Therefore, the market-based view supplements a resource-based view, as the firm establishes sustainable development at the firm's normative level (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Thus, firms developing a competitive strategy that incorporates sustainability must consider the resource-based view regarding an organization's use and exploitation of strategic assets or resources to remain competitive (Lloret, 2016). The resource-based view further concerns strategic assets, resources, and capacities based on tangible and intangible assets (Wernerfelt, 1984; Lewis & Slack, 2017). Lloret (2016) showcases that resources are significant for all companies in his study. However, the resources and capacities are beneficial when they are valuable, rare, inimitable, and adopted by the organization in an entrepreneurial context or as an extension of natural resources (Hart, 1995). Regarding the relation between the resource-based view to sustainability, the strategic assets encounter biophysical limitations imposed by the environment. At the same time, sustainability requires the creation and application of strategic actions consistent with these limitations over time. Therefore, these limitations can be a source of competitive advantages as by reducing waste, utilizing new product designs and technologies, integrating stakeholders into the decision-making process, and most significantly, developing a long-term vision, companies can acquire advantages (Hart, 1995). Firms can use the new capacities and resources

based on the limitations of natural resources to develop a sustainable vision for the company. However, companies that depend on natural resources are vulnerable to the varying availability of these. On the other hand, exploiting the vulnerability can ensure value generation if strategically managed. Therefore, the resource-based view of the organization must support the complementary assets or the resource-dependent perspectives from stakeholders. Therefore, competitive advantage from resources and capabilities, in terms of strategic assets, stems from the organization itself (Lloret, 2016). Lloret (2016) argues that if firms embed resource limitations and restrictions based on the resource-based view in corporate sustainability, they are likely to increase their competitiveness. Such a company has further internalized the restrictions and will apply the value of sustainability into the decision-making process (Lloret, 2016).

Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) state that rules and regulations are essential, regardless of the maturity level of the sustainability strategy. Therefore, firms have to consider the institutional-based view, based on institutional theory or the new institutionalism, when developing a competitive strategy that incorporates sustainability. The view has gained attention in the management literature, as it proposes implications for both businesses and the environment. Precepts, laws, rules, codes, customs, and traditions that determine behavior represent institutions (Lloret, 2016). Peng et al. (2009) posit that competitive advantages stem from the institutional limits externally established to the company. These institutions will set the limits that individuals, companies, and governments may act within. Furthermore, the main attribute of institutions is that they lend certainty to business transactions and reduce transaction costs. Therefore, the institutions will establish the limits that an organization moves, both formally and informally (Peng et al., 2009). Relating the institutional-based view to sustainability, Lloret (2016) describes the institutional-based view as indispensable to understand sustainability. Consequently, companies must have an institutional vision to be sustainable as they are subject to regional, national, international, and self-regulatory mechanisms that guide conduct. Lloret (2016) clarifies these mechanisms in his findings by showing that the national and international regulations drive strategic decisions for sustainable practices. Institutions further develop internal norms of conduct that respond to sustainability demands. The institutions create incentives for sustainability adoption because they derive behavior adaptations that comply with societal expectations. Consequently, it is the capacity to adapt to the institutional conditions that will generate long-term strategies, which will generate value. Therefore, the institutional-based view is central to strategic decision-making and can derive a competitive edge if considered by corporate sustainability (Lloret, 2016).

The market-based, resource-based, and institutional-based views should be carried out in collaboration with stakeholder management and be limited to the economic, environmental, and social systems. In order to tie the three different views into a strategy, sustainable leadership is required, signified by communities, collaboration among stakeholders, and promotion of long-term sustainable values, to constitute a firm strategy that advocates long-term competitiveness. Corporate governance is required to maintain long-term competitiveness. Even though the requirements on corporate governance are unique for every

company, corporate governance must control the internal and external actions of managers, employees, and external stakeholders (Lloret, 2016).

2.2.2 Strategic approaches within sustainability

Firms planning a corporate sustainability strategy have to clarify to which extent sustainability is part of the organizational vision and mission statements (Baumgartner, 2014). Firms aiming to reach higher maturity levels should base their corporate sustainability strategy on sustainability-related vision and mission statements. Furthermore, firms aiming to reach higher maturity levels of sustainability should commit themselves toward completely integrating sustainability into their operations and making sustainability a key aspect represented in their vision and mission statements. The Lloret (2016) contextual framework highlights the essential element to model a sustainability strategy, but it is not sufficient by itself. So, to practically develop the sustainability strategy, more efforts are needed. Therefore, decision-makers need to consider certain decisions when developing a sustainability strategy (Baumgartner, 2014). A critical decision is to determine the strategic approach between the static or the dynamic approach to achieving resonance between strategy and resource utilization (Lewis & Slack, 2017; Baumgartner 2014). Moreover, to achieve resonance between strategy and the environmental, social, and economic dimensions required for the higher levels of sustainability maturity.

The static approach to achieve sustainability is associated with prevention or defense against competitors attacking the market and the resource position. Firms should use the static approach if the contextual factors have a low impact on sustainability issues (Lewis & Slack, 2017). Thereby, the static approach is more suitable when firms solely require lower maturity levels regarding their sustainability strategy. Further, the static approach implies that firms can use mechanisms to isolate themselves from competitors. The mechanisms can act as a defense both through internal and external means. Internally, using mechanisms to isolate from competitors includes viewing resources as rare and imitable. At the same time, externally, a firm's overall performance is considered dependent on how well the strategy executes its actions according to the market (Lewis & Slack, 2017; Baumgartner, 2014).

The dynamic approach concerns offense, e.g., attacking new attractive markets and evolving existing operations. The dynamic approach requires a higher level of alignment to achieve an increased balance between market requirements and operational resources. An increasing balance between market requirements and operational resources can provide advantages and be profitable, as it is time and resource-consuming for competitors to replicate and imitate (Lewis & Slack, 2017). Thereby, the dynamic approach is more suitable when firms aspire to achieve higher maturity levels regarding their sustainability strategy. Suppose firms aspire to achieve higher levels of maturity within their sustainability strategies. In that case, Baumgartner (2014) proposes that firms should set long-term sustainability objectives corresponding to the environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Furthermore, firms using the dynamic approach should plan activities using backcasting and forecasting and then define the active strategy type, plan activities, measures, and specify goals. Setting long-term

sustainability goals and planning activities refer to firms deriving strategic measures from goals and activities through classic approaches for strategic development. While defining the strategy type and planning activities, measures and specifying goals is, on the other hand, associated with reinforcing the business strategy in order to contribute to the company's strategic market positioning (Baumgartner, 2014).

2.3 Sustainability in relation to business strategy

In order to realize the operationalized sustainability strategy, firms have to link it to their business strategy to unlock the sustainability strategy's full potential. Furthermore, the fit between the sustainability strategy and the business strategy is an important discussion point regarding maturity levels of sustainability strategies (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Long (2019) elaborates, stating that organizations face an increasing challenge of incorporating sustainability in their business strategies, as improved awareness of sustainability issues within society has led to damage in the reputation of businesses. Thus, governments have implemented legislation to get organizations to acknowledge sustainability within their business. As a result, most organizations have adopted sustainability initiatives to comply with new legislation (Matzembacher & Meira, 2019). Furthermore, some organizations voluntarily use practices to increase their environmental, social, and economic performance. However, when voluntarily engaging in sustainability, organizations often misinterpret the actual reason behind sustainability activities and consider the sustainability dimensions as a source to increase reputation (Maniora, 2018). Therefore, organizations rarely consider sustainability a top priority within their business, as they do not realize the true benefit (Matzembacher & Meira, 2019; Maniora, 2018). Rarely considering sustainability as a top priority can be attributed to integrating sustainability into the organization and business strategy, as sustainability is a complex phenomenon. These challenges include setting appropriate goals and developing performance measures to identify if the organization is steering in the right direction regarding the implementation (Brady et al., 1999). Dealing with the challenges associated with sustainability integration can be done by setting a strategic direction by utilizing the dynamic or static approach, thereby aligning the business strategy and sustainability strategy. By aligning the business strategy and the sustainability strategy, organizations can maximize the effectiveness of their sustainability strategy in relation to the business strategy, rather than limiting it to its operations. Suppose organizations limit the sustainability strategy to certain functions rather than spreading it throughout the organization. In that case, they will have a lower maturity level of sustainability and thereby never enjoy the actual benefit that sustainability encompasses (Stubbs, Higgins & Milne, 2013). On the other hand, by linking the overall business strategy and the sustainability strategy, organizations will enhance their business value generated by sustainability as functions will coordinate activities and learn from each other, indicating a higher sustainability maturity level (Kashmanian et al., 2011).

As the sustainability strategy matures with time and implementation, the sustainability strategy should change the business model, which implies that the sustainability strategy should create the sustainable business model. In addition, if an organization intends to develop a sustainable business model, it must have a sustainable strategy. Consequently, an organization must have

a sustainable business model, as the sustainable strategy is unlikely to be sufficient due to the increasing importance and necessity of sustainable strategies (Long, 2019). Organizations that understand and capitalize on the increasing importance of sustainability and transform toward more sustainable business models can achieve long-term strategic and competitive advantages. Organizations utilizing sustainability within their operations will also develop a better understanding of their offerings' environmental, social, and economic value and identify opportunities for cost reduction and offering improvement (Brady et al., 1999). However, Brady et al. (1999) highlight that determining to which extent organizations should comply beyond sustainability regulations can prove to be complicated. Dhaliwal et al. (2012) further state that mismanagement and misunderstanding of sustainability issues can threaten an organization's financial performance through several channels. Therefore, organizations must identify cost leadership strategies, product differentiation strategies, and hybrid strategies to ensure that their sustainability strategy fits with their general strategic orientation. Organizations incorporating sustainability strategies with higher levels of maturity can develop a deeper relationship with customers and suppliers, enhance brand image and community relationship, and comply with sustainability regulations (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010).

2.3.1 Incorporating sustainability into the business strategy

Sustainability strategies become almost obsolete if not incorporated into the business strategy. Klettner, Clark, and Boersma (2014) elaborate, stating that the current literature focuses on why companies should adopt sustainability practices and not how to incorporate sustainability strategies in business strategies practically. Firms must, in practice, carefully tailor the sustainability strategies to match the specific circumstances encircling the firm. Therefore, it is highly challenging to translate the concept into actions, i.e., concrete initiatives (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016). To ease the process of translating concepts into concrete initiatives, Engert and Baumgartner (2016) discuss that when incorporating sustainability into business strategies, firms need to consider different aspects. These aspects are importance, challenges, prioritization and guidelines, and organizational fit related to the incorporation of sustainability strategies.

Bonn and Fisher (2011) imply that incorporating sustainability strategies is essential, as they state that sustainability strategies are the missing ingredient in the business strategy. Thus, firms have to consider sustainability issues in their strategic decision-making process. At the same time, managers need to realize the true benefit associated with sustainability integration into their business. However, many managers consider sustainability unnecessary and feel little pressure to implement it. Thus, such managers are unmotivated to fuel both the structural and cultural change needed to implement sustainability (Stubbs et al., 2013). As managers feel no pressure to implement sustainability, they will disregard it and focus on other areas. However, managers in firms that have not disregarded sustainability usually realize the importance of formulating a sustainability strategy (Epstein & Roy, 2001). Thus, the question is no longer whether firms should implement corporate sustainability strategies, and instead, how firms should implement these strategies (Baumgartner, 2014). However, implementing corporate sustainability strategies is not simple, as the corporate sustainability strategy concepts are often

intangible. However, bridging the gap between sustainability strategy formulation and implementation can be done by translating the intangible concepts into a strategy based on a particular set of actions (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016; Epstein & Roy, 2001). Firms that manage to bridge the gap between sustainability strategy formulation and implementation by developing a sustainability strategy and incorporation into the business strategy are likely to enhance their competitive advantage through differentiation and innovation (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). However, to achieve the competitive advantage, the sustainability strategies need to be carefully formulated to match the firms' specific circumstances that intend to implement them (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016).

Due to the number of challenges related to the incorporation of sustainability strategies, managers must engage stakeholders, create a sustainable culture that promotes sustainability and select the appropriate managerial tools and systems to collect data (Brady et al., 1999; Crews, 2010). Stakeholder engagement refers to managers having to simultaneously manage the expectations and needs of stakeholders. Managers need to ensure that they do not disregard one stakeholder's interest to fulfill another because trade-offs can cause tension within the organization. Managers should aim to avoid trade-offs when managing stakeholder engagements (Crews, 2010). Managers establishing a shared vision and strategy are more likely to be successful in including the needs and expectations of all the relevant stakeholders. Creating the culture refers to establishing the sustainable organizational culture needed to integrate sustainability successfully. However, creating the culture represents a challenge for managers as sustainability is a relatively new initiative for organizations. Thus, the employees within the organization might consider sustainability as a fad and not take it as seriously. Consequently, managers integrating sustainability need to ensure that the entire organization understands the initiative that sustainability entails. As a result, employees of the organization are likely better prepared for the organizational change that sustainability entails (Crews, 2010). In addition, Crews (2010) states that managers face the challenge of choosing the appropriate tools and management systems concerning sustainability reporting as there are multiple options available. Therefore, managers need to ensure that the chosen systems and tools are appropriate to the respective business strategy their organization utilizes (Crews, 2010).

Firms translating intangible sustainability concepts into strategy need prioritization and guidelines by the organization. The most critical requirement is prioritizing and integrating sustainability into the existing core strategy (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016), which firms can do by changing their approach concerning sustainability. Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) state that this approach concerning sustainability should be straightforward where the firm expresses its purpose and vision in terms of environmental, social, and economic outcomes. Moreover, changing the approach concerning sustainability will also change the business model and logic of the firm and make it more suitable for sustainability. Doing these changes in business model and logic ensures that the firm can develop internal structural and cultural capabilities to achieve firm-level sustainability. For example, a firm that changes its business model and logic to be more suitable for sustainability will look at profit as means to achieve sustainable outcomes, while firms less focused on sustainability will look at a profit to exist and survive

(Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008). Having a straightforward approach regarding sustainability will also signal to the employees that sustainability is central to the business. Moreover, signaling toward employees that sustainability is central to business will also drive sustainable behaviors and decision-making at different levels of the organization on a day-to-day basis (White, 2009). Furthermore, having appropriate structures in place, e.g., management systems like the ISO 14001, can ease implementing the sustainability strategy in the organization. Thereby, the management system guides the strategy implementation (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016).

The fit between strategies, organizational structure, and organizational processes is needed when addressing sustainability in relation to business strategy to successfully implement sustainability strategies (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016). Based on strategies, organizational structure, and organizational processes, six barriers or factors of corporate sustainability implementation can be derived. These six barriers are organizational structure, organizational culture, leadership, management control, employee motivation, and qualifications and communication. Furthermore, the six barriers can hinder the strategy implementation. However, when sufficiently managed, they act as success factors (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016). A successful sustainability strategy implementation demands an organization to ensure no trade-offs regarding sustainability. Thus, if an organization has a clear strategy with stated overall boundaries, the decision-making regarding sustainability will be facilitated. Furthermore, organizations that maintain a balance between the three dimensions of sustainability will ensure that all aspects of sustainability will remain relevant while ensuring that the organization is steering in the right direction (White, 2009; Brady et al., 1999).

2.3.2 Sustainability as an integral part of strategy

Becoming a sustainable organization is a long and arduous process. As earlier mentioned, incorporating sustainability strategies, in practice, demands carefully tailoring it to match the specific circumstances encircling the firm. Therefore, it is a challenge to translate the concept into actions, i.e., concrete initiatives (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016). To cope with the challenge of translating concepts into concrete initiatives, Bonn and Fischer (2011) developed a framework illustrated in Figure 3, which firms can use to assess the degree to which the firms have strategically incorporated sustainability. Complete incorporation of sustainability into the business strategy refers to making it an integral part of the strategy, implying that sustainability is an integral concept of strategies that become evident in all aspects. To consider itself sustainable, the firm has to address the different aspects of sustainability during the strategic decision-making process and incorporate them into the corporate, business, and functional level strategies (Bonn & Fisher, 2011).

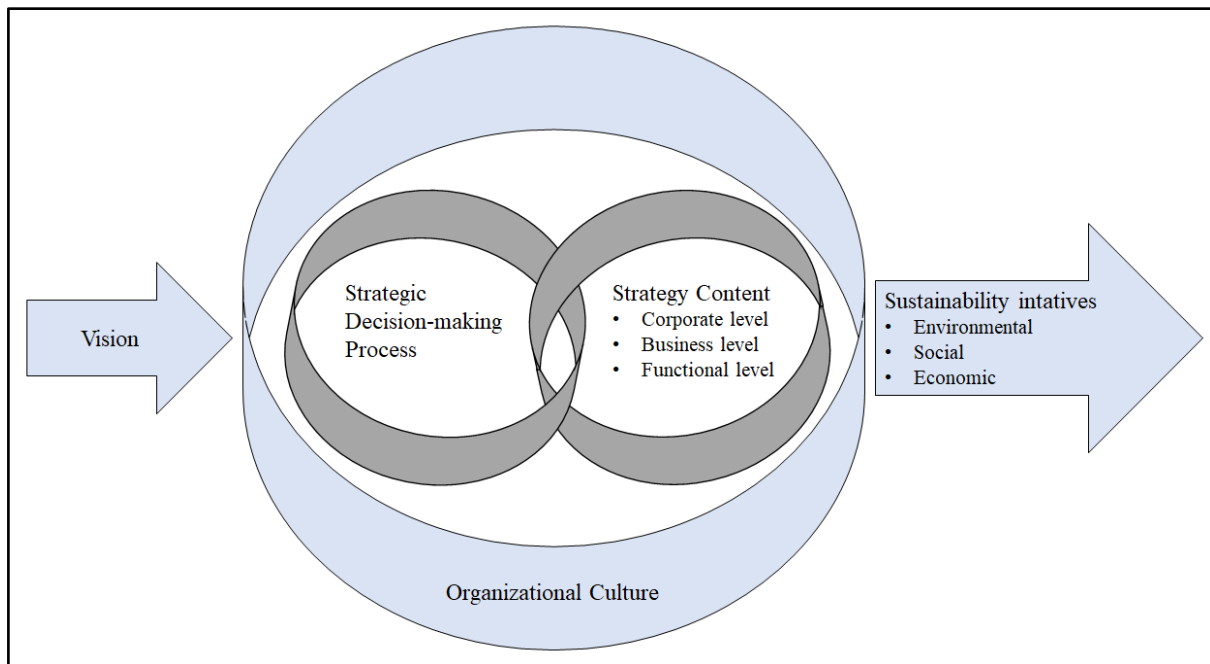


Figure 3, Sustainability as an integral part of the strategy. Source: Own elaboration on Bonn and Fisher (2011).

