



How sustainable business practices influence knowledge
work employees' attitudes towards work

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<p>Abstract: This thesis explores how organizations can influence knowledge work employees' attitudes towards work through implementing sustainability practices.</p> <p>Employees' attitudes towards work are a cornerstone of organizational success. Attitudes can have an impact on organizational business performance, turnover rates and quality of work. By implementing sustainability practices, organizations can influence their employees' attitudes towards work, guiding them to the desired direction to maximize the results. Sustainability practices are categorized and analyzed according to ESG framework: Environmental, Social and Governance. Moreover, positive attitudes are strongly linked to employee well-being, which can have an impact on costs generated from employee absence due to illness. This qualitative research was completed by conducting semi-structured interviews, and the results were analyzed through thematic analysis.</p> <p>The findings indicate that social sustainability practices have the biggest influence on knowledge work employees' attitudes towards work, impacting positively job engagement, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, and job satisfaction. Environmental sustainability practices don't seem to have an influence on attitudes. Sustainable business practices on governance aspect are more difficult to interpret, as they work rather as a basis for the practices, providing the opportunities for the implementation. Hence, the governance aspect needs to correlate with other practices and the organizational strategy and message in the line with the actions the organization executes.</p>	
Keywords: <i>Sustainability, Sustainable business practices, Sustainability practices, Knowledge work employees, Attitudes, Attitudes towards work</i>	

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Employees' attitudes towards work are a cornerstone of organizational success. Positive attitudes can lead to higher motivation, enhanced productivity and decreased turnover rates (Judge et al., 2001). Furthermore, positive attitudes enhance better collaboration and communication within teams (Robbins & Judge, 2009), promoting healthy and positive organizational culture. Conversely, negative attitudes are strong predictors of poor job performance, higher turnover and increased likelihood for an employee to experience burnout (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Hence, it is important for employers to acknowledge the impact that employees' attitudes towards work can have on organization's success to ensure the best possible outcome and consider what they can do to influence these attitudes to the desired direction. It is not enough to focus on promoting positive attitudes, but to also pay attention on how to mitigate the negative ones. Highlighting the significance of the issue, Beheshtifar and Zare (2012) state that in a modern and competitive work environment the employees' attitude and the inclusion of their opinions are the most important key factors of organizational success. Based on this claim, organizations should focus on employees' attitudes more than ever before. Thus, one way to influence employees' attitudes is by implementing sustainable business practices. Even though influencing the employees' attitudes is not the main purpose of sustainable business practices, it is a great approach for organizations to consider enhancing positive outcomes, due to the rising interest and concern around sustainability matters. As discussed, employees' attitudes play a crucial role on organizational success, and hence the organizations should be aware of all aspects that have an influence on them. By recognizing the influence that sustainability practices have on employees' attitudes, organizations can better utilize all benefits that the practices hold.

Sustainability is no longer a voluntary value for organizations, as companies with strong ESG practices keep thriving in long-term performance and employee engagement levels (McKinsey & Company, 2022). In recent years, sustainability has become an important part of how many businesses operate, and corporate responsibility is drawing increasing attention across industries. While much attention has been given to the environmental and economic impacts of sustainable practices, less is known about how these practices affect organizations' own employees and their attitudes towards work. Even though social aspects have been taken into consideration, the focus is heavily on customers and how they perceive the companies' actions and impact on sustainability related issues. Employees' attitude towards work plays an important role on organizational development (Othman & Suleiman, 2013). Employees' attitudes toward work can be influenced through implementing sustainability practices, while

the impact depends on how much the employees personally care about sustainability, as well as by how seriously and effectively their organizations put these practices into action (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Norton et al., 2015). Those employees' attitudes who value sustainability highly are therefore more alert and sensitive to organization's sustainability actions than those who don't. Hence, the result is a combination of an employee's personal character and the quality and magnitude of the organization's sustainability practices. It is crucial for organizations to have a comprehensive understanding of what kind of impacts may sustainability practices have on their employees, as attitudes most likely have a strong correlation on employees' actions and effort and therefore impacting their business performance and financial results. Even though sustainability practices are established to have positive results from key stakeholders, such as employees, the response might be the opposite if the practices are implemented poorly or don't seem authentic.

While some employees feel more positive and motivated when they sense that their company is acting responsibly (Glavas, 2016), others may feel disappointed and disengaged if they don't believe that the sustainability efforts are authentic or genuine (Bailey et al., 2017). Furthermore, sustainability concerns can create severe stress and worry for people who find such values important. Undoubtedly, nowadays one cannot avoid being exposed to news about environmental harms caused by climate change, human rights violations or incorrect use of power in governmental bodies. Hence, it is no surprise that the anxiety and stress leveraging from these issues touches much wider audience than just those who value sustainability issues deeply. The scope of anxiety related to the climate change includes, for example, worrying for future generations, helplessness of response to climate change and threats to livelihood (Soutar & Wand, 2022). And as we know, stress is one of the main factors of poor mental health of employees, which can lead to serious issues if not taken care of and therefore need a long recovery. Not only does this damage the organizations' overall performance and quality of work, but it is also very costly for companies. Thus, organizations might try to reduce sustainability-related stress among employees by establishing sustainable business practices, so that employees sense that they are doing their deed and that their contribution to society is meaningful by working for an organization, with which their values align.

According to Tanskanen (2022), employees' absence from work due to illness costs approximately two times more than paying salary per day. However, absence from work due to mental health issues that can be derived from long-lasting chronic stress and anxiety usually requires a lengthy absence for the employee to recover. After an employee's absence has lasted for over ten days, the employer will get compensation from health insurance for the salary paid during the absence. However, the compensation won't cover the whole salary the company has to pay. Based on the calculations by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (n.d.), the value

of lost labor input because of absence due to illness in Finland is approximately 3.4 billion euros per year. Most certainly, if an employee is experiencing serious and chronic stress that might lead to absence from work, there are other worries apart from sustainability-related concerns as well. However, Maslach and Leiter (1997) state that misalignment between individual's and organization's values is one of the factors that may lead to burnout. Based on this claim, establishing sustainability practices may have a positive impact on stress reduction for an employee who values sustainability highly. As the employee's absence due to illness can bring enormous external costs to both organizations and government, it is crucial for the companies to recognize this aspect and possibility, and emphasize sustainable policies and practices to support the employees' well-being, while also enhancing their business performance.

The strong relationship between employee well-being and organizational performance has been an intriguing research topic for several years (Collings et al., 2011), and it is proven by several studies that happy employees are more productive and efficient, which leads to better organizational performance. Furthermore, well-being is an essential aspect to take into consideration as it influences how employees respond to changes on organizational level, such as established sustainability practices (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). There are several theories to define what employee well-being means or how it is achieved. Generally, the employee's well-being is "achieved by attaining physical, emotional, financial, and social and psychological health" (Collings et al., 2011). When employees feel psychologically safe and healthy, they respond more positively to sustainable business practices and view them to align with their personal values (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). The same research states that poor well-being may lead to suspicious and critical attitudes, even if the change was ethically positive. Based on this, we can conclude that employee well-being has an impact on employee attitudes towards both sustainable business practices and work itself. As the wide spectrum of impacts spreads across various aspects of working life, it has a wide impact on employee engagement. Key drivers of employee engagement include leadership support, recognition, career development opportunities, and a healthy work-life balance. These elements enhance motivation, commitment and job satisfaction, resulting in increased productivity, better retention rates, and a more pleasant workplace culture, essentially promoting organizational performance (Dabrai, 2025). Due to the wide impact employee well-being has on attitudes towards sustainability practices and work, especially on employee engagement, the matter will be widely discussed on this paper. In order to thrive in their field, businesses aspire to succeed and outperform their competitors. Employees are a company's greatest asset since they are the ones who determine how well it performs in the competitive modern markets. Their skills, dedication and motivation drive innovation, enhance productivity, and foster strong customer relationships. To succeed in today's dynamic and ever-evolving workplace, firms want a

thriving workforce that is devoted, engaged, and captivated about their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2010). Thus, employee engagement has become one of the most crucial elements in determining the success of today's organizations.

The following six attitudes are general feelings and states of mind that employees may have towards their jobs: **employee engagement, a sense of moral pride, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and critical advocacy**. Out of an endless number of attitudes that exist, these six were chosen to be explained further as they are rather common attitudes that employees may have towards their work, and that might be influenced by sustainable business practices. The attitudes are results of a various range of variables, and this study focuses on how sustainable business practices can influence attitudes towards work. The attitudes that might be influenced or even created from sustainable business practices are not limited to these six covered in this thesis. It is important to acknowledge that individuals' responses to sustainable business practices vary on a personal and organizational level, depending on one's personal values and how the practices are implemented. Also, not all employees find sustainability practices a positive thing, but might have an opposite reaction and attitude. These attitudes will be discussed further in the chapter 'Theoretical framework'.

1.2 The aim of the study

The aim of the research is to answer the research question: "How sustainable business practices influence knowledge work employees' attitudes towards work?" The research seeks to find out what kind of sustainable business practices organizations can implement, what kind of attitudes they create, and what are the best sustainability practices to enhance desired attitudes. As several studies show, employee well-being has a strong link to employee engagement and business performance, and therefore the topic will be widely discussed also in the thesis. Even though the intentions were good, implementing sustainability practices does not necessarily have a positive impact on employees' attitudes, as poorly executed they might even have an opposite effect. The goal of sustainable business practices is to embrace strategies that integrate environmental governance and social equity into corporate operations. Furthermore, the practices aim to reduce adverse impacts on society and the environment while enhancing overall corporate performance and cohesion.

