Environmental Sustainability in the Dutch Construction Sector:

A Research on the Importance of Short-term Environmental Sustainability Goals

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Abstract

Since its introduction, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has seen major developments. In recent years attention on sustainability, an important aspect of CSR has placed the construction sector in the spotlight more than ever before. With major pollution and negative contributions to the environment, environmental sustainability has become a popular term in this industry. Especially, because the construction sector has such a high potential for improvement in terms of environmental impact. Given their numeral domination, SMEs are perceived as the biggest part of the problem. Hence, research on SMEs and environmental sustainability in the construction sector was conducted. This dissertation is based on a multiple case study analysis, researching Dutch medium sized construction companies. Through semi-structured interviews multiple aspects of environmental sustainability engagement were covered. Since no research had been conducted about the importance of short-term environmental sustainability goals in achieving long-term goals, this was researched. After categorizing and coding the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, several meaningful results were yielded. The results showed that most companies had an intrinsic motivation to engage in sustainability. However, a set of external factors influenced that engagement as well. Along with the company's financial position, the results showed an influence of laws and regulations on sustainability engagement. When looking at the impact of sustainability engagement, the results showed that not a lot of impact has been yielded so far. This may be due to short engagement times and the fact that customers are not ready for sustainability yet. From a strategic perspective it is believed that sustainability operations should be based on the long-term goals. However, the short-term should not be overlooked. With short-term goals increasing employee engagement, external support, and (re)evaluating practices, it is perceived to be essential for achieving long-term sustainability goals.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Since the introduction of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the 1950s, the matter has seen developments over the years. While the 50s, 60s, and 70s were classified as the ''awareness'', ''issue'', and ''responsiveness'' eras, the last decade is seen as one where the contribution to the matter laid in conducted research (Carroll, 2009). Before the 2000s the focus was more on defining CSR. With all the contributions and developments, it is hard to find a widely accepted definition of CSR. Bowen (1953), one of the first to define CSR, refers to it as the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society. Since then, multiple authors and researchers have contributed and redefined the concept of CSR. In the 2010s the focus shifted more towards value creation (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019). It is believed that the purpose of the corporation is to create shared value, and to prioritize identifying the societal needs as well as the benefits or harms that the business embodies through its products (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

An important part of CSR is sustainability. Sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of generations to meet their own needs (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). At a general level scholars agree that sustainability can be best described by linking the three dimensions; social, economic, and environmental (Elkington, 1997; Cohen, Smith, & Mitchell, 2008; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). The environment is seen as a crucial part of sustainability, because without a sustainably productive environment to provide a resource foundation it is impossible to have a sustainable society (Morelli, 2011).

A crucial theory in this thesis is the stakeholder theory. Freeman (2004) defines stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of a corporation's purpose. By considering and balancing the interests of these groups, an organization can engender and maintain support from the constituent groups they have a relationship with (Freeman, 1984). Creating value to the stakeholders is essential to maintain the relationships with them (Freudenreich, Lüdeke-Freund, & Schaltegger, 2020; Harrison & Van der Laan Smith, 2015). If an organisation manages to satisfy or exceed the demands of its stakeholders, it will be sustainable. This will give organizations a competitive advantage (Jones, Harrison, & Felps, 2018). The stakeholder theory is especially important in the construction sector as it is a sector where firms must take many different parties into account. This included their impacts on the environment as an example. Therefore, the stakeholder theory is an essential theory in this thesis, tying all the term together.

The construction sector is a sector that contributes to the environment in a negative way (Yilmaz & Bakis, 2015). Accordingly, 23% of air pollution and 40% of drinking water pollution come from the construction sector. Additionally, the construction sector accounts for 50% of landfill waste and contributes to 50% of the climate change[1]. Despite all these negative contributions, the construction sector has the highest energy saving and pollution reduction potential (Bal, Bryde, Fearon, & Ochieng, 2013). Because of these numbers and its huge potential to reduce the numbers, there is an increasing attention to sustainability. Hence, this research's primary focus will be on environmental sustainability in the construction sector.

[1] https://gocontractor.com/blog/how-does-construction-impact-the-environment/

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute a major part of global economies, but it is believed that they have negative impacts on the environment with around 70% of global pollution coming from SMEs (Malesios, De, Moursellas, & Dey, 2020). Knowing this it can be concluded that SMEs within the construction sector also account for most negative impacts on the environment. Because of the negative impact on the environment of the construction sector and SMEs, this research is based on environmental sustainability and medium sized enterprises. Since medium sized enterprises offer more in-depth data regarding this subject, it was decided to only focus on medium sized enterprises.

The term sustainability is well researched in the construction sector. However, it seems that research does not specifically research the importance of short-term goals in the process of achieving long-term sustainability successes. A study by Lin Wu et al. (2017), about short-term versus long-term benefits, systematically reviews sustainability journals of the last two decades. Although the research provides insights on the benefits of balancing short-term and long-term sustainability goals, there is still a gap in the sense that this research does not provide answers on how the short-term affects the long-term goals. Besides, that study addresses the need for further research on how short-term and long-term goals can be balanced. Additionally, that study is not specifically focused on environmental sustainability and the construction sector.

Most studies are based on literature reviews like the study from Lin Wu et al. (2017). Another study by Olanipekun et al. (2020), that discusses the state of CSR practices in the construction sector, is also based on a literature review. Furthermore, there are studies that provide insights on benefits of short-term and long-term goals. However, those studies do not provide information on the contribution of short-term goals to long-term goals. Additionally, those studies do not specifically focus on the construction sector. This study is based on a multiple case study analysis which provides concrete and up to date answers about the subject being researched. Sustainability in the construction sector is still in development, meaning that up-to-date data provide significance to studies around this matter. The studies that do carry out surveys and case studies do not research similar objectives. Based on this information and the main terms and concepts important to this research, the following research question has been formed:

''How important are short-term environmental sustainability goals in achieving long-term environmental sustainability goals for Dutch medium sized construction companies?''

This research aims to provide answers on how short-term environmental sustainability goals contribute to the long-term environmental sustainability goals of construction companies in the Netherlands. This is important because sustainability is often viewed as a long-term matter, which makes it hard for companies to grasp how important the short-term is. Short-term and long-term visions towards CSR are perceived as important because they allow firms to effectively increase short-term earnings and, at the same time, protect the environment and social integrity (Chang & Kuo, 2008). A truly sustainable organization should be able to implement short-term and long-term goals. The research will provide answers on the importance of the short-term environmental sustainability goals, and how these short-term goals will help companies to achieve their long-term goals.

As mentioned, this research will be based on a multiple case study analysis. The thesis structured as follows; firstly, the paper will discuss the literature review which consists of the sub-chapters ''Corporate Social Responsibility: The History and Development of CSR'', ''Sustainability'', ''Sustainability in small and medium sized enterprises'', ''Sustainability in Construction Sector'', ''Short- and Long-term Sustainability'', and ''Stakeholder Theory''. The literature review will help to get a better understanding about the subject and the importance of it. The literature review will start by introducing CSR and providing an overview of its history and development because sustainability is part of it. Then ''Sustainability'' will be reviewed. Consequently, the review addresses sustainability in SMEs, and its role in the construction sector. Afterwards, short- and long-term sustainability will be reviewed as this is the most important aspect of this research. In the ''Stakeholder Theory'' section will be explained what the role of stakeholders is in CSR, and why these should be considered. The literature review is followed by the methodology chapter, which will discuss the methodology and show the case studies summaries. Then the summary of the findings will be presented in Chapter 4. Lastly, the discussion section follows. This section will address the conclusions, limitations, and future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory is an important theory tying all the important terms of this thesis together. This thesis focuses on medium sized construction companies. Especially in the construction sector this theory plays a major role. This is because construction projects require attention to many different parties, making it the most important theory of this thesis. Later in this thesis further examples and explanations will follow of how construction companies affect and must take other parties into account. In this chapter the concept and history of the stakeholder theory will be explained.

Freeman (1984) introduced the concept of stakeholders into organizational studies to emphasize their importance of them and how they affect organizations. According to Freeman (2004), stakeholders are defined as ''Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of a corporation's purpose." Stakeholder theory argues that an organization can engender and maintain support from the constituent groups they have a relationship with, by considering and balancing the interests of these groups (Freeman, 1984). Balancing stakeholders' interests is a process of assessing, weighing, and addressing the competing claims of those who have a stake in the actions of the organizations (Reynolds, Schultz, & Hekman, 2006). Creating value to the stakeholders is essential to maintain the relationships with them (Freudenreich, Lüdeke-Freund, & Schaltegger, 2020; Harrison & Van der Laan Smith, 2015). The capability of building a close relationship with stakeholders is rare. A company that manages to do so, will enjoy a sustainable competitive advantage (Jones, Harrison, & Felps, 2018).

To optimize stakeholder decision making and value creation a company should take four traditions into account: optimizing, balancing, structuring, and involving (de Gooyert, Rouwette, van Kranenburg, & Freeman, 2017). When these traditions are considered and adopted, it should help to improve relationships with stakeholders (de Gooyert, Rouwette, van Kranenburg, & Freeman, 2017). Stakeholder theory contains an important individual aspect as most organizational decisions are made by individuals, with the managerial figure presented as the centre of a stakeholder approach. It is thus important to understand that balancing stakeholders' interests is critical for managerial survival. If a manager does not (occasionally) meet the claims of certain stakeholder groups, he or she will lose the support of those groups (Reynolds, Schultz, & Hekman, 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that managers are motivated to engage in this theory.

When balancing stakeholders' interests, it is important to consider resource divisibility. Whether the resources are capital, profits, effort, or time, stakeholders can have different opinions on how these should be utilized (Reynolds, Schultz, & Hekman, 2006). The research concluded that when resources can easily be divided, managers are more likely to distribute the resources equally amongst stakeholders. What is important to consider in balancing stakeholders' interests, is stakeholder saliency. Stakeholder saliency is offered as a means of conceptualizing and measuring the validity of stakeholder claims. According to Mitchell et al. (1997) stakeholder saliency is defined as the extent to which a stakeholder is powerful and legitimate, and the claim is urgent. Stakeholder saliency helps managers to identify who and what matters when making stakeholders' decisions. Stockholders may get preferential treatment because they have ownership for example.

Stakeholders can be divided into two categories: primary stakeholders, and secondary stakeholders (Garvare & Johansson, 2010). Primary stakeholders are actors that have direct control of essential means of support required by the organization. These include customers, management, employees, suppliers, and the Government for example. Secondary stakeholders are actors that do not directly provide any essential means of support for the organization (Garvare & Johansson, 2010). Non-government organizations, academics, media, and environmental pressure groups for example. If an organisation manages to satisfy or exceed the demands of its stakeholders, it will be sustainable. This is called organizational sustainability, which focuses on primary and secondary stakeholders. However, this is different from global sustainability, which involves the interest of future generations and the natural environment. In the case of the stakeholder theory, this means that besides fulfilling the stakeholders' needs and expectations, the organization should also avoid any practices harming the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Garvare & Johansson, 2010).

As mentioned, value creation is essential when considering stakeholders. However, it should be mutually beneficial, meaning stakeholders should create value for the company as well. Value creation with stakeholders requires a joint purpose and an appreciation of the stakeholders' active contributions (Dentoni, Bitzer, & Pascucci, 2016). If value creation is not mutually beneficial for all parties, a business would lose its business partners and resources as well as its legitimacy (Freudenreich, Lüdeke-Freund, & Schaltegger, 2020). Freudenreich et al. (2020) created a framework for Stakeholder Value Creation to Sustainability. This framework consists of three key implications. Firstly, an understanding of stakeholders' relationships, and of what constitutes value. In this implication all stakeholder relationships should be motivated by and tied to a joint purpose. Secondly, each relationship and its related mutual value exchange contribute to overall value creation in the business model. Thirdly, the focus should be on all types of value, of which financial value is only one. This provides a richer basis for developing business models for sustainability (Freudenreich, Lüdeke-Freund, & Schaltegger, 2020). This helps finding robust and innovative solutions to business and society issues and effectively implementing them. Looking at this framework, it is thus important that stakeholder relationships are co-operative in nature and form the basis for joint value creation and mutually beneficial exchanges (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2016).

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility: The History and Development of CSR

This chapter reviews the history and the development of corporate social responsibility. Firstly, CSR will be introduced by stating its origin. Consequently, developments/trends and theoretical contributions will be provided to show how CSR has developed over the years.