Relating the framework by Bonn and Fisher (2011) to the higher levels of maturity associated with sustainability strategies, the decision-making is associated with uncertainty and incomplete information. In order to mitigate the uncertainty encircling decision-making, establishing a commonly shared vision provides guidance, which considers the interests of different stakeholders. A vision with high sustainability maturity will include the environmental, social, and economic elements and mediates corporate norms and values that guide the decisions of all employees. At the same time, the vision must be genuine, rather than a mere slogan, and should reflect the organization's fundamental values. Thereby, firms should establish a strong relationship between the organization and its stakeholders. Furthermore, the vision should posit that sustainability is an integral part of the business approach to stakeholders and society (Bonn & Fisher, 2011).

The vision serves as the basis for the strategic decision-making process. The decision-making process must identify strategic problems and analyze their nature and underlying causes. In order to achieve long-term commitment toward sustainability, the decision-makers should address the sustainability concerns in all decision-making processes, especially when there is tension between environmental, economic, and social considerations. Addressing tension by focusing on long-term sustainability rather than short-term financial gains will emphasize that sustainability is an integral part of the organization's strategy. Furthermore, the decision-makers must monitor sustainability initiatives emerging within the organization. It is encouraged to provide an environment where sustainability opportunities, suggested by employees, are encouraged and rewarded (Bonn & Fisher, 2011).

The outcome of the strategic decision-making process is the strategy content, more particularly a set of strategies for the corporate, business, and functional levels of strategies. In terms of

corporate-level strategy, to achieve high maturity levels associated with sustainability, strategic decision-makers need to rethink the current business model. Therefore, managers need to analyze whether the corporate portfolio establishes a balance between the organization's environmental, social, and economic goals (Bonn & Fisher, 2011). Analyzing the corporate portfolio has to be done, as businesses should develop and promote durable offerings that can be produced and consumed with minimal environmental impact. At the same time, the individual businesses need to be balanced so that the corporate portfolio contributes to the long-term economic sustainability of the organization (Stead & Stead, 2013). In terms of the business-level strategy, organizations that aim to increase the sustainability maturity level must further decide whether to modify existing offerings to make them more sustainable or to develop new sustainable offerings. In terms of the functional-level strategy, firms must address the training and development programs intended to improve the employees' knowledge and skills in sustainability. Furthermore, a reward system that measures and rewards contributions to the organization's environmental, social, and economic performance criteria is required (Bonn & Fisher, 2011). Similarly, the marketing strategy must ensure the fulfillment of stakeholders' needs, support the sustainability goals, and ensure that the marketing processes are sustainable. The market strategy should further convey the environmental and social achievements by utilizing sustainable marketing channels (Stead & Stead, 2013).

For the sustainable vision and the sustainable strategies to be successful, they must be supported and reflected by the norms, values, beliefs, and informal problem-solving and decision-making. Therefore, the organizational culture is crucial in increasing the maturity level associated with sustainability (Bonn & Fisher, 2011). Cultures encircling sustainability reinforce a view that environmental and social values are of importance, and these cultures guide the behavior of the employees. Such cultures consist of beliefs and practices that are consistent with the principles of sustainability and encourage behavior sensitive to environmental and social issues. Further, these cultures can influence the attitudes of stakeholders (Stead & Stead, 2013).

In combination with a culture embracing sustainability, the sustainable vision and the sustainable strategies will promote sustainability initiatives. There is a broad range of sustainability initiatives to undertake, e.g., allocating resources to R&D to develop offerings with improved sustainable features, investing in social and cultural development, investing in cleaner technology, implementing a labor safety program, and developing a child labor policy. However, for the initiatives to be effective, there must be a vision that incorporates the environmental, social, and economic elements. There must be a strategic decision-making process based on commitment toward sustainability, where strategic content is specific concerning sustainability at the corporate, business, and functional level and an organizational culture that promotes sustainability efforts. Worth noting is that becoming a sustainable organization with a high maturity associated with sustainability is a long and arduous process that requires continuous capability building and managing engagement to integrate all the sustainability initiatives to form a cohesive whole (Bonn & Fisher, 2011).

2.4 Maturing and incorporating sustainability strategy

Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) highlight that to understand sustainability strategies, it is necessary to be aware of the range of sustainability issues that the specific sustainability strategy aims to address. These sustainability issues refer to sustainability's environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Based on the range of sustainability issues specific sustainability strategies aim to deal with, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) discuss specific maturity levels of sustainability strategies. These sustainability maturity levels are extensive and serve a specific purpose as a managerial tool to enhance organizational understanding of sustainability issues and ease decision-making regarding sustainability. However, there is no clear distinction of making a sustainability strategy associated with a higher maturity level of sustainability, which can hinder sustainable development. On the other hand, the conceptual model proposed by Lloret (2016) aims to enhance competitiveness through generating an understanding of the sustainability limits imposed on firms. The framework of Lloret (2016) covers the three domains, market-based view, resource-based view, and institutional-based view, which firms can use as a basis for sustainable development. Therefore, there are opportunities to explore how the three domains can be incorporated to achieve sustainable development and bridge the gap between the different sustainability strategy maturity levels. However, solely developing a new sustainability strategy is by no means sufficient, as the literature stresses that there are requirements on the organization to integrate the sustainability strategy with the business strategy. It is further a long and arduous process to become a sustainable organization. As a result, the incorporation of sustainability strategies, in practice, demands carefully tailoring it to match the specific circumstances encircling the firm. Therefore, it is a challenge to translate the concept into actions, i.e., concrete initiatives. In order to cope with the challenge of translating concepts into concrete initiatives, the framework developed by Bonn and Fisher (2011) illustrates the incorporation of sustainability into the business strategy, making it an integral part of the strategy. Therefore, Bonn and Fisher's (2011) framework aids in finalizing the maturing of the sustainability strategy to be associated with a higher sustainability maturity level, which is still unexplored. Thus, this section derives the following two research questions:

RQ1: How can a sustainability strategy be associated with a higher sustainability maturity level?

RQ2: How can a sustainability strategy with a higher sustainability maturity level be incorporated to become an integral part of the business strategy?

3. Methodology

This chapter accounts for the chosen methodology, research strategy, research design, and specific approaches and considerations taken in this research. Complementary literature then supports the presented taken decisions.

3.1 Research strategy

The research strategy refers to the overall approach taken in the conducted research, which stems from the philosophical assumptions that inform the research design, the choice of research questions, and the chosen methods to address them. The research strategy is often associated with two different types, deductive and inductive. At the same time, an abductive research strategy refers to combining the deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach is the most common to explain the relationship between theory and research. The deductive approach utilizes the established domain and its theoretical considerations to deduce empirically scrutinized hypotheses. On the other hand, the inductive approach utilizes a grounded theory approach to analyze data and generate theory. Therefore, the inductive research yields new and generalized theory, commonly based on inspiring and illuminating findings, but whose theoretical significance is unknown (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018). As this particular research phenomenon was unexplored beforehand, the gathered data served as the basis for both theory development and elaboration. Therefore, it was suitable to utilize the abductive research strategy, where the empirical data was elaborated upon, to elaborate on the theoretical foundation presented in chapter 2.

Related to the research strategy is the research approach, which is associated with the qualitative and quantitative research approach. The qualitative research approach is favorable when the aim is to understand human behaviors, and the data is collected by doing observations and interviews. The quantitative research strategy is beneficial when data is numerical, and the data analysis utilizes statistical methods. Moreover, to link theory and data is common to utilize the qualitative research approach (Bell et al., 2018). As this particular research encircles a case study based on the development and incorporation of a sustainability strategy, behaviors and insights of different actors were essential to obtain. Therefore, this research utilizes the qualitative research approach, as that research approach aligns with the nature of the study.

3.2 Research design

Case studies differentiate from other types of research designs, as case studies focus on a bounded situation or system, categorized as an entity with a purpose and functioning parts (Bell et al., 2018). Therefore, a case study design was used for this research as the particular problem associated with this research derives from a bounded situation. Furthermore, to formulate the research question, a literature review was done. Following the literature review and formulation of research questions, data collection and data analysis methods were selected. The data collection, data analysis, and data processing steps were treated as interdependent, as they affected each other to a certain degree. The sections below clarify the data collection, data analysis, and data processing. Based on the determined research strategy, research design chosen, collection, analysis, and data processing, the research was conducted according to the following steps, see Figure 4 for illustration.

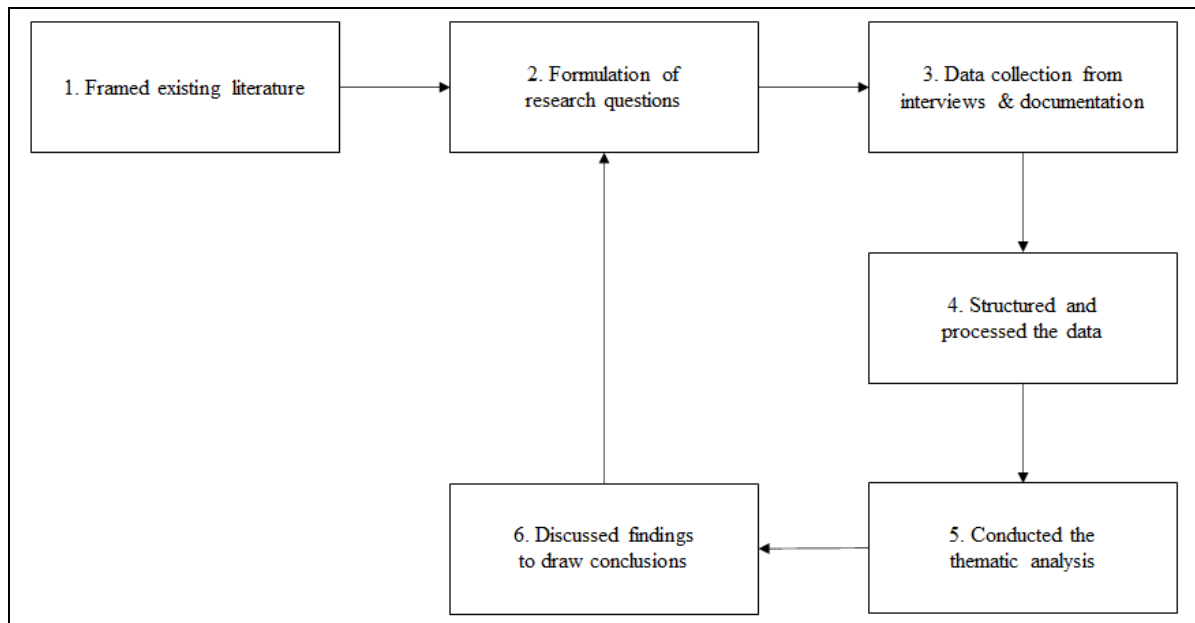


Figure 4, Illustration of the steps conducted in the research.

1. *Existing literature from databases and online libraries framed.*

The data collection was executed by using online databases such as EBSCOhost and Google Scholar, and using a combination of keywords such as “Sustainability,” “Corporate Sustainability,” “Sustainability Strategy,” “Sustainability Maturity,” “Business Strategy and Sustainability,” “Planning a Sustainability Strategy,” “Developing a Sustainability Strategy.” But also, through internet sources such as KPMG and WCED.

2. *Formulation of research questions.*

The research questions presented in sections 1.3 and 2.4 were created by identifying gaps in the current literature.

3. *Data collection was executed by conducting interviews and using documentation.*

The collection of data rests on the multiple sources of evidence principle. The primary sources of evidence were collected through interviews and complemented with documentation and archival records.

4. *Structured and processed the data to create prerequisites for analysis.*

The collected data were processed and structured by breaking it down into different sections. Furthermore, was the data grouped to ease the process of analyzing.

5. *Conducted the data analysis using thematic analysis to look for patterns in answers.*

After the data was structured and grouped, the usage of thematic analysis aided in analyzing the different data groups. The different areas of data were first analyzed independently to gather information to discuss in order to be able to draw independent conclusions. Further, the areas were analyzed in terms of linkage to gather information to draw combined conclusions.

6. *Discussed the findings in order to address research questions and draw conclusions.*

A discussion took place to pinpoint the qualitative implications of the findings. Based on that discussion, it was possible to draw conclusions to address the research question to generate an unaddressed generalized theory.

3.3 Research delimitations & limitations

Regarding delimitations within this research, this thesis obtained its findings through a single case study that operates within the wholesale industry, primarily concerning sales and distribution of ice cream. Therefore, the findings of this thesis might not be directly applicable for other industries, as the selection of a single case study as the research object limits the generalizability of the findings. Further, the data collection within this thesis was primarily conducted within the top-management domain of the case study object, as the research results mainly have significant implications for the top management team of the case study object. Thus, the findings of this thesis might not be shared outside of the top management domain of the case study object as the findings may not directly have implications for employees outside of the top management team.

Regarding limitations within this research, conducting this thesis was limited to a five-month time frame. Thus, the limited time available made it difficult to utilize a quantitative research approach to complement the chosen qualitative research approach. As a result, numeric data was neither analyzed nor investigated, which resulted in no objective verification of the research findings. In addition, time constraints also excluded the investigation of causality. Furthermore, this research had to cohere with the restrictions set by the COVID-19 pandemic, as the pandemic was ongoing during the execution of this research. As a result, the solitary possibility for data collection was remote, limiting physical interactions between the interviewees and the researchers. Moreover, the phenomena chosen to research were unexplored to some degree beforehand, so the availability of prior information concerning the research phenomenon was limited. Finally, during this research, the case study object had its high seasonal period, limiting employees' availability.

3.4 Collection of data

There are six recurrent sources of empirical evidence when conducting a case study research: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant- observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2018). Based on these sources, it was determined to use multiple sources of evidence as a principle for data collection. Thereby, to provide insights into the current strategic and sustainability work, a combination of documents concerning strategic documents and current sustainability work, public archival records, and a sustainability survey conducted in a workshop were used. Using this combination of documents also provided insights into how the current strategic and sustainability work has developed over time. These evidence types are not created due to the case study results as they cover a broad, long unobtrusive period. Thus, these types of evidence ensure a certain level of stability. Further, these evidence types contain details about particular events, ensuring a certain level of stability. On the other hand, there are weaknesses in these types of evidence, as it can be hard to find and access this type of evidence. Further, these types of evidence are usually biased, where the author often remains unknown (Yin, 2018).

According to Yin (2018), interviews are essential evidence in a case study. Therefore, to elaborate further on the bounded situation within this study, interviews were used. Interviews can further provide answers to the how and why of significant events while giving insights into the participant's perspective. Thus, this study utilizes interviews as the primary source of evidence to elaborate on the obtained data from documentation and archival records and get insights about the future. Interviews are favorable as they can be targeted to the focus of the case study and be insightful, as they provide both explanations and personal views. On the other hand, bias can be present due to both poorly formulated questions and the responder. Furthermore, there could be inaccuracies due to poor recall and risk for reflexivity, e.g., that the participant states what the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2018). The following section presents how interviews were planned and constructed in this research.

3.4.1 Interview methods

Asking questions and getting answers is more difficult than it may seem, and thereby a certain interview approach is preferred in research (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The interview approach in qualitative research tends to be less structured than in quantitative research. Therefore, qualitative research focuses on generality in the formulation of initial research ideas and insight into the interviewees' perspectives. The aim is to obtain rich and detailed answers, where the answers can be coded and processed quickly. As a result, qualitative interviews tend to demand flexibility, where the interviewer constantly needs to respond to the direction the interviewee takes during the interview and might even have to adjust the emphasis in the research as significant issues emerge in the course of interviews (Bell et al., 2018). However, the approach taken by the interviewer in qualitative interviewing varies. Based on the varying approach taken by interviewers in qualitative interviewing, Bell et al. (2018) mention two significant types of interviews, the unstructured and the semi-structured interview.

The unstructured interview often bases on a brief set of self-prompts used to deal with a particular range of topics (Bell et al., 2018). Thus, the usage of such interviews provides a greater breadth of data than the other types (Fontana & Frey, 2005). It is not uncommon that the interviewer asks a single question where the interviewee can respond freely, and the interview progresses by the interviewer following up on points of interest (Bell et al., 2018). Therefore, the nature of unstructured interviews tends to be similar to a conversation (Burgess, 1984).

The semi-structured interview often bases on specific topics to be covered, where the list of questions based on the covered topics forms an interview guide. At the same time, the interviewee can reply freely. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview allows the interviewee to ask questions not included in the interview guide as the interviewer can follow up on the interviewee's response. Nevertheless, interviews should cover all the questions, and interviews should all use similar wording (Bell et al., 2018).

When the researcher has a clear focus, rather than a general notion of exploring the topic, the semi-structured interviews are favorable as more specific issues can be addressed. Semi-

structured interviews are further preferred to ensure comparability when interviewees are multiple. When conducting case study research, semi-structured interviews are beneficial as their structure provides an opportunity for cross-case compatibility (Bell et al., 2018). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used in this research, as they were considered suitable for this particular type of research.

3.4.2 Interview preparations and execution

The interview questions were grouped in sequential order and formulated within different focus areas according to recommendations by Bell et al. (2018). Therefore, the interview template was based on three different focus areas to ensure comparability and ease the analysis process. Furthermore, Bell et al. (2018) recommend formulating interview questions to address research questions. Therefore, according to Bell et al.'s (2018) recommendations, the interview questions were formed to cover the areas associated with the different research questions presented in chapter 2.4. Moreover, to predetermine the questions' sequence and ensure an adequate flow in the interviews, a pilot interview was used. In addition, when interviewees needed extra clarification and explanations regarding the questions during the interviews, these clarifications and explanations were done. Furthermore, when additional interesting concepts that the original interview questions did not cover came up, using follow-up questions aided the discussion regarding these new concepts. Follow-up questions also aided when there were difficulties in understanding the meaning behind the interviewee's answers.

The interviewee selection aimed to obtain rich and detailed information regarding the focus topic. Therefore, this research utilizes the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique is primarily concerned when a sample is predominantly selected to answer a particular research question (Bell et al., 2018). As a result, interviewees selected were mainly within the organization's top management and board domains, as the research results would mainly have implications for these two domains of the researched organization. According to Warren (2002), for qualitative research to be sufficient, the minimum number of interviews required has to be between 20 and 30. In addition, Glaser and Strauss (2017) further state that data collection should be continuous to achieve a state of theoretical saturation. Therefore, according to Warren's (2002) recommendations, a sufficient number of interviewees were selected and asked to participate in the research. Furthermore, the data saturation reached a high level as the number of participants interviewed increased. Thus, the number of interviews was deemed in total to be sufficient.

Two interviewers conducted all of the 16 interviews. One interviewer was responsible for asking the main questions, while the other interviewer was responsible for asking follow-up questions and filling in when needed. Initially, the idea was to conduct interviews through digital platforms. However, due to time constraints on the interviewees' behalf, some interviews were conducted over the phone. Nevertheless, the interviewers conducted the vast majority of the interviews through digital platforms. It is, however, worth noting that one

3. Methodology

interview was conducted in person by the interviewers. In order to ensure trust between the researchers and the interviewees, the researchers initiated the interview by presenting themselves. Furthermore, to maximize the result of the interviews, the participants were informed about the research and its purpose. The interviewees got the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions to achieve a deeper discussion with the possibility of unexpected answers (Lavrakas, 2008). The interviewees were further informed about anonymity and asked for approval to record the interview, where all interviewees approved recording. The interviewers utilized the semi-structured interview template to perform the interviews, see appendix A for the English version and appendix B for the Swedish version. After the interview, the interviewers transcribed the recordings of the interviews to capture the relevance of the data. However, due to some participants not being comfortable performing the interview in English, 9 interviews were instead performed in Swedish and then translated and transcribed to English. Table 1 illustrates the 16 interviewees and their respective organizational role.