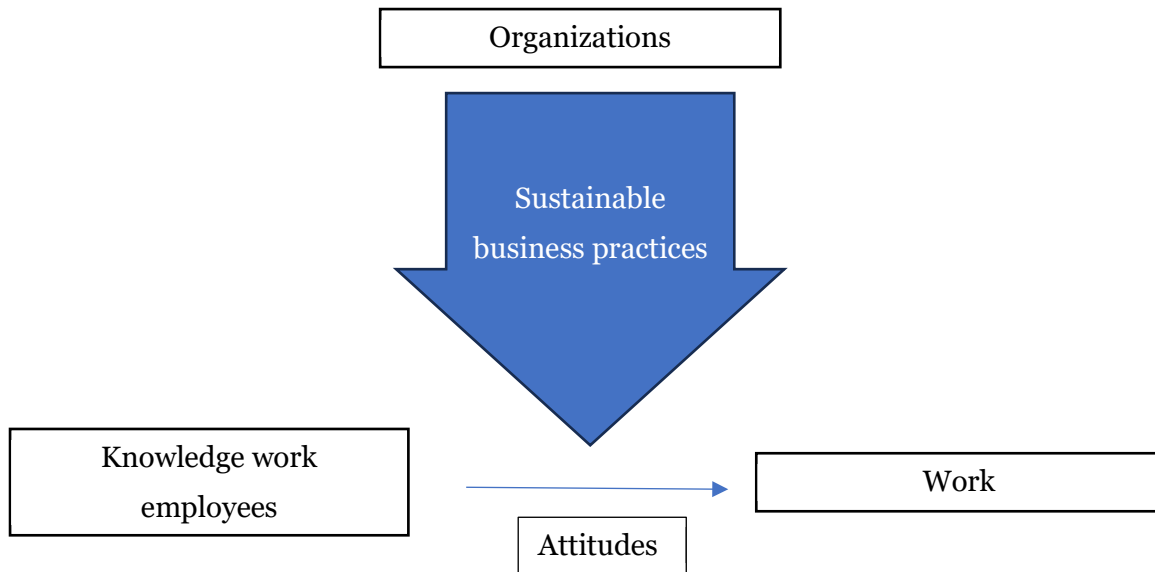


Figure 1 Illustration of the research

The employee scope is limited to knowledge workers of big corporations, whose primary capital is intellectual rather than manual, and daily activities usually consist of tasks such as problem-solving and decision making. Attitudes towards work vary greatly across industries, and so it is more convenient to draw conclusions when the research is focused on employees of a specific industry. Knowledge work employees' attitudes towards work are critical, not only in terms of individual well-being and productivity, but they also demand broader success of sustainability related goals on organizational level (Drucker, 1999). The purpose of limiting the scope to big corporations' employees was made with the assumption that they have larger resources to allocate to sustainability practices than small companies.

1.3 Standards and regulations

Throughout the years, various sets of standards, regulations and laws have been implemented to control organizations' operations, claims they are allowed to make and limit their negative impact on the environment and key stakeholders. Furthermore, transparency has become a more important factor than ever, not being an advantage anymore, but rather a requirement. Sustainability is a rising trend, and since the end of the 1990s businesses have systematically considered environmental issues in terms of different positions and levels within a firm, such as design, purchase, sale and extermination (Welford, 2000). To help and guide all sorts of organizations to establish and run environmental management systems, the United Kingdom released BS 7750, a standardized specification for an environmental management system in 1994 and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) released an environmental

management standard ISO 14001 in 1996 (Bae & Smardon, 2011). By setting systems and standards for organizations to follow, it is easier not only for companies to implement strategies and policies for them but also increases trust among their stakeholders.

As the latest addition for organizations' sustainability aspect, the European Union (EU) implemented Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), requiring large and listed companies to publish sustainability statements, reporting the social and environmental risks of their operations and the impact their activities have on people and the environment (European Commission, n.d.). CSRD is one of the outputs of the European Green Deal, aiming to reach a carbon-neutral Europe by year 2050 (Sustainia, n.d.). The implementation of the law began in 2024, as the companies of the first of four waves had to apply new rules for their financial reports, which were published in 2025. The implementation waves are determined by whether the company is listed, its total assets, revenue, and the average number of employees. By 2028, CSRD will affect approximately 50,000 companies, compared to 12,000 affected in 2024. The purpose of the CSRD is to help consumers, investors and other stakeholders to evaluate companies' sustainability performance, as the reports are built answering on datapoints, so the information will be clear, transparent and comparable to other companies' sustainability reports. This allows stakeholders to make conscious decisions regarding the company, as they have been provided with all the relevant information. Furthermore, as CSRD requires more companies to start implementing the new reporting law within the next few years, it will probably decrease the citizens' and employees' environmental related stress, as there will be more trustworthy information available.

Because of the improved laws and regulations regarding sustainability, companies might begin to consider putting more effort into their sustainability actions and policies, as they are or will be required to share the impacts and risks of their operations and business model. Organizations obviously seek to give out as good an impression to stakeholders, and as a rising trend sustainability is an essential aspect that consumers will pay increasing attention to. Due to the increasing awareness of the negative effects of climate change, it is more crucial than ever for organizations to place sustainability at the core of their policies and practices, not to fall behind their competitors.

Standards and regulations make it easier for investors to examine which companies to put their money in, as comparisons are much more convenient to proceed with, as they would be without controlled circumstances. For companies, investing in sustainable business practices will most likely improve organization's profitability in the long run due to several reasons, but at the time of implementation, new costs are created, and it might take time from the workforce to establish the strategies and policies into the practice. The costs arising at the

beginning of implementation and uncertainty of the results and payback that will result may create reluctance for organizations to consider such practices in the first place. Therefore, it is essential to provide evidence for organizations of what kind of positive side-effects, such as increased employee engagement and profitability, sustainable business practices may bring along. Furthermore, because of increasing awareness and requirements regarding sustainability, it won't be that easy for organizations to stand out for their sustainability actions next to their competitors, but they need to put more effort in sustainability practices to appear more attractive for the potential investors.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Common attitudes

On this chapter, six common attitudes towards work that employees may have towards work in general are presented. In this thesis, the aim is to examine how sustainable business practices influence the knowledge work employees' attitudes towards work. Thus, the impact of these practices might strengthen or weaken these attitudes, have no impact at all, or influence other attitudes that are not discussed in this chapter. The first four attitudes, higher employee engagement, a sense of moral pride, perceived organizational support and job satisfaction are positive attitudes that organizations wish to see from their employees, as they have a positive impact on employees' performance and profitability. The fifth attitude, organizational commitment, can occur in either positive or negative sense to employees. The different dimensions of commitment will be presented and discussed. The sixth attitude, critical advocacy, is a common negative attitude towards work, that may also come up as a response to sustainability practices. Such an attitude might be caused by organizations' poor implementation of sustainability practices, bad communication, attempts to greenwash, or individual's personal beliefs and attitude towards sustainability issues. Positive attitudes that may arise from sustainability practices often go hand in hand with each other, so also having a negative attitude weakens several aspects at once. As will be noted, several attitudes overlap and have similar characteristics, making it difficult to distinguish or differentiate one from another, as they often go hand in hand.

2.1.1 Higher employee engagement

As a term, employee engagement has aroused interest for a couple of reasons. First of all, it has been proved to positively correlate with crucial business performance elements, such as low employee retention rates, productivity, feeling of safety and customer satisfaction rate (Little & Little, 2006). Even the most traditional organizational factors, such as job satisfaction rates, have not been proven to have an equally powerful impact on these elements like employee engagement has. Additionally, the elements of the workplace that are within the local manager's control are measured by the items used in employee engagement surveys (Little & Little, 2006). These surveys typically assess factors such as leadership style, recognition and the effectiveness of communication – areas in which the manager can make a difference. To put it short, the local manager has a direct impact on employee engagement. However, despite the ordinariness of the term and how often it is discussed, understanding the definition of employee engagement is not straightforward for several reasons. First of all, there are various models and theories that try to explain what is meant by the concept of "employee engagement". According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2010), one cause for the

confusion is that the term evoked more interest amongst practitioners than academic society when it was first introduced. As the unclear term has created so much bafflement, Ferguson and Carstairs (2005) raised a question whether “employee engagement” is even a valid and reliable concept after all.

As a result of the practitioners’ initial interest in the concept, the term has got a more functional and pragmatic meaning, away from the scientific and theoretical approach. In its more pragmatic use, the emphasis is often on direct, tangible results that can be implemented quickly in an organizational business context, rather than establishing strategies or concepts from empirical research. Thus, Saks (2006) highlighted that the data mainly consists of practitioner journals where the information is collected from practice and consultancy firms, instead of validated theory and empirical research. Therefore, this approach can be problematic, as the data collected from practitioner journals and consultancy firms might not be thoroughly tested or validated through systematic research methods, which can lead to inaccurate and untruthful conclusions. Also, these parties may also have financial or professional incentives to promote certain ideas that align with their own business interests. In these cases the results might not be trustworthy, as the results may be guided to desired direction. As a result of the confusion regarding the practitioners’ approach to employee engagement, it is difficult to establish one, all-embracing definition that has the same meaning among all users.

Generally, employee engagement is characterized by practitioners as follows:

1. Organizational dedication, especially affectual (or emotional) and ongoing dedication to the organization. In summary, an engaged employee wants to keep working within the organization.
2. Putting in additional effort, referring to an employee’s desire to sign up for voluntary roles and responsibilities, and discretionary actions that advance the organization’s productivity and efficiency.