According to Spector, the current social responsibility movement can be traced back to the period 1946-1960 (Spector, 2008). However, it is believed that the roots of CSR certainly extend back to before World War II. In the 1930s and 1940s concepts of CSR already started appearing (Carroll, 1999). But Archie B. Carroll sees the late 1800s, the industrial revolution, as the real starting point of CSR. Because in that time, emerging businesses were already concerned about their employees and how to make them more productive workers (Carroll, 2009). Bowen (1953) was one of the first to define CSR. According to Bowen (C)SR refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society (Carroll, 2009). According to William C. Frederick (2006), the three core ideas of CSR in the 50s included the idea of the manager as a public trustee, the balancing of competing claims to corporate resources, and corporate philanthropy, which is about businesses supporting good causes. The biggest takeaway from CSR in the 1950s is that the primary focus was on business' responsibilities to society and doing good work for society (Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

In the 1960s CSR was shaped by social movements. Movements of civil rights, women's rights, consumers' rights, and environmental movements pressured companies to adopt CSR perspectives, attitudes, practices, and policies (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Frederick characterized the 1960s and 1970s as the corporate social responsiveness stage. In the 1960s CSR engagement was driven by external, socially conscious motivations. Businesses were not looking to get something in return. The 1970s was a period where CSR started to get formally defined, and CSR, responsiveness, and performance became the centre of discussions. Different people developed definitions and views on CSR in this decade. Two important contributions to social expectations came from the Committee of Economic Development (CED). Their first two publications, ''A New Rationale for Corporate Policy'', and ''Social Responsibilities of Business Corporations'', are seen as having great relevance as they advanced the public debate around CSR (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019). The 1970s was a decade with writings suggesting the importance of a managerial approach to CSR, in which business managers applied traditional management functions to deal with CSR issues. Thus, it was recommended that companies forecast and plan for CSR, organize for CSR, assess social performance, and institutionalize corporate social policy and strategy. In this stage, it was still more talk from companies than action. But legislative initiatives during the 1970s mandated that companies create organizational mechanisms for complying with federal laws dealing with the environment, product safety, employment discrimination, and worker safety (Carroll, 2009). Corporate Social Performance (CSP) was a term getting more attention in this decade as well. Looking back at the 50s, 60s, and 70s, it can be concluded that 1953 to 1967 was classified as the 'awareness' era. That 1968 to 1973 was seen as the 'issue' era, and 1974 to 1978 was seen as the 'responsiveness' era (Carroll, 2009).

Although there was more focus on researching CSR in the 1980s, rather than refining and defining the term. Thomas M. Jones defined CSR as the notion that corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that which is prescribed by law and union contract (Jones, 1980). Accordingly, stakeholders such as customers, employees, suppliers, and neighbouring communities should be considered as well. Jones revised CSR as a process, rather than an outcome (Carroll, 2009). In the 1980s there was a growing interest and attention to CSP as well. Hence, Steven Wartick and Philip Cochran presented their 'evolution of the corporate social performance model' which was an extension of Carroll's (1979) three-dimensional integration of responsibility, responsiveness, and social issues. Epstein (1987) discussed how these three concepts deal with closely related and overlapping themes and concerns. He argued that CSR primarily relates to achieving outcomes from organizational decisions concerning specific issues or problems which have beneficial rather than adverse effects upon pertinent corporate stakeholders. The normative correctness of the products of corporate action has been the focus of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 2009). According to Frederick, the most critical issues of the 1980s included business practices concerning environmental pollution, employment discrimination, consumer abuses, employee health and safety, quality of work life, deterioration of urban life, and questionable/abusiveness practices of multinational corporations (Carroll, 2009). In the 1980s two important alternative themes emerged. The stakeholder theory and business ethics theory (Carroll, 1999).

In the 1990s only a few unique contributions to the definition of CSR occurred. The major themes of the 1990s were CSP, stakeholder theory, business ethics theory, and corporate citizenship (Carroll, 1999). In the 1990s, Carroll looked at the stakeholder theory and suggested that organizations should consider the stakeholders that are most important to the organization in its CSR orientation and activities (Carroll, 1999). The concept of the ''Triple Bottom Line'' was an important contribution, which was based on social, environmental, and economic aspects. Elkington (1998) explained that outstanding triple bottom line performance (social, environmental, and economic) could be achieved through effective and long-term partnerships between the private and public sectors, and among stakeholders (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019). A significant development in CSR was the foundation of the non-profit organization Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), helping organizations with implementing CSR practices. BSR defines CSR broadly to include topics such as business ethics, community investment, environment, governance and accountability, human rights, marketplace, and workplace (Carroll, 2009). Another major trend from the 1990s, which continues today, is the development of excellent CSR reputations by companies (Carroll, 2009).

The 1990s was seen as the decade where CSR gained international appeal. The creation and adoption of international bodies and agreements influenced the perspective towards CSR and sustainable development such as the European Environment Agency. From 1995 European Commission also started encouraging the implementation of CSR in 1995 (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019). Globalization caused companies to have concerns about competitiveness, reputation, global visibility, and an expanded network of stakeholders (Carroll A. , 2015). This led the way to new alternatives which meant that at the end of the 1990s there was a lack of a globally accepted definition of CSR (Lantos, 2001).

In the first decade of this century globalisation continued. The globalisation of CSR has been most present in Europe in the 2000s. Voluntary initiatives in corporate social responsibility were a major trend in international business in this period. According to OECD the benefits of CSR are numerous, even though organizations found it difficult to get a grip on the costs of CSR. According to Jeremy Moon (2005), the growth of CSR in the UK, US, and other developing countries, was characterized by CSR teams being established in companies, embedding CSR in corporate systems through codes, increased social reporting, and increasing numbers of partnerships between companies and Governmental institutions. Additionally, the growth of CSR could be seen in higher education, in the CSR consultancy industry, and CSR Umbrella companies (Moon, 2005).

An important development in the 2000s was the foundation of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), which was established to create an instrument that would fill the gaps in governance of the time in terms of human rights and social issues and to insert universal values into markets (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019). One year later, in 2001, the European Commission started promoting CSR as well. The European Commission has led several campaigns for promoting the European approach to CSR. To this day the European Commission is still promoting CSR intensively. The Global recognition of CSR has been influenced by international certification which addresses social responsibility as well. Examples are ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and ISO 26000. ISO 26000 has been adopted by more than 80 countries as a guideline for national standards (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019).

From 2000-2002 empirical research linking CSR or CSP to other relevant variables was dominating new concepts. Backhaus et al. (2002) concluded that job seekers consider CSP to be important in their assessment of firms. On the conceptual front, Schwartz and Carroll (2003) presented a three-domain approach to corporate social responsibility. These categories were economic, legal, and ethical. This approach was especially useful in discussions of business ethics (Carroll, 2009). In this period the CSR 'best practices' received more attention and moved to centre-stage. Philip Kotler and Nancy Lee (2005) authored a book about the 25 best practices. These practices were placed in six categories. These are: (1) cause promotion (increasing awareness and concern for social causes); (2) cause-related marketing (contributing to causes based on sales); (3) corporate social marketing (behaviour change initiatives); (4) corporate philanthropy (contributing directly to causes); (5) community volunteering (employees donating time and talents in the community); and (6) socially responsible business practices (discretionary practices and investment to support causes) (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Also, in the 2000s academic literature provided relevant contributions to the concepts of CSR. Craig Smith (2001) implied that corporate policies had changed as a response to public interest. This resulted often in positive social impact. Smith (2001) and Lantos (2001), saw CSR as a company's strategy to fulfil its long-term obligations towards society. Lantos only viewed engagement in CSR as a strategy if it were for financial profit (Lantos, 2001). After Lantos first introduced CSR for strategic purposes, different authors built on that theory with different perspectives. It was for example believed that Strategic CSR would yield a competitive advantage and create value (Heslin & Ochoa, 2008).

In the 2010s the focus shifted towards shared value creation (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019). This concept was further developed by Porter and Kramer (2011), who explained it as a necessary step in the evolution of business. They claim that Creating Shared Value (CSV) should replace CSR, as CSR had become an outdated and limited concept. They believe that the purpose of the corporation is to create shared value and to prioritize identifying the societal needs as well as the benefits or harms that the business embodies through its products. Creating Shared Value should be the main objective (Porter & Kramer, 2011). This perspective aligns with what Leila Trapp called the third generation of CSR. This is about the new roles and responsibilities that corporations are willing to take to generate shared value (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019). The third and fourth edition of Chandler and Werther's book Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility builds on the theory of creating shared value as well. Chandler and Werther's most valuable contribution are their perspective on the implementation of SCSR, from the fourth edition. It is believed that the maximization of profits is no longer an acceptable objective. Instead, companies should focus on optimizing value over the long term by focusing on their areas of expertise. By doing so there would be a reorientation of efforts toward the creation of shared value. Chandler believes that SCSR should be part of the day-to-day operations for it to be successful (Chandler, 2016).

2015 was seen as the most important year of this decade, as it notes the adoption of the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement includes a set of 15 Sustainable Development Goals. This Agreement affects companies massively, as they will be pressured to contribute to making these goals. By EU Law, large companies of public interest are required to disclose non-financial information on their reports as of 2018. This affected the expansion of CSR reporting. In this decade, the number of published academic literature has increased massively as well, with 2015 and 2016 noted as the years with the highest number of publications. In 2015, Carroll concluded that the concepts of stakeholder engagement and management, business ethics, corporate citizenship, corporate sustainability, and the creation of shared value are interrelated and overlapping (Carroll A.

, 2015). Hence, it is defined as the benchmark and central piece of the socially responsible business movement.

2.2.1 Benefits of CSR

This sub chapter discusses the benefits of CSR. Companies are often driven to engage in CSR by market pressure, policy pressure, and innovation and technological developments (Zhang, Oo, & Lim, 2019). But engagement in CSR can yield many benefits. Benefits for an organisation consist of measurable gains that come from strategic results as well as societal results. When engaging in CSR strategies, companies should consider the needs of the company itself as well as its internal and external stakeholders (Żychlewicz, 2014). These stakeholders can vary from employees, to customers, and investors.

The creation of a positive image is seen as of the benefits that come from CSR engagement (Żychlewicz, 2014; Jenkins, 2006). The CSR initiatives that support the positive corporate image include the company's involvement in ecological issues. Showing care and interest in natural environment protection builds the image of a company taking responsibility for its impact on the environment (Żychlewicz, 2014; Alhouti & D'Souza, 2018). Therefore, activities toward environmental protection should be adopted at all operating stages. To create a positive image, it is important to report CSR practices and initiatives (Zhang, Oo, & Lim, 2019). Social campaigns are another tool to get recognition which stimulates a positive image. Additionally, better goods and services make an organization more appealing for customers (Zhang, Cao, Zhang, Liu, & Li, 2019).

Secondly, cost reduction may be a benefit as well. This can be achieved through several ways. CSR may increase employee motivation and reduce the need for costly performance evaluation and measurement systems for example (Sprinkle & Maines, 2010). Increased employee satisfaction can be achieved with CSR. This is achieved by ensuring occupational health and safety, work hygiene, and providing employees with learning and development opportunities, as well as providing medical benefits to employees and their families (Żychlewicz, 2014). These activities also increase work efficiency and help retain and motivate talent and employees, which results in lower personnel rotation. The attraction of qualified employees, another gain from CSR, supports lower personnel rotation as well (Vázquez-Carrasco & López-Pérez, 2013). Besides, the mitigation of business risk is another significant benefit of CSR. This is achieved by maintaining dialogue with companies, which increases their trust and results in a higher willingness to provide credit and reduce business risk (Żychlewicz, 2014). Another way of cost reduction comes from the reduction of resource consumption and emission (Atz, Van Holt, Douglas, & Whelan, 2021). Recycling leads to cost reduction as well. These operations lead to higher operational efficiency.

Recycling yields cost reduction. However, being able to reuse materials also means that recycling can yield new revenues. Sustainable engagement can thus generate new revenue streams. This can be done through offering new sustainable products. These could be buildings that are specially designed to be more sustainable than others, and a company can also incorporate sustainable materials and products in buildings, which increases revenue (Atz, Van Holt, Douglas, & Whelan, 2021; Zhang, Oo, & Lim, 2019).