Table 1, list of interviewees in accordance with their respective organizational role.

Interviewee	Role
Interviewee 1	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 2	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 3	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 4	Central office employee
Interviewee 5	Central office employee
Interviewee 6	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 7	Central office employee
Interviewee 8	Central office employee
Interviewee 9	Central office employee
Interviewee 10	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 11	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 12	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 13	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 14	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 15	Wholesaler owner
Interviewee 16	Wholesaler owner

3.5 Analysis of data

Qualitative research typically generates a large, complex dataset as the data collection phase is not as structured and normalized as the data collection phase in quantitative research. Because of the size of the data the qualitative research usually generates, the researchers must avoid being captivated by the richness of data because the richness of data can lead to the researcher not interpreting the data's broader significance (Bell et al., 2018). The large number of interviews conducted in this research generated a vast amount of data. Furthermore, Yin (2018) states that not choosing data analysis methods beforehand ruins a study's purpose. Thus, data analysis methods were determined beforehand not to ruin the purpose of this study. Further, data analysis methods were determined beforehand to ensure that it would be possible to deal with the vast amount of data generated by a large number of interviews conducted in this research. In addition, it was possible to align the data collection and the data analysis by choosing the data analysis methods beforehand. The approach used to analyze the data in this research is called Thematic Analysis by Bell et al. (2018). The thematic analysis approach rests on the idea that data is collected and analyzed regarding particular specified themes. An emphasis is put on repetition in the thematic analysis approach, as the approach uses repeated themes to establish patterns. The thematic analysis also provides the researchers with a certain degree of flexibility that other methods do not provide, which can aid the researcher's data analysis phase (Bell et al., 2018). In order to utilize the thematic analysis for this particular study, three main areas were predetermined, along with several themes in each area, where the themes represent a repetition of similarities in interviewees' answers. These three main areas are corporate sustainability strategies, operationalizing sustainability strategies, and sustainability in relation to business strategy. After the predetermination of these three areas, interviewees' answers were analyzed and coded, and themes were generated based on the repetition of similarities in interviewees' answers. After generating the themes, the scrutinization of the interviewees' answers took place to ensure that the themes represented the repetition of interviewees' answers. Lastly, the themes were adjusted and named with what repetition of interviewees' answers they represented under their main area. However, as the interviews were semi-structured, there were some differences in the data set due to personal reflections and opinions. Therefore, the interviewees' answers to specific questions could be applied to more than one theme.

Moreover, the vast amount of data and differences between interviewees' answers to questions created a need to re-allocate some of the data. Therefore, Microsoft Excel (Excel) was used to organize and analyze the vast amount of data the research generated. However, as emphasized by Yin (2018) and Bell et al. (2018), computer tools are only tools and will not analyze data by themselves. However, using Excel to organize the data aided and expedited the data analysis. The interviews were firstly conducted and then transcribed. Then, the data was structured and organized in Excel to distinguish between individuals and different subgroups, as it eased the distinction between the answers from the interviewees. After distinguishing answers using Excel, specific quotes could be matched to subgroups and provide the researchers with a deeper understanding of the topic in focus. According to the mentioned

method, the data could be broken down and conceptualized by conducting the data analysis, leading to more rich conclusions drawn from the data.

3.6 Research quality

There are three dominant criteria or tests for evaluating business and management research: reliability, replicability, and validity (Bell et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). The sections below will explain these three criteria in detail.

3.6.1 Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research is concerned with whether the analytical procedures used in research are consistent (Noble & Smith, 2015). In other words, reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of the study are repeatable so that a researcher using similar procedures conducting the same study can achieve the same or similar results (Bell et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). The reliability goal is to minimize the errors and bias in a study. Thus, when conducting a qualitative case study, procedures must be documented to ensure considerations concerning reliability. Other researchers will also find it easier to replicate the research process by documenting procedures. Therefore, the chance increases that the results of other researchers will be similar or identical to the results of the original study. Furthermore, when performing a case study, it is favorable to perform the research to ensure that an auditor who repeats the procedures achieves similar results (Yin, 2018). Further, Treharne and Riggs (2014) propose that researchers document the procedures used to ensure a sufficient level of reliability. Documenting procedures used in this research ensured a sufficient level of reliability. Further, documenting the procedures used in this research ensured that replication of this study could be possible. The research strategy, research design, data collection, and data analysis have been described in the sections above in chapter 3 to ease replicating this research.

3.6.2 Replicability

Replicability is closely associated with reliability. However, sometimes researchers choose to replicate the findings of others, mainly in order to understand whether the actual results match other evidence relevant to understand the topic. Therefore, original researchers have to ensure to frame their procedures correctly. Otherwise, replicability is infeasible to achieve for other researchers (Bell et al., 2018). Similar to the considerations of reliability in this research, the purpose of the research framed the procedures, ensuring that replicability was feasible. Further, the purpose of the research framed the procedures, ensuring no confusion regarding procedures in other attempts to replicate this research.

3.6.3 Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the integrity and application of methods used and the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Validity can

be categorized into three different aspects: measurement validity, internal validity, and external validity (Bell et al., 2018).

Measurement validity

Measurement validity, often referred to as construct validity, is concerned with whether a measure in research captures the phenomena intended to capture. Measurement validity is also closely associated with reliability because the concept of measurement validity assumes that measurements are reliable and stable (Bell et al., 2018). In order to make sure that measurement validity is sufficient, researchers have to conduct data collection without subjective judgment. Furthermore, researchers should forward a draft to key interviewees for revision before publication (Yin, 2018). To ensure a sufficient enough level of measurement validity, the report, along with the research questions, was derived from previous research and was therefore not based on a subjective judgment of the researchers. In addition, the thesis was reviewed and validated by the case study company before publication.

Internal validity

Internal validity is concerned with understanding whether a conclusion based on the relationship between two or more variables holds (Bell et al., 2018). In different words, when conducting interviews and reviewing documents, the researchers will likely conclude that a particular event can be associated with something that happened earlier. In a case study, internal validity is concerned with the interferences happening concerning a particular event, and it is impossible to do direct observations concerning these interferences. In order to deal with these interferences, researchers should address rival explanations during the phase where data is analyzed. Furthermore, logic models can be helpful when assessing internal validity (Yin, 2018). Thus, data were analyzed using logic models to ensure a sufficient level of internal validity in this research. Logic models also helped determine whether there was a logical relationship between two or more events. In addition, when results from using the logical model were not sufficient, rival explanations to events described by the interviewees were addressed to ensure that arguments could either be ruled out or highlighted for further explanation.

External validity

External validity is concerned with whether the research results can be generalized beyond the specific research context. Because of external validity, the issue of selecting people or organizations to participate in research becomes crucial (Bell et al., 2018). In order to aid the generalization of the results of research, researchers can use "how" and "why" questions. Using these types of questions sufficiently addresses the level of external validity (Yin, 2018). Further, to ensure a sufficient level of external validity, the research questions are derived from the literature review, which was conducted early on within this research. Furthermore, as Treharne and Riggs (2014) propose, throughout the research, a thorough description of the participants' answers was provided when deemed needed to ease the generalization of the findings. However, as this research uses a singular case, the generalizability of the results of this research remains a concern.

3.7 Ethical aspects

Ethical principles are a recurrent discussion when conducting research, and maybe more specifically transgressions of ethical aspects that revolve around particular recurrent issues. These issues are as follows: harm to participants, invasion of privacy, lack of informed consent, and deception (Bell et al., 2018).

Harm to participants includes a facet of different types of harms, e.g., physical harm, harm to participants self-esteem, the harm related to stress, hindrance of career development, or obstruction of future employment. Keeping the participants anonymous throughout the report mitigated the issue regarding harm and its different facets. Keeping the participants anonymous also helped mitigate the risk that participants' contributions could inflict direct harm.

Invasion of privacy principles on the fact that the right of privacy is a highly valued tenet, and transgressions are beyond acceptance within research (Bell et al., 2018). Therefore, it is essential to respect the participants' values and the participants' sense of privacy. The anonymity of the participants implied that their privacy was maintained. In addition, to ensure the anonymity of interviewees, interviewee numbers were randomized to mitigate the risk of backtracking. However, anonymity to maintain privacy in itself is not sufficient. According to Bell et al. (2018), there are particular difficulties related to confidentiality and anonymity when conducting qualitative research, as possibilities to backtrack participants' data to a specific individual exist, which implies a risk. Therefore, the data gathered from the interviews were sent to the participants to ensure that it did not violate their privacy or could cause harm in the event of backtracking.

Lack of informed consent concerns that participants are not given sufficient information about a study in order for them to make an informed decision about whether they want to participate or not (Bell et al., 2018). Thus, the participants were informed twice about the study and its purpose to avoid the ethical issues concerning lack of informed consent. First in conjunction with the initial email seeking their participation, and secondly at the beginning of the interview, which gave the participant opportunities to ask questions.

Deception occurs when the research represents anything other than what it is (Bell et al., 2018). Therefore, to mitigate deception risk, participants were provided with information about the research and its purpose. Further, participants were informed about the usage of their contribution to the research.

4. Varsego Sverige AB

The studied firm, Varsego Sverige AB (Varsego), is a wholesaler that operates within Sweden and is a market leader in sales and distribution of ice cream, where Varsego provides the market-leading ice cream brand. As a result, Varsego mainly acquires its revenue through the distribution and sales of ice cream. Besides the ice cream, Varsego offers their customers additional products based on market-leading brands within beverages, confectionaries, protein products, fast food, food, and coffee bread. Varsego highlights its domestic presence by having warehouses in 22 different locations spread across Sweden. Varsego even states that they are Sweden's most local wholesaler. The domestic presence combined with the product portfolio enables Varsego to provide solutions tailored to the customer. Thereby, the studied firm signifies itself by flexibility, comfortability, and customer service.

The customer base of Varsego divides into two different segments, in terms of smaller customers, e.g., small local stores, and more prominent firms, e.g., chains who have multiple facilities across Sweden. Therefore, Varsego has a wide range of customers underlined by their customers, ranging from service trade, hospitality, and food service to local football clubs. As a result, the customer base sums up to around 18,000 customers. In order to manage customer relationships, Varsego puts effort into making their customers understand the process of delivering products. Moreover, Varsego stresses to their customers that if a particular product is not a market-leading product, customers will not need it in their stores because the products will likely not be profitable. Thereby, Varsego maintains a narrow product portfolio, enabling them to decrease complexity within their supply network and simultaneously improve customer efficiency.

Varsego was founded in 2008, as one of the most prominent ice cream suppliers started to disbud its national distribution in Sweden. As a result, the local wholesalers formed their own companies. These wholesalers' companies, who acted more or less independently, identified benefits of collaborating with the other wholesalers and establishing central control, which served as a basis for the foundation of Varsego, as the wholesalers jointly formed the company. Since its founding, Varsego has proliferated, which is stressed by vast increases in revenue, demonstrated in the year-to-year financials. The growth is foremost a result of organic growth, exemplified by new market entries, expanded market segments, and up-sell through additional products. However, Varsego has also grown inorganically, exemplified through the acquisition of Hemglass i Sverige AB (Hemglass) in 2014. Hemglass specializes in B2C sales of ice cream through vehicles in local areas. Varsego is determined to continue its growth, underlined by the target of reaching 1.5 BSEK in revenue by 2025.

Varsego has prioritized corporate sustainability since its founding to contribute toward a sustainable society. Therefore, Varsego was a suitable case study object for this specific research. The prioritization of corporate sustainability in Varsego is underlined by their sustainability vision, stating that they should be considered the most sustainable wholesaler within Sweden. Furthermore, Varsego is certified according to *ISO 14001* and has been since its foundation. Moreover, Varsego is certified according to *Ekologisk produktion* and *Krav*. As

a reason, Varsego has to act under the requirements that the certifications entail. For instance, Varsego must maintain constant dialogues with suppliers and customers regarding the environmental impact. The monitoring of the certificates implies regular internal and external audits. Besides these certificates, Varsego has two critical goals they aspire to achieve. The first one is the *Transportutmaningen 2025*, where Varsego aims to have 100% fossil-free transportation of products by 2025. The second one is that Varsego will be completely climate-neutral as a supplier and partner by 2030.

Twelve underlying wholesalers' companies own Varsego, where the wholesalers possess different shares in the company. The wholesalers are, to some extent independent, in terms of local adoption. However, Varsego supports the wholesalers by conducting domestic-scaled sales, managing supplier relationships, handling invoicing, managing master data, and making central decisions. The organization has close to 450 employees in total, where ten employees work directly in the central office of Varsego. The central office constitutes the roles of *CEO*, *Financial Director* with its *Accountant* and *Financial Assistant*, *Business Manager* with its *KAM* and *Sales/Marketing Coordinator*, *IT-responsible*, *Sustainability Director*, and *Master Data*. On the top level of Varsego is the board, which is involved in strategic work and decision making. The board is constituted by owners from the wholesalers' companies, complemented with external representatives. Figure 5 illustrates the organizational structure of Varsego.

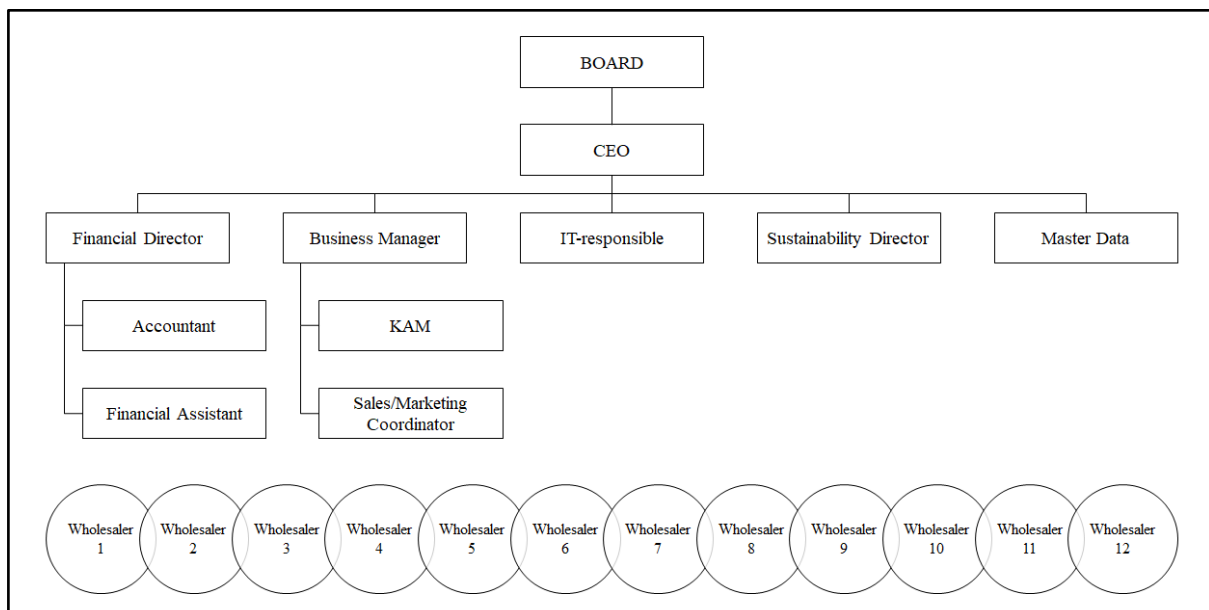


Figure 5, Illustration of the organizational structure of Varsego. Source: replication of received material from Varsego (2021-01-19).

The selection of interviewees corresponded to all the different parts of the organization to gain extensive knowledge and understand different perspectives. Thus, the selection of interviewees included employees from the central office of Varsego, board members, and owners of the wholesalers' companies. Thereby, all interviewees are associated with managerial positions within the organization. Furthermore, by interviewing owners representing all the wholesalers' companies, local differences could be identified and considered.

5. Result & analysis

This chapter presents findings in the three areas of *corporate sustainability strategies*, *operationalizing sustainability strategies*, and *sustainability in relation to business strategy*.

5.1 Corporate sustainability strategies

This section will present the findings of the conducted interviews regarding corporate sustainability strategies on broad terms and the findings from the interviews regarding the three dimensions of sustainability proposed by Baumgartner and Ebner (2010).

Regarding sustainability and sustainability strategies, the responses from the interviewees stress that the motive for the firm to have a sustainability strategy is to become the most sustainable distributor in Sweden, which aligns with their sustainability vision.

“We have the vision to be the most sustainable distributor/partner in Sweden. Our goal is to achieve that in 2025, so we want to market ourselves as a sustainable partner.” – Interviewee 5

In line with the statement above, when asked about the purpose of having sustainability and sustainability strategies in place, it could be seen that sustainability has a central focus in everything undertaken within the studied firm.

“Sustainability has a central focus both at Varsego and here at our wholesaler company. We think it is important, and the central focus reflects how we as a company handle it. We try to do as much as possible based on the available resources. We could do the minimum, but we chose to go further...” – Interviewee 14

The central focus on sustainability mentioned above, is further emphasized by interviewees who stress that the studied firm has a central sustainability strategy that the wholesalers concretize.

“Varsego has a great sustainability strategy centrally, and then all the local wholesalers think about how we should reach it.” – Interviewee 3

Relating to the central focus, interviewees emphasize that their culture embraces sustainability. An interviewee exemplifies the embracing culture of sustainability by stating that employees have embraced sustainability and have integrated it into their thoughts. However, the same interviewee also states that the cultural embracement of sustainability has mainly been within environmental sustainability because the studied firm has done most work within that dimension of sustainability.

“Since we have done much environmental work, employees within Varsego have embraced and accepted it. It’s not always their main focus though, but it’s something they understand that they need to think about.” – Interviewee 9

However, responses from interviewees display that the central focus within the studied firm on sustainability issues has not always been as evident as it currently is.

“When we started, there was a large focus on sustainability but at that time there was no central focus within the organizations...” – Interviewee 1

Even though the central focus toward sustainability has not always been evident, responses from the interviews stress that sustainability has always been a part of the firm. The interviewees also explain how person X has been a deciding factor for Varsego to improve its focus on sustainability issues.

“Sustainability has always been a factor within Varsego. I think X is doing a great job when it comes to sustainability and the environment. X is always giving us feedback and tips and tricks in ways of how to improve sustainability and the environment.” – Interviewee 10

When discussing the need to have a sustainability strategy, the interviewees stress its importance, stating that the studied firm would not survive within the market by not considering sustainability.

“If we don’t work with sustainability by informing and educating our employees and work with our environmental goals, then we won’t survive on the market. It is not acting as a facade; it is all about doing things in order to survive on the market.” – Interviewee 12

Following the statement above, several respondents further stress the need to have sustainability incorporated as the awareness of sustainability issues and requirements has grown over the last years within the firm's customer base.