Robinson et al (2004) define engagement as “A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization...” According to Macey and Schneider (2009), employee engagement is a desired condition that has an organizational meaning that consists of both attitudinal and behavioral components, such as participation, passion, eagerness, focus and energy. Bakker and Leiter (2010) describe work engagement as a distinct and well-defined state that can be applied to practice as well as empirical research. Additionally, Bakker and Leiter disagree with the use of the term

“employee engagement” as a catch-all term for ideas like organizational citizenship behavior and behavioral engagement, to name a few.

Even though there is no generally accepted theory to define employee engagement, few similarities exist in academia. Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) and Saks and Gruman (2014) present that according to these similarities, we can conclude that employee engagement is:

1. A motivating condition including behavioral, emotional and cognitive components
2. Linked to favorable results at both the organizational level (performance quality) and individual level (personal role performance, growth and development)

In the end, despite the ambiguity around the terminology and the idea of what employee engagement stands for, the majority of employers still aspire to have engaged workers. Because of this, businesses strive to conduct their businesses in a way that encourages and strengthens employee engagement. When employees are committed to their work and have their values and goals aligned with the organization, they are extremely valuable assets while organizations tackle problems and challenges arising in continually adapting environment and unexpected circumstances.

Taking the opposite stand, Bates (2004) claims that the long and predictable careers with a paternalistic management approach have come to an end and thus the long-lasting relationship between employees and companies are no longer expected from either behalf these days. According to this statement, employee engagement is not as essential and desired attitude, as employees are most likely about to switch jobs anyway. These days, employees desire to be in charge of their own careers, have a sense of freedom, switch jobs and companies and utilize their experience from company to another in order to climb the industrial ladder and gain better positions more than in the past. Lyons et al. (2015) found that especially Millennials and Gen Z are significantly more likely to change jobs if they experience dissatisfaction with organizational values, poor development opportunities or that their expectations are not met. This finding supports Bates’ (2004) claim that long-lasting relationships between employees and companies are not expected anymore, as the younger generations don’t value long-term employment or organization loyalty highly. Individuals prioritize self-development and satisfaction over loyalty towards a single employer. Technological advancements, outsourcing and restructuring create instability and uncertainty among the workforce, which forces employees to seek for new jobs, but also encourages them to stay one step ahead and leave voluntarily for new positions. Although, employers can also benefit from shorter careers, as temporary contracts are more cost-efficient for them, provide flexibility to scale their workforce up or down rapidly based on current business needs and enables them a possibility to assess the performance of the new potential permanent employee

without the need to get them fired if they are not suitable for the position. In summary, the working life culture has experienced a dramatic shift, and it has led to declining employee engagement, but also to increasing interest towards it. However, employee engagement should not be neglected by organizations, as the relevance of it is only increasing in terms of how powerful an advantage it can bring over the competitors.

The relationship between employee engagement and shared organizational values is critical for enhancing successful business performance and fostering a positive workplace culture. Research points out that when employees perceive alignment between their personal values with organizations values, engagement levels increase, resulting in improved outcomes. Dixit and Naredran (2019) address that a strong alignment of shared values between employees and the organization fosters higher employee engagement. Hence, this emotional and intellectual commitment enhances organizational performance and sustainability in the long run, ultimately having a positive impact on key business performance indicators, revenue, and profitability.

A study conducted by Kaur, Hassan and Kaur (2023) highlights that common values between employees and organizations enhance the strength of employee engagement, fostering work motivation and dedication. Furthermore, it is essential for an organization to demonstrate and communicate explicitly how its goals and purpose connect to employees' personal values, as it fosters a sense of belonging and commitment among the workforce (Baltzley, 2016). According to Cartwright and Cooper (2008), people with increased levels of psychological well-being are more effective problem-solvers, have an optimistic attitude towards change and enhance a positive atmosphere at the workplace. Apart from job and industry specific skills, these are essential employee characteristics for organizations to succeed, that the companies need to aim to nourish. From this we can conclude that employee psychological well-being is a crucial factor in supporting high engagement levels and therefore requires an inevitable position at the core of the organization strategy. Employee well-being will be discussed further later in this thesis.

2.1.2 A sense of moral pride

Another common attitude, a sense of moral pride, is what employees often experience when working at an organization which they believe is doing the "right thing". Moral pride is driven by the alignment of employees' personal values and the sustainable actions of the organization they work for. This positive feeling occurs when individuals perceive themselves or their organization as doing something ethically correct or socially responsible. Employees view corporate social sustainability as a moral action, and if it's in alignment with their own values, it fosters feelings of gratitude and pride (Rupp et al., 2006). In addition, Ellemers et al. (2011)

state that when employees believe their organization is acting ethically, they feel more pride. This supports the employees' moral identification with the organization and strengthens also other critical attitudes, employee engagement and job satisfaction. Glavas and Piderit (2009) present that employees who find their organizations acting positively for society experience deep emotional attachment, personal fulfillment, and job satisfaction. Based on this, we can conclude that a sense of moral pride is an essential link between sustainability practices and positive employee outcomes, i.e. organizational sustainability practices strengthen the sense of moral pride towards work.

Naturally, the multitude of moral pride varies individually, depending on how much an employee values CSR and how organizations implement sustainable business practices in their operations. Thus, moral pride is one of the most crucial motivators for those employees who actively stand for and engage in CSR, as they feel like "a good person" for working at an ethical organization (Jones et al., 2014). A sense of moral pride often leads to other positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction.

2.1.3 Perceived organizational support

Perceived organizational support (POS) stands for the degree to which employees believe that their organizations respect their contributions and authentically cares about the employees' well-being (Eisenberg et al., 1986). This organizational support theory (OST) is rooted in Social Exchange Theory (SET), that suggests that employees and organizations' relationships are based on reciprocal exchange of resources; employees give their effort, time and performance, while organizations give support, rewards and resources (Blau, 1964). As an attitude, organizational support is a psychological and emotional belief experienced by employees, that they have about their employer's actions, intentions and attitudes. As organizational support is an employee's own perception, it is more crucial how the employee experiences the work situation, rather what the actual work situation is. According to Beheshtifar and Zare (2012), the support that employees perceive to receive from the organization is in alignment with several favorable outcomes, such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and therefore may be a vital indicator for determining their attitudes towards the organization. When employees feel that they're heard, receive feedback, are rewarded and their supervisors act supportive, the sense of organizational support is strengthened (Robbins & Judge, 2009; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Kuvaas, 2006). Thus, rewarding employees is a practical form of social aspect's sustainability practices. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found after reviewing over 70 studies that employees perceived organizational support to match the strongest with fairness, supervisor support, and rewards and favorable working conditions. Moreover, POS was linked in the same study to positive results, such as job satisfaction and affective commitment, benefiting both parties the

employees and the organization. Based on the literature review, giving value to employees will reward also the organization in turn.

2.1.4 Job satisfaction

Strongly associated with the previous attitudes, employee engagement, a sense of moral pride and perceived organizational support, is job satisfaction – the most studied job attitude, is one of the common outcomes that results from organizations' successful implementation of sustainable business practices. Locke (1976) describes it as a pleasant or positive emotional state that results from an individual's appreciation towards their experience or job. Job satisfaction is an internal state, the sum of beliefs and feelings that an employee has about their job (Aziri, 2011). Supporting this definition, Judge et al. (2017) state that job satisfaction is a general attitude that addresses how pleasant an employee sees their job. Positive feelings strengthen satisfaction and can lead to higher motivation, performance and organizational commitment, while negative feelings indicate dissatisfaction and can lead to turnover and burnout. To put it simple, Robbins (2003) suggests job satisfaction to be individuals' general attitudes towards their jobs.

Job satisfaction is a high priority for organizations, as it is one of the most essential factors that impact efficiency and effectiveness of business organizations (Aziri, 2011). As job satisfaction is an implication of employee engagement and their feelings towards work, motivation and productivity, it is a vital Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for organizations. Job satisfaction can be measured, for example, through employee surveys. Satisfied employees are proven to be more productive and eager to work hard for good results, while staying away from contrary, harmful actions (Judge et al., 2001; Riketta, 2008). Moreover, satisfied employees most likely talk about their workplace in a positive sense, improving the company's brand image in and out of work. A brand image is not important to only make the company seem more attractive to customers or potential employee candidates, but also to current employees. Thus, satisfied employees foster a positive workplace culture, creating a favorable positive loop of impact.

Organizations can aim to have a positive impact on employees' job satisfaction through implementing sustainable business practices and strengthening the alignment of values and the individuals' feeling that they are part of something meaningful. Glavas and Piderit (2009) found that employees are more satisfied with their jobs when they believe that the organization's CSR actions reflect authentic values. Moreover, Rosso et al. (2010) state that doing meaningful work, often driven by prosocial contributions, has a positive impact on job satisfaction. Furthermore, high perceived organizational support has proven to increase job satisfaction (Aban et al., 2019), which organizations can enhance by implementing sustainable

business practices. However, practices that bring satisfaction to some employees might not bring satisfaction to others or might create even dissatisfaction for someone else.