CSR engagement also results in a higher attractiveness for investors (Hodinková & Sadovský, 2016). This can come from an increased reputation among consumers. A better record of CSR can improve the organization's reputation, which can lead to higher customer satisfaction and higher organizational attractiveness (Zhang, Cao, Zhang, Liu, & Li, 2019). Research showed causal evidence that investors collectively value sustainability (Hartzmark & Sussman, 2019). Additionally, it showed that the market views sustainability as a positive company attribute. Furthermore, it yields greater transparency and strengthens trust in the company, increases competitive advantage through differentiation, improved market position, improved brand- and customer loyalty, and increased customer attraction (Hodinková & Sadovský, 2016; Żychlewicz, 2014).

Engaging in CSR activities offers tax benefits as local, state, and federal agencies frequently provide tax credits for CSR and sustainability efforts (Sprinkle & Maines, 2010). These include tax incentives in the form of sales-tax exemptions and property-tax abatements. But one of the most important gains from CSR initiatives may be an increase in revenue. In many cases, this can be realized when "green" products are introduced on the market. Eco-products attract new buyers and increase brand loyalty (Żychlewicz, 2014). In general, branding can be seen as a benefit of CSR engagement (Zhang, Oo, & Lim, 2019).

2.3 Sustainability

2.3.1 Background of Sustainability

At first, the concept of sustainability was originally used in forestry. The concept meant never harvesting more than what the forest would yield in growth. The word sustainability was first used in Germany (Nachhaltigkeit) and dates to 1713. Since then, several groups and people gave their understanding and perspective on the concept of sustainability. The report of the Club of Rome, published in 1972, predicted that natural resources crucial to our survival would be exhausted within one or two generations (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Based on this, the UN World Commission published the Brundtland report, in 1987, which adopted the concept of sustainability and gave it the widespread recognition it enjoys today (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). The Brundtland Report engendered the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), known as the Rio Earth Summit, in 1992 (Mensah, 2019). The recommendations of the report formed the primary topics of debate at the UNCED. In 2002, the Rio+10 conference was held, to review the progress in implementing the outcomes of the Rio Earth Summit. A new plan was made which was called the Johannesburg Plan. Another 10 years later (2012), the Rio+20 conference was held. In this conference the topic stated ''The Future We Want''. The focus was on a green economy and an institutional framework (Mensah, 2019).

From 1960 there were three waves of public pressure that shaped the environmental agenda (Elkington, 2013). The first wave starting in the early 1960s, brought an understanding that environmental impacts and natural resource demands must be limited. This resulted in an initial outpouring of environmental legislation. Following the Brundtland Report, the second wave started in 1988. This wave brought a wider realization that new kinds of production technologies and new kinds of products are needed, culminating in the insight that development processes must become sustainable. The third wave began in 1999. This wave focused on the growing recognition that sustainable development will require profound changes in the governance of corporations and in the entire process of globalization. This put a renewed focus on government and on civil society (Elkington, 2013).

An important contribution in the history of sustainability comes from Elkington, who in 1994 developed the "'Triple Bottom Line''. The Triple Bottom Line focuses on the economic, environmental, and social lines (Elkington J. , 1997). The economic line refers to the impact of the organization's practices on the economic system. The idea of the social line is that these practices provide value to the society and ''give back community''. The social line refers to conducting fair and beneficial labour, human capital, and community practices. Lastly, the environmental line refers to engaging in practices that do not compromise the environmental resources for future generations (Elkington J. , 1997). Accordingly, there are seven drivers of the Triple Bottom Line: markets, values, transparency, life-cycle technology, partnerships, time, and corporate governance (Elkington, 2013). The Triple Bottom Line set up the key to long-term strategies for companies making the transition to sustainability. Sustainability is achieved where all the lines of the Triple Bottom Line overlap (Elkington J. , 1997).

2.3.2 Definition of Sustainability

In the Brundtland report, sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Coming back to all the literature on this concept, this is the most important definition. However, the definition received criticism for the room that is given for further interpretation.

The World Conservation Strategy (1980) focused on the need for conservation and how this can be achieved (Mitlin, 1992). Accordingly, this can be done by achieving three main objectives. Firstly, through maintaining essential ecological processes. Secondly, through preserving genetic diversity. Through ensuring the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems. They also argue that there is a need for public participation and environmental education. According to Rees (1989), sustainable development requires that ecological diversity and productivity in developing regions are maintained (Mitlin, 1992). Redclift (1987) argues that sustainable development is about seeking a compromise between the natural environment and the pursuit of economic growth but also recognizes that the limits of sustainability have structural and natural origins (Mitlin, 1992).

According to Elliot (2012), there are three other important authors, besides the United Nations, who have given important definitions to the concept of sustainable development. Turner (1988) defines sustainable development as: ''In principle, such an optimal (sustainable growth) policy would seek to maintain an "acceptable" rate of growth in per-capita real incomes without depleting the national capital asset stock or the natural environmental asset stock'' (Elliot, 2013, p. 18). Conway (1987) as: ''The net productivity of biomass (positive mass balance per unit area per unit time) maintained over decades to centuries'' (Elliot, 2013, p. 18). Lastly, Sen (1999) says: ''A sustainable society is one in which people's ability to do what they have good reason to value is continually enhanced'' (Elliot, 2013, p. 18).

Sustainability is always seen in terms of three dimensions: social, economic, and environmental. This is embodied in the definition of sustainability adopted by the United Nations in its Agenda for Development: ''Development is a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development, and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development'' (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Defining these three dimensions is seen as one of the most important developments in the concepts of sustainability and will be discussed more deeply in the next subchapter.

2.3.3 Three Dimensions of Sustainability

The research examines sustainability from several different angles such as institutional, political, integrative, and ethical (Garriga & Melé, 2004). However, it is difficult to define sustainability in a way that covers all those aspects. Hence, at a general level, scholars agree that sustainability can be best described by linking the three dimensions; social, economic, and environmental (Elkington, 1997; Cohen, Smith, & Mitchell, 2008; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Sustainability measures benefit the environment and society in general. But the financial aspect is important for businesses as well. Hence, Elkington (1994) introduced the economic bottom line, completing the full triple bottom line. Besides the economic bottom line, the triple bottom line consists of the social and environmental bottom line as well (Elkington J. , 1997).

The economic bottom line refers to the value of organizations in terms of their financial, physical, human, and intellectual capital. The environmental bottom line refers to natural capital. Think of renewable, replaceable, and substitutable capital. The social bottom line is about human capital. This includes public health, skills, education, but also society's health in general (Fischer, Brettel, & Mauer, 2018). The relationship between these bottom lines is called shear zones. These include both challenges and opportunities. There are three types of shear zones: economic-environmental, economic-social, and environmental-social. The economic-environmental shear zone describes eco-efficiency; how products are priced competitively and have a lower environmental impact. The economic-social shear zone included business ethics. The environmental-social shear zones cover environmental education and environmental justice for example (Elkington J. , 1997).

2.3.4 Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is the foundation of one of the three dimensions. Whether one considers sustainability to exist as three-dimensional or as a dualistic relationship between human beings and the ecosystem, it can at least be agreed that ensuring the provision of clean air, clean water, and clean and productive land is fundamental to a responsible socioeconomic system. Without a sustainably productive environment to provide a resource foundation, it is impossible to have a sustainable society (Morelli, 2011). A sustainable economy depends upon a sustainable flow of material, energy, and environmental resources. Without it, economic systems will fail. Humans are depending on these economic systems as they offer crucial services. These services are regulating services (e.g., air regulation, water regulation, climate regulation), support services (e.g. soil formations, photosynthesis, primary production), and cultural services (spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, recreation, aesthetic experiences) (Morelli, 2011). Because human beings are so dependent on ecosystems, it only makes sense to take action to remove threats to and foster environmental sustainability.

Morelli (2011) defines environmental sustainability as '' delineating the boundaries of this use of "sustainability" to correspond to the overlay of human activity upon the functioning of the supporting ecosystem''. This aligns with what the Brundtland report states as "meeting the resource and services needs of current and future generations without compromising the health of the ecosystems that provide them" (WECD, 1987). Goodland (1995) defines environmental sustainability as the ''maintenance of natural capital''. This definition constitutes the input/output rules. Under the output rule, organizations should consider waste emissions. Under the input rules, organizations are concerned with harvest rates of renewable inputs and depletion rates of non-renewable resources. It is believed that environmental sustainability is there to improve human welfare by protecting the sources of raw materials used for human needs and ensuring that the sinks for human wastes are not exceeded. Humans must learn to live within the limitations of the biophysical environment (Goodland , 1995).

Environmental sustainability is important. We have learned that environmental resources and sinks are finite. The capacities of these sources were large, but the scale of the human economy exceeded them. Source and sink capacities have become limited (Goodland , 1995). The damage human beings have already done to the earth is massive. Hence, there is a real urgency for sustainability. Eventually, the world will become sustainable again. However, if we do not take the necessary actions, this will happen at the expense of the humanity's downfall (Goodland , 1995). To prevent this the United Nations had its first conference on Human Environment in 1972 (Stockholm). The conference led to the development of 26 principles, most of which addressed environmental concerns (Giovanni & Fabietti, 2014). Because of the conference, the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) was founded in 1972. Besides stressing the importance of ecological development, one of the most important aims of the UNEP was the promotion of leadership in the care of the environment. After its foundation, multiple initiatives followed. In 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, the UN Conference on Environment and Development was held. At this conference, a global action plan was established for sustainable development (Giovanni & Fabietti, 2014). Other initiatives such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), The Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987), Kyoto Protocol (1997), and the Paris Agreement (2016), highlight the importance of Environmental Sustainability[2].

2.4 Sustainability in small and medium sized enterprises

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute a major part of global economies. SMEs make up 90% of the world's businesses. However, SMEs generate negative impacts on the environment because they have not integrated sustainable practices into their processes, strategies, or long-term vision. These practices are perceived to be expensive and hard to adopt. SMEs have a major contribution when it comes to pollution. They account for 70% of global pollution. Hence, SMEs have become more focused on sustainability, and balancing the environmental, social, and economic factors of the company (Malesios, De, Moursellas, & Dey, 2020). But due to intense competition and lack of support from regulatory authorities, SMEs often prioritize economic aspects rather than implementing environmental and social initiatives. Additionally, the customer does not have a supportive role because they often prioritize economic aspects over environmental aspects as well.

Environmental sustainability can be seen as an important aspect as there is a positive relationship between environmental performance and financial performance (Albertini, 2013). Working well on environmental initiatives could boost your company financially. Competitive advantage positively contributes to financial performance as well (Cantele & Zardini, 2018). Companies with sustainable practices have an advantage over those who have not. Besides competitive advantage, there are multiple other drivers of sustainability adoption in SMEs. These are internal as well as external. A study found that managers' environmental responsibility is the most important driver of environmental behaviour. Pressure from top management and stakeholders has an influence on the company's engagement in sustainability (Gandhi, Thanki, & Thakkar, 2018). Additionally, organizational cultures have shown to be a driver. Furthermore, environmental regulations have a positive effect on sustainability engagement as well (Piget, Bocquet, & Mothe, 2015).

Contrary to motivations, some barriers create obstacles for SMEs to engage in sustainability. These can be internal and external as well. SMEs are dependent on the availability of resources as well. Triguero et al. (2013) discovered that working closely with institutions, colleges, and the government benefited companies in the sense that they could more easily innovate sustainable solutions. Other barriers are a lack of awareness, education, and expertise (Caldera, Desha, & Dawes, 2019). As governmental regulations can be supportive of engagement in sustainability, the lack of regulations can also be a barrier. The lack of monitoring and enforcing strong regulations does not encourage SMEs to be greener either. Organizational cultures can be barriers as well (Bakos, Siu, Orenga, & Kasiri, 2019).

[2] https://ironline.american.edu/blog/beginners-guide-environmental-agreements/

Moore and Manring (2008) make a case for the importance of networking when it comes to sustainability. They believe that SMEs must network to be sustainable and obtain the size and efficiencies needed to compete. Developing networked SME strategies for sustainable supply chain management also seems to offer opportunities for better economic performance in market spaces (Moore & Manring, 2008). Additionally, networked SMEs provide much financial and organizational efficiency that enables the development of technologies and markets essential to achieve ‘‘sustainable development.’’ Many of these developments are new and disruptive (Moore & Manring, 2008). Although SMEs have failed to consistently follow the guidelines of sustainable production for a long time, they hold enormous potential to become sustainable (Prashar, 2019).