“The main factor right now is that a few but big customers and big chains expect us to be sustainable. These customers have strict requirements that we have to follow regarding sustainability.” – Interviewee 15

However, respondents explain that they need to consider sustainability not only for the studied firm's benefits but also for being responsible for their actions within society.

“Sustainability is most importantly about taking responsibility. We live in a rented place, and we are responsible for how we use it and what footprints we leave after us. And if we are not willing to take responsibility for that, then we have big problems. During my lifetime, it might work, even for my children’s generation, but the future

generations will get big problems if we do not start to act now. The distribution of drinks and ice cream might not be the best, but at least I can take responsibility and do it as well as I possibly can...” – Interviewee 14

5.1.1 Environmental dimension of corporate sustainability

In terms of the environmental dimension of sustainability, interviewees stress that the focus on environmental issues within the studied firm has increased over the last couple of years.

“We have increased the focus on environmental sustainability over the years. It has been in our business strategy documents for quite some time, but the focus has increased over the years. We want to be seen and act in an environmentally good way.” – Interviewee 7

Moreover, the employees are becoming more and more aware of sustainability, as one of the interviewees mentioned that their employees are shifting toward electric cars, which they promote.

“Sweden is forthcoming regarding environmental issues. Four of the employees have bought electric cars in the last year. We promote this, and they can charge their cars at work in order to make them drive electric cars. This mindset already exists within Sweden and its culture” – Interviewee 11

Furthermore, responses from several interviewees stress the need to have a central employee responsible for developing the environmental work. Interviewees' responses further clarify that participation in achieving environmental goals is demanding to some extent. On the other hand, interviewees state that the wholesalers can voluntarily engage in more environmental activities beyond the goals.

“We have X, a central employee responsible for both environmental and sustainable purposes within the organization. X makes the environmental goals for each year and distributes them out to the wholesalers. But then it is up to us wholesalers to decide if we want to be better and take it to the next step” – Interviewee 1

Building on the statement above, responses from interviewees pinpoint the need for a locally positioned employee who is assigned the responsibility of handling the central environmental goals, in order to achieve them.

“Every wholesaler has one responsible person for the environmental work done within their location. The employee in question can differ, but it’s often a person responsible for the warehouse or a plant manager. However, it’s not a title you have on a paper.” – Interviewee 5

Interviewees further state that by acting on the environmental goals, the wholesalers can increase efficiency and contribute toward environmental and economic goals.

“We want to do as good as we can. [...] when we are delivering the ice cream, or whenever it is a Red Bull, and getting it out to the customers, we try to be as efficient as possible. Because an efficient environment is often hand-in-hand with an efficient economy, as well for the shareholders and a benefit for everyone I would say.” – Interviewee 10

Building on the quotation above, interviewees seem to agree that one of the most important things for the studied firm to consider regarding their environmental impact is the usage of fuel within their distribution chain and how that can be improved.

“We constantly need to aim to have as little impact on the environment as possible. This year, we have updated our vehicles frequently, to more environmentally friendly options. So now we use HVO100 in our cars, because fuel is critical concerning our environmental footprint.” – Interviewee 2

While stating that the fuel usage within their operations is one of the most crucial things when reducing their environmental footprint, several interviewees highlight why the studied firm has tried to enhance its usage of freezers and gas associated with these freezers.

“We try to dispose of freezers, for example, old freezers, before they tend to be totally out of order and start leaking as that is not good for the environment. We dispose of plastics, metals, paper, and corrugated paper. We do not throw anything where it should not be.” – Interviewee 10

However, when discussing transportation and its environmental impact, interviewees state that the transformation into fully sustainable solutions cannot be implemented directly due to economic constraints.

“We also have a plan to convert all of the trucks to more environmentally friendly gases, but that is extremely expensive.” – Interviewee 16

In terms of the life cycle aspect and how the studied firm considers the life cycle of offerings from an environmental point of view, the responses from the interviewees agree that they do consider the life cycle aspect of offerings. An interviewee further emphasized the life cycle aspect, stating that the studied firm considers it by sending new suppliers questionnaires regarding the new suppliers' products in order to document life cycle aspects of products.

“Yeah, we consider the life cycle aspect of products because, in the ISO14001, you need to have a life-cycle perspective on things. So, I send out questions to our suppliers when we start working with them. And then, these suppliers get several questions regarding the life cycle of their products. We do the questionnaire to document these things to know them [...]. These questions and documents we make signals to the organization that we are interested in the life cycle aspect of products.” – Interviewee 9

Building on the statement above, interviewees agree that pressuring suppliers to consider the life cycle aspect of offerings is not always easy. An interviewee emphasizes the difficulty of

pressuring suppliers to consider the life cycle aspect of offerings, which states that one of the biggest suppliers is quite advanced in terms of their sustainability work. As a result, the studied firm focuses on what it can do internally.

"[...] We focus on the things that we can change. The vast majority of our volume is ice cream from Supplier Y, one of the world's biggest companies, and they have a strong focus on sustainability and environmental issues. We can point out what we would like them to change, but they work in their way. Therefore, we can't directly change so much..." – Interviewee 1

Nevertheless, responses from several interviews reveal that the studied firm can actively have an input in the production of products they receive and distribute regarding sustainability and environmental impact and issues.

"We can pressure Supplier Y in terms of requirements of sustainability regarding products, but Supplier Y works even harder than us to ensure sustainability within their products. Thereby, we don't have to pressure Supplier Y. [...] But if we hear something from our customers, we inform Supplier Y about it, but as they are already so far ahead, they might already be working on it." – Interviewee 6

Even though the studied firm considers supplier Y to be ahead of themselves regarding sustainability, they work with other suppliers and put more pressure on those.

"I think that Supplier Y is ahead in terms of environmental and sustainability thinking. [...] I am thinking about our other suppliers that produce the things we are eating the ice cream with, such as the cup and plastic spoons. There we have tougher demands, and they need to take action. We started not to buy items that are negative toward the environment" – Interviewee 15

Building on the quotation above, responses from interviewees reveal that it can be complex to choose which products to distribute and which not, as the firm emphasizes the need for its products to be sustainable.

"Within logistics, sustainability is always a big question. Thus, having sustainable logistics is one of our challenges, as you need to be sustainable while achieving financial performance, which is linked. Further, as we are a company within wholesales, we cannot affect the production of products, but we have the choice to choose which products to pick. On the other hand, we need to work with the products that sell, so we have to keep a certain balance." – Interviewee 8

5.1.2 Social dimension of corporate sustainability

Concerning the social dimensions of sustainability, interviewees' responses highlight that social sustainability is something that the studied firm considers. However, responses from

various interviews also showcase that social sustainability can be hard to grasp and that members have a hard time understanding what initiatives contribute to a sustainable society.

“It feels like we have only taken tiny steps in terms of social sustainability, but we wholesalers and the employees do not fully grasp it. Where we are heading is to some extent taken up at meetings, but there is a long way to go regarding social sustainability.” – Interviewee 15

Moreover, several responses from interviewees emphasize that the central function of the firm set the culture and values in terms of social sustainability.

“I think Varsego is considering social sustainability. It is foremost about the culture and values you have within the company. These are set centrally at Varsego.” – Interviewee 3

Furthermore, it can be concluded from the interviewee’s answers that the studied firm promotes social sustainability by ensuring that the work environment is safe and representative by having safety representatives and protective rounds.

“We work toward promoting a good working environment. We have policies and things like that. For example, we have policies for a safe working environment, have safety representatives, and conduct protective rounds [...]. We get visited by Arbetsmiljöverket, and we need to send documents to them to ensure fulfillment of their requirements. Otherwise, we could get a fine or things like that.” – Interviewee 9

Interviewee’s responses highlight that the studied firm tries to promote social sustainability through methods in the form of incentives and bonuses.

“If we save electricity this year, for example, by closing doors and turning off the lights, the employees will get a bonus, and we will do something nice together. Because initiatives like closing doors and turning off the lights saves a lot of money but is also a good environmental achievement.” – Interviewee 1

Building on the statement above regarding the promotion of social sustainability, an owner of a wholesaler exemplifies a specific method. The wholesaler in question offers employees the same monthly payment regardless of whether it is the high or low season to keep employee turnover as low as possible. The same interviewee states that his employees are pleased with having the same monthly payment regardless of the season while being a deciding factor in keeping employee turnover low.

“Well, turnover is rather little when it comes to employees. [...] And what differentiates us is that we have the same monthly payment every month, regardless if it is low season or high season. [...] My employees are doing the same in October as they did in June. They are pretty pleased with it. From what I hear, they do not want to change anything regarding this.” – Interviewee 10

Nevertheless, responses from interviewees reveal that the goals in terms of social sustainability within the studied firm are vague and lacking to some extent.

“It is important that the human being is feeling well. I think Varsego should be able to set some goals regarding this. However, it is easier to point at a goal regarding electricity, fuel, or invoices as those are more concrete.” – Interviewee 14

However, despite the statement above, interviews reveal that the studied firm centrally sets policies and guidelines on how to behave. An interviewee exemplifies the central set of policies and guidelines while further stating that the wholesalers set their local policies and guidelines. The wholesalers act according to social norms and prepositions existing within their geographical operating location.

“We have our policies and guidelines on how to behave, both locally and centrally. Varsego develops these policies. These do mirror each other since we are this type of organization.” – Interviewee 2

Regarding workforce diversity, most of the interviewee's responses agree that the studied firm considers the diversity within the workforce. Furthermore, the interviewees' responses showcased that the firm considers equality, as posited by an interviewee who states that everyone should have the same values, regardless of personal matters.

“Equality is important. We are a mixture of employees with multiple nationalities. So, we specifically stress that everyone should have the same values, and for instance, religion should not matter. We have marked that we do not discuss religion at work. Everyone has the same value, no matter the religion or other things. We do not accept violation against this, and this has been marked very clear.” – Interviewee 11

Furthermore, interviews imply that the studied firm also considers social sustainability from an external perspective. An interviewee exemplifies how they consider social sustainability externally by stating that they have updated their fleet of vehicles, to make it more applicable for female to apply and work for them.

“We also have transformed toward driving more small trucks, as it's harder to find employees who have a C driver license. So, every year, we are replacing one big truck with one small one. That does the work our drivers have to do easier, making it more appealing for females to apply. We, of course, try to employ women and men equally, but it's tough to find women that would like to drive our big trucks” – Interviewee 15

Furthermore, interviews posit that the studied firm also considers social sustainability from an external point of view. An interviewee exemplifies how they considers social sustainability externally by stating that they sponsor local clubs and thereby contributes toward an external societal development.

“We have a policy that the clubs where employees’ children are active, we sponsor. This sponsoring is local. Since we are working with ice cream, many people contact us regarding sponsorship. But we had to draw a line.” – Interviewee 13

Moreover, several interviewees highlight that the studied firm integrates its internal stakeholders into the decision-making process. An owner of a wholesaler further emphasizes the stakeholder integration by stating that they integrate its internal stakeholders into the decision-making process to gather the stakeholders' perspective.

“We have meetings with the employees, to get insights of what the individual thinks, both good and bad things. Most of the time we have weekly meetings, where we can catch up on things...” – Interviewee 3

Relating to the statement above, several interviewees emphasize the importance of ensuring employee well-being within their workplace, stating that it is essential that their employees feel well within the workplace and in their personal lives. A wholesaler further emphasizes the focus on employee well-being by stating that if they can satisfy their employees, then social sustainability can have an even more significant impact than what it already has.

“We have to make sure that who we employ feel well, both in their working life and their personal life. And obviously that these people want to stay. If we have high employee turnover, it hinders us from being sustainable, as we need to educate everyone. If we can get everyone to be happy and want to stay at Varsego, then social sustainability can have an even greater impact than what it already has.” – Interviewee 4

Moreover, building on the statement above, it can be concluded from the interviewees' responses that the studied firm promotes employee well-being within its workforce through several methods. A wholesaler owner exemplifies employee well-being by highlighting initiatives to mitigate and prevent employees from taking sick leave.

“We have insurance and health insurance. Further, every other week you could get massages during work. Because the employees that are out and working hard, in all weather, and carrying heavy things. Moreover, they have access to free naprapathy. These initiatives have decreased my sick leaves enormously, foremost regarding wear damage. So, it is worth every single penny.” – Interviewee 12

Another employee further emphasizes the focus on employee well-being within the studied firm and states that the employees should not work for the firm based on necessity but instead based on their willingness to be there.

“When I employ people, one of the things that I emphasize is that we do not exist to force someone to do something. It would be best if you were here because you want to be here. This drive is something that we drive very much. I should not need to point with the whole hand, and you need to understand that yourself...” – Interviewee 8

However, even though most examples showcase that the studied firm focuses on social sustainability internally, some initiatives regarding external social sustainability could be revealed. An interviewee exemplifies how they focus on external social sustainability by stating that they must consider and respect social rules that apply within its offerings' distribution.

“Our cars have the logo on them. Therefore, we need to ensure that we park correctly, drive following speed limits, especially close to schools, and do not drive in bus lanes. This driving behavior is something we have pushed since it has happened that someone called and complained.” – Interviewee 11

However, several interviewees reveal that ensuring employee well-being is hard. An interviewee emphasizes the difficulty of ensuring employee well-being and states that the firm requires flexibility. However, flexibility is sometimes a constraining force on the employees and their well-being.

“Flexibility needs to be in place.. [...] But we are sometimes too flexible. To grow and be socially sustainable, we need to decrease flexibility. I have noticed, especially in the high season, that the flexibility can become pretty hard on some employees when they have a lot more work to do.” – Interviewee 4

Building on the statement above regarding difficulty ensuring employee well-being, an interviewee further emphasizes that the studied firm needs to engage their employees to ensure employee well-being. The same interviewee further states that the owners of the wholesalers themselves have to be engaged to promote engagement within the employees.

“I think that we need to engage all the employees, to ensure they feel well. [...] We take responsibility for the staff. As an owner, you must engage in different activities across the firm. We drive the trucks ourselves, are out in the inventory and prepare deliveries, we are in the freezers and helps out, and we are carpooling when possible. I think it is essential that you are engaged in all these parts, which I think that not all the wholesalers are.” – Interviewee 15

5.1.3 Economic dimension of corporate sustainability

Concerning economic sustainability, several answers from interviewees display that the studied firm considers economic sustainability. Further, interviews pinpoint that the employees consider it as economically sustainable to some extent while stating that they can improve within the economic dimension of sustainability. However, interviews also explain the prioritization of the economic dimension, stating that the benefits of economic sustainability are a side benefit from the other two dimensions of sustainability.

“I would say that we don't work that much with economic sustainability, to be honest. We prioritize environmental and social sustainability more than economic sustainability. Because of that, the benefits of economic sustainability are like a side benefit from focusing on the other two dimensions of sustainability” – Interviewee 10

Building on the statement above, several interviewees highlighted the sustainable benefits of having good economics. A wholesaler owner emphasizes the sustainable benefits of having good economics by highlighting the positive relationship between good economics and sustainability initiatives.

“If the business is good in the short-term, it generates liquidity that enables us to finance sustainability initiatives, as if the cash flows in and investments can be done, it creates a positive circle. For instance, if we can afford the investment to replace the freezing rooms, we will get economic gains in the future while doing something good for the environment.” – Interviewee 13

Building on the quotations above, responses from the interviewees reveals that the studied firm promotes their sustainable thinking concerning the three dimensions of sustainability toward their customers. An interviewee emphasizes sustainable thinking toward customers by stating that they have discussions regarding waste with its customers and why waste is detrimental concerning the three dimensions of sustainability.

“In terms of the environment and sustainability, waste is a big problem. A company that makes smoothies that are portion packed and based on order produce no waste. But many restaurants and cafés make six to seven smoothies, and then they sell four to five and thereby have to throw two away. Thus, waste is a problem since you throw something away and further the profitability crashes. So, we try to mitigate these things, and we talk about profitability with our customers. Minimizing the waste.” – Interviewee 8

Building on the statement above, responses from interviewees reveal that the studied firm promotes their sustainable thinking toward their customer base by ensuring that their customers understand why their products might be more expensive than products from competitors.

“We talk to the suppliers, and the suppliers want to have the highest price possible on the market to make as much money as possible obviously. Within Varsego, we need to have high margins to pay our employees, and our distribution chain is quite expensive. [...] We try to make sure that the margins we have are sustainable, but we also ensure that the customers understand our value on the market.” – Interviewee 4

Interviewees also highlight that the studied firm could do better in certain aspects concerning the economic dimension of sustainability. An interviewee stresses the possible improvements by stating that it would be beneficial for all interested parties if the firm had a better central purchasing system.

“In terms of central purchasing, we are lacking. We have not become as central as we could be. Let’s take electricity as an example. I would guess that we consume 12 million kWh. If Varsego made this purchase for us commonly, it would be beneficial. Also, regarding vehicles, for the purchasing, service, and maintenance. The purchasing is a

strong incitement, as if Varsego as an organization had a better purchasing function, it would probably be favorable for everyone.” – Interviewee 13

Regarding economic goals, interviewees' answers showcase a central distribution of economic goals while stating that the wholesalers within their different geographical areas also have their own economic goals.

“We set up goals together with Varsego, which then constitute the central goals. [...] for example, that we should sell for X MSEK. Then these goals are broken down to every individual wholesaler, while all the wholesalers have their local goals as well.” – Interviewee 3

Building on the statement above, an interview with an owner of a different subsidiary reveals that an economic objective within that subsidiary is to ensure shareholder dividend.

“We would like to have a dividend every year, at least some kind. We want to keep the dividend for each year as similar as it was the year before.” – Interviewee 10

Relating back to the statement above regarding dividend, responses from interviewees reveal that the focus on ensuring shareholder dividend and shareholder satisfaction is different based on which wholesaler is being discussed. However, the difference between shareholder satisfaction within the wholesalers can be traced to the fact that the wholesalers are owned by different persons and the number of owners can be between one owner and up to three owners.

“We do not focus a lot on shareholders. For example, the only shareholder in my company is myself. So, we try to invest as much money we can for the future, but we don't have any other shareholders. If you look at the other wholesalers, some have three shareholders, but most of them have two, and I am the only one who owns my company myself. As well, there are no wholesalers that have external shareholders and all of the shareholders in the wholesalers work in the everyday business of Varsego.” – Interviewee 1

Regarding salary levels and employee benefits, several responses from interviewees emphasize that the studied firm focuses on employee benefits and salary levels by distributing policies and agreements centrally out to its wholesalers. An owner of a wholesaler emphasizes the focus on employee benefits and salary levels by stating that it is vital for the wholesalers to follow these centrally distributed policies.

“...economic sustainability is all about taking responsibility, and we align with the collective agreement, so people have the good salaries and right prerequisites and get paid for what they do. For instance, getting paid for working overtime and getting the right to have vacation days. These things are all negotiated centrally, and we must follow.” – Interviewee 14

An employee further emphasizes the focus on having beneficial salaries by stating that the employees' salaries are high. The reason for the high salary levels is that the studied firm wants to reward its employees.