Sustainable business practices may play an essential role also in the recruitment phase, as candidates are looking for a workplace where they will feel belonging and satisfied with their job. Individuals often look for and are selected into experiences and environments that match their personalities, forming a person-environment fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005); Schneider, 1987). Having sustainable business practices in place, organizations can appear more attractive for employee candidates who value sustainability highly and look for a person-environment fit between themselves and the organization to work for. Supporting this, Ostroff and Zhan (2012) present the person-environment fit as an essential tool in recruitment decision making and retention. Hence, in recruitment situations both the candidates and organizations can assess compatibility by taking the person-environment fit into consideration.

According to Schneider's Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) framework (1987), individuals are attracted to organizations that correlate with their identity and values, and organizations choose the best candidates based on this detected alignment. Successful recruitment, resulting in a good person-environment fit, reinforces job satisfaction and commitment (Jones et al., 2014). Furthermore, the fit between an individual's personality and the modal personality of the occupation and the similarity with others at the occupation have a positive impact on job satisfaction (Törnroos et al., 2019). Attracting workforce who find sustainability issues important will foster a place of sustainability in the workplace culture, as a uniform value among employees. Moreover, a high fit has been found to associate with improved job satisfaction and well-being among employees and decreased turnover rates (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003).



Figure 2 ASA framework

However, researchers have found that job satisfaction is after all relatively stable (Staw & Cohen-Sharash, 2005), and not dependent on the time, workplace, or occupation (Staw & Ross, 1985). Based on this conclusion, organizations and their sustainable actions and operations don't have as much power over employees' job satisfaction, as it is more of a stable attitude and not influenced by individual factors. Therefore, it is not expected to see sustainability practices to significantly influence employees' job satisfaction on this survey either. It is important to keep in mind that employees' feelings and opinions regarding sustainability issues vary a lot, and the same sustainability practices have different impacts on everyone's job satisfaction and other attitudes. Moreover, the two research mentioned that these conclusions are relatively outdated and might not be as accurate in today's working environment. As sustainability-related issues have drawn increasing attention in recent years and sustainability is becoming a more important value for employees, it is safe to assume that sustainability practices may have a larger impact on job satisfaction in the future.

2.1.5 Organizational commitment

Similar attitude to employee engagement is organizational commitment. According to Baatham et al. (2010), organizational commitment stands for the degree of the employees' loyalty and support showed to the organization, while Robbins (2005) describes it as a positive correlation between the commitment and the desire to stay in the organization. Even though both of these definitions refer more to the attitude towards an organization rather than the work itself, the same principle and core idea applies in this context as well. Based on research, high job satisfaction results to increased organizational commitment (Aban et al., 2019). Companies should be mindful and pay close attention to their employees' level of organizational commitment as it is, together with job satisfaction strongly associated to turnover intention (Luz et al., 2018). If employees don't experience organizational commitment or aren't satisfied with their jobs, they are likely to resign. Thus, in addition to these factors, individual demographic variables, such as personal experiences at work have influence on employees' turnover intentions. Yousef (2017) highlights the importance of organizational commitment as in addition to turnover intention, it influences also job satisfaction, job performance, and attitudes toward organizational change. Thus, organizational commitment can be examined from two perspectives; intention to quit and increased job satisfaction, performance and loyalty towards the organization. A study by Hunton and Norman (2010) highlights that it is essential for organizations to review and monitor their policies that focus on escalating organizational commitment after implementing them, as those employees that are motivated easily to respect their connection with the organization, are more likely to remain at the company. Hence, the benefits of such policies

could be wasted due to poor communication. In this study, the focus regarding organizational commitment is on the intention to quit.

In terms of intention to quit, organizational commitment is often divided into three distinctions (Meyer & Allen, 1991):

1. **Affective commitment:** The emotional attachment an employee has to the organization. Employees that experience high affective commitment stay with the organization because they want to do so, i.e. they have a desire to stay
2. **Normative commitment:** A sense of an obligation to stay with the organization. Employees with strong normative commitment feel like they have to stay, because it is a morally right thing to do.
3. **Continuance commitment:** Commitment based on the costs that the employee associates with leaving the organization. Employees with high continuance commitment remain at the organization because they feel like they have to, either because perceived lack of better job opportunities or personal sacrifices associated with the leaving. Hence, the employee sees the current situation the best they can get for now, as the price of leaving would be bigger than the price of staying, even if they were not fully satisfied.

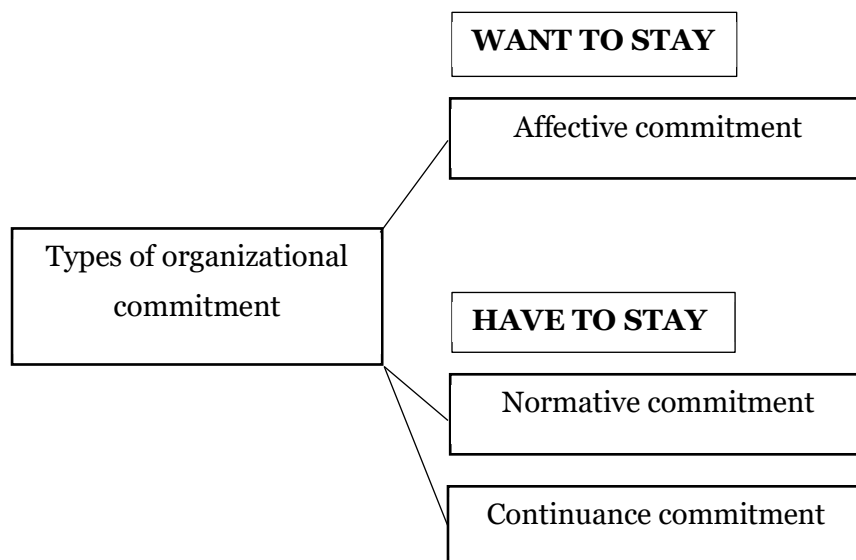


Figure 3: Organizational commitment framework by Mayer and Allen (1991), composed by the author.

Hence, commitment can be based either on a desire to stay, or a feeling of “have to stay”. To an organization it is a more complex case; committed employees tend to have lower turnover rates and therefore save costs related to recruitment and training of new employees. Although,

if the employees remain with the organization only because they feel like they have to and not because they want to (except with affective commitment), can they be happy and productive employees? All three forms of organizational commitment have impact on the length that employees stay with the organization. However, organizations should pay attention to how to increase the feeling of affective commitment among employees, enhancing the desire to stay with the organization, rather than feeling obliged or doomed to do so.

2.1.6 Critical advocacy

Besides the positive attitudes and feelings that employees often have towards work and sustainable business practices implemented in organizations can raise, also negative and controversial attitudes might come up, such as critical advocacy. According to Vlancho et al. (2014), employees are highly sensitive and perceptive about corporate social responsibility authenticity and examine critically organizations' initiatives. Hence, when sustainable business practices are poorly implemented, disconnected from employee well-being or core practices, or come across as greenwashing, employees might feel frustrated, disappointed or ethical conflict (Ramus & Montiel, 2005; Glavas & Piderit, 2009). In such situations, sustainability actions with good intentions might have the opposite effect among employees, also making it even harder to convince the workforce about sustainability related matters in the future once the trust has been compromised. Indeed, not all organizations have pure intentions and practice greenwashing, in which case the employees' reactions and attitudes are justified and reasonable. Perceived misalignment with employees' own values will have a negative impact also on job satisfaction, a sense of moral pride, and employee engagement. Thus, employees who value sustainability deeply may become critical instead of staying neutral or supporting and begin to actively demand accountability and change as a vocal advocate.

As said, critical advocacy towards sustainability practices may occur whether the organization has pure or artificial intentions. Avoiding this controversial attitude and negative response, organizations need to establish authentic, well-implemented, transparent, and relevant practices to enhance sustainability in their actions and operations and communicate them clearly and explicitly to key stakeholders. Thus, employees who are pessimistic or cynicist by their nature are more likely to anticipate negative consequences from organizational changes and perceive ambiguous and even neutral information as threatening (Wanous et al., 2000) and believe that organizations are acting primarily out of self-interest instead of authenticity (Stanley et al., 2005). These types of employees are automatically more resistant to changes and don't tend to trust managerial intentions.

2.2 Sustainable business practices

Sustainable business practices, also referred to as sustainability practices in this thesis, are organizations' established actions and strategies, aiming to protect the environment, promote social well-being, and secure long-term financial viability. Such practices are rooted in the concept of sustainable development, defined as meeting the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Closely similar, the term "sustainability" refers to meeting today's demand without sacrificing future needs (Abdulhafedh, 2021). Supporting this definition, Aluru & Tej (2023) state that in business, sustainability stands for balancing environmental, social, and governance needs while ensuring long-lasting success. The message of these definitions is that if organizations have sustainability at the core of their strategy and activities, business will most likely stay in operations as it is ensuring the continuity without compromising environment, people or governance. Yet, as it is rather impossible to act perfectly sustainably without the need to make sacrifices in one sector or another, organizations can implement sustainable business practices to support and guide them to act more ethically.

Sustainable business practices refer to organizational strategies that incorporate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations into operations and activities. By encouraging ethical behavior and boosting long-term profitability, these strategies help and guide businesses to have a positive impact on the environment and society and limit the harm and negative impacts that they cause on them. Moreover, this thesis examines the impact that these practices have on employees' attitudes towards work. Westerman et al (2020) emphasize that at the heart of organizational sustainability is an orientation towards integrating the organization's sustainability related goals with various dimensions of well-being of the employees and the surrounding communities and stakeholders.