2.5 Sustainability in Construction Sector

The construction of buildings requires intensive usage of natural resources. Solid and liquid wastes and gas emissions at the end of construction and destruction activities have a lot of negative impacts on the environment. These negative impacts include the consumption of unrenewable resources, decrease in biological diversity, destruction of forest areas, loss of agricultural areas, air, water, and soil pollution, destruction of natural green areas, and global warming (Yilmaz & Bakis, 2015). Buildings in use can consume vast amounts of energy as well, which negatively affects climate change too (Vyas, Ahmed, & Parashar, 2014). According to 2017 data from construction blog Bimhow, the construction sector contributes to 23% of air pollution and 40% of drinking water pollution. Additionally, the construction sector accounts for 50% of landfill waste. Most strikingly, the construction sector contributes to 50% of climate change[3]. Considering the number of sectors there are, it can be concluded that these numbers are extreme. Fortunately, according to IPCC (2007), the construction sector has the highest energy saving and pollution reduction potential. But research points out that the industry must shift from being reactive to proactive and promote sustainability practices if they are to realise that potential (Bal, Bryde, Fearon, & Ochieng, 2013).

Because of these numbers and their potential to reduce the numbers, there is increasing attention to sustainability that is pushing the construction sector towards rapid changes. Policies, laws, and regulations around the world are asking the sector to adopt sustainable innovation in terms of products and processes to encourage more sustainable buildings (Steurer & Hametner, 2011). Public opinion towards sustainability has changed. This has had an impact on the change of habits in the construction industry as well. Sustainable construction is the application of sustainable development principles to a building life cycle. The building life cycle includes planning the construction, constructing, mining raw materials, material usage, destruction of construction, and management of waste (Yilmaz & Bakis, 2015). These are all processes that need to be considered within the concept of sustainable construction. According to UNEP (2006), sustainable building and construction should have certain characteristics. Sustainable buildings should be routinely designed and maintained to optimize the entire life span, and sustainability considerations and requirements should take in building legislation and standards. In addition, environmental aspects should be considered in the project and should include short-term as well as long-term aspects, policies, and incentives provided by the government to support sustainable building and construction practices, investors, insurance companies, property developers and buyers of buildings, who are aware of sustainability considerations and should take an active role to encourage sustainable building and construction practice.

[3] https://gocontractor.com/blog/how-does-construction-impact-the-environment/

Considering the size and importance of the construction industry to the world economy and its contribution to environmental damage the suggestion has been made to use the emerging "sustainability" agenda as a lens through which construction performance can be measured (Murray & Gotgrave, 2007). Sustainability-building certification programs and rating systems are used throughout the entire world and have seen a big growth throughout recent years (Bloom & Wheelock, 2010). Sustainability assessment can be defined as the process of identifying, predicting, and evaluating the potential impacts of initiatives and alternatives (Devuyst, 2000). It is necessary to increase the growth of sustainable buildings (Cheng, Pouffary, Svenningsen, & Callaway, 2008). According to Hastings and Wall (2007), systems for sustainability assessment can be grouped into three categories:

- Cumulative energy demand (CED) systems, which focus on energy consumption
- Life cycle analysis (LCA) systems, which focus on environmental aspects
- Total quality assessment (TQA) systems, which evaluate ecological, economic, and social aspects.

Another development is green buildings. These are designed to remove the negative effects of construction on the environment and human health (Vyas, Ahmed, & Parashar, 2014). They have the aim to have used nearly zero energy and for some part of this energy to be supplied from renewable energy sources - solar panels for example. Constructions defined as green buildings must provide defined standards on specific aspects. Buildings that can meet these standards are certified. The most acceptable certifications are LEED and BREEAM (Yilmaz & Bakis, 2015).

LEED provides a framework for healthy, efficient, carbon and cost-saving green buildings. To get a LEED certification, a project earns points by adhering to prerequisites and credits that address carbon, energy, water, waste, transportation, materials, health, and indoor environmental quality[4]. A certification can either be certified bronze, silver, gold, or platinum, depending on the points the project has received. BREEAM are validation and certification systems for sustainably build environments[5]. BREEAM assessment evaluates the procurement, design, construction, and operation of a development against a range of targets based on performance benchmarks and focuses on sustainable values[6].

Another important aspect of sustainability in the construction sector is stakeholder engagement, to deliver excellent project outcomes. A well-managed stakeholder engagement process increases comfort and quality of life while decreasing negative environmental impacts and increasing the economic sustainability of the project. Therefore, stakeholder engagement should be part of ''sustainable development plans'' (Bal, Bryde, Fearon, & Ochieng, 2013). Successful stakeholder engagement involves actively giving and getting their support and working together to devise, plan and develop new business solutions (Persson & Olander, 2004). Successful stakeholder engagement can be obtained through six key steps: (1) identifying all key stakeholders, (2) relating the stakeholders to different sustainability-related targets, (3) prioritizing the stakeholders, (4) managing stakeholders, (5) measuring their performance and (6) putting targets into actions (Bal, Bryde, Fearon, & Ochieng, 2013). If these steps are followed carefully, stakeholders can be engaged throughout the entire project life cycle. Examples of typical construction project stakeholders are (sub)contractors, sustainability consultants, employees, clients, engineers, local government, the managing director, material suppliers, and the architect.

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[4] https://www.usgbc.org/leed
[5] https://bregroup.com/products/breeam/
[6] https://www.thenbs.com/knowledge/what-is-breeam

Sustainability has become an important part of the construction sector, necessary to see positive results regarding the environment. However, it yields things for the construction companies as well. Improved image and business reputation are outcomes of CSR and sustainability engagement (Huang & Lien, 2012). Sustainability engagement also leads to high performance for the companies, especially in terms of profits (Roberts, Jones, Hillier, Comfort, & Clarke-Hill, 2009).

2.6 Short- and Long-term Sustainability

Sustainability is often viewed from a long-term perspective. Sustainable construction requires taking a long-term view as well (Zhou & Lowe, 2003). But to succeed both a long-term and a short-term perspective need to be present and complementary in a company (Hörisch, Freeman, & Schaltegger, 2014). If an organization puts too much attention on long-term sustainability, their short-term profitability can be severely harmed (Wu, Subramanian, Abdulrahman, Liu, & Pawar, 2016). If there is too much focus on the short-term, sustainability is pushed away. Thus, there is a need for a balance between the long-term and the short-term. However, companies still struggle to balance short-term profitability and long-term sustainability.

Sustainability has many benefits on the long-term. The major economic benefits of sustainable construction are an improvement of building performance and durability. Other benefits are the accumulation of intangible resources and capabilities, including innovation, human capital, reputation, and culture (Surroca, Tribó, & Waddock, 2010). It is believed that sustainability yields positive results on the short-term as well (Horváthová, 2012). However, on a long-term basis the positive effects are stronger (Porter & van der Linde , Toward a new conception of the environment–competitiveness relationship, 1995; Rassier & Earnhart , 2011). Rassier and Earnhart (2011), states that lower emissions improve firm financial performance both in short and long-term with a stronger effect in the long run. Additionally, on the long-term the company's value can improve (Wu, Subramanian, Abdulrahman, Liu, & Pawar, 2016). This may result in future prosperity and competitive advantage.

Although sustainability has plenty of benefits on the long-term, the short term is often still preferred. There are multiple reasons for that. Firstly, many market participants overvalue the short-term profits over the long-term wins (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2015). There is little market incentive for clients to pay more for innovation without gaining extra return over the short-term period (Zhou & Lowe, 2003). Secondly, proactive environmental (long-term) strategies will result in extra costs for firms in the short term (Wu, Subramanian, Abdulrahman, Liu, & Pawar, 2016; Smith, Whitelegg, & Williams , 1998). Lastly, because long-term sustainability strategies bring a high degree of uncertainty and risk (Wu & Pagell, 2011). Hence, short-term financial value is still a primary goal of organizations and in conflict with sustainability, the benefits of which accrue over the long-term (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014).

This does not mean that sustainability does not have a positive impact on the short-term. Rassier and Earnhart (2011) already showed that sustainable activities can yield positive results on the short-term. Furthermore, firms can find efficiencies quickly through reducing resource use or diverting waste, which yields cost reduction. On the long-term this leads to whole life costs savings. Lean management is an example of a short-term activity that benefits the company in that sense on the short-term. Lean management improves customer's satisfaction too. Additionally, sustainability reduces natural and human resource costs on the short-term (Zhou & Lowe, 2003). However, improved stakeholder relationships are a long-term benefit (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2015).

Firms prioritizing short-term results are more likely to ignore the interests of stakeholders (Slawinski & Bansal, 2012). Long-term strategies are vital in managing uncertainty as well (Haessler, 2020). These are reasons that highlight the importance of balancing the short-term and long-term in terms of sustainability. Additionally, short-term, and long-term visions are perceived as important because they allow firms to effectively increase short-term earnings, through additional revenue streams, and at the same time, protect the environment and social integrity (Chang & Kuo, 2008). Short-term sustainability practices, if properly implemented, can have profound long-term benefits in addition to the constant short-term benefits (Wu, Subramanian, Abdulrahman, Liu, & Pawar, 2016).

3 Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology that was used for the conducted research. The function of all scientific research is to investigate answers to questions about the evolution of an experience or phenomenon via observation (Jackson II, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Qualitative research was conducted to gain a contextualized understanding of behaviours, beliefs, and motivation (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), the function of qualitative inquiry is to understand the meaning of human action by describing the inherent or essential characteristics of social objects or human experience. In the case of the research, the beliefs of construction companies towards sustainability in the sector were investigated. In broad terms, qualitative research is an approach that allows a researcher to examine people's experiences in detail by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories or biographies. A qualitative researcher will primarily be concerned with ''the human as instrument'' approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Which has its focus on understanding human beings' richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences. Rather than relying on a set of closed questions, the qualitative researcher relies on the participants to offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experience (Jackson II, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). This humanistic, interpretive approach is also called ''thick-descriptive'' because of the richness and detail of the discussion (Jackson II, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). This design allows the qualitative researcher to get far more information about a phenomenon. This avoids results to be generalized to a population because the few participants that participated in the study offer much depth of detail.

Social science attempts to discover new or different ways of understanding the changing nature of lived social realities (Jackson II, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). A key difference between qualitative and quantitative research is that qualitative research relies primarily on non-numeric data in the form of words, including all types of textual analyses such as content, conversation, discourse, and narrative analyses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This is called textual data (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). On the contrary, quantitative data relies on numeric or statistical data. Qualitative data uses a small number of participants. These are selected purposively (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020).

Multiple methods can be used to gain those contextualized ways of understanding of beliefs about sustainability in the construction sector. A case study design should be considered when the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions when you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study, when you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study, or when the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Yin, 2003). Because this study attempts to answer a how question and the behaviour of the participants cannot be manipulated, a case study design was established for this research. The research uses multiple case studies. Multiple case studies can be used to either predict similar results (a literal replication) or predict contrasting results but for predictable reasons (Yin, 2003). In the case of this research, multiple case studies are used for literal replication, to predict results for the construction sector.

An important part of a case study analysis is to determine the unit of analysis (the case). Asking yourself the following questions can help to determine what your case is; do I want to "analyse" the individual? Do I want to "analyse" a program? Do I want to "analyse"? Do I want to "analyse" the difference between organizations? Answering these questions along with talking with a colleague can be effective strategies to further delineate your case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this research, the cases were established in discussion with the research supervisor. It was decided to establish construction companies as the cases.

To avoid answering a question or addressing a topic that is too broad, several authors including Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) have suggested that placing boundaries on a case can prevent this explosion from occurring. In this research, the cases were bound by place (the Netherlands), activity (construction), and definition (Medium Sized Enterprises; between 50 and 250 employees). It was established that the cases were Dutch Medium Sized Construction companies.

3.1 Case selection and sampling

The unit of analyses was established to be Medium Sized Construction companies in the Netherlands. When selecting cases, it is essential to consider data saturation. Data saturation is the conceptual yardstick for estimating and assessing qualitative sample sizes (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). Saturation refers to the point during data analysis at which incoming data points produce little or no new useful information relative to the study objectives (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). Saturation is present in all qualitative research (Morse J. , 2015). Researchers have different views of when data saturation is reached. According to Guest et al. (2006), data saturation may already be reached after 6 interviews. According to Stake (2005), a researcher should preferably select between four and ten cases. This recommendation was followed. Ten cases and one pilot case were selected for the research. Saturation was indeed reached after ten cases, excluding the pilot case. It is believed that there is always potential for new data to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, a point was reached where further data collection would have become counter-productive (Saunders, et al., 2017).