“Varsego does not have a low salary level, so in those terms, we are quite good. We have chosen to have a higher salary since the minimum salary level is not the best and we want to do better for our employees. Also, the minimum level of salary would probably not work within Varsego due to the structure and how the organization works.” – Interviewee 6

Building on the statement above, an employee emphasizes that even though the studied firm rewards the employees with high salaries, it also considers the pressure on the employees. The same employee emphasizes the pressure considerations of employees by stating that the firm explores ways to decrease pressure on their employees, even though that might have harmful economic implications.

“It is also about benefits, how are the employees thriving and how much pressure is there on them. These aspects also have an economic aspect. Maybe we should employ one more person because then the other employees might feel better, which has economic implications for us as a company. We might get a worse result, but the employees are feeling better, which might lead to less turnover in staff in the long term as people want to stay.” – Interviewee 14

Regarding the economic situation and investments, several interviewees' answers reveal that the size and organizational structure of the firm is a constraining force, especially when discussing investments. One of the wholesaler owners emphasizes the difficulty of investments by stating that the studied firm cannot invest freely in new alternatives but instead have to evaluate their investments in small steps.

“We at Varsego can't invest heavily in things because of the financial muscles we have, so instead, we have to do it in small steps. [...] So, we have to evaluate and go for the things we can economically justify. For instance, if we say that we have to go for electric cars, then we have to make the calculations and ensure we have the money to take the big steps, so none of the wholesalers won't go bankrupt.” – Interviewee 1

Relating back to the statement above, interviewees' answers also highlight that the organizational structure is a constraining force regarding investments. An answer from a wholesaler owner highlights these investment difficulties by stating that the economy is different for each and every one of the wholesalers due to different opportunities within respective geographical areas.

“The financial situation for every wholesaler is pretty different; some have good economies, and some have never had good economies because of different opportunities within local areas.” – Interviewee 5

Moreover, an owner of a different wholesaler further emphasizes the difficulties mentioned above by stating that the economic challenges that the wholesalers face are different based on their locations.

“...this is dependent on what economic situation we wholesalers have. Some have larger economic challenges than we have and cannot invest in solar panels, for example. So, it is different, depending on what local economy you have, to make that investment.” – Interviewee 3

Relating to the mentioned quotation above, responses from interviewees reveal that while the wholesalers have had to deal with different economic challenges and opportunities, being a part of the organization has enabled the wholesalers to gain more power together while helping them financially.

“The good thing about having Varsego is that, for example, when we got certified according to ISO 14001, it cost a large amount of money to get the certificate. But as we had Varsego, we could all get certified, and the end cost was just a small part of the amount, instead of every one of us having to pay the full amount individually. So being part of Varsego is very good, as it decreases the costs of getting certificates and things like that for the wholesalers. So, having Varsego as a whole, we have much more power, and it is much more financially efficient for us.” – Interviewee 1

5.2 Operationalizing sustainability strategies

In terms of the operationalization of the sustainability strategy, one of the interviewees implies that the studied firm considers sustainability to a large extent possible in the operationalization. The firm considers sustainability to an as large extent as possible in operationalization to ensure that it does not decide on anything that would negatively affect sustainability.

“We would never decide on anything that would have a bad contribution in terms of sustainability. Sustainability is always considered to as a large extent as possible.” – Interviewee 7

Building on the statement above, interviewees stress that the studied firm has specific thinking when operationalization its sustainability strategy. A wholesaler owner emphasizes the specific thinking by stating that the they aim to go for the approachable options to become more cost-effective.

“Sustainability requires heavy investments. Therefore, the initiatives undertaken are to become more cost-effective. We have taken the lowest hanging fruit. For instance, to buy renewable electricity.” – Interviewee 13

Several interviews pinpoint that the studied firm initiates the operationalizing process by discussions that employee X has internally. These discussions are further brought up in yearly meetings to ensure that everyone aligns with the strategic decisions.

“It starts with X, as she talks with people internally in Varsego. Especially if it is a critical decision, we take it up in our yearly meeting in the autumn to discuss decisions. In these yearly meetings, we discuss strategic decisions to ensure that everyone is on the same page.” – Interviewee 10

These internal discussions are carried out centrally at Varsego, but further with the employees with environmental responsibilities within the wholesalers' companies. These employees cooperate with a central employee in order to make decisions.

“There is one environmental employee within the 12 wholesalers, and they are in cooperation with X, who is in the central position. They take these decisions. [...] The environmental group meets once or twice a year where they discuss where we are now and what should be the goal for next year.” – Interviewee 7

One of the interviewees' responses highlights that the studied firm then forwards these discussions and decisions to the board of directors. The board of directors reviews these goals, and then the year's goals are presented to the shareholders.

“Then they send these to the board of directors. [...] We recently had a meeting to decide what the 2021 goals should be. Then when we have a board meeting in April, where all the shareholders of Varsego meet, and at that meeting, we present for all the owners of the company what the goals will be.” – Interviewee 1

Furthermore, several interviews highlight the importance of board meetings and state that the board members shape the business strategy during specific days of the year.

“We have chosen the board members, and we have meetings where the shaping of the business strategy takes place. We have a specific day or days in the year where we talk about these things.” – Interviewee 11

Elaborating on the quotation above and linking it to the sustainability strategy, several interviewees stress that the studied firm approves the sustainability strategy and sustainability goals at these annual meetings. One of the interviews also highlights employee X's collaboration with the board.

“X drives the sustainability question centrally at Varsego. And that is always done in collaboration together with the board. Where the sustainability strategy and

sustainability goals are approved. So, the board works together with X.” – Interviewee 3

Building on the quotation above, most wholesaler owners stress that after the board has made decisions, the wholesalers get the outputs and think about how to realize them by achieving goals on a local level.

“The board meets once or twice every year and looks at the strategic plan and makes decisions. Then I get the output, and I have to think about how we should achieve the plan in reality and how we should act on this decision. So, Varsego decides the goals following the board, and then I sit down with relevant members of my organization to decide how we should locally achieve these goals.” – Interviewee 1

However, one of the interviewees mentions that they wish to decide their strategy within their wholesaler company to a more considerable extent. At the same time, the interviewee states that if they were to decide their strategy independently, then the concept of Varsego would fall apart and thereby stresses the importance of the board and the owners.

“We wish to some extent that we could decide our strategy, but it is not like that. We rather go through X and the board to shape the strategy of Varsego and then adjust in accordance. But, we, of course, can take small steps within this strategy and determine how we want to work based on the determined prerequisites, which is where we are. It has to go through Varsego, which has to decide directions. If we set our directions, the whole concept of Varsego falls apart. We, therefore, must have Varsego with us. This gives the board and the owners an important role in determining what direction we should take.” – Interviewee 14

5.2.1 Modeling a sustainability strategy

In terms of the market-based view and how the studied firm competes within their respective market, interviewees stress that they do not compete based on price. Instead, they rather reach their customers by utilizing well-known brands combined with their service, based on local knowledge and local logistics.

“We can’t always compete with price, so we instead deliver the product to the customers when the customers want, in quantities the customers want and have local knowledge of the market. [...] We are local, work mostly with well-known brands and sometimes experiment and work with lesser-known brands.” – Interviewee 6

Several of the interviews stress that the market has changed, where specialist traders have become an area of focus. Nevertheless, an interviewee clarifies that the studied firm still relies on the golden mass and not only the chain-based market.

“The market has shifted a lot over to specialist trade. So now, Varsego uses their system to maintain and support working with these customers, as they want to work with Varsego. Varsego has one market that is chain-based and another market that is the

golden mass, which is our strength, so we are trying to find ways to connect with the golden mass again to grow with that segment rather than seeing the golden mass segment decrease. [...] we try to find ways to better communicate to the golden mass as we see that there is a shift and decrease in their ability to make purchases.” – Interviewee 8

In order to reach out to these customers, several of the interviewees highlight that the studied firm constantly tries to utilize their local logistics to find new markets and new channels. One of the interviewees further emphasizes how the firm reaches out to new customers by stating that they adapt to trends in society, e.g., padel centers, as the sport has gained increased interest, and the gaming world, which is an industry that is constantly growing. On the other hand, the same interviewee states that the firm does not have specific targets and has to remain wide to seize opportunities that arise.

“It is a continuous task to work with new markets and new channels. The latest one is the padel centers, which sell both ice creams and beverages. We are also looking at car showrooms. Further, it is much about developing specialist trade customers. Another part that is growing is the gaming world, where there is potential to sell beverages, both to companies developing apps and games and internet cafés. It is important to scout and identify the next new thing. [...] We are wide and do not have any specific targets.” – Interviewee 14

Furthermore, an interviewee states that the studied firm tries to mitigate seasonal fluctuations, increase efficiency, and find products to complement their business, resulting in constant product portfolio development.

“We have a lot of things going on constantly. For instance, how we can maximize our transports while we are out at a customer. We try to get even more products when we drive out to the customer. During the winter season, we have challenges when the ice cream does not sell that much. Then we look at finding something that can complement our business. And this is something we have done a lot since we do not only sell ice cream today. But we also sell many other things, such as beverages, chocolate, coffee, confectionery, and what else it can be. Back in those days, it used almost solely to be ice cream. But now we have more products in the product portfolio. So, it has developed all the time.” – Interviewee 3

In terms of the resource-based view, most interviewees stress that the employees are the most valuable resource for them, while one of the interviewees further states that the firm would not function without the employees.

“The core is the employees. Without the employees, there is no purpose. We can think and do whatever we want, but without the employees, it does not matter.” – Interviewee 11

To elaborate on the quotation above, most interviewees highlight the value of having a specific central employee. Several interviewees highlight the value of having a specific central employee by stating that the central employee is an influential force to drive and develop sustainability within the organization to create value for the customers.

“We have a powerful asset in X, as X always manages to put itself on the correct level to influence people. X drives decisions through Varsego and their subsidiaries with actions and choice of words.” – Interviewee 6

Building on the quotation above, one of the interviewees states that engagement is a significant resource, referring to the engagement of the wholesalers in order for the firm to function.

“Our organization is built based on the owners that own their warehouse. It is the engagement out there that is the important resource...” – Interviewee 8

Relating to the engagement mentioned above, an interviewee highlights the importance of customer relationships. The interviewee emphasizes the importance of resources related to customer relationships by stating that the relationships with their customers are the most crucial resources. Therefore, the studied firm does everything to fulfill its customers' needs.

“The most important resource we have are the relations with our customers. I would say the customer is more or less delighted with the cooperation, which is the most valuable thing we have right now. If our customers want something, we try as much as we can to fulfill their needs. We don't have a certain standardized way of working, as every customer is unique. We rather try to implement new things based on the fact whether our customer wants it or not.” – Interviewee 10

Nevertheless, several interviewees stress that the most critical resource within the studied firm is their local brands combined with their privilege to work with other leading brands, as these shape their competitive edge.

“Our brand is our strength. Varsego is getting more well-known, as the customers now know what we stand for, and the customers also know that we provide excellent service. [...] Then we have the privilege to work with other leading brands. These are the most important things. And these we have in place.” – Interviewee 5

Regarding the institutional-based view, multiple institutions were present for the studied firm. Several interviewees highlight multiple institutions, stating that one of the first institutions established was ISO 14001, which guides behavior and determines ways of working.

“We decided to get certificated according to the ISO 14001 certification. That was the first step concerning environmental thinking which resulted in yearly goals about diesel consumption, the waste the company left behind, such as plastics, paper, and so on, and concerning the gases used by their wholesalers, such as Freon. [...] By having ISO we need to do things in a certain way.” – Interviewee 1

Furthermore, several interviewees highlight the effect of laws, legislation, and policies on the studied firm. An interviewee emphasizes the effect of laws, legislation, and policies by stating that laws, legislation, and policies affect the firm as they have to follow these to operate. The same interviewee further states that these laws, legislations, and policies are sometimes hard to deal with, as following these takes time and energy away from other priorities.

“We have some laws, legislations, and policies that affect us, as we need to follow these laws and legislations. [...] Don’t limit us in how we conduct business, but of course, these take time and energy from other things, so it is all a lot of work. [...] I try to help the wholesalers to follow these properly, but if they have limited time, they do things they should do, but then they might not have time to do environmental-related things.”

– Interviewee 9

Thereby, according to several interviewees, the studied firm sets up policies to declare how to work and behave. However, the interviewee also explains differences in how the wholesalers adopt policies due to differences in geographical location.

“Varsego has developed central policies, for instance, policies for sustainability, policies for how to behave, and policies for working as an environmental contributor. We are working toward all the wholesalers having the same values. These similar values are important, and you cannot be under the same umbrella, and then it is chaos. But, of course, there must be some differences, depending on your geographical area.”

– Interviewee 12

Furthermore, the interviews highlight values as a recurrent institution for the studied firm. Besides the central values, an interviewee stresses the importance of local values. However, the interviewee implies that laws and precepts prevail in values.

“We have our central values which should guide everything that we do. Of course, laws and precepts are always above these. Then we have our local values, that we want to live after every day.” – Interviewee 3

Lastly, an institution that is deemed to be recurrent based on the interviews, is the systems used by the firm. Interviewees reveal that the systems are limiting to some extent, as they are working with multiple old systems and have to connect these with newer systems, rather than having a uniform platform.

“We have realized that our IT systems are pretty far behind. We have many systems that do not interact with each other, which affects the whole value chain. Better IT systems will ease customer order handling, and the customers can do more in the systems as well as getting the information they need by themselves without contacting us...” – Interviewee 13

5.2.2 Strategic approaches within sustainability

Regarding the strategic approach undertaken within the studied firm, the interviewees implicitly imply ambidexterity in the strategic approach. Furthermore, an interviewee stresses that they utilize a dynamic strategic approach by stating that they are not afraid of committing if they find appealing opportunities.

“We are not afraid of pulling the trigger and investing in things, and we are ready to commit if we find an appealing opportunity.” – Interviewee 1

The vision proposed by one of the interviewees further stresses a plan to attack new attractive markets to enhance growth.

“The vision is obviously to get as many customers as possible and take over the world. However, in terms of growth, the target upfront is to get a large section of customers when it comes to, for instance, gas stations and other customers like that. [...] The objective, for now, is, of course, to grow by finding new customers and new customer segments to enter.” – Interviewee 4

In more concrete terms, an interviewee states that the vision is to reach 1.5 BSEK in revenue by 2025, which implies that the studied firm must act offensively to ensure growth.

“We are absolutely on the offense, as the shareholders have set a tough goal to reach 1.5 BSEK by 2025. We want to achieve this growth goal and must be offensive, to ensure that we will grow.” – Interviewee 5

Relating to the quotation above, to achieve the growth goal mentioned above, an interviewee states that the studied firm is evolving its existing operations and is changing its value chain. The interviewee exemplifies this by stating that they have expanded their existing operations through acquisition.

“We try to develop all the time by taking strategic approaches to change our value chain. For example, we acquired Hemglass, so we have had to redo the organization and transform it to develop further and make it profitable. If we stop and do not develop, we will not last for long. The industry changes all the time, so we need to renew ourselves all the time.” – Interviewee 2

However, as earlier mentioned, the strategic approach undertaken within the studied firm is signified by ambidexterity. An interviewee implies ambidexterity by highlighting defensive mechanisms associated with the static strategic approach. The same interviewee emphasizes that they already have a market-leading position within the ice cream. Therefore, the focus lies on maintaining the same volumes and defending that resource position. It is rather about increasing sales for other products.

“Regarding ice cream, the goal is to maintain the same volumes as last year as the ice cream has changed a lot in the last 10-15 years. [...] For the other products, the goal

is to expand the customer base and the product portfolio and expand the offerings to current customers with a certain amount of percentage. It is easier to grow more on the other products in percentage because we are already big regarding ice cream.” – Interviewee 12

Building on the quote above, an employee emphasizes the ambidexterity within the strategic approach of the studied firm by stating that they are somewhat on the defensive regarding the strategic approach while trying to anticipate future demands.

“I do not think we are attacking. We are more trying to anticipate future demands. For example, the environmental work started before the founding of Varsego because the founders thought the customers would require ISO certification. Without the ISO certificate, we would not get the business. So we are trying to anticipate future demands, and then we can prepare for those.” – Interviewee 9

5.3 Sustainability in relation to business strategy

When discussing sustainability strategy in relation to business strategy, responses from several interviewees showcased that there is potential for improvement there. An owner of a wholesaler emphasizes the potential for improvement by stating that they could better integrate their sustainability strategy into their business strategy.

“It is easy to focus on the strategy and revenue and determine the goals for that. And then the sustainability goals are in a completely different place. I think we should become better at linking and integrate them.” – Interviewee 14

However, an owner of a wholesale company states that even though the focus within the firm was naturally on sales and how to improve them, the firm still has an environmental mindset within its decision process. Moreover, a response from an interviewee reveals that the studied firm has incorporated its sustainability strategy into its goals, ensuring that they reach their goals sustainably.

“We are more focused on the growth goal. We are fundamentally a sales company, so it is not strange that we focus on sales. But the two strategies go hand-in-hand, so our goals go together and are aligned. For instance, we need to increase the volume we distribute, but we also need to make sure that our distribution is sustainable and I think that we always have an environmental mindset on the agenda.” – Interviewee 4

Building on the quotation above, it can be concluded that the sustainability strategy has been integrated into the firm's goals because sustainability has become an area of focus. An interviewee highlights the integration by stating that sustainability has become a core aspect of everything the firm does.

“Sustainability has become a core aspect of the business, in everything we do. We always think about how we are sustainable in as many ways as we can, both environmentally and socially.” – Interviewee 16

Building on the mentioned sustainability integration, several interviewees' answers imply that the studied firm considers sustainable aspects within their business model. An owner of a wholesaler emphasizes that they do consider sustainable aspects within their business model by stating that the firm considers business and environmental steps in parallel when considering business models.

“Sustainability is a part of it, but of course, for each sustainability step we take, we have to have a business plan that is attractive as well. But it is more of a case that if we bring something in that is not sustainable, and then we have to work to make it sustainable.” – Interviewee 13

An owner of a wholesale company emphasizes the integration of sustainability by stating that even though the business strategy is flexible, it is an essential part of the studied firm's sustainability model. The same interviewee further states that he does not see any limitations regarding the integration of sustainability into the business strategy.

“They must go hand-in-hand. Even though the business strategy is flexible, I would still say that it is within the sustainability model we have at Varsego. However, this can be expensive but, in the pace we have right now, I do not see any limitations” – Interviewee 2

5.3.1 Incorporating sustainability into the business strategy

In terms of sustainability incorporated into the business strategy, several interviewees explain that the business strategy and sustainability strategy go hand-in-hand in terms of challenges, as these often are the same.

“In terms of challenges, the business strategy and sustainability strategy work hand-in-hand as they are supposed to be compatible and support each other. It is more difficult if we only talk about revenue, though” – Interviewee 9

One interviewee elaborates on incorporating the sustainability strategy into the business strategy by stating that the business strategy and the sustainability strategy align and fit. The same interviewee exemplifies the fit between the two strategies by implying that if the number of deliveries decreases, then the number of packages per delivery can be increased, which implies that the revenue can be maintained while reducing the environmental impact.