Vesal, Siahtiri and O'Class (2021) suggest that by creating sustainability associations through establishing social and environmental practices in companies' operations and communicating these to customers, companies can strengthen the position of sustainability in their brand image. Moreover, Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014) highlight that firms that are committed to sustainability practices in their operations create a more credible brand image, which will therefore have a positive impact on business performance. Thus, in order for sustainable business practices to gain positive results and avoid the suspicion of greenwashing, the companies must pervasively follow and communicate their execution of these practices (Kapitan, Kennedy and Berth, 2019). Although as mentioned, even if sustainable business practices were implemented with good intentions and authentic reasons,

employees might still respond with critical advocacy, especially those who have pessimistic or cynical attitudes towards work to begin with.

Respect for people and the desire to protect the environment has set the framework for modern culture of management towards sustainability (Chomac-Pierzecka et al, 2024). Hence, organizations can implement various sustainable business practices in their daily operations and activities to enhance their economic viability while fulfilling social and environmental responsibilities. These practices not only contribute to sustainability but also help to strengthen the employee engagement by embodying their values and commitment to sustainability. Such practices can be for example integrating sustainable business practices into their strategic value chain, utilizing data to inform sustainability strategies and adopting environmentally and socially responsible measures to ensure resilience during economic instability while promoting long-term viability (Shayed et al, 2024). Furthermore, Srivastava (2024) suggests that organizations can adopt sustainable business practices such as aligning business goals with sustainable development goals (SDGs), implementing ethical practices, strengthening the engagement of its stakeholders, mitigating negative environmental impacts, promoting social equity, and enhancing corporate reputation through transparent reporting and leadership commitment. Supporting the practices mentioned above, Rohith (2024) states that responsible waste management, green technologies, circular economy principles, ethical supply chain management and fostering innovation to address global challenges like climate change are sustainable business practices that organizations can implement in their operations.

Next, the environmental, social and governance aspects will be presented and discussed further. The distinction between these should not be simplified or expected for each practice to sit in one category only, as many sustainability practices overlap with others as well. Finally, the conflict between these aspects is discussed, as usually employees and other stakeholders and governance have different priorities.

As the term is most likely new for most of the interview participants, the term will be explained to them at the beginning of the interviews, and examples of each aspect will be provided to support the understanding.

2.2.1 Environmental aspect

As people are becoming more aware of environmental issues and companies are required to be more transparent about their operations than ever before, greenwashing is not that easy for companies as people are expecting more concrete actions instead of just claims without proof. Even if the business or its operations don't have a direct impact on environment, there are several ways to incorporate environmental-friendly decisions and activities into daily

operations and activities, furthering organizational sustainability impact. Environmental business practices can include both tangible and intangible factors.

Tangible factors can be for example switching to eco-friendly energy sources and preferring energy efficient technologies to cut down energy consumption and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Providing effortless waste recycling system at the office encourages employees to pay closer attention to packaging materials and maybe adapting the practices also to home.

Intangible practices can be remote work policies, so the employees cut down commuting emissions, choosing to collaborate only with suppliers that have certified sustainability practices, and providing education for the employees about environmental issues. Furthermore, commuting emissions can also be minimized by encouraging to choose cycling or public transportation instead of private cars, by offering financial incentives for these options.

2.2.2 Social aspect

Social sustainability covers all important stakeholders involved – organizations' own workforce, customers and affected communities. Furthermore, the social aspect is not limited to working hours, as it has also a far-reaching impact on employees' free time and quality of life in general. Social business practices for employees can be for example an organization providing flexible working hours and the possibility to work remotely, health benefits, offering training and upskilling possibilities and providing safe and inclusive working environment. Also compensation policies, such as fair and transparent wage, promotion programs and bonuses are forms of social sustainability practices. On customer level, it can be ensuring honest advertising, data privacy and customer feedback channels. Organizations' sustainability practices can be reached out to affected communities by providing the employees a paid volunteer day at some local site, such as elderly care.

As discussed in chapter 2.3.1, knowledge work employees face lots of pressure from keeping up with the improving systems and technologies. It is crucial that organizations ensure that they have high-quality trainings, workshops, webinars and development possibilities to provide their employees, so that they sense the feeling of succeeding in their tasks and not fall behind. Not only is it important that organizations provide these social sustainability practices, such as training possibilities and health benefits for their employees, but they also need to be informed and communicated clearly to them. Therefore, it is essential to research whether and how these practices are communicated in respondents' organizations, as the practices are basically useless if the information is difficult to understand or not communicated properly.

2.2.3 Governance aspect

Governance aspect is indeed the most complex and blurry of these, as the sustainable business practices are implemented through establishing new sustainability strategies and goals, adjusting corporate culture and building a bigger picture, rather than making concrete and tangible actions. The governance aspect basically stands for how the organization sets sustainability at the core of all decisions and operations it does and how well the promises and communications regarding sustainability are in alignment with the actions. The best way to examine sustainability from governance aspect is to elaborate whether the organization culture and communication is in line with implemented sustainability practices. Thus, governance sets the possibilities and opportunities for all sustainability practices, like a basis or a foundation. For example, if an organization claimed that they encourage their employees to bicycle to work for environmental and health reasons, but don't offer any benefit to support the action, the governance aspect is not functioning properly. However, as governance aspect is relatively complex and rooted deeper than other aspects, the results and effects of these implementations are most likely seen only after a longer period of time, making it also more difficult to measure in the short run.

2.2.4 Conflict of aspects

The first and most important goal of an organization is to maximize profit. This congenital characteristic creates a contradiction between enhancing employee well-being and engagement and profit maximization, as the former require investments that have no guaranteed results or payback, as they depend on various reasons. This inherent conflict is predominantly rooted in the traditional business mindset that prioritizes immediate financial results over sustainable business practices, which are still a relatively new concept, and other perceived as costly and complex. However, as people are becoming more aware of sustainability issues, societal values shift and environmental concerns become increasingly pressing, businesses are experiencing a growing pressure from stakeholders to reconcile these seemingly opposing priorities. Thus, employees feel more engaged to an organizations when their values align with each other. Due to this, saving costs by not implementing sustainable practices may actually create more costs, as organizations face massive expenses if employee turnover is high and new employees need to be hired and trained to their positions. As proved, implementing sustainable practices is a complex procedure that requires many approaches to be taken into consideration and careful strategic planning.

One of the main reasons for the conflict between governance and other aspects is the cost implications associated with adopting sustainable practices, as depending on their magnitude, may require substantial upfront investments. However, while the initial costs may be high, the

long-term benefits, such as reduced carbon footprint, enhanced brand loyalty, improved employee engagement and cost-efficiency can contribute significantly to organizations' financial performance. Yet, as also investors are increasingly prioritizing Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria when making investment decisions, organizations that can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability issues may find themselves better positioned to attract investment and secure their future profitability. Wu, Zhu and Tao (2024) highlight that organization's positive ESG performance signals sustainability and responsible management to potential investors, and can mitigate stock price volatility, and enhance market stability. Furthermore, Ma (2024) states that robust ESG practices can attract more interest among investors, by advancing corporate transparency and strengthening stakeholder trust, ultimately resulting in more positive reputation of a company and improved operational efficiency. Thus, it is safe to assume that establishing sustainable business practices will draw increasing attention and interest among investors also in the future, but there is no guarantee of how significant the impact will be and what kind of financial advantages it will bring.

2.3 Knowledge work

As the study is limited to knowledge work and workers, it is essential to understand what is meant by the term, and what kind of challenges these type of professions might face in their work, that might affect positively or negatively to their work. Organizations can promote social sustainability by ensuring that profession specific aspects are taken into consideration for example when planning office spaces or considering what kind of benefits to offer for the employees.

2.3.1 Knowledge work and worker defined

Knowledge work refers to tasks that first and foremost include processing and application of knowledge and information. Furthermore, Kelloway and Barling (2000) define knowledge work as behavior within organization consists of creating, applying, transmitting and acquiring knowledge. In today's modern corporate world, knowledge work has become crucial component for the success and growth of organizations. As knowledge work differs greatly from physical work, as it typically involves problem solving, strategic thinking and skills to interpret data, rather than repetitive tasks, it is crucial for the organizations to ensure that employees have the right state of mind in order to succeed. As knowledge work relies on brainpower rather than physical strength, employees' mental well-being and sense of engagement play a crucial role in how well they perform on tasks and function in fast-paced working environment.

2.3.2 Knowledge work challenges

As knowledge work is highly dependent on information systems and technology, it is crucial that the employees working in such roles have their skills and knowledge up to date. Technologies improve constantly and builds pressure to workforce to keep up with the pace, as otherwise the employees will fall behind and experience failure. In addition to the pressure that comes from continuous need to upgrade skills, knowledge workers often face challenges such as maintaining a decent work-life balance, managing stress from high demands at work. Unlike at physical labour, knowledge work is typically completed at computer and other electronic devices, which enables the employee to keep working outside of office hours at home and to be reached by telephone, blurring the line between work and leisure, causing damage to work-life balance. Studies show that poor work-life balance can lead to increased risk of a burnout, decreased job satisfaction and ultimately negatively affect job performance. Westover (2024) highlights that in order to minimize burnout effects, there is an essential need for strategies to support work-life balance.

As discussed, knowledge work consists of brainwork and typically does not require physical effort, there are lots of risks and challenges that are derived from such passive workdays. Lack of body movement and physical effort, sitting by the computer several hours a day and ignoring the importance of physical health can lead to increased risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and pain in back and neck due to bad posture, to name a few examples. Organizations can have a positive impact on this aspect by providing ergonomical and adjustable working conditions, allowing possibilities to take breaks for moving around and stretching and promoting the importance of physical health.