The general sampling approach in qualitative research is purposive, which means actively selecting the most productive sample to answer the research question (Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research should contain sampling techniques that represent the phenomenon, not the population (Morse J. , 2006). Thus, demographics are irrelevant andso purposive sampling is used. The research required the use of the quota sampling technique as the research is to be representative of the construction sector (Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). When selecting potential participants homogeneous sampling had to be used because all the participants had to have similar characteristics (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). All the participants had to be from a Dutch Medium-Sized construction company, dealing with sustainable practices within the firm. According to the Dutch Chamber of Commerce, a medium-sized company should have between 50 and 250 employees[7].

The sampling process initially consisted of two rounds. The first round yielded two participants. An email to ten companies, selected from the website CoBouw, was sent out[8]. The first

[7] https://www.kvk.nl/inschrijven-en-wijzigen/deponeren/jaarrekening-deponeren/waaruit-bestaat-de-jaarrekening/

[8] https://www.cobouw.nl/290093/dit-is-de-bouw-top-50-van-2020

company that was interviewed was established to be the pilot case. In between the first and second email rounds, the third participant was targeted and acquired through a call because it was an acquaintance of the researcher. In the second round, 50 emails were sent out. The potential cases were selected through LinkedIn, which filtered all the companies meeting the requirements. Eight more interviews were derived from this round. After ten case studies, saturation was reached, which made it unnecessary to hold the third round.

3.2 Data collection

Data collection is an important part of the research. Different methods can be used to collect data. However, there is a major difference between the methods that are used for qualitative and quantitative data. Some can be used for both. But because qualitative research is based on textual data, several quantitative data collection methods cannot be used. The methods that are typically used for qualitative data collection are coded observations, narrative observations, participant observations, archival measures/documents, content analysis, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups (Morgan & Harmon, 2001). According to Morgan and Harmon (2001), these are all highly rated apart from coded observations and questionnaires. Since interviews allowed participants to provide detailed and self-formulated answers, this was established as the data collection method for this research. Questionnaires do not provide such detailed and rich answers because it is common that these contain close-ended questions.

Interviews were deemed better fit for this research. Qualitative research interviews aim to gain knowledge about the participants' views of their lives, and so to gain access to their experiences, feelings, and social worlds. They may be unstructured or semi-structured. Structured interviews contain questions that are administered in a particular order and consistent across participants (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Semi-structured interviews are used to facilitate a more focused exploration of a specific topic, using an interview guide (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Interview guides usually contain a list of questions and prompt designed to guide the interview in a focused, yet flexible and conversational, manner. Semi-structured interviews have a further use to follow up on specific ideas or issues, which emerged from initial unstructured interviews, during subsequent data collection (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Because semi-structured interviews are flexible and versatile, these were adopted in this research. The semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Interviews can either be face-to-face or telephonic (online) (Morgan & Harmon, 2001). Two of the 11 interviews were conducted face-to-face, whilst the other interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams. Information gathered during data collection was recorded because that enables the researcher to analyse the data, but also allows him or her to describe the subjective meaning and social context of the data. Note-taking and tape recording is a useful combination that enables analysis of the material, while more specific components of interviews can be transcribed in full for detailed analysis (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). On most occasions, both were done. Sometimes it was hard to keep up with the pace of the interviewee, so the tape recordings were transcribed afterwards.

In the data collection process, the researcher should be cautious of a handful of common pitfalls. Common pitfalls are equipment failures, environmental hazards, and transcription errors (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000). Equipment failure happens during the recording of conversations or interviews. Equipment failure occurred once in the interviewing process. However, this was not significant because a phone was used for the recording of that interview. Environmental hazards could include loud noises that affect the quality of the recording. Environmental pitfalls did not occur during the process. The thing to be most cautious of during the transcription process is to not distort the meaning of the phrase (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000). This can happen because of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. In the case of this research, the interviews' transcripts had to be translated from Dutch to English. In processes like these, the meaning of phrases can easily be distorted due to language barriers. To avoid processing misinterpreted data in the research, the case studies were checked by the interviewees.

As mentioned, this research focuses on investigating a set of case studies. Sampson (2004), states that Pilot Cases are an important part of data collection and believes that pilot cases improve the quality of qualitative studies. Pilot cases benefit studies in fore-shadowing research problems and questions. Additionally, they help in highlighting gaps and wastage in data collection, and in considering broader and highly significant issues such as research validity, ethics, representation, and researcher health and safety (Sampson, 2004). Pilot cases show value in improving the effectiveness of instruments and research design as well (Malmqvist, Hellberg, Möllås, Rose, & Shevlin, 2019). The Pilot Case helped this research a lot in terms of the refinement of the data collection method ''semi-structured interviews''. In Appendix 1 the Pilot Interview can be found, and in Appendix 2 the ''refined'' interview for the regular cases can be found. Comparing both interview structures with each other, there is a difference between the interviews. The Pilot case helped to filter out double questions, which reduced wastage in data collection. Additionally, the Pilot case highlighted gaps in the way the questions were asked. Especially, in following up on the questions. Thus, also in this research, the Pilot Case proved to be invaluable.

3.3 Data Analysis

To analyse the data, coding has been used. Firstly, the interviews were transcribed. Consequently, the transcriptions were coded before the case studies were created. Coding is a method of discovering the meanings of individual sections of data. Codes function as a way of patterning, classifying, and later reorganizing them into emergent categories for further analysis (Saldaña, 2014). A code in qualitative data analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2014). The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation fieldnotes, journals, documents, literature, artifacts, photographs, video, websites, e-mail correspondence, etc (Saldaña, 2014). In the case of this research, the data consisted of interview transcripts and notes. The data was assigned to 8 codes for analysing the data. These codes were used to structure the case studies findings analysis. There are several types of coding. This research adopted descriptive coding, which used nouns to summarize a topic (Saldaña, 2014). The following codes were created in this research's data analysis:

- The motivation behind environmental sustainability (1)
- Short- or long-term goals (2)
- Contribution of short-term goals (3)
- Effect of laws and regulations on environmental sustainability engagement (4)
- Effect of financial position on environmental sustainability engagement (5)
- Effect of sustainability on marketing practices (6)
- Effect of sustainability on goodwill (7)
- Impact of environmental sustainability activities on the company (8)

Determining validity is also an essential element in analysing data. Qualitative inquirers bring a different lens towards validity than that brought to traditional, quantitative studies. When referring to the lens, the viewpoint for establishing validity in a study is meant. There are three types of lenses that can be used to determine validity. One lens to determine the credibility of a study is the lens of the researcher. Researchers determine how long to remain in the field, whether the data is saturated to establish good themes or categories, and how the analysis of the data evolves into a persuasive narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Altheide and Johnson (1994) refer to it as ''validity-as-reflective-accounting'', where researchers, the topic, and the sense-making process interact. The second lens is used to check how accurately participants' realities have been represented in the final account. To employ this lens participants are actively involved in assessing whether the interpretations accurately represent them (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this research, these two lenses were adopted. The second lens was adopted by mailing the case studies back to the participants to get feedback on their case study. If the participants returned feedback, the case studies were adjusted according to their feedback. The research did not include a third lens, which uses reviewers not affiliated with the project to help establish validity. The validity procedure of using both the lens of the researcher and participant for confirmation is called Member Checking. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this is ''the most crucial technique'' for establishing credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

3.4 Case Studies

As mentioned, this research is based on a multiple case study analysis. Ten case studies, and one pilot case were conducted. These case studies can be found in this sub chapter. In the table below, information about the cases can be found. To respect the privacy, and meet the participation conditions of the participating companies, the cases are processed anonymously. All the cases were Dutch medium sized construction companies. In the table, the number of employees and the function of the interviewee of each case can be found.

Table 1. Additional information on the cases.

Case Study	Nr. of Employees	Function Interviewee
Pilot Case Study	250	Director of Business Development
Case Study 1	130	Sustainability Advisor
Case Study 2	80	Project Developer
Case Study 3	80	General Director
Case Study 4	130	EMVI Coordinator & Chairman Sustainability team
Case Study 5	160	(1) Director of Development, (2) Director of Construction firm
Case Study 6	120	Development Manager & Project Developer
Case Study 7	150	Innovation Manager
Case Study 8	196	Adjunct Director of Policy, Strategy & Innovation
Case Study 9	160	Adjunct Director
Case Study 10	120	Adjunct Director

3.4.1 Pilot Case Study

Pilot Case Findings

The Motivation behind Environmental Sustainability

This subject was not tackled in the Pilot Interview. To compare the pilot case with the case studies, this subject is included.

Short- or Long-term Goals

It is believed that the long-term is more important than the short-term. , the company would rather have fewer satisfactory results in the short term if that means better results will be yielded in the long term. It is believed that a company must suffer in the short-term, to see results in the long term.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Short-term goals are perceived as essential as well, as long-term success is decided by short-term steps. Short-term goals are little parts of the big process. In the short term, those little steps can be made, which contribute to long-term success.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

The firm is affected by laws and regulations. Rules about emission release are getting stricter each year, which has a lot of influence on its operations. In City areas such as Amsterdam, regulations are stricter, thus having more impact on the company. It is believed that laws and regulations will have a bigger influence on construction companies in the future.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

When it comes to engaging in sustainability, the financial position of the company plays a key role. There needs to be made room for investments. If the company has a bad year, there are different priorities than sustainability. The budget needs to be available to engage with sustainability.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability affects the company's marketing operations too. Sustainability is promoted through social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Instagram. Through marketing, the company tries to paint the best picture of itself to influence the perception of the customers. Accordingly, this touches on the term greenwashing. No lies are promoted, but there is an attempt to paint a better picture than reality.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Goodwill is perceived as important. Hence, the company tries to paint a better picture of themselves. It is believed that improved goodwill attracts more customers and employees. Additionally, it plays a prominent role in keeping employees as well.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

Environmental Sustainability Activities are costly.

Impact on Employees

The company has noticed that people like to work for more sustainable companies.

Impact on Financial Returns

The company has not seen an increase in profits.

Impact on Customers

The company has seen a positive impact on customer attraction.

3.4.2 Case Studies

After completing the pilot round, the interview questions were refined. In Appendix 2 the interview questions and structure for the case studies can be found. The analysis was structured in the same way as the pilot findings presented above. In the next chapter ''summary findings'' the case studies results will be presented in two tables. There will be an elaboration on the findings in this chapter as well.

4 Summary findings

In this chapter, the main findings of the case studies will be presented. Because the interviews offer great depth to the research on the subject ''environmental sustainability'', the findings are categorized according to the codes to clearly analyse what has been researched. The interviews cover multiple aspects of environmental sustainability to offer more insights into the research on an important matter. In the tables below the results for each case study are presented. More in-depth results for each case study can be found in Appendix 3. Below the tables the topics are outlined, to provide more clearance on results presented in the tables. This chapter contains an in-depth elaboration on the findings as well.