“I would say that they fit pretty well because the business strategy advocates that we want to sell more to the customers, which means that we want to minimize the number of deliveries to our customers. When we already are at the customer, we have already driven there, and then we can as well bring 15-20 packages extra.” – Interviewee 3

Furthermore, in terms of the mentioned fit and integration, an interviewee highlights that different stakeholders understand the importance of integrating sustainability within the firm. However, the same interviewee also reveals that they do not publish sustainability reports as they are not required to.

“I think the stakeholders understand the importance, but they want to profit, and they need to understand that profit needs sustainability work in the future, I think. Because if Varsego is going to grow and become a bigger company there will be more rules to follow. The reason we haven’t published sustainability reports so far is that we are not required to. There are also other laws that may concern us in the future if we grow, for example the EU Taxonomy Reporting.” – Interviewee 9

On the other hand, the interviewees consider the business aspects of higher prioritization than sustainability, as sustainability depends on the business aspect. An interviewee underlines the higher prioritization of business than sustainability within the studied firm, stating that money is considered a requirement to be sustainable.

“Business is probably more prioritized than sustainability because if you do not have a business model and a business strategy, then you cannot achieve sustainability. You need to have money in order to be sustainable.” – Interviewee 13

The high prioritization of business compared to sustainability might be explained by the fact that the sustainability strategy has evolved because one of the interviewees highlights some misalignment due to the integration of sustainability's social and economic dimensions.

“We are trying to get to a certain point where the business and the sustainability strategy are aligned, but we are not there yet. I would say it used to be aligned when we only had to consider the environmental aspect, but now as we are integrating the economic and social aspect of sustainability, we have to rethink it and do a bit more.” – Interviewee 6

Furthermore, one of the interviewees stresses dependencies in incorporating sustainability into the business strategy by explaining that the studied firm cannot conduct their sustainability work without a stable financial ground.

“We have to remember that if the boat is leaking, then you have to fix the holes. It does not matter how much sustainability work we do if we cannot survive financially. We need to build a stable ground and then work from there.” – Interviewee 12

5.3.2 Sustainability as an integral part of strategy

Several interviewees stress that the business goals, vision, and objectives align with the sustainability goals, vision, and objectives. Furthermore, interviewees state that these have dependencies, as the fulfillment of the sustainability goals implies fulfilling the business goals.

“Right now, the goals, vision, and objectives are in parallel, but ideally, they should be the same. We talk about meeting goals in the future due to our environmental goals and standards. If we decrease our impact on the environment, it will lead us to meet our goals in terms of distribution, volume and revenue.” – Interviewee 4

Building on the quotation above, interviewees agree that sustainability must be a part of the growth goal for the studied firm to reach this goal. An interviewee further emphasizes the need to consider sustainability by underlining the need to integrate sustainability even more into their operations.

“Sustainability must be part of the growth plan we have 2025. So, it will not decrease, rather the opposite. We need to think about sustainability if we want to be a part in the future.” – Interviewee 2

However, the studied firm has established visions and goals, but an owner of a wholesaler states that these are hard to connect. The owner further emphasizes the difficulty of connecting the goals, vision, and objectives by stating that the wholesalers currently do not have any documented strategy content and preferably make decisions based on their insights and current knowledge.

“My feeling is that there is a better way to connect the strategies. In an ideal world, I would like them to be more linked. However, as Varsego is a small company, it is hard to know how this connection looks in practice, as I make connections in my brain when making decisions. We do not have the connection written down and formulated in any way as of today.” – Interviewee 14

In addition, some of the interviews mentioned the potential benefits of utilizing a sustainability parameter in the strategic work to include another element in the decision-making process.

“I think we could utilize a parameter or scale, indicating how good strategic alternatives it is in terms of sustainability, in order to get another element when we are making decisions.” – Interviewee 13

Building on the quotation above, it can be concluded that the mentioned struggles to some extent reflect the organizational culture. One of the interviewees highlights these struggles, implying that the board tends to focus more on business aspects, leading to a lack of content regarding sustainability.

“From my perspective, I can see that the strategies are getting more and more aligned. Moreover, I see the importance of the sustainability strategy, but I am not sure that everyone has the same view. So, I think we have to talk more about sustainability, and we have to get a better-shared vision for everyone to see the importance of aligning both strategies.” – Interviewee 1

As a result, several interviewees pinpoint that it is up to the local wholesalers to create the strategic agenda based on the central directions and undertake sustainability initiatives. However, these sustainability initiatives have become desirable for all wholesalers to conduct.

“Sustainability has spread down to all the local wholesalers. Every wholesaler has an environmental manager now. The wholesalers have gone from thinking that sustainability was a burden to thinking it is something they want to do, but further, something they need to do. Therefore, sustainability has become the core aspect in Varsego.” – Interviewee 4

5.4 Summarization of findings

This section highlights the findings of the result and analysis chapter to transpose to the discussion. The findings are summarized and presented in Table 2.

Table 2, a summarization of findings per respective area

Finding	Area
A shared central sustainability focus embedded in the organization is of importance	Corporate sustainability strategies
Multiple initiatives encircling environmental sustainability indicates a focus on the environmental dimension of sustainability	Corporate sustainability strategies
Mentioned social initiatives in terms of social sustainability are more coherent with internal social sustainability	Corporate sustainability strategies
The economic dimension is the least prioritized sustainability dimension and is rather seen as an outcome of the other two dimensions	Corporate sustainability strategies
The operationalization of the sustainability strategy is signified by complexity, as it involves multiple steps and employees	Operationalizing sustainability strategies
Awareness of differentiation and changes in the markets enables the firm to seize market opportunities	Operationalizing sustainability strategies
Several different resources are deemed to be significant	Operationalizing sustainability strategies
There are multiple internal and external institutions present	Operationalizing sustainability strategies
The strategic approach is signified by ambidexterity, but the dynamic approach contributes more significantly toward goals	Operationalizing sustainability strategies
The sustainability strategy and business strategy go hand-in-hand, but there is room for improvement	Sustainability in relation to business strategy
Business is prioritized over sustainability, but there are efforts toward aligning them as it is demanded that if the firm grows, adherent to more rules and reporting will be required	Sustainability in relation to business strategy
Sustainability is not fully an integral part of the business strategy as they act in parallel. At the same time, organizational prerequisites are in place to make sustainability a fully integral part of the business strategy	Sustainability in relation to business strategy

6. Discussion

The following chapter discusses the findings of the report to address the research questions.

6.1 Maturing sustainability strategies

The following section will provide a discussion and answers for the first research question:
How can a sustainability strategy be associated with a higher sustainability maturity level?

6.1.1 Central sustainability focus

As Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) stress, it is necessary to be aware of the sustainability issues regarding a distinct sustainability maturity level to develop a sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level. Thus, the discussion is initiated by discussing the studied firm's current sustainability strategy.

It is essential to discuss the sustainability strategy's focus to understand the sustainability strategy, as the focus determines its boundaries. The studied firm showcased that sustainability has always been a factor. However, the focus regarding sustainability issues has not always been evident, as the central focus toward sustainability lacked on a cultural level back in the days. Nevertheless, the focus has improved, and interviews stress that there is a central focus toward sustainability represented in the culture, illustrated by the dedicated sustainability vision. The vision is essential as it is a prerequisite for leadership, strong values, and ethics deeply embedded in the culture required for a successful sustainability strategy implementation, according to Galpin et al. (2015). Thus, the findings conclude that a shared vision deeply embedded in the culture should be in place for firms aiming to reach the high sustainability maturity because the vision promotes going beyond the minimum concerning sustainability considerations, as showcased by the studied firm. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the studied firm does not solely consider sustainability for their benefits but also takes responsibility within society. As a result, the central focus highlights the responsibility of the studied firm by including care for the planet and human potential, which adhere to the aspects proposed by Van Marrewijk and Werre (2003), where these are considered the only sustainability aspects that matter in the end.

Further, interviews reveal that the studied firm has realized the importance of a central sustainability focus concerning the organizational infrastructure, as sustainability has become central to everything they do. In order to achieve the central focus, the studied firm has altered its operations, e.g., changing fuel and vehicles and adjusting delivery routes. The altered operations ensure that sustainability complies with organizational goals and missions. As a reason, the wholesalers become responsible for fulfilling this central focus locally. In terms of the suggested methods by Kashmanian et al. (2011), interviews showcase that the studied firm has accurately aligned its organizational infrastructure to support sustainability strategy development by implementing new managerial roles tailored to sustainability. By having new managerial roles tailored to sustainability, the studied firm manages to integrate sustainability into its operations, which goes in line with Kashmanian et al. (2011). As a result, the studied

firm showcases the importance of firms aligning their infrastructure to support the development of its sustainability strategy to ensure that the implementation of its sustainability strategy will be successful, which is in line with what Galpin et al. (2015) state. Moreover, Galpin et al. (2015) posit that establishing a central focus is crucial, as the central focus serves as a prerequisite to reaching the higher levels of sustainability maturity. Thus, it is plausible to conclude that the central sustainability focus concerning organizational infrastructure serves as a foundation to reach association with a higher level of sustainability maturity.

When discussing the central sustainability focus and its business implications, the studied firm has realized that if they do not centrally focus on sustainability, they will likely fall behind their competitors. These competitive implications go in line with Herzig and Schaltegger's (2006) work, which implies that organizations with a central focus on sustainability are more likely to realize the actual benefits associated with sustainability. Understanding the actual benefit associated with sustainability is essential as it drives sustainable development within organizations because they prepare themselves to take the next step to understand what business implications sustainability has, rather than being forced to consider sustainability out of necessity. Interviews further reveal that large customers of the studied firm have requirements concerning sustainability. However, these requirements have aided the studied firm in its sustainable development, where the requirements serve as guidance in estimating the demands of future customers. Thus, it is plausible to conclude that the business implications imposed by large customers' requirements have enabled the studied firm to grasp the actual benefit of sustainability because they can use sustainability to foresee future business implications. As a result, firms managing to realize the true benefit of sustainability can associate their sustainability strategy with a higher sustainability maturity level.

6.1.2 Investigation of sustainability issues and contributions

However, a central sustainability focus within an organization is insufficient to make the sustainability strategy associated with the highest sustainability maturity level. Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) state that a comprehensive corporate sustainability strategy must consider all dimensions, impacts, and interrelations encompassed in sustainability. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss the sustainability strategy in terms of the three dimensions.

In terms of the environmental dimension of sustainability, the findings illustrate that the studied firm focuses massively on the environmental dimension of sustainability that multiple environmental initiatives underline. This focus has aided in improving environmental issues within the studied firm. Interviews highlight this improvement by underlining the importance of having a central employee responsible for both formulating the environmental goals and promoting environmental initiatives. Interviews further underline the importance of having an environmental manager for each of the wholesalers in order for the wholesalers to follow through with the centrally distributed goals. While the wholesalers oblige to follow through with the environmental goals, they can engage in voluntary activities to improve their environmental impact if they choose to do so. However, it is probable to presume that the environmental goals of the studied firm primarily focus on effects concerning environmental

impact, which implies a lower level of sustainability maturity, according to Baumgartner and Ebner (2010). Nevertheless, initiatives were undertaken within the studied firm to minimize its environmental impact, clearly focusing on causes concerning environmental impact. Interviews reveal several environmental initiatives undertaken, primarily based on causes rather than effects. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that the firms should emphasize causes rather than effects in terms of initiatives regarding environmental impact, which implies a higher level of sustainability maturity, according to Baumgartner and Ebner (2010). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that because the environmental goals are vaguer than initiatives, the studied firm focuses more on causes rather than effects in terms of its environmental initiatives. Therefore, based on the work of Baumgartner and Ebner (2010), it can be concluded that the level of sustainability maturity within the studied firm can be considered high to some extent.

However, focusing solely on aspects concerning environmental impact is not sufficient. Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) stress that firms should take their environmental work a step further by considering impacts and environmental issues throughout the life cycle of their offerings. Interviews reveal that they consider the life cycle aspect of offerings because they have discussions with its suppliers regarding the life cycle aspects of the products the firm distributes. However, interviews reveal that, as their firm is only a distributor of products, it cannot influence its distributions. Thus, interviews reveal that the studied firm cannot have too much influence regarding the life cycle aspect of offerings for a particular supplier because that supplier is advanced in terms of environmental impact concerning their products. Therefore, the studied firm emphasizes the life cycle aspect of other suppliers within their value chain because the supplier mentioned above is solely a part of an enormous value chain. Thus, firms must emphasize the life cycle aspect of offerings regarding their suppliers to ensure that their supply chains are sustainable. Furthermore, interviews reveal that they send out questionnaires to new suppliers regarding the life cycle aspect of offerings. The questionnaire aims to recognize the environmental impact of offerings, to be able to conclude whether a product is sustainable or not. The studied firm can also prioritize sustainability activities to monitor its environmental footprint, which contrasts with Kashmanian et al. (2011) and Brady et al. (1999). Based on the initiatives mentioned above, it is plausible to conclude that firms have to make an effort to minimize their environmental impact. These initiatives to minimize and neutralize the environmental impact imply a certain high level of sustainability maturity, directly in line with Van Marrewijk and Werre's (2003) work regarding sustainability maturity and environmental impact.

Regarding the social dimension of sustainability, interviews reveal that they are still in the initial stages, considering aspects of social sustainability. The firm has not concretized any real goals regarding social sustainability. Nevertheless, interviews also revealed that the studied firm centrally sets values and culture in terms of social sustainability. However, this culture and values might not be applicable for everyone as the wholesalers operate within different geographical locations where different norms and prepositions exist in culture. Thus, it is conceivable to conclude that cultural differences might be the significant difficulty concerning social sustainability for firms. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss social sustainability within

the studied firm in terms of internal and external aspects, according to the work of Baumgartner and Ebner (2010).

Regarding internal aspects, as mentioned above, no concrete goals exist regarding social sustainability. Therefore, the studied firm complements several initiatives to improve its impact on society. Interviews agree that these initiatives primarily aim to contribute toward employee well-being. For instance, through initiatives like having safety representatives and protective rounds, the firm ensures employee well-being as a safe and pleasing environment leads to employees wanting to do their jobs and feeling well. Initiatives like the mentioned ones are in contrast with Stiglitz et al. (2010), which states that organizations improving their employee's health and safety will likely see an upturn in their employees' productivity. Furthermore, the firm ensures employee well-being through initiatives like motivation and bonuses, e.g., having the same salary regardless of the season. Motivation and bonuses are critical aspects for organizations that intend to become socially sustainable, according to the work of Baumgartner and Ebner (2010). Nevertheless, interviews reveal that ensuring employee well-being is not always an easy task because the studied firms' operations and employees need to be flexible to deal with seasonal fluctuations. To investigate how its employees feel, they could utilize an employee survey regarding employee well-being that already exists. However, interviews reveal that they do not utilize that survey as well as they could. Interviews further highlight the importance of utilizing this survey better to check how the employees feel in reality. Furthermore, interviews reveal that the studied firm integrates its stakeholders into the process of formulating rules and policies, e.g., workplace rules. The stakeholder integration ensures that different stakeholders' different perspectives influence this process. Therefore, the studied firm influences its stakeholders in a positive manner, which is in contrast to the work of Ebner (2008). Kashmanian et al. (2011) further state that engaging in a multi-dimensional effort with internal stakeholders benefits both the company and its stakeholders. Thus, it is plausible to conclude that firms must integrate their stakeholders in several decision-making processes, as multiple parties will benefit from this. Lastly, interviews explain that the studied firm promotes social sustainability through having a diverse workforce while ensuring a certain level of equality in terms of gender within their workforce. The studied firm showcases workforce diversity by having females in top-level management positions and changing its way of working to make it easier for females to apply and work within the firm. However, interviews imply that ensuring workforce equality is not always an easy task. For instance, females do not want to drive big ice cream trucks as this position is more often associated with male workers. These mentioned initiatives above ensure employee well-being and likely increase the employee's loyalty toward the firm.

Regarding external aspects, interviews revealed that the studied firm emphasizes these more minor than internal aspects. Therefore, it is probable to conclude that the studied firm focuses more on internal social sustainability. Even though the studied firm operates according to rules and legislations, these do not contribute toward external social sustainability as these are simply a requirement for it to be able to operate. However, regardless of internal or external aspects, Van Marrewijk and Were (2003) state that an increasing maturity level of sustainability implies a greater chance that organizations can improve their impact on society. Based on the work of

Van Marrewijk and Werre (2003), it is reasonable to conclude that the studied firm represents a higher level of sustainability maturity, as it uses multiple initiatives to improve its impact on society. However, the findings posit that firms need to focus on both internal and external aspects regarding social sustainability to reach a high sustainability maturity level.

In terms of the economic dimension of sustainability, interviews revealed that this dimension is the least prioritized out of the three dimensions. An interviewee exemplifies the prioritization of the economic dimensions by revealing that the benefits associated with this dimension are considered side benefits from the other two dimensions. However, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) state that usage of general aspects correlated with the economic dimension of sustainability often produces favorable results that correlate positively with organizations' financial performance and sustainability. Therefore, as the study's findings pinpoint the connection between financial performance and sustainability, it is plausible to conclude that firms should create a positive circle, utilizing strong economics to contribute positively to the environment.

In terms of discussions regarding stakeholder integration, interviews reveal that the studied firm emphasizes ensuring its different stakeholders understand how environmental factors in negative terms can contribute to worse economic performance. The studied firm ensures stakeholder integrations by having discussions with its customers about how excessive waste can contribute to worse profitability, which in contrast with the work of Baumgartner and Ebner (2010). By ensuring stakeholder integration, firms can give their customers context as to why they focus on environmental issues concerning economic performance. By doing so, firms can enhance their waste management while simultaneously cutting costs, as exemplified by the studied firm. Furthermore, they also discuss with their customers to ensure the customers understand why their prices might be higher than the competitors' prices. Having these discussions regarding price with the customers ensures that the customers understand the value behind their offerings.

Concerning shareholder satisfaction, Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) propose that maintaining shareholder satisfaction is one of the main challenges associated with the economic dimension of sustainability. Interviews reveal that the studied firm does not prioritize its shareholders, as the shareholders are owners of wholesalers that operate within the organization. Interviews further highlight that shareholders seem to be relatively pleased with its financial performance. However, the findings reveal some irritation within the shareholders as the studied firm does not have a central purchasing system. This central purchasing system is something that some wholesaler owners would like to establish because a central purchasing system could increase the efficiency of both the individual wholesalers and the firm's efficiency. Nevertheless, shareholders mostly seem to be pleased to be part of the organization, as being part of the organization increases the power the wholesalers have while aiding their financial performance. Based on stakeholder satisfaction, it is conceivable to conclude that firms have to find the right balance between stakeholder and shareholder needs. Since the studied firm has found the right balance between stakeholder and shareholder needs, it represents a higher level of sustainability maturity, according to Van Marrewijk & Werre's (2003) work. However,

Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) state that organizations need to prioritize the three dimensions of sustainability to reach the highest sustainability maturity level. Thus, organizations that intend to reach the highest level of sustainability need to prioritize equally between the three dimensions that sustainability encompasses.