These challenges underline the need for effective strategies that enhance employee well-being and engagement. When organizations plan sustainable business practices, it is crucial to acknowledge the unique characteristics and needs of knowledge workers, so they can not only attract top talent but also retain and nurture it, ensuring a thriving working environment and culture that has a competitive edge against rivals. Tackling these issues is an essential part for of promoting social sustainability.

2.4 Employee well-being

In organizational research, employee well-being has become one of the most studied outcomes of businesses. However, a cohesive theoretical framework that integrates diverse research streams of distinct well-being metrics is still missing. Martela (2025) highlights that in order to understand what employee well-being stands for, it is important to comprehend what well-being in general means. Martela distinguishes well-being into two categories: functional well-being, that comprises attributes of *having*, *loving* and *doing*, and perceived well-being that

comprises *being*. According to Martela, the functional dimension encompasses “satisfaction of human needs at work”, and recognizes humans as biological, social and active creatures, while the aspect of perceived well-being “is about experiencing well-being at work” and focuses more on humans as creatures to whom experiences are meaningful and seek for positive emotions, such as joy and motivation. Thus, Martela believes that these two dimensions are interconnected, with functional well-being serving as a foundation for the more subjective and experiential aspect of well-being in the workplace.

2.4.1 Connection with employee engagement

Robertson & Birch (2010) claim that the attempts to improve employee engagement will only reach a limited level of success, if the employees’ psychological well-being is not taken care of. As discussed in chapter 2.2.1, employee well-being and engagement correlate positively with each other, so as well as employee engagement goes hand in hand with productivity levels, efficiency and reduced absenteeism, so does employee well-being. This only strengthens the claim that it is only beneficial for organizations to put emphasis on employee well-being in order to reach greater results. In recent years, many academics have regarded human assets as crucial in reaching both financial and sustainable goals (Spooner & Kaine, 2010). Thus, employee well-being and the health of the workforce rose to be more important topics than ever before. In order to successfully establish sustainable human resource management practices, organizational sustainability has to be linked with HRM that focuses on developing healthy and resilient employees to establish strong and sustainable practices in an organization. A study conducted by Madero-Gómez et al (2023) states that sustainable practices in the workplace can improve the workforce’s well-being and lower the pollution in the environment, while also supporting company viability. Furthermore, the authors stress the need for organizations to establish sustainable human resource management practices in order to minimize the adverse impact on employee well-being and take advantage of the savings that are generated through sustainable initiatives. Human resource management has a central role in whether the sustainable business practices are succeeding. Furthermore, as the most crucial asset of organizations, i.e. employees are dependent on it, the impact that HRM has can reach enormous levels, in good or bad.

2.4.2 Connection with productivity

Shin and Konrad (2017) emphasize the claim that organizations’ productivity and performance are highly dependent on their employees. Providing a relatively strong and surprising insight, Wright and Cropanzano (2000) even proved with their research that employee well-being is a stronger premonition of job performance than job satisfaction is. Supporting this point of view, in a study of 16,000 employees, Donald et al (2005) found that

almost a quarter of the variance in reported levels of workforce profitability was predicted by their mental well-being, the experienced engagement of the organization to the employee and provided resources and quality of communication. In addition, Harter et (2002) found from analyzing data from almost 8,000 business units in 36 companies that there is a strong correlation between employee survey scores and organizations' business accomplishments, such as satisfied customers, high productivity levels, profitability, employee retention and low levels of absence. Both of these research reports suggest that psychological well-being and employee engagement are interconnected. Employees with higher psychological well-being are more likely engaged in their work, showing more enthusiasm and commitment to the company and their tasks, while promoting a positive atmosphere at the workplace. Whereas when employees are engaged, they experience greater job satisfaction and a sense of purpose, which nourishes their overall psychological well-being, creating a mutually reinforcing positive cycle.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, the focus group selection, research methodology, and the process of conducting the interviews will be presented.

3.1 Focus group

As discussed, the study is limited to employees that work at knowledge work. The only further requirement of the focus group participants was that they need to work in a big corporation. Geographical location did not play any role on the selection, as the interviews could also be conducted online. The requirement was due to the assumption that big corporations tend to have better resources and possibilities to implement sustainable business practices if they wish to do so, compared to small start-ups for example. In modern corporate world, it is more a rule than an expectation that organizations state sustainability as one of their driving values, but it is far from guaranteed that all organizations actually place sustainability at the core of their strategies and operations, or implement it any other how in their decision-making processes. However, still this day as sustainable reporting laws and regulations, such as CSRD are just beginning to function, it is still relatively possible for organizations to practice greenwashing by making distorted claims regarding their sustainability practices. The first wave of CSRD came into effect for large, listed corporations to include sustainability statement in their financial report for financial year 2024. However, consumers are still relatively ignorant and unaware of the interpretation of sustainability issues, but this will definitely improve rapidly during upcoming years. Thus, we can assume that big corporation employees have some knowledge, expectations or assumptions about sustainability practices and therefore they are the best participants for this study, as they must have been informed about these from the behalf of the organization.

3.2 Data collection

The data for this research was collected through semi-structured interviews. This chapter will provide a description of the chosen interview method and how the interviews were conducted.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

To ensure that deep knowledge and insights are gathered, the data for this study will be collected through interviews. For the research method, a semi-structured interview was chosen to be the most suitable one due to its flexibility; it allows the participants to freely share their thoughts and has room for follow-up questions and further discussion on topics that seem to provide interesting insights. A semi-structured interview gives the interviewer the flexibility to probe further into particular answers, ask follow-up questions and rearrange the questions if needed to better fit the conversation flow, in contrast to a structured interview,

which uses a set of preset questions asked in a predetermined order (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023).

Even though an interview is one of the most important methods for collecting qualitative data, it carries some risks and deficiencies that should be acknowledged. To begin with, there lies a risk of simplifying and idealizing the interview setting, if the respondents are optimistically assumed to be competent and moral truth-tellers, “acting in the service of science and producing the data needed” to share their personal experiences and knowledge (Alvesson, 2023). Furthermore, some quantitative researchers consider data collected through empirical methods, such as interviews, not to be trustworthy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), as they regard interviews not to differ from ordinary daily conversations (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Interview has faced criticism as a data collection method also because of how time-consuming it is; lots of preparation is required before conducting the interviews (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023) and interviewing the participants, transcription and response analysis take a considerable amount of time (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

Despite the deficiencies of the interview as a data collection method, it is the most suitable choice to serve the purpose of this research. Interviews allow the researcher to gain deeper understanding of the respondents’ thoughts, experiences and opinions as they get to describe their answers in their own words instead of using scales or numbers or other predetermined selections. Furthermore, depending on the interview structure and position, the interviewer can actively adjust the framework and conversation depending on the responses and other circumstances.

3.2.2 Romanticism

The framework composed by Alvesson (2003) presents that as research methods there are three theoretical perspective methods: neopositivism that studies facts, romanticism that studies meaning, and finally localism, that has a skeptical and critical approach to interview as an instrument to begin with and aims to break the traditional stance of interviews. Out of these three, this study’s interviews will follow the romanticism approach, as the goal is to gain deep understanding of the respondents’ thoughts and experiences. Furthermore, in a romantic approach the respondent is encouraged to share their authentic emotions and experiences, as the trust and commitment is reached through two equal humans, the interviewer and interviewee having a discussion (Alvesson, 2003). Thus, due to these characteristics, a romantic approach can provide a more realistic picture and understanding than neopositivist approach can (Fontana & Frey, 1998). In romanticistic view, the interviewer is an empathetic listener who is trying to explore and gain a deep understanding of the respondent’s inner world (Alvesson, 2003).

3.2.3 *The conduct of interviews*

The data for this research was collected from semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or on Teams, depending on which was a more suitable choice for each participant. Both alternatives included the possibility to read non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, which wouldn't have been possible if the interview had been conducted, for example, through a phone call. The author concluded that conducting ten interviews was sufficient to gather enough evidence to be able to draw conclusions from the results. If new information had kept coming up and results had not saturated, more interviews would have been held. Before the interview started, the participants were informed about the GDPR practicalities, and the author ensured that the participant agreed that the interview will be recorded and transcript will be generated using Microsoft 365 Word Online version.

The interview guide was originally developed in English but translated to Finnish to use in interviews. As all participants' native language is Finnish, the interviews were also held in Finnish so the participants can express their thoughts and opinions effortlessly, and the conversation will feel more natural and authentic. The interview guide included four pre-determined questions, but as the interview was semi-structured, each interview had a slightly different follow-up questions that came up naturally among the conversation, digging deeper into topics that seemed interesting, and the participant had interesting insights about. The interview questions were open-ended and designed so that there is room for follow-up questions and some further conversation around the answers. The interview guide can be found from the appendices in English and Finnish.

At the beginning of the interview, the research topic was presented and the definition of 'sustainable business practice' was carefully explained with examples for all areas; Environmental, Social and Governance. Explaining the terms to participants ensured that they have a full understanding and confidence that they understand what the interview is about and can provide detailed answers and have deeper discussions around the topic. Then, the first question for all participants was to recall which types of sustainable business practices they have at their organizations. At this point, the author also got confirmation that the respondent had understood what is meant by the term 'sustainable business practices'. Following the listing, the focus was shifted to the participants' feelings about the practices and the importance of sustainability as a value. All questions were designed so that the participants had the possibility to freely share their own opinions and thoughts and discuss and focus on the topics that are most meaningful to them. In addition to interactive listening, the interviewer took notes to emphasize the responses that caught the interviewer's interest and wrote down some notes to support the later analysis of the results. Finally, right after the

interview was over, some conclusions were written down from each interview to capture raw impressions, to improve the depth and accuracy of the analysis.