Table 2. Case Study Interview Results (1)

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
Case 1	Internal and external motivation	Short-term more important for company	Short-term contributes to long-term	No effect on company	Has an impact on engagement	Have an impact	Sustain-ability improves goodwill
Case 2	Internal motivation	Both short-term and long-term	Short-term contributes to long-term	Strong effect on company	Has an impact on engagement	Impacts the marketing practices a lot	Sustain-ability improves goodwill
Case 3	70% internal motivation, 30% external	Should be focused on the long-term	Short-term contributes to long-term	Has an effect on company	Has an impact on engagement	Sustain-ability drives 25% of marketing	Sustain-ability improves goodwill
Case 4	Internal and external motivation	Should be focused on the long-term	Short-term contributes to long-term	Major effect on company	Strong impact on engagement	Sustain-ability stimulates marketing	Sustain-ability improves goodwill
Case 5	Internal and external motivation	Both short-term and long-term	Short-term contributes to long-term	Impacts the company	Strong impact on engagement	Sustain-ability influences marketing	Sustain-ability improves goodwill
Case 6	External motivation	Should be focused on the long-term	Short-term contributes to long-term	Has an effect on company	Strong impact on engagement	Sustain-ability influences marketing	Sustain-ability improves goodwill

Case 7	Internal motivation	Sustain-ability should be about the long-term	Short-term contributes to long-term	Has little effect on the company	Plays an important role	Little influence on marketing	Sustain-ability can be an important part of goodwill
Case 8	Internal motivation	Vision should be long-term based	Short-term contributes to long-term	Has little effect on the company	Has an impact on engagement	No influence on marketing	Sustain-ability can be an important part of goodwill
Case 9	Internal motivation	Should be focused on the long-term	Short-term contributes to long-term	Major effect on company	Has an impact on engagement	Sustain-ability influences marketing	Sustain-ability can be an important part of goodwill
Case 10	Majority from internal motivation, but also external	Both short-term and long-term	Short-term contributes to long-term	Major effect on company	Has an impact on engagement	Has little impact on marketing operations	Sustain-ability is a crucial factor in goodwill

Table 3. Case Study Interview Results (2)

	T8.1	T8.2	T8.3	T8.4
Case 1	No impact	No impact	No impact	No impact
Case 2	Negative impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	Positive impact
Case 3	Negative impact	Positive impact	Positive impact	Positive impact
Case 4	Positive impact	Positive impact	Positive impcat	Positive impact
Case 5	Negative impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	No impact
Case 6	Negative impact	Positive impact	Positive impact	No impact
Case 7	Negative impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	No impact
Case 8	No impact	No impact	No impact	No impact
Case 9	Negative impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	No impact
Case 10	Negative impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	Positive impact

Topics interviews:

Case Study Interview Results (1)

T1: The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

T2: Short- or Long-term Goals

T3: Contribution of Short-term Goals

T4: Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

T5: Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

T6: Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

T7: Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Case Study Interview Results (2) – Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

T8.1: Impact on Costs

T8.2: Impact on Employees

T8.3: Impact on Financial Returns

T8.4: Impact on Customers

4.1 Elaboration on Findings

The motivation behind Environmental Sustainability Engagement

All the interviewed companies were engaging with at least some sort of sustainability initiative. However, some companies are more engaged than others. When looking at the motivation behind sustainability engagement it can be concluded that all the companies do it from internal motivation. This means that these companies have the desire to be engaged in sustainability and want to have a positive impact. However, six out of ten companies mentioned being driven by external motivation as well (internal and external motivation). The external motivations varied from wanting to meet the customers' expectations and desires, to wanting a good image in society, and being ahead of the Government's enforcement. Another external motivation that was mentioned was the nitrogen situation with the farmers, which encouraged the company to engage in sustainability. Furthermore, an (external) motivation was to be in a good competitive market position for local government.

Short- or Long-term Goals

All the companies have different visions on how sustainability goals should be completed. One believed that long-term goals require vision, ambition, authenticity, and leadership for example. Despite all the different strategical visions, they all agreed that sustainability goals should be focused on the long term. Except three, who explicitly stated that sustainability goals should be about the long-term and the short-term. A long-term strategy is believed to have a positive impact on the company. But it is also believed that people are not so good with long-term goals.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Although all companies said that goals require a long-term focus, they are also all agreed that short-term goals are essential. Short-term goals are necessary and contribute massively to long-term goals. The short-term is seen as steps, that help the company move towards its long-term goals. Short-term goals are important in terms of attracting employees and customers and creating the environment behind sustainability engagement. Through short-term goals, companies find themselves in a cultural switch towards sustainability engagement. It helps increase awareness and consciousness among employees. Accordingly, short-term goals are based on quick wins. This help to get the support of authorities and attract contractors. Additionally, short-term goals help to re-evaluate the companies' practices, and whether they are moving in the right direction. ''It is best to make good short-term decisions that also have a positive effect on the long-term''. In general, that is the approach to have short-term goals which are positive for the long term as well.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations have a major influence on companies. However, one company said not being affected by these laws and regulations. There are norms and requirements buildings must meet when constructing. None of the companies struggled to meet those. When asked about the role of the Government in sustainable development, only one company said it was satisfied. Several companies showed dissatisfaction. This was due to a lack of ambition of the Government, and rules not being accessible and strict enough. It is believed by one of the companies that the Government should take a more prominent role in sustainable development. Another company believed that the Government is acting too slowly. Additionally, the rules and regulations should be the same in the entire global industry. Meaning that the rules in other countries must be the same. To summarize, it can be concluded that laws and regulations have a major impact on the construction sector. However, these should still be stricter.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Based on the analysis it can be concluded that the financial position of a company has a big influence on sustainability engagement. Without having a budget or resources, companies cannot invest in sustainability. Few companies mentioned that sustainability is a priority and would be invested in even if they would be in a slightly worse position. One company mentioned that sustainability investments are allowed to cost money. Especially in the development phase. Another company mentioned that they feel a societal obligation to meet goals, which costs money. However, at the end of the day, there must be room for it financially, as all the companies are commercial companies needing to make money.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

In general, sustainability affects the companies' marketing practices. The majority was keen on promoting its sustainability practices, with two companies still having the belief there is room for improvement. Two of the ten companies mentioned it to have only minor impact, while one company said that it had no influence at all. The latter believed that marketing practices would not influence the demand or revenue model. Thus, promoting sustainability practices through marketing did not make sense for them. However, this company did believe that they could positively impact the company's image. The companies engaged in marketing and promoting their sustainability practices mostly did this through their websites and social media pages. However, it can be concluded that these promotions cannot be compared to the marketing practices of big companies. Medium-sized enterprises only have one or a few employees working on marketing. In CSR greenwashing is a common matter. One company had the same opinion and wanted to be cautious about this when promoting their practices.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

All companies perceive goodwill as an important factor. It is believed that sustainability improves goodwill. If companies have improved goodwill, they believe they can attract more customers and have a better position in society and amongst other stakeholders such as Governmental institutions. ''If a company does not communicate their sustainable activities well enough, they do not profit that much from their sustainable engagement.''

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

It can be concluded that sustainability investments are costly. Almost all companies have seen an increase in costs due to sustainability investments. Only three companies have had a positive (financial) return-to-cost ratio. Two companies have not noticed any impact on the costs.

Impact on Employees

Based on the data the conclusion can be drawn that sustainability engagement can have a positive influence on attracting and keeping employees. However, this is not the case at every company. Most companies have not seen clear impacts on employees in terms of attracting and keeping them. Furthermore, companies have noticed that employees find sustainability engagement important and have seen an increase in sustainability awareness among employees.

Impact on Financial Returns

Seven out of the ten companies have not seen a positive impact on financial returns. This means no higher revenues or profits. This can be because these companies have only started investing recently, or that the initiatives have not been in place long enough. Although, three companies have seen positive returns already.

Impact on Customers

No impact has been seen on customers in six out of ten cases. Two have seen that sustainability engagement helps with the attraction of customers, whilst one has seen positive reactions but could not tell if it has attracted new customers. It is believed that the reason for the minimal impact is due to the customers not being ready yet to pay for sustainable options. Some do, but in general, that is not believed.

5 Conclusion and discussion

Firstly, this chapter discusses the contributions of the research to the existing theory and practice. The practical implications are aimed to provide information to managers of Dutch medium sized construction companies. The new insights will provide answers and guidance in the adoption processes of sustainability practices. The following research question was formulated and answered to provide this guidance:

''How important is the short-term in achieving long-term environmental sustainability goals for Dutch Medium Sized Construction Companies?''

Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the research's limitations and suggestions for future research.

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 Theoretical implications

A lot of studies have been done on CSR and sustainability. With the potential of the construction sector to improve sustainability, it was decided to conduct research in this industry. The aim of this research was to provide answers on the importance of short-term sustainability goals in achieving long-term environmental sustainability goals. No research has yet been done to answer this specific question. However, several studies have been done on the effect of short-term and long-term sustainability goals.

This research intended to research how short-term sustainability goals contribute to achieving long-term sustainability goals. The most important finding concludes that construction companies cannot meet long-term objectives without meeting the short-term goals in between. The short-term goals should be seen as steps that contribute to the long-term goals. It is believed that a company cannot completely change its operations suddenly. The word long-term implies that the goal is achieved over a lengthy period. This lengthy period should consist of steps or short-term goals. Thus, short-term goals are necessary for achieving long-term goals. Although several studies show how the short-term can be important, they do not show how essential it is in achieving the long-term goals, and that short-term goals are necessary to succeed. Those studies did find that short-term goals are important for resource and waste reduction, leading to cost reduction (Zhou & Lowe, 2003). Additionally, sustainability adds new revenue streams, while protecting the environment (Chang & Kuo, 2008). Another study concluded that short-term sustainability practices if implemented correctly can additionally have profound long-term benefits as well (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2015). This thesis confirms that finding but builds further on it by explaining why it is so important. The result from this thesis goes as far as concluding that short-term sustainability goals are essential in achieving long-term sustainability goals.

A study discussing how to balance the long-term and short-term did discuss several interesting points close to this matter (Chang & Kuo, 2008). The short-term was perceived as important because it allows firms to effectively increase short-term earnings and, at the same time, protect the environment and social integrity (Chang & Kuo, 2008). Hence, companies should be able to implement short-term goals. When looking at what this research conducted, it can be concluded that the participants agree on the point that short-term sustainability is important. Several studies looked at how sustainability goals affected the short-term and the long-term. It was concluded that on the long-term sustainability has a stronger positive effect on financial performance (Porter & van der Linde , Toward a new conception of the environment– competitiveness relationship, 1995; Rassier & Earnhart , 2011). However, results about how sustainability affected the short-term were divided as two studies said it yielded positive results on the short-term as well, while another study concluded sustainability had no effect on financial performance in the short-term (Porter & van der Linde , Toward a new conception of the environment– competitiveness relationship, 1995; Rassier & Earnhart , 2011; Horváthová, 2012). In this research it is shown that there was almost no impact on financial performance on the short-term, except for two companies. The participants did expect this to change in the future.

Long-term sustainability goals have more positive results than the short-term. One of the long-term results is a positive impact on organizational culture (Surroca, Tribó, & Waddock, 2010). In this research, it proved to be the case that short-term sustainability goals also have a positive impact on organizational culture. It is even perceived as essential to achieve long-term sustainability goals as the employees need to get behind the organization's goals for them to succeed. Short-term sustainability goals proved to increase consciousness, awareness, and acceptance towards sustainability. It even increased excitement around the matter in some cases.

Even though this study covers multiple aspects of the importance of short-term sustainability goals, other studies have contributed with different insights which are not covered in this research. For example, long-term strategies are vital in managing uncertainty (Haessler, 2020). Thus, short-term sustainability goals could provide more guidance and certainty while having a positive contribution in terms of sustainability. In this research it was shown that short-term sustainability goals help re-evaluate goals, which makes achieving long-term goals easier and more feasible. Additionally, firms prioritizing short-term results are more likely to ignore the interests of many stakeholders (Slawinski & Bansal, 2012). A good relationship with stakeholders is essential for companies, especially in the construction sector where companies have many direct stakeholders, they are dependent on. Creating value to the stakeholders is essential to maintaining the relationships with them (Freudenreich, Lüdeke-Freund, & Schaltegger, 2020; Harrison & Van der Laan Smith, 2015). A company with good and close relationships with their stakeholders will enjoy a sustainable competitive advantage (Jones, Harrison, & Felps, How applying instrumental stakeholder theory can provide sustainable competitive advantage, 2018). In the case studies it was mentioned that it is important to be in an advantageous position among stakeholders. It was said that short-term sustainability goals help to get support from external stakeholders when they are achieved. This is because short-term goals are based on quick wins. When companies can show results from short-term goals, that helps to get the support of authorities. Additionally, it helps to attract contractors as well. Additionally, they could have an advantage over other companies with local Governmental institutions.

An important reason to engage in sustainability goals is an improved goodwill (Zhang, Oo, & Lim, 2019). This is seen as important because the participants believe that it increases customer attraction. In only three companies, was an improvement on customer attraction noticed. This may indicate that improved goodwill cannot be achieved on a short-term basis. It could also indicate that the positive results have a lag on improved goodwill. According to studies other benefits are cost reduction and a higher attractiveness for investors (Hodinková & Sadovský, 2016; Sprinkle & Maines, 2010). However, cost reduction was not seen in any of the cases. On the contrary, nine of the ten cases said that they have seen an increase in cost. In some cases, this yielded positive financial returns. Furthermore, increased employee satisfaction can be achieved through sustainability engagement. This also increases work efficiency and help retain and motivate talent and employees, which results in less personnel rotation. The attraction of qualified employees, another gain from CSR, supports lower personnel rotation as well (Vázquez-Carrasco & López-Pérez, 2013). This was the case at some of the participants' companies after sustainability engagement. However, in most cases sustainability engagement did not prove to have an influence on keeping and attracting employees on the short-term.