6.1.3 Incorporation of sustainability considerations into strategic views

In order to incorporate the three dimensions, the sustainability strategy needs operationalizing. The interviews highlight that operationalizing the sustainability strategy at the studied firm is complex, as it involves multiple steps and employees. Due to the complexity, the operationalizing might be problematic, significantly as the maturity level of the sustainability strategy increases due to incorporation or more sustainability issues. At the same time, the studied firm considers sustainability an integral part of the operationalizing of a sustainability strategy as sustainability is considered to a large extent possible. By considering sustainability, there are indications that the studied firm can rethink and challenge their current assumptions, which is in line with Werbach (2011), to generate sustainable value through the strategy. However, a central employee initiates the operationalizing based on internal discussions, rather than especially plan and analyze the factors that constitute its business strategy, which Baumgartner (2014) proposes as a starting point. Discussions like these are carried out rather clumsily through more formal meetings. Moreover, the seven principles of sustainability proposed by Werbach (2011) are present in the sustainability work at the firm. However, the studied firm does not formally utilize the seven principles in discussions, which could hamper higher levels of sustainability maturity. Not formally utilizing discussion combined with the process initiation could imply difficulties in understanding the effect strategic alternatives have on the sustainability dimension in the early phases. Further, no strategic framework was mentioned, which both Baumgartner (2014) and Lloret (2016) promote to create a shared understanding and achieve competitiveness in the long term. In the specific case of the studied firm, this is of particular importance as there are many employees involved in the operationalizing process. Therefore, it would be beneficial to utilize a strategic framework or strategically directed model to achieve the highest maturity level of sustainability.

Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) clarify that higher maturity level sustainability strategies utilize sustainability issues to derive market advantages. Thereby, it is of relevance to discuss the market-based view. The interviews stress that the studied firm is aware of their differentiation because they do not compete on price and instead differentiate based on being local, working with strong brands, and ensuring high customer service to create value. However, the differentiation strategy utilized contrasts with Porter (1985), who states that the differentiation is often coherent with cost leadership. On the other hand, the studied firm's differentiation may be beneficial in associating the sustainability strategy with a higher sustainability maturity because the customers do not have the price as the determining factor. Therefore, sustainability issues can be incorporated. Because higher prices might be justified as improved sustainability increases the perceived benefits, and as Lloret (2016) states, increasing the value and enhancing growth. Furthermore, incorporating the sustainability issues might not be financially harmful, but rather the opposite as both Albertini (2013) and Orlitzky et al. (2003) state that improved

environmental performance yields a positive financial return over time. Based on the findings, it is plausible to conclude that there is a connection between improved environmental performance and financial return within firms, exemplified by the fact that the studied firm acquires multiple customers through the perceived value generated by environmental performance. Furthermore, the interviews showcased a relation between minimizing customers' waste and obtaining profits, which lies in line with Porter and van der Linde (1995), which pinpoint the relationship between increased productivity and reduced waste.

When discussing markets, the interviews stress that the studied firm explores new markets constantly. More recent shifts indicate that they use the perceived value to compete in new markets. Interestingly, the studied firm does not have specific targets and prefers to remain wide. In addition, they prefer to remain wide to be flexible and instead enter market segments that benefit from their offerings, e.g., markets arising due to changes and trends in society. The studied firm emphasizes that being flexible regarding markets might benefit firms as they can utilize generated value to enhance growth. Lloret (2016) explains this behavior, implying that firms embracing sustainability are often exploring new markets with the perception that customers demand sustainability attributes of the offerings. At the same time, the studied firm must consider sustainability as some customers require it to enter the market, which Lloret (2016) discusses, implying that exploration of new markets is one of the main drivers of sustainability adaptation. Moreover, the growth target will likely enhance sustainability, as higher levels of sustainability maturity will open possibilities to enter new markets and achieve growth. Besides finding new markets, the firm constantly develops its product portfolio. The development of the product portfolio is based not only on sustainable motives but also on mitigating seasonal fluctuations because the ice cream is season-based. Furthermore, all the products represent strong brands. Nevertheless, Lloret (2016) showcases no support that the brand can act as a driver for sustainability. Therefore, strong brands might not be favorable for sustainability strategy to be associated with a higher sustainability maturity level. On the other hand, the strong brands are from well-established corporations, signified by high sustainability requirements.

Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) clarify that the market-based view is not sufficient by itself to reach a higher sustainability maturity level, and the resource-based view should supplement it. Therefore, it is of relevance to discuss the resource-based view. The findings illustrate that several different resources are deemed to be significant. The interviews stress the importance of the employees and their engagement as a resource. The employees are valued as they create direct value, possess experiences and tacit knowledge that is hard to imitate, and are present in an entrepreneurial context where they directly influence the organization. However, employees are hard to consider as rare per se. Nevertheless, engaged employees are scarcer, which the studied firm has focused on achieving. These characteristics can explain the benefits the employees impose and lie in line with Hart (1995), who implies that resources with these characteristics reap benefits. Thus, it is not unexpected that the employees and their engagement are considered the most valuable resource. Further, the findings posited the relationships with customers as an essential resource. Relating the relationships with customers

to Hart (1995), it is reasonable to conclude that the relationships reap benefits because they are valuable, rare, inimitable, and involve the customers in the entrepreneurial work. The importance can be explained by the reasoning of Hart (1995), as this is involving stakeholders in the decision-making process. Furthermore, another recurrent resource is the intangible asset of the local brand. The local brand is valuable, rare, hard to imitate, and adopted by the organization in an entrepreneurial context, which reaps the benefits of a competitive advantage posited by Hart (1995). Lastly is the mentioned infrastructure in terms of digital systems. These might not be rare or imitate, but the digital systems create direct value for the customers and promote entrepreneurial initiatives within the organization. Thus, it is possible to state that the resources and capabilities are of value to establish strategic assets, which aligns with what Lloret (2016) posits, who states that strategic assets stem from the organization itself, which is the case for the studied firm. Suppose that firms embed these strategic assets into the strategy through corporate sustainability. In that case, the firms can increase their competitiveness and at the same time create prerequisites to increase the sustainability maturity level.

At the same time, as posited by Baumgartner and Ebner (2010), institutions are of importance no matter the sustainability maturity, and Lloret (2016) describes the institutional-based view as indispensable to understand sustainability. Thus, it is relevant to discuss the institutional-based view as most firms are subject to internal and external institutions. The findings underline that there are multiple internal and external institutions present for the studied firm. The external institutions resemble both national and local laws, e.g., environmental zones. However, these institutions are favorable for firms to promote development which is in line with the work of Lloret (2016), who states that regulations drive strategic decisions for sustainable practices. Furthermore, regarding the institution of ISO 14001, the studied firm audits it both internally and externally. The ISO 14001 drives strategic decisions as specific requirements are present to maintain the certificate. Thus, the ISO 14001 guides behavior, and the consequences of losing the certificate are severe, as multiple customers require the certificate for business relationships. These two externalized institutions set limits in which the firm may act and are therefore essential for the sustainability strategy to be associated with a higher sustainability maturity level. These externalized limits lie in line with Peng et al. (2009), who stress their importance. The competitive edge also stems from the externally established institutions, and thus management of these is of importance.

Besides external institutions, internalized institutions affect the studied firm. One recurrent institution is internal policies, such as policies to guide more informal behavior of employees or policies to maintain specific standards to ensure a safe work environment. As well, employees also have to adhere to local values. Another recurrent institution is the systems, as the systems affect working ways and guide behavior within the firm. The policies and local values that collaborate with the systems correspond to an essential role in shaping the informal internal norms. Lloret (2016) stated that these norms are critical to responding to sustainability demands. Therefore, the internal institutions must establish limits coherent with sustainability issues, which is also necessary for the sustainability strategy to be associated with a higher sustainability maturity level. With these institutions in place, firms can establish sustainability adoption expectations that comply with societal expectations. Lloret (2016) stresses the

importance of sustainability adoption, stating that it is essential to build up a capacity to adapt to the institutions because it is the sustainability adoption that generates long-term strategies. The institutions, therefore, should be incorporated in the central decision-making, which is something the studied firm has done as laws and mentioned institutions are monitored and deployed centrally. Incorporating the institutions in the central decision-making lays the foundation to achieve the highest level of sustainability, which will derive a competitive edge if considered in corporate sustainability.

6.1.4 Determining the strategic approach

As Lloret (2016) stresses, the strategic views by themselves are not sufficient for firms to plan and develop the sustainability strategy, especially for higher levels of sustainability maturity. Thus, it is relevant to discuss the strategic approach, as it is underlying to achieve resonance between strategy, resource utilization, and the sustainability dimensions.

In terms of the strategic approach, the findings underline ambidexterity within the strategic approach of the studied firm. The interviews imply that the strategic approach concerning the ice cream segment is associated with defense and can be related to the static approach. The difficulty explains the defensive mechanism associated with the ice cream segment to expand the large market share the studied firm possesses. The static approach is not suitable for a sustainability strategy with a higher maturity level, as it does not demand as drastic changes as if, e.g., entering a new market. On the other hand, while the possibilities for attack are limited, the studied firm relies on how well it executes actions following the market, which drives sustainable actions. At the same time, the interviews highlight offense in the strategic approach. The dynamic approach derives from the growth targets set by the organization and includes considerations to evolve their existing operations and value chain. Attacking new customers in combination with evolving existing lies in line with Lewis and Slack (2017), who state that firms who aspire to reach higher maturity levels need these in place. However, the dynamic approach requires a higher level of alignment to achieve an increased balance between market requirements and operational resources. The interviews showcase the higher level of alignment, highlighting the importance of reaching new customers and enhancing growth. The goals have been essential in promoting initiatives to evolve the existing operations, such as implementing solar panels, changing fuel, and upgrading vehicles, promoting higher maturity levels of sustainability. However, the ambidexterity implied in the interviews might not be beneficial as it can cause confusion and increase the complexity associated with decision-making.

6.1.5 Proposed framework to mature sustainability strategies

Based on this research, it is reasonable to conclude that making a sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level is a complex process. Nonetheless, it is plausible to conclude that organizations intending on maturing their sustainability strategy to be associated with higher levels of sustainability maturity need to consider certain aspects. Thus, this chapter presents a conceptual framework to address these aspects. The suggested

framework and its aspects, illustrated in Figure 6 **Error! Reference source not found.**, will be explained in the following section.

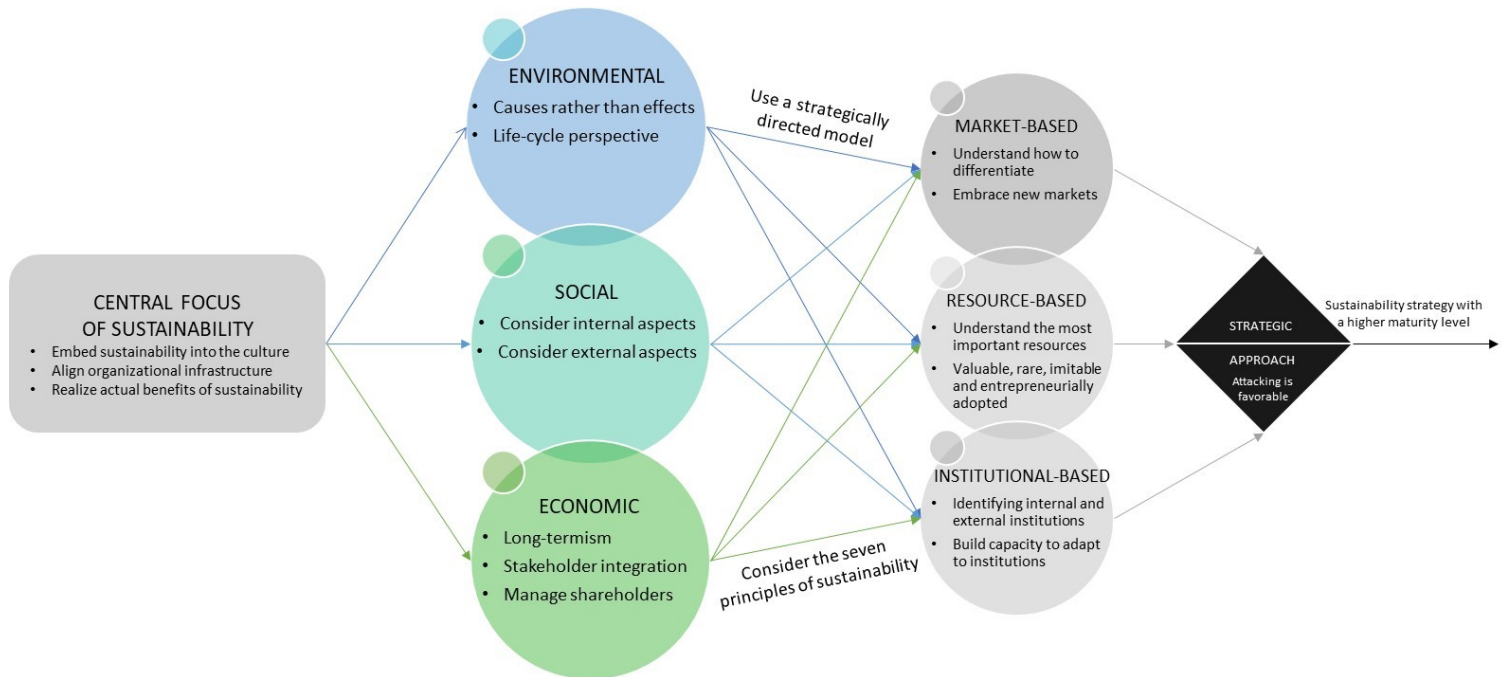


Figure 6, A suggested conceptual framework to make sustainability strategies associated with higher levels of sustainability maturity.

The first step to making a sustainability strategy associated with a higher level of sustainability maturity is establishing a central focus toward sustainability within an organization. Here, it is vital to ensure sustainability is embedded into the organizational culture to embrace the central focus. Furthermore, the organizational infrastructure must be aligned with the central focus to ensure support for sustainable development. Lastly, the central focus must be declared to realize the true benefit sustainability encompasses. These factors are essential to set the prerequisite in order to reach higher levels of sustainability maturity.

The second step to reach high levels of sustainability maturity is to analyze and investigate sustainability impact in terms of the three dimensions. In terms of the environmental dimension, the findings identified two primary considerations. The environmental consideration in terms of goals and actions must circle causes rather than environmental impact effects. Further, the life-cycle aspects of offerings must consider environmental impact within the value chain of offerings. In terms of the social dimension, this dimension must consider internal and external aspects within organizations, where internal aspects focus on internal stakeholders. In contrast, external aspects focus on external stakeholders. In terms of the economic dimensions, the findings identified three significant considerations. The economic dimensions must encircle long-termism rather than focusing on short-term financial gains, as long-termism leads to financial and sustainable gains in the long term. At the same time, organizations must inform and integrate stakeholders about the economics of the organization, as it leads to a sustainable financial organization. Moreover, it is probable to conclude that

organizations must ensure shareholder satisfaction, as shareholders are the dominant members within organizations and are thereby influential in sustainable development.

The third step is to incorporate the identified sustainability issues into the strategic views. To facilitate this process, it is conceivable to conclude that a strategically directed model is favorable. Further, it can be beneficial to utilize the seven principles of sustainability proposed by Werbach (2011). In terms of the market-based view, it is essential to understand how to differentiate based on offerings and perceived value and embrace new markets. Both these facilitate and promote sustainable development. In terms of the resource-based view, an organization must understand its most important resources and whether these are valuable, rare, imitable, and adopted in an entrepreneurial context. These are crucial to mature a sustainability strategy. Regarding the institutional-based view, it is essential to identify both internal and external institutions and how these relate to sustainable work to build capacity and adapt these institutions to drive sustainable development.

The fourth and final step is to determine the strategic approach concerning whether to utilize a static or dynamic approach. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the dynamic approach is favorable because the dynamic strategic approach stimulates sustainable development and is thereby beneficial to make a sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level.

6.2 Incorporation of the matured sustainability strategy

The following section will discuss and answer the second research question: *How can a sustainability strategy with a higher sustainability maturity level be incorporated to become an integral part of the business strategy?*

6.2.1 Sustainability in relation to business strategy

To unlock the full potential of a high maturity level sustainability strategy, firms have to link it to their business strategy, as Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) state. Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) further state that a critical discussion point regarding the maturity level of sustainability strategies is the fit between the sustainability strategy and the business strategy. In terms of the studied firm, interviews reveal that the link between the two strategies is indistinct to some extent. Interviews further reveal that it is easier for them to formulate business goals and objectives than sustainability goals and objectives. However, the difficulty of formulating sustainability goals and objectives can be related to Brady et al. (1999), which state that it can be challenging to integrate sustainability into business strategies due to the pure complexity associated with sustainability, predominantly related to the formulation of sustainability goals.

Regarding mitigation of the challenges associated with integrating high maturity level sustainability strategies, it is beneficial for firms to establish a central focus encircling it. Interviews reveal that the studied firm integrates sustainability into operations through a central focus, making sustainability central to everything done within the firm. Maniora (2018) and Matzembacher and Meira (2019) state that firms rarely consider sustainability a top priority and therefore do not realize the true benefit of sustainability. However, as interviews reveal that sustainability is central to everything done within the firm, it can be concluded that the studied firm has prioritized sustainability within its operations by grasping the actual reason behind sustainability incorporation. Nevertheless, interviews highlight the need to integrate sustainability even better into its business strategy. The interviews underline the importance of integrating sustainability even better within the firm by revealing that several wholesalers would like the matured sustainability strategy and business strategy to be the same to support each other. Integrating sustainability into the business strategy even more, is beneficial, as integrating the matured sustainability strategy enhances the business value generated by the business strategy, as functions coordinate activities and learn from each other, according to Kashmanian et al. (2011).

For firms to grasp the sustainable business value the sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level generates, the business model shall be sustainable. In terms of the studied firm, interviews reveal that they consider business plans from a sustainable business model perspective. Long (2019) underlines the importance of a sustainable business model, which states that sustainability strategies are unlikely to be sufficient due to their increasing importance and necessity and that business models must be sustainable. Interviews further reveal that sustainability goals and business goals align and support each other. For example, the studied firm focuses on sales and growth goals, but at the same time, they consider

how to achieve these specific goals sustainably. However, firms must simultaneously judge business plans from a business perspective and a sustainable perspective. Therefore, integrating sustainability strategies associated with a higher maturity level of sustainability into business models requires an increased sustainability focus in the business model. Increasing the sustainability focus of the business model can be beneficial as business models with a more extensive focus on sustainability can help firms achieve a long-term strategic and competitive advantage, according to Brady et al. (1999).

6.2.2 Incorporating sustainability into the business strategy

In order to establish a relationship between the business strategy and the sustainability strategy, firms must incorporate the sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level. However, Klettner et al. (2014) imply a lack of current literature regarding incorporating sustainability strategies into business strategies in more practical terms. In addition, matured sustainability strategies become almost obsolete if not incorporated into the business strategy. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss the incorporation of sustainability into the business strategy of the studied firm to shed light on this dilemma.