Table 1 Respondents

Respondent	Occupation	Interview date and duration
1	HR specialist	21.7.2025 33 minutes
2	Audit associate	24.7.2025 26 minutes
3	IT support supervisor	24.7.2025 28 minutes
4	Audit associate	25.7.2025 21 minutes
5	Customer success manager	25.7.2025 29 minutes
6	Shift supervisor	28.7.2025 18 minutes
7	Audit senior associate	28.7.2025 17 minutes
8	Audit associate	27.7.2025 18 minutes
9	Operations specialist	28.7.2025 31 minutes
10	CSRD senior associate	31.7.2025 17 minutes

3.3 Data analysis

By combining all the information gathered from the interviews, the aim is to find out how sustainable business practices influence knowledge work employees' attitudes towards work.

After conducting the interviews and transcribing the recordings, it was time to clear out and prepare the data for thematic analysis. This step included correcting spelling errors that the transcription software made and as the interviews were held in Finnish, the transcription was translated into English. Special attention was paid to idiomatic expressions, ensuring that the meaning of the response does not change but remains during the translation even though there might not be straight translation to other languages. In this step, the author is further familiarizing her with the data while translating and making notes for the next stage, thematic analysis.

As the data collected by semi-structured interviews, aiming to find out the respondents' attitudes, the best method to analyze the results is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a common method for analyzing rich, non-numerical data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Furthermore, this method can be applied to analyze unstructured data, as it helps to identify frequently occurring words or phrases in interviews and therefore define key themes (Bryman & Bell, 2011). What brought challenge to thematic analysis was that many of the organizations that the participants work for have different types of sustainable business practices. Here, the division of the aspects Environmental, Social and Governance helped a lot to discover similarities and themes for analysis and drawing conclusions. As the Social aspect was the largest one, it was further divided to sub-categories, which will be presented in Empirical findings.

This thesis applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for the thematic analysis to analyze the data: (1) familiarizing myself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) generating initial themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming the themes, (6) writing the report. The first step, familiarizing myself with the data, started already during the interviews as I took notes during the interviews in addition to recording, and wrote short conclusions right after them. Furthermore, the interview transcripts were read and gone through several times to gain a comprehensive perception of the bigger picture. Conducting this step thoroughly helped significantly in the following steps, when generating codes and themes. Next, initial codes and themes are manually generated by identifying key patterns in the data. Phases (2) and (3), generating initial codes and themes, is a crucial part of thematic analysis as the codes can be considered as the building blocks for themes that arise from the dataset (Jones et al., 2011; Clarke & Braun, 2017). In order to make these steps of thematic analysis more manageable, the data was imported to Microsoft Excel. After all data was coded and categorized, the data was reviewed, and meaningful phrases and words were marked with different colors in Excel to help the analyzing process. Finally, descriptive definitions and labels were applied to the themes. Once all these steps were completed, it was time to draw conclusions and summarize the findings in the report.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were taken into consideration throughout the process. All participants who were interviewed were provided with a consent form, and permission to record the interviews was verbally confirmed before each interview. The participants were informed about the data storing procedures and were made aware that their participation is totally voluntary, and that they have the right to withdraw at any time if they wish to do so.

3.5 Research quality

The quality of the research is dependent on how critically the data is analyzed and if the methods or findings are biased (Patton, 2015). The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be assessed by five different criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and integrity (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). This framework was adapted with the present study to ensure high quality of the research.

Credibility, also known as internal validity or authenticity, can be implemented by dealing critically with the data and findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Credibility aims to present things in the study as they are in reality (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), using multiple data sources is one way to improve the validity of the study. This research adapted the approach by retrieving the data for theoretical framework from multiple academic sources, as evident from the reference list, and conducting multiple interviews. Furthermore, the sample chosen to participate in the interviews was made with the intention to gain a wide range of variety among the respondents; from different organizations, different job descriptions, different age groups and backgrounds.

Transferability, also called external validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015) refers to how well hypotheses and findings from the study can be adapted in other contexts (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). In order for the study to be transferable, the studied context, methods and background data need to be explained by providing detailed information. In this research, the methods used, description of how the interviews were conducted, and the key terminology are presented in detail, so the research could possibly be transferred into a different context.

Dependability, also known as reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015), refers to whether the result of the study would remain the same in case it was conducted by another researcher (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). As the sample of knowledge work employees was selected to represent a wide range of different individuals based on their demographics, it is safe to assume that the findings would be rather similar if the study was replicated by some other researcher. However, this research was conducted in a rather short period of time, while it is preferred for a study to be observed over time to be considered dependable (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

Confirmability, or objectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2015), indicates how strongly the study is based on research and not on the author's own thoughts and opinions (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). Hence, to improve the confirmability of the study, the author needs to minimize personal biases. Especially when data is collected from semi-structured interviews, the author needs to be very mindful and pay attention not to let their own biases lead the interview to their desired direction to serve their own interests. Also, in interviews the respondents might sense the interviewer's preferences even from non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, and adjust their answers to please the interviewer. To enhance the confirmability of this research, the author was very mindful of the mentioned risks and paid attention not to give out her own biases or opinions.

The integrity of the study assesses how the received information can be proved to be truthful (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). This was ensured by ensuring the respondent the anonymity of them as individuals and the organizations they work for. Therefore, the respondent couldn't benefit from giving out a more positive image of their organization to aim to bring themselves into the better light in the eyes of the company. In other words, the respondent wouldn't gain any personal benefit depending on their answers. The anonymity of the respondent and the organization also secured that the respondents didn't need to be concerned to share their worries and honest opinions about their jobs fearing that they would damage the brand image.

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings made from the ten semi-structured interviews conducted. The interviews aimed to uncover how sustainable business practices influence the knowledge work employees' attitudes towards work. As the sustainable business practices were categorized according to ESG framework (Environmental, Social and Governance) in theoretical framework and the concept was explained to interview participants with examples divided into same categories, the results will be analyzed accordingly. The quotations in the chapter can be found from the appendices in their original language Finnish. In this chapter, the findings will be presented rather briefly, as the analysis will be completed on a deeper level in the next chapter, Discussion and conclusions.

4.1 Findings regarding environmental aspect

For all participants, it was relatively easy to recall what kind of environmental sustainability practices their organizations have at the office. Without exception, environmental practices such as recycling and reducing paper waste by storing all documents digitally are considered as a minimum requirement and expected policy, rather than seen as a remarkable action. Hence, environmental practices at the office are “nice to have” but don't appear as significant to employees:

“... I recycle also at home and always switch off electricity at home as I don't want to squander. Thus, I would find it odd if we didn't recycle at the office or electricity wasn't switched off.” - Participant 6

“At the office there are recycling possibilities basically to everything, but I don't know, seems sort of insignificant to which recycle bin I put my yoghurt cup compared to how big environmental impact some organizational decisions have, for example do they do charity. On the other hand, I guess recycling opportunities are sort of “bare minimum” that offices can do for sustainability. Although environmental practices become more practical now that the new office building is being built and I think it will be quite environmentally friendly with design and stuff.” - Participant 4

“As I live alone and don't produce litter by myself that much, I haven't paid attention to my recycling habits. However, as there are nice recycling possibilities at the office I do recycle there and it's kind of a good reminder that maybe I should do it at home also.” - Participant 7

Even in an organization that has arranged recycling possibility, but it isn't taken care of, the participant was just laughing about how badly it's handled and finds it rather funny than a crucial deficiency:

“We have the recycling opportunity at the office, and we try to maintain it, and we do have a cleaner that wishes that we would recycle but that's not always the case. Doesn't go as in Strömsö haha. Our garbage bins are too small and they're always full, so people just toss the garbage where are little emptier, but then the whole purpose of recycling sort of fails” - Participant 9

In several interviews, environmental practices that are connection with social practices, which seem to gain lots of praise, and participants were also excited to discuss about these practices:

“We absolutely have environmental-friendly playing a big part in the company, for example recycling level is followed very closely and staff is well informed of that and lots of effort is put into that. Most of our machines and restaurants aim to be run by renewable energy. Also waste reduction procedures are constantly being considered and how waste could be utilized. We have as the staff the possibility to buy the previous day’s leftovers with an 80% discount. These kinds of good and concrete actions are constantly being considered.” - Participant 6

“... we have the charity campaign every spring that collects donations based on how many kilometers we employees walk with colleagues. I see it as a way to make people get excited about walking and start considering walking as a transportation option, but obviously it is also a social practice as only those kilometers count that are done with colleagues.” - Participant 4

Even though the participants who described sustainability to be an important value for them, the environmental practices didn’t come up as crucial actions as social practices. Not a single environmental sustainability practice seems to influence the employees’ attitudes towards work. Also, when respondents were asked whether they would wish to have any sustainable business practices, no suggestions or wishes regarding environmental aspects came up.

4.2 Findings regarding social aspect

The social aspect stood out as the most important factor with the biggest influence on the employees’ attitudes towards work. As the social aspect is quite a broad concept, the findings will be analyzed by the main three categories that came up from the interviews: **learning, promotion and compensation, employee well-being, and consideration of other key stakeholders.**

4.2.1 Findings regarding learning, promotion and compensation

The first category, learning, promotion and compensation seems to play an important role in employees’ attitudes towards work. Without exception, all participants considered it to be important that there are opportunities to improve their skills and advance their careers:

“I think it’s great that there is a clear career path to follow, that if you do your work well and show that you’re ambitious and motivated, you will be rewarded by bonuses and there is a next grade waiting for you. It really motivates me to complete my tasks well to know that there are good compensations in the company.” - Participant 4

“I’m not that interested in this industry that I would give that much energy and effort to my job if there wasn’t this compensation program that we have. Gotta say it’s a good way to keep employees engaged, works at least for me.” - Participant 8

“Our employer provides LinkedIn certificates for us so that we can conduct e-learnings there if we want to. I think it’s really nice that we are provided with the opportunity to learn new skills even though they are not industry specific, but rather overall skills such as management.” - Participant 9

Hence, bonus system is not always seen as only a positive aspect, as it can create a sense of continuance commitment:

“In general, I see the bonus system as a good thing. But as they are paid in September, there is no sense to resign any other time than right after that. The hardest time at work is always the busy season from January to April, to some it lasts even to June. So why resign before getting the bonus for the hard work you’re done? That leaves a rather small window for resignation, in case there even are any interesting positions available that time. Sometimes it feels like you’re in a trap.” – Participant 10

Slight individual differences were identified when participants were asked to describe which sustainable business practices they find to be the most important to them:

“Supporting career development, good atmosphere at work, rewarding and equal treatment are the most important sustainability practices” - Participant 7

“How these sustainability actions influence my engagement with the organization varies. For example, I wouldn’t resign or not apply to a company if recycling or charity campaigns stopped. But then if the organization removed the salary model or promotion opportunities were worse or employees’ well-being wasn’t priority or were treated unequally, I believe that would influence a lot my decision to resign.” - Participant 2

Although even though there were no participants that have a critical attitude towards job, there was a participant that consciously does not want to let sustainability practices influence their attitude towards work:

“I don’t want to let anything external have an influence on my performance at work.” – Participant 5

Career advancing opportunities and rewarding models, such as bonus systems came constantly up as critical factors that increase engagement and organizational commitment. Rewarding models and pre-determined career path can raise both motivation and pressure to overcome high performance.

4.2.2 Findings regarding employee well-being

Employee well-being is a rather broad concept but as discussed in Theoretical framework, it is heavily linked to employee engagement. Even though employee well-being wasn’t mentioned in interview questions, in several interviews the participants brought the term into discussions as it was an essential factor for them. Participants associated several social sustainable business practices, such as a decent workstation, health and sport benefits such as Edenred, and free gym at the office building to be important benefits that increase well-being and therefore also productivity.

“I save tons of money by utilizing the sport benefits that our company offers, like Edenred, hobby clubs and the free gym at the office basement. And I really feel different, more energetic and productive when I take care of myself and I appreciate that the company supports that. Plus it feels like free money.” - Participant 4

“It would be a deal breaker if my company didn’t put effort into employee well-being, I wouldn’t be happy to work here.” - Participant 3

Almost all participants associated employee well-being strongly with social sustainability, highlighting its importance to them.

4.2.3 Findings regarding consideration of other key stakeholders

In this chapter, the term ‘other key stakeholders’ stands for those that are affected by the organizations’ actions, such as the contractors, customers, and the targets of the charity work. As the previous two categories show correlation with employee engagement and job satisfaction, consideration of other key stakeholders influences a lot how proud the employees feel about their jobs. The following three interviews included very strong attitudes towards the job regarding how other key stakeholders are treated.

In the interview, Participant 1 was very excited to share what kinds of charity actions her organization does on a regular basis in local and global level. She even showed some news and articles about their accomplishments and sent some more links after the interview as she got invested in the topic. Based on the discussion, social sustainability is a really important value for her and she is grateful that because of her job description, she has a possibility to influence the well-being of others on an individual level through shift planning, while the organization she’s working for can have a significant impact on a larger scale through charity work.

“Even though I quite automatically hate big corporations as I feel like they’re just greenwashing, I’m really proud of my employer and I feel like I’m on the “good side” and can stand for those in weaker positions... I want to be a part of this team in this type of company... I like that there are concrete results and numbers of the charity accomplishments... If I know that someone is struggling in their personal life, I want to keep sharing the company value of taking care of others and pay attention to how I can make their situation easier.” - Participant 1

Participant 6 was also very proud of the charity work that her organization does and how they ensure social sustainability:

“... charity plays a big role as we make donations every year based on how much profit is made... When you do your job well, your company is doing better and so it’s directly affecting, that we can make bigger donations. Also, suppliers are very carefully selected, for example we canceled the X collaboration because of Ukraine was situation. The responsibility of new and current suppliers is constantly being examined. I couldn’t imagine working for a company that didn’t find these sustainability issues important or actively improved them.” - Participant 6

Sometimes, sustainability actions regarding considerations of other key stakeholders may become even more important than bigger salary would:

“For example, the donation we recently did for the children feels so meaningful and important to me that I don’t care that I don’t have that good salary. There are certainly many organizations that would pay me more for what I do but what we do here feels so important.” - Participant 6

On the other hand, lack of consideration of other key stakeholders may have a contrary influence on attitudes towards work; actively recognizing of not feeling proud, like participant 9. Even though the respondent is satisfied with her salary and how she’s treated, she doesn’t feel proud to be working for the organization because of how poorly their contractors are compensated and customers treated occasionally. She acknowledges that the company she’s working for doesn’t have a good brand image and has very mixed feelings about her job because of that. When asked whether she would feel prouder towards her job if the contractors had a decent salary and customers treated with more respect, the answer was clear:

“Absolutely yes. Unfortunately, I have no chance to make a change or improvement on those things, but they are always haunting at the back of my head.” - Participant 9

4.2.4 Findings regarding governance aspect

Sustainable business practices in governance aspect can be considered by how sustainability is integrated into an organization’s core values and operations. One way to examine the impact of this is to determine the brand image of one’s company and how well it’s aligned with an employee’s personal values and if the actions and promises go hand in hand. Hence, the governance aspect should be considered rather as a broader framework, rather than practical actions. Sustainability in governance was seen as a positive guidance among participants:

“It seems at least to me that the board really wants to emphasize sustainability to be the leading value, and I think it’s in line with recent actions and decision. And when the message from upper management is clear that sustainability is the thing, it’s easier to execute it also in own daily work.” - Participant 2

“I would find my effort to act sustainably next to nothing if the company didn’t integrate it to the core of our values. I’m happy to work there as I know that I’m playing in the same team and to the same goal with the company.” - Participant 10

4.3 Summary

Despite the different industries, organizations and participants’ personal preferences, several conjunctive factors were identified. The author was prepared to conduct more interviews than was originally planned in case new information would have just kept coming up. However, there was enough consistency and rich insights that support one another, so ten interviews were deemed sufficient to draw conclusions. It is important to keep in mind that due to the limited resources, such as time and number of participants, too bold assumptions should not

be made or generalize findings but rather treat the data as supporting evidence for the existing theories. The findings presented in this chapter will be further discussed and tied to the theoretical framework with summarizing conclusions in the next chapter.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discusses the key findings that were shortly presented in the previous chapter, main insights from the study, limitations and recommendations for the future research, and draws final conclusions of the research. Furthermore, some managerial implications are suggested. The findings from the interviews are tied to theoretical framework that was presented in the beginning of this thesis.

5.1 Main insights of the research

The aim of the study was to find out how sustainable business practices influence the knowledge work employees' attitudes towards work. Lots of valuable insights were gathered from the semi-structured interviews, in which the respondents shared their insights and opinions. As expected, some differences were identified between the respondents' attitudes and how are they influenced by sustainable business practices, as the degree of the influence depends on how much the employee cares about sustainability and how organizations implement the actions (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Norton et al., 2015).

Based on the findings made from the interviews, environmental sustainability practices don't seem to have a remarkable influence on employees' attitudes towards work, even though environmental business practices were the most familiar for the participants. Purely environmental practices, such as recycling or handling all documents digitally instead of paper are "nice practices" but rather expected and don't raise any specific feelings. Environmental practices are considered as a "bare minimum", as they are so established on employees' spare time as well. Thus, such practices could be said to have an insignificant meaning to knowledge work employees. However, the results suggest that environmental practices have a much bigger influence on employees' attitudes if they are combined with social aspects, such as charity campaigns encouraging employees to walk together to raise money for a good cause. Also, waste reduction by selling leftovers to staff with a significant price reduction was considered a remarkably positive practice, combining both environmental and social benefits. Thus, environmental actions aren't enough to raise any remarkable emotions or trigger changes in feelings or actions but can influence positively employees' attitudes towards work. Even if participants don't recognize the existence of environmental practices to have an influence on their attitudes towards work, we can say with certainty that there wouldn't be negative attitudes if environmental practices didn't occur.

According to this study, social sustainability practices have the biggest impact on employees' attitudes towards work. Based on the answers, the influence was first and foremost positive. Learning, promotions and fair compensation systems have a positive impact on employee

engagement and job satisfaction. These findings are in alignment with the claim that receiving feedback and being rewarded strengthens the sense of organizational support (Robbins & Judge, 2009; Kutessis et al., 2017; Kuvaas, 2006). Majority of participants expressed to feel more engagement when it is clear that good job will be rewarded by monetary compensation and recognition. Also, learning and self-development opportunities were highly praised, and employees feel satisfied when they get to improve their knowledge and skills. They feel like they become a more valuable workforce when they keep their skills and knowledge up to date. These feelings are part of affective commitment, when the employee wants to