Despite all the positive results coming with the integration of short-term sustainability goals, a lot of companies still prioritize short-term financial results over sustainability engagement (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2015). That is because there is little market incentive for clients pay more for innovation without gaining extra return over the short-term period (Zhou & Lowe, 2003). Especially in the construction sector this is an influential factor. Some participants indicated that customers are not willing to invest in sustainability, and that sustainability engagement did not attract more customers. Several studies show that these are reasons that companies do not engage in sustainability. That did not hold the participants' companies back to engage in sustainability. Another reason to engage in sustainability was due to their belief that laws, and regulations will become stricter in the future, which will enforce them to do things which may be beyond their financial capabilities if they do not start investing in sustainability now. Now they believe they still have the room to give meaning to sustainability themselves. The strengthening of laws and regulations will limit their flexibility in the future and will force companies to change rigorously in a short time.

To conclude construction companies cannot meet long-term objectives without meeting the short-term goals in between. The word long-term implies that the goal is achieved over a lengthy period. This lengthy period should consist of steps or short-term goals. Short-term goals are necessary for achieving long-term goals. Thus, to answer the research question, short-term sustainability goals are essential for Dutch construction companies to meet long-term environmental sustainability goals. They cannot be achieved without short-term environmental sustainability goals.

5.1.2 Practical implications

The theoretical implication is important and can help managers of construction companies to understand the practical aspect and the importance of adopting short-term sustainability goals. When companies are engaged in sustainability and have long-term goals in place, it is important that the entire company is behind those practices and works towards that goal. Short-term goals help to increase awareness and consciousness on that matter. It leads to a cultural switch, in which employees understand the urgency and importance of sustainability.

Another important reason for managers to implement short-term sustainability goals is for re-evaluating their current operations. With short-term goals in place, this is done regularly which will help achieve long-term goals. Considering all these things, it can be concluded that companies engaged in sustainability, or companies that want to be more engaged, should have short-term sustainability goals in place as these are important for achieving the company's long-term objectives. Without having these in place companies could encounter difficulties such as low employee engagement and inefficient operations. These things have a big influence when companies are enforced to meet more sustainability requirements.

5.2 Limitations and future research

Each research can be subject to limitations. This research has its limitations as well. The first limitation occurred in the selection process. When selecting potential cases, companies that looked more likely to participate were selected. This was an intuitive process. Potential cases had to meet certain criteria but were selected based on intuition, which can be seen as biased. An additional limitation in the case selection process came from the participants themselves. It could be the case that only companies that are more interested in and engaged with sustainability decided to participate in this research. Considering the answers, this can be suggested, as only companies interested in sustainability decided to participate. This is a limitation because it potentially provides different information, which is not representative of medium sized companies in the construction sector. However, looking at the research question, it does not seem to matter as much.

Thirdly, this research may be subject to self-reporting bias (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). This limitation occurs when participants do not truthfully answer the questions. Although it is thought that in this case, the participant's answers were reliable, these still cannot be controlled. Since environmental sustainability is seen as a social responsibility, it can be the case that participants gave socially accepted answers at times. These answers could differ from the truth. Furthermore, it is believed that this research may not be narrow enough. Even though it is believed that this research provided answers to an important subject, it is believed that the research could have had a bigger contribution would it had been more specific and narrower. The research now had a spread approach, with interview questions covering multiple aspects of environmental sustainability engagement in the construction sector. With more focus solely on short-term and long-term aspects, the research could have provided greater data.

Another limitation lies again in its reliability. The answers and conclusions of this research rely on textual data. This means that there are no numbers that can back up the answers that were given. When discussing the impacts of sustainability goals, answers are more reliable when these are backed with numbers, which is not the case in this research.

Lastly, the fact that the companies have not been performing environmental sustainability activities for a long time can be seen as a limitation as well. The research discusses the importance of short-term goals on long-term goals. However, these long-term goals have not been met, and are often not even close to being met yet. If this research would have been conducted 20 years later, it would have been easier to assess what the exact impact was in the long term and say how important these were. This brings us to the next discussion point ''future research''. Considering this limitation, it can be suggested that this may be a good subject for future research. When conducting similar research in the future, a great suggestion would be to assess what the short-term goals have specifically done for the long-term goals. This could be done by either researching companies that have been engaged in sustainability longer and already met some long-term goals, or to conduct the same research in a later stage when more companies have been engaged longer. In future research, it would also be suggested to assess quantitative data. Quantitative data could prove these same conclusions with numbers, which could provide more reliability to the research.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Semi-structured interview Pilot Case

Interview Questions Pilot Case Study

<u>Company:</u>
<u>Number of Employees:</u>
<u>Interviewee:</u>
<u>Function:</u>

1. What is Sustainability in your opinion?

2. What does sustainability mean to the company?

3. What do you think of the sustainability developments, and the growth in the importance of it?

4. What is your company vision, and how does sustainability fit in that vision?

5. Do you think sustainable strategies should be focused on the long-term or short-term?

6. Have you implemented any sustainability strategies within the company?

If yes?
   a. Were they focused on the short-term or long-term?
   b. Why long- or short-term?
   c. What was the impact on the company?

If not?
   a. Why not?
   b. Do you think that will happen in the future?
   c. Do you think it would have a positive influence on the company?

7. Have the implemented sustainability strategies been more client driven or company driven? (So based on client results, or internal company results)

8. How much influence do rules and laws have on sustainability within the company?

9. What is your vision on sustainability as a long-term strategy?
a. Do you think that strategy will have a positive impact on the company?
b. Do you think these strategies are important for the construction sector?

10. Do you think that short-term sustainability goals contribute to the long-term success of the company?

11. How do these short-term goals contribute to a long-term strategy?

12. Is it more important to yield good short-term results than good long-term results?
a. Would you rather have fewer good results on the short-term if this means you will get better results in the long-term?

13. Coming back to your sustainability strategy
    a. What sustainable activities were you engaged in?
    b. What was the purpose/goal of those activities?
    c. Were these adoptable on the short-term (within 1 year) or long-term (longer than 1 year)?
    d. What was the impact of these activities on the long-term?
        - Costs
        - Customers
        - Employees (Satisfaction)
        - Company results
            - More/less profit/revenue
    e. Do you think the consumer finds sustainability important?

14. How do short-term sustainability goals fit in a long-term sustainability vision?

15. What influence does sustainability have on your marketing?

16. Do you think sustainability is important for ''goodwill''?

If yes?

a. How much influence do you think improved goodwill will have on the company? And how would you see that back?

Do you think some of the questions were unnecessary?

Do you think some topics were missing in this interview?

Do you know any other companies that I can contact?

Appendix 2 – Semi-structured interview Case Studies

Interview Questions Case Study

Company:
Number of Employees:
Interviewee:
Function:

1. What is Sustainability in your opinion?

2. What does sustainability mean to the company?

3. What do you think of the sustainability developments, and the growth in the importance of it?

4. What is your company vision, and how does sustainability fit in that vision?

5. Do you think sustainable strategies should be focused on the long-term or short-term?

6. Have you implemented any sustainability strategies within the company?

If yes?

d. Were they focused on the short-term or long-term?
e. Why long- or short-term?
f. What was the impact on the company?

If not?

d. Why not?
e. Do you think that will come in the future?
f. Do you think it would have a positive influence on the company?

7. Have the implemented sustainability strategies been more client driven or company driven? (So based on client results, or internal company results)

8. How much influence do rules and laws have on sustainability within the company?

9. What is your vision on sustainability as a long-term strategy?
c. Do you think that strategy will have a positive impact on the company?
d. Do you think these strategies are important for the construction sector?

10. Do you think that short-term sustainability goals contribute to the long-term success of the company? And how?

11. Is it more important to yield good short-term results than good long-term results?
b. Would you rather have fewer good results on the short-term if this means you will get better results in the long-term?

12. What role does the company's financial position play in engaging with sustainability?

13. Coming back to your sustainability strategy
    f. What sustainable activities were you engaged in?
    g. What was the purpose/goal of those activities?
    h. Were these adoptable on the short-term (within 1 year) or long-term (longer than 1 year)?
    i. What was the impact of these activities on the long-term?

- Costs
- Customers
- Employees (Satisfaction)
- Company results
    - More/less profit/revenue

j. Do you think the consumer finds sustainability important?

14. What influence does sustainability have on your marketing?

15. Do you think sustainability is important for ''goodwill''?

If yes?

b. How much influence do you think improved goodwill will have on the company? And how would you see that back?

Appendix 3 – Case Study Results

Case Study 1

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

The engagement in sustainability partly comes from intrinsic motivation. However, their motivation to engage in sustainability comes more from a customer perspective as well. The biggest motivation and urgency come from the current nitrogen situation with the farmers.

Short- or Long-term Goals

From a strategic perspective, a sustainable strategy should be focused on the long term. Long-term success should be more important when looking at positive climate effects. For the firm, the short-term is more important because of quick wins. Short-term and long-term are cohesive terms, as short-term goals affect long-term goals, and long-term goals affect short-term goals.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

The short-term actively contributes to long-term targets. The company reflects on its short-term targets to decide whether they must be changed. The short-term targets are monitored through the Plan Do Check Act cycle. The first short-term targets are most important because then you find out how to approach the rest. The short-term is important because of quick wins. These quick wins are believed to be necessary for the employees to be engaged in the process, and supportive of the targets that are set.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations do not affect the company much as the moment. The company does more than is mandatory. They do not want to get behind. The Government do not have strict rules, so the company functions as their own Government. They have their own demands for subcontractors and project developers. That has mostly to do with their own ambitions.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

The financial position of the company matters a lot. At the end of the day, this is the overriding factor when it comes to making decisions. In construction and development, it is important to get results. Furthermore, costs have considerable influence on sustainability within the construction sector. Traditional constructions are cheaper than sustainable options. The market does not stimulate companies to be more sustainable, so decision-making is still cost-driven.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability does have impact on marketing operations. The company wants to show the world that they are doing things in the right manner, that they are engaged in sustainability, and make good decisions. They promote sustainability because they want to attract new projects. However, they believe it is important not to use sustainability solely as marketing tool as they are cautious about greenwashing.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

It is believed that sustainability improves goodwill.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

No impact was seen on costs yet.

Impact on Employees

No impact was seen on the company's employees. They are in the stage of increasing awareness among employees.

Impact on Financial Returns

No impact was seen on financial returns.

Impact on Customers

No impact was seen on its customers. The average buyer has little knowledge about sustainability.

Case Study 2

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

Sustainable engagement comes from internal motivation. They have an ardent desire to do well in terms of sustainability. However, they want to be on the same page as their customers as well.

Short- or Long-term Goals

A measure should not be either short-term or long-term oriented. The best is to make decisions that have an immediate effect but are also still effective in the long term. Positive short-term goals will also lead to positive long-term results. The company would be willing to suffer in the short term if that means they will have better results in the long term. Thus, the company would weigh the long-term higher.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Short-term goals contribute to the long-term goal. The biggest impact can be achieved when good short-term results can be proved. It is easier to get the support of authorities and attract contractors when you can prove that short-term measures have an immediate effect. Results should be immediately visible.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations have an important impact on the company's sustainability engagement as well. The company must do what the rules and laws require them to do. They do not get a permit if they do not meet those rules. Currently, the company has no trouble meeting the rules and is already doing more than is expected.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

The company's financial position is important to the engagement in sustainability. A company is founded to exist. Profits need to be made if you want to exist. You cannot make losses year in, year out. Sustainability is perceived to be equally as important as the company's financial position.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability affects the company's marketing operations a lot. They have 3 employees that run the social media pages. They are keen on promoting sustainability. They love to pay attention to it.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Goodwill is important. It is believed that improved goodwill will lead to more customers.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

Sustainability is costly and has only cost the company money so far. It is believed that sustainable options will remain costly and more expensive until every company starts engaging in those options.

Impact on Employees

Employees have become more aware and conscious.

Impact on Financial Returns

The company has not seen any positive impact in terms of financial returns. Sustainability is expensive and has even decreased profits.

Impact on Customers

In terms of customers, the company has noticed a positive impact, with a lot of positive reactions. In the entire country there is more attention to sustainability.

Case Study 3

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

The engagement comes 70% from their motivation, and 30% from a marketing, technical, and image perspective. But there is a strong feeling that they need to do the right thing.

Short- or Long-term Goals

Sustainability goals should be focused on the long term. Long-term goals have a more positive impact than short-term goals. You are setting a future trap for yourself, if you are not trying to be sustainable as a company, and do not live up to the sustainable long-term thoughts you have as a company.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Short-term goals contribute to the long-term success of a company. They look at what their short-term activities do in the long term before they implement them. Short-term decisions are based on quick wins. This help to re-evaluate whether you have done the right things.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations affect sustainable engagement. Especially when looking at the products the company is realising. The buildings need to meet a lot of criteria. The company sees the pressure increasing because of this. The end-product is dictated by rules and laws.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

There is a definite link between the company's financial position and sustainable engagement. If a company does not have the budget or is struggling to pay the monthly bills, sustainability is not a priority at that moment in time.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability drives 25% of the company's marketing promotions. The good and sustainable things that are done are promoted. They promote the projects that are built, those that are circular, or partly circular. These projects are put more in the spotlights. Sustainability is promoted on their website as well as the social media platforms they are on.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Goodwill is perceived as important as goodwill decides the value of the company. When you score well on sustainability you are always in a better position.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

Sustainability has cost the company a lot of money.

Impact on Employees

The employees are more engaged and are prouder now. It is believed that sustainability plays a role in keeping employees to a certain degree.

Impact on Financial Returns

The investments have seen positive financial returns in profit.

Impact on Customers

Sustainability has attracted more customers as well. Customers are finding it more important.

Case Study 4

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

Engagement in sustainability comes from internal motivation as well external motivation.

Short- or Long-term Goals

Sustainability should be focused on the long term. Companies should look at what certain decisions can yield later. But long-term strategies require vision, ambition, authenticity, and leadership. The company would be willing to suffer in the short term if that means better results will be yielded in the long term.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Short-term goals contribute to the long-term success of a company. The short-term helps to start moving towards the long-term goals. The short term is also important for cultural change within the company. You start small and build slowly towards your long-term goals. Short-term successes help to get financial backing from the bank as well.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations have a major impact on sustainability within the company. The company needs to meet certain norms and have certain certifications. If rules and laws are conflicting with the company's ambitions, it stops.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

It is believed that the financial position of the company matters a lot when it comes to investing in sustainability. If the investments do not yield anything, they would go bankrupt. They are a commercial company, so they need to earn money in the short-term and long term.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability helps stimulate marketing, but it also helps to reach the customer. Currently, the company does too little in terms of marketing. They promote on social media and their website but do not have a marketing team, which is their pitfall.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Goodwill is important but can only be achieved or improved if you can support your sustainable engagement with data. You need to show that sustainability scores and yields something. Improved goodwill attracts more customers.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

Sustainability has cost the company money. But the cost-to-return ratio is positive because they have organized their activities in the right way.

Impact on Employees

There has been a positive impact on employees because it helps the company with employee retention. Applicants are asking more about sustainability too. Especially younger people are more conscious.

Impact on Financial Returns

The company has seen more profits because of their engagement.

Impact on Customers

The company has attracted more customers. They see that customers find sustainability more important as well.

Case Study 5

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

The engagement comes from both internal as well as external motivation. Within the office there is a big motivation for sustainability engagement. But the company wants to be in an advantageous position in the municipality as well.

Short- or Long-term Goals

Sustainability goals should be based on both the long-term and the short-term. In the basis the long-term, but from that point, short-term goals need to be set that will help to realise the long-term targets.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Short-term goals are necessary to take steps toward the ultimate long-term goal. The short-term helps to make the employees more conscious as well. It is equally important to have satisfactory results in the short term as well as the long term.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations affect sustainability engagement. The company needs to act upon the rules. There is a construction decree where certain requirements need to be met.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

The financial position of the company is very important. If they cannot afford to invest, they cannot engage in sustainability.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability influences marketing. The company promotes its sustainable activities actively through sales brochures, its website, and social media. Marketing is important and seen as one of the benchmarks.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Goodwill is perceived as important. Through goodwill, they hope to find themselves in a better position in the municipality. If they do well in terms of sustainability, they hope to be prioritized over other firms.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

Sustainability has an impact on costs.

Impact on Employees

Sustainability has an impact on attracting employees. It is believed that the company would be unattractive to new employees if they would not engage in sustainability. Within the company, there has also been a cultural switch since engaging in sustainability.

Impact on Financial Returns

There has not been a positive impact on financial returns.

Impact on Customers

The average customer does not seem to be that interested in sustainability.

Case Study 6

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

The engagement in sustainability comes from a company and society perspective, but much less from a customer's perspective because only a few customers want to invest in sustainability. The company is operating in society and wants to have a good image in society.

Short- or Long-term Goals

Sustainability must be long-term oriented because it is not possible to execute all plans in one quarter. Market development takes time.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Short-term goals contribute to long-term success. One of the most important things is to start realising things right now. If companies do not engage, they will miss the boat on certain projects where specific permits are necessary.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations affect sustainability engagement. Companies must meet requirements like BENG norms, and MPG scores. These things have a lot of influence on costs and processes. Every company needs to meet requirements to get those permits.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

The financial position is very important for a commercial company when it comes to sustainability engagement. But the company has societal goals as well. This costs money. Quite a lot of time, money and energy is already being put into that. Gaining knowledge takes time and energy as well. That is all part of being a company that wants to have a good role in society.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability is playing a bigger role in marketing. The game is now being won with different things, such as sustainability and circularity. So that needs to be promoted. The company is expanding their marketing activities more. It has become a red thread through the whole product and process. The company promotes through their website and social media.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Goodwill is viewed as important. It attracts more customers. Sustainability is important for investors, business partners, and the municipality as well.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

The company has invested in sustainability and seen more costs because of it.

Impact on Employees

It has an impact on employees. Employees find sustainability important.

Impact on Financial Returns

The company has seen positive financial returns. It has yielded more than cost.

Impact on Customers

The company has not noticed an impact on customers.

Case Study 7

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

The company's motivation to engage in sustainability is more company driven and intrinsic. They are doing it because they want to.

Short- or Long-term Goals

Sustainability should be about the long-term.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Short-term goals contribute to the long-term success of the company. Short-term successes are needed to show that goals can be met in the short term. It is necessary to get the mindset of the people on the same page as the processes that are involved with sustainability. That determines 75% of your success. In terms of getting employees, customers, and the environment behind it, it is believed that the short-term is more important right now. Thus, short-term goals are seen as important, and necessary for achieving the end goals.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

In terms of laws and regulations, there are norms companies must meet, which influences the cost perspective. The budget needs to be adopted to meet those norms. However, the company does not struggle to meet these norms.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

When engaging in sustainability, the financial position plays an important role. The company would always prioritize innovation and sustainability. But if they do not have the resources to make mistakes or experiment, they cannot do it. But even if the company would be in a worse financial position, it would still be engaged in sustainability.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability only has a little role in marketing. The marketing operations are handled poorly. It is believed that they should show more of what they do and why they do it.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Goodwill is becoming more important. However, sustainability needs to get rid of the container term and needs to be given a face. Only then sustainability can grow to be an important part of goodwill. Goodwill will be more important in the future.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

In terms of costs, sustainability has not had a positive impact. Sustainable options are more expensive, and sustainable engagement costs a lot of time and energy

Impact on Employees

The company believes that sustainability helps with attracting new employees. Especially younger people. In terms of keeping employees, it should not make a difference. That depends on many factors, with sustainability being one of them. The employees have become more aware and conscious since the company's engagement in sustainability.

Impact on Financial Returns

There has been no positive impact on revenue or profits.

Impact on Customers

There has not been a positive impact on customers. Customers often still choose cheaper options. Governmental institutions tend to be more interested in sustainability.

Case Study 8

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

The company's sustainability engagement comes from intrinsic motivation and is based on the Golden Circle. The company concluded that they believe that only if you are involved you can mean something to your environment. The company is convinced of a higher purpose with sustainability being a part of that. That is the reason for their existence.

Short- or Long-term Goals

The company believes sustainability should have a vision based on the long-term rather than the short-term.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

Short-term goals contribute to the long-term success of the company. To execute developments and visions, short-term activities and successes need to be shown. Short-term goals make people more engaged in sustainability in the long term. Thus, short-term goals are very important to achieve long-term goals.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations affect the company's sustainable engagement. There are certain norms the company must meet. The company does not struggle to meet those requirements.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

The financial position of the company affects sustainability. Sustainability should be allowed to cost some money. But there must be room for it financially.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Marketing is not influenced by sustainability because that would not influence the demand. The demand would still be there. The company has never been good at marketing either but believes that it does influence the company's image. However, it is not believed that more marketing engagement would affect the revenue model

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Goodwill is seen as important. It helps create an image of the company. Improved goodwill could yield the company more opportunities and benefit from being more attractive.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

There has been no impact on the company's costs.

Impact on Employees

There has been no impact on its employees.

Impact on Financial Returns

There has been no impact on revenues or profits.

Impact on Customers

There has been no impact on customer attraction. The company believes that will not change either.

Case Study 9

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

The motivation to engage in sustainability is intrinsic. However, they remain dependent on the customer.

Short- or Long-term Goals

Sustainability goals should be focused on the long-term because the long-term is continuity, which is an important goal for the company. A long-term vision is believed to have a positive impact on the company.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

The company cannot overlook the short-term. It is believed that the short-term contributes to the long-term success of the company. The company looks at what it can achieve in the short-term but through a long-term based perspective.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations affect the company a lot. The housing norms and norms to be sustainable in the process are not hard to be met.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

The financial position has an effect on environmental sustainability as the investments of the company align with its financial position. However, they prioritize committing to sustainability rather than making more profits. Even if the company would be less profitable, it would still prioritize sustainability. Financial resources are reserved for sustainable investments.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability influences the marketing operations of the company. Sustainable actions are promoted through a video on their website and social media. The company is yet to make decisions on how to approach marketing in the future. The company believes it does not do enough in terms of marketing. It must get better.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

The company believes goodwill is important. Improved goodwill is believed to have a positive impact on attracting customers.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

The sustainability engagement has had a big impact on the costs because a lot of money is invested in executing sustainable policies.

Impact on Employees

There has been a positive impact on awareness among employees. Minor impact is seen and expected in terms of retaining and attracting employees.

Impact on Financial Returns

There has been no impact on revenue.

Impact on Customers

There has been no impact on customers, although the company has seen an increase in awareness and interest in customers in the housing market.

Case Study 10

The Motivation Behind Environmental Sustainability

Sustainable engagement comes from intrinsic motivation. But it is also customer driven because the company remains dependent on the customer.

Short- or Long-term Goals

Sustainability goals should be based on both the short-term and long-term. The long-term is something a company strives for and is working towards. But you need to start with the short-term because in the short-term there could be a lot of solutions that are costly for the long-term.

Contribution of Short-term Goals

The short-term goals contribute to making the long-term goals. A company cannot completely switch its operational management without short-term goals.

Effect of Laws and Regulations on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

Laws and regulations have a lot of influence on sustainability engagement as well. The BENG norm is a requirement that must be met for example.

Effect of Financial Position on Environmental Sustainability Engagement

The financial position plays a role in the company's engagement in sustainability. If there are a lot of extra costs, sustainability is pushed away.

Effect of Sustainability on Marketing Practices

Sustainability does not affect the marketing practices that much. That is because the company does not do a lot with marketing. Their parent company in Belgium has a whole marketing team, from which the (Dutch) company gets more exposure.

Effect of Sustainability on Goodwill

Sustainability is seen as a crucial factor when it comes to goodwill. There is a small balance between greenwashing and communicating sustainability appropriately. A company needs to communicate its sustainable activities well to profit that much from its sustainable engagement. Improved goodwill would help with attracting customers.

Impact of Environmental Sustainability Activities on the company

Impact on Costs

The costs have increased since engaging in sustainability.

Impact on Employees

The employees have become more engaged in sustainability. It is believed that sustainable engagement has a big impact on attracting new employees as well. Especially younger people.

Impact on Financial Returns

There has been no positive impact on revenue and profits.

Impact on Customers

Sustainability helps with attracting customers. They are getting more demands and are asking more about sustainability in their tenders already. They notice that more people are appreciating sustainability.