Associated with the dilemma of incorporating sustainability into business strategy is the importance and prioritization regarding sustainability and business. The findings highlight that business is prioritized more than sustainability. Nevertheless, as earlier mentioned, the interviews revealed that sustainability is vital within the studied firm. Prioritizing sustainability enhances the firm's ability to translate intangible sustainability concepts into strategic actions as Engert and Baumgartner (2016) state that integrating sustainability into the existing core strategy is the most critical aspect when translating sustainability concepts. However, prioritizing business over sustainability creates tension within the firm, resulting in the managers' more tremendous effort to drive the changes needed to integrate sustainability. The immense effort the central employee currently has to put into driving sustainability works pinpoints the effort needed to drive changes to integrate sustainability. If the prioritization of the sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level excels, the sustainability work could instead be driven based on shared efforts throughout the organization. Thereby, firms' capacity to translate intangible sustainability concepts to strategic actions would excel, and resistance to change mitigates.

It is further essential to maintain the balance between the matured sustainability strategy and the business strategy in the incorporation, which Engert and Baumgartner (2016) stress. The interviews reveal that the business strategy and sustainability do fit. However, all three dimensions are not currently incorporated. Thus, making a sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level demands more effort to maintain a fit. The fit is currently maintained by handling and mitigating trade-offs, which lies in line with Porter's (1985) posits. For instance, the interviews exemplify handling the constant trade-off between sustainable investments and economic stability. The trade-offs are a critical consideration for the studied firm. In addition, they will likely become even more critical as the complexity of the sustainability strategy increases when making it associated with a higher sustainability

maturity level. Moreover, sustainability strategies with a higher maturity level require all three sustainability dimensions to be incorporated. Firms must ensure no trade-offs regarding sustainability issues when incorporating sustainability strategies associated with a higher sustainability maturity level.

In close association to the incorporation are the challenges related to the strategy. The interviews stress that challenges associated with the business strategy go hand-in-hand with the sustainability strategy, as facing challenges benefit both business and sustainability. Crews (2010) work explains that creating a shared vision regarding strategy aids the process of aligning the sustainability strategy to the business strategy. For instance, the challenge of achieving rapid growth links to both business and sustainability. Because higher sales volumes result in deliveries with lower average environmental impacts, on the other hand, increased sales volumes could pressure the employees. It is plausible to conclude that these two support each other, at least to some extent, which is essential as it, consciously or unconsciously, will indirectly drive sustainability work. However, to make a sustainability strategy associated with the highest levels of sustainability maturity, the challenges sustainability imposes must be faced directly, simultaneously as the business challenges because these should preferably be the same, as stressed by Crews (2010). Excelled stakeholder engagement can make business and sustainability challenges mostly the same. The studied firm is currently not required to do sustainability reporting, but there will be demands to adhere to rules and reporting if they grow. This adherent increases the direct focus on the sustainability challenges, as these challenges will be followed up and monitored. The direct focus on sustainability challenges is in line with Baumgartner and Ebner (2010), which state that firms need to produce sustainability reports to thoroughly incorporate sustainability strategies with a high maturity level into the business strategy.

6.2.3 Making sustainability an integral part of strategy

As mentioned above, it can be challenging for firms to translate intangible concepts into concrete sustainability initiatives, according to Engert and Baumgartner (2016). To cope with this challenge, the framework of Bonn and Fisher (2011) addresses how firms can make sustainability an integral part of their business strategy. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss these aspects to address how firms can make the sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level an integral part of their business strategy.

In terms of vision, goals, and objectives, Bonn and Fisher (2011) state that firms with a shared vision display that sustainability is an integral part of their business approach to their stakeholders. The findings highlight that sustainability is not an integral part of the studied firm's business strategy. Nevertheless, interviews reveal that they currently have a strong sustainability vision, parallel with the business strategy. Therefore, the studied firm demonstrates toward its stakeholders that sustainability is an integral part of their business approach to some extent while monitoring sustainability initiatives and tracking sustainability goals. However, interviews imply that stakeholders have difficulties understanding how sustainability can be incorporated even more in practice. Thus, firms making matured

sustainability strategies an integral part of their business strategy have to have a strong vision that explains how the different dimensions of sustainability contribute toward a sustainable organization to the stakeholders.

In terms of decision-making, Bonn and Fisher (2011) state that firms aiming to achieve long-term commitment toward sustainability need to address sustainability concerns in all decision-making processes, primarily when tension exists concerning which issues of focus. Interviews reveal that much effort mainly correlates to environmental issues and less effort correlates to issues concerning the other two dimensions of sustainability. Thus, the difference in prioritization between the sustainability dimensions might display to stakeholders that the studied firm does not treat all sustainability issues equally. Therefore, firms making sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level an integral part of their business strategy need to prioritize equally between the three dimensions of sustainability to signal toward their stakeholders that all three dimensions and their issues matter.

In terms of organizational culture, Bonn and Fisher (2011) state that the culture within firms has to embrace sustainability to achieve the sustainable vision and the matured sustainability strategy to be successful. Concerning the studied firm, interviews reveal that the culture can be considered sustainable, at least to the extent that employees seem to have embraced the sustainable vision. However, interviews further reveal that the studied firm has not embraced the sustainability strategy as effortlessly as the vision because they predominantly focus on the environmental dimension of sustainability. The main focus on only the environmental dimensions within the studied firm might result in employees questioning the purpose of sustainability. Therefore, firms making sustainability strategies associated with a higher sustainability maturity level an integral part of their business strategy have to prioritize the three sustainability dimensions to create a sustainable culture.

In terms of sustainability initiatives, Bonn and Fisher (2011) state that a strong vision, strategic decision-making leading to strategic content supporting sustainability, and organizational culture embracing sustainability, are crucial for successful sustainability initiatives. While interviews highlight that the studied firm has embraced the vision, they have not embraced the other aspects as effortlessly. Thus, sustainability initiatives might not be successful in the future for the studied firm. Therefore, firms aiming to have successful sustainability initiatives need to ensure that their organizational culture embraces the matured sustainability strategy in terms of the sustainable vision and strategic decision-making, resulting in strategic content supporting sustainability.

6.2.4 Proposed incorporation of matured sustainability strategy

Based on this research and prior research, it is reasonable to conclude that incorporating sustainability into a business strategy is a grueling process. Nevertheless, this research reveals particular action-based aspects organizations must consider when incorporating a matured sustainability strategy into their business strategy in practice. Thus, this section proposes and

explains actions for organizations that intend to incorporate sustainability strategies associated with a higher sustainability maturity level.

The first action for organizations who intend to integrate a sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level into their business strategy is to understand its relationship and the business strategy. The findings identified two things of importance. Foremost, organizations need to create a central focus toward sustainability within the organization, as the central focus is crucial in sustainability strategies associated with a higher sustainability maturity level. Creating the central focus can be done by having a shared vision statement where sustainability is incorporated. It is further essential to ensure that the business model within the organization is sustainable, as the matured sustainability strategy itself is not sufficient due to the increasing awareness and importance of sustainability strategies.

The second action proposed is to incorporate the sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level into the business strategy in practice. Here, it is critical to determine and escalate both the importance and prioritization of the matured sustainability strategy in relation to the business strategy. Furthermore, a fit and balance between both the strategies and sustainability issues must exist to handle and mitigate trade-offs. Further, challenges associated with both strategies must be aligned and support each other, or be the same in ideal cases, to ensure that business and sustainable development within an organization are heading in the same direction.

The third and last action proposed is to make the sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level an integral part of the business strategy. As a result of this, it is essential to incorporate sustainability into the vision statement to ensure sustainability integration. Further, all three dimensions of sustainability must be incorporated into the decision-making process, as strategic content supporting sustainability work derives from the decision-making process. Further, firms must establish a sustainable culture, as the sustainable culture promotes sustainability work, from where sustainability initiatives can be derived.

7. Conclusion

After analyzing and discussing findings generated from the conducted interviews, four sequential steps reveal how firms should make their sustainability strategies to be associated with higher maturity levels of sustainability. The first step is to establish a central focus within the organization. This focus can be achieved through embedding sustainability into the culture, aligning the organizational infrastructure to support sustainable development, and realizing the actual benefits of sustainability. The second step to reach high levels of sustainability maturity is to analyze and investigate sustainability impact in terms of the three sustainability dimensions. The environmental dimension should consider the causes rather than the effects and incorporate a life-cycle perspective. The social dimension must consider both the internal and external aspects. The economic dimension should initiate long-termism, integrate stakeholders, and manage shareholders. The third step is to plan and develop the sustainability strategy. Proposed recommendations are to utilize a strategically directed model combined with the seven principles of sustainability proposed by Werbach (2011). Nevertheless, the operationalizing initiate based on the strategic views. The market-based view shall include an understanding of differentiation and embrace new markets. The resource-based view must include identifying the most critical resources and further ensuring that they are valuable, rare, imitable, and entrepreneurially adopted. The institutional-based view shall identify the internal and external institutions and build a capacity to adapt to these. The fourth and last step is to determine the strategic approach, where the proposed recommendation is to utilize a dynamic approach to enhance sustainable development. These steps are summarized in **Error! Reference source not found.** and act as guidance for managers that aim to excel at the sustainability maturity level within their organization.

Based on the findings of this research, three significant actions reveal how firms should integrate a sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level and make it an integral part of the business strategy. The first action is for firms to understand the relationship between the matured sustainability strategy and the business strategy. A proposed recommendation is to create a central focus toward sustainability and ensure that the business model within the firm is sustainable as the matured sustainability strategy itself will not be sufficient. The second action is to incorporate the sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level into the business strategy in practice. As a result, firms must ensure that the business strategy and sustainability strategy are equally prioritized and fit together in terms of challenges to ensure sustainable development. The third and last action is to make the sustainability strategy associated with a higher sustainability maturity level an integral part of the business strategy. Therefore, firms must incorporate sustainability into their vision and incorporate all three dimensions of sustainability into the decision-making process. These three actions serve as guidance for managers aiming to incorporate the sustainability strategy making it an integral part of the business strategy.

7.1 Managerial implications

Regarding managerial implications, a recommendation to the studied firm is revising the central focus according to all three dimensions of sustainability instead of limiting the focus to the environmental dimension. Revising the central focus implies that the firm should revise its vision based on including the three dimensions. The vision should then be anchored throughout the organization to establish a sustainable culture, where the actual benefits of sustainability are recognized. When operationalizing the sustainability strategy, recommendations are to use a strategically directed model to structure the work and ensure that all elements are included, especially sustainability, in terms of the three views. In realizing the sustainability strategy to become associated with a higher level of sustainability maturity, recommendations are to take an offensive strategic approach to achieve growth and long-term gains. Furthermore, a recommendation for the studied firm is to understand the relationship between the two strategies even further while analyzing and operationalizing the sustainability strategy, as the integration process is not sequential. When understanding the relationship between the strategies, the studied firm should integrate the sustainability strategy's different aspects into the business strategy. Building on this integration, it is recommended for the studied firm to make sustainability an integral part of the business strategy by ensuring that the vision, decision-making processes, organizational culture, and strategy content are sustainable.

7.2 Future research

In terms of future research, a first recommendation is to further pursue the development of the sustainability strategy at the case study object because this research is conducted in an academic setting to test the framework and proposed actions in a practical setting. Pursuing the development process of the studied firm verifies the framework and the actions, increasing credibility as the gap between practice and theory is bridged. A second recommendation is to investigate sustainability strategies associated with a higher sustainability maturity level based on a quantitative research design to complement this research, as the design of this research was qualitative. As a result, the quantitative research will enhance a nuanced understanding of sustainability strategies with higher sustainability maturity levels. Moreover, investigating sustainability strategies associated with a higher sustainability maturity level in a quantitative research design can also aid in assessing whether the findings of this research will be applicable for a quantitative research setting or whether the findings are limited to qualitative research. Lastly, is a recommendation to expand the sample and not only look at a single case study object. The expansion would preferably include companies that showcase differences internally and externally concerning the case study object used in this research. As a result, the expanded sample addresses the generalizability of the framework, and the proposed actions could and therefore, the results can derive applicability to firms across sectors and industries.

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Appendix A.

Interview questions English version

Interview questions:

General

1. Could you briefly tell us your name and position within Varsego?
 - a. How long have you been working within Varsego?

Sustainability strategy

2. How would you describe Varsego's sustainability strategy?
 - a. How would you describe the sustainability vision?
 - b. Where does Varsego's main focus of the sustainability strategy lie?
 - c. How is the sustainability strategy broken down within Varsego?
 - d. How is the sustainability strategy reflected in Varsego's organizational culture?
 - e. What sustainability initiatives have been undertaken in Varsego? Provide examples.

Environmental dimension of sustainability - This dimension concerns the impact on the environment, for example, resource use, emissions in the air, the water, or the ground, as well as waste, hazardous waste, and biodiversity.

3. How does Varsego work with environmental sustainability?
 - a. How does Varsego work with reducing their environmental impact?
 - b. How is the life-cycle aspect regarding offerings considered?

Social dimension of sustainability - This dimension concerns the impact on the society and stakeholders, for example, motivation and incentives, health and safety, and human capital development, behavior and human rights, no controversial activities, no corruption and cartel, and corporate citizenship.

4. How does Varsego work with social sustainability?
 - a. How does Varsego fulfill internal stakeholders' (For example, employees, managers, and owners) needs?
 - b. How does Varsego fulfill external stakeholders' (For example, suppliers, customers, creditors, governments, shareholders, and society) needs?
 - c. How does Varsego manage stakeholders' relations?

Economic dimension of sustainability - This dimension concerns economic performance and the shareholders, for example, through innovation and technology, collaboration, knowledge management, processes, purchase, and sustainability reporting.

5. How does Varsego work with economic sustainability?
 - a. How does Varsego achieve economic performance?
 - b. How does Varsego fulfill shareholders' needs?
 - c. How does Varsego manage shareholders' relations?

Operationalizing sustainability strategy

6. How does Varsego plan and develop its sustainability strategy?
 - a. How does Varsego's strategic decision-making process look?
 - b. What aspects does Varsego take into consideration when planning and developing its sustainability strategy?

Strategic views

7. What markets, products, and other opportunities is Varsego exploring?
 - a. Why these markets, products, or opportunities?
8. What resources are used by Varsego to create value?
 - a. What tangible resources are used?
 - b. What intangible resources are used?
9. What institutions, i.e. precepts, laws, rules, policies, codes of conduct, customs, and traditions that determine behavior, are present for Varsego?
 - a. How do these limit the organization?

Strategic approaches

10. Is Varsego's strategic approach based on defense (For example, prevention against competitors attacking the market and the resource position) or attack (For example, attacking new attractive markets and evolving existing operations)? Provide examples.

Sustainability strategy in relation to business strategy

11. How does Varsego's sustainability strategy fit with its business strategy?
 - a. In terms of the business model?
 - b. In terms of the organizational structure, and organizational processes?
 - c. In terms of importance and prioritization?
 - d. In terms of challenges?

Appendix B.

Interview questions Swedish version

Intervjufrågor:

Allmänt

1. Kan du kortfattat berätta ditt namn och din position inom Varsego?
 - a. Hur länge har du arbetat inom Varsego?

Hållbarhetsstrategi

2. Hur skulle du beskriva Varsegos hållbarhetsstrategi?
 - a. Hur skulle du beskriva Varsegos hållbarhetsvision?
 - b. Var ligger Varsegos huvudfokus gällande hållbarhetsstrategin?
 - c. Hur bryts hållbarhetsstrategin ned inom organisationen?
 - d. Hur återspeglas hållbarhetsstrategin i Varsegos organisationskultur?
 - e. Vilka hållbarhetsinitiativ har tagits inom Varsego? Ge exempel.

Miljömässig dimension av hållbarhet - Denna dimension avser påverkan på miljön, till exempel, resursanvändning, utsläpp i luften, vatten och marken, samt farligt avfall och biologisk mångfald.

3. Hur arbetar Varsego med miljömässig hållbarhet?
 - a. Hur arbetar Varsego med att minska sin miljöpåverkan?
 - b. Hur betraktas livscykelaspekten när det gäller värdeutbud [produkter]?

Social dimension av hållbarhet - Denna dimension avser påverkan på samhället och intressenter, till exempel, motivation, incitament, hälsa och säkerhet, utveckling av humankapital, beteende och mänskliga rättigheter, icke-kontroversiella aktiviteter, ingen korruption och kartel, och företags samhällsansvar.

4. Hur arbetar Varsego med social hållbarhet?
 - a. Hur uppfyller Varsego interna intressenters [stakeholders] (Till exempel, anställda, chefer, och ägare) behov?
 - b. Hur uppfyller Varsego externa intressenters [stakeholders] (Till exempel, leverantörer, kunder, kreditgivare, myndigheter, aktieägare, och samhället) behov?
 - c. Hur hanterar Varsego relationen till intressenterna [stakeholders]?

Ekonomisk dimension av hållbarhet - Denna dimension avser påverkan på ekonomisk prestation och aktieägarna, till exempel, genom innovation och teknik, samarbete, kunskapshantering [knowledge management], processer, inköp, and hållbarhetsrapportering.

5. Hur arbetar Varsego med ekonomisk hållbarhet?
 - a. Hur uppnår Varsego ekonomiska resultat?
 - b. Hur uppfyller Varsego aktieägarnas behov?
 - c. Hur hanterar Varsego relationen till aktieägarna?

Operationalisering av hållbarhetsstrategi

6. Hur planerar och utvecklar Varsego sin hållbarhetsstrategi?
 - a. Hur ser Varsegos strategiska beslutsprocess ut?
 - b. Vilka aspekter tar Varsego i beaktande när man planerar och utvecklar sin hållbarhetsstrategi?

Strategiska synsätt

7. Vilka marknader, produkter och andra möjligheter utforskar Varsego?
 - a. Varför dessa marknader, produkter eller möjligheter?
8. Vilka resurser används av Varsego för att skapa värde?
 - a. Vilka materiella resurser används?
 - b. Vilka immateriella resurser används?
9. Vilka institutioner, dvs. föreskrifter, lagar, regler, policies, code of conducts, tullar och traditioner som guidar beteende, återfinns inom Varsego?
 - a. Hur begränsar dessa organisationen?

Strategiska tillvägagångssätt

10. Är Varsegos strategiska tillvägagångssätt baserat på försvar (t.ex. förebyggande mot konkurrenter som attackerar marknaden och resurspositionen) eller attack (t.ex. attackera nya attraktiva marknader och utveckla befintliga operationer [operations])? Ge exempel.

Hållbarhetsstrategi i förhållande till affärsstrategi

11. Hur samverkar Varsegos hållbarhetsstrategi med sin affärsstrategi?
 - a. När det gäller affärsmodellen?
 - b. När det gäller organisationsstruktur och organisatoriska processer?
 - c. När det gäller betydelse och prioritering?
 - d. När det gäller utmaningar?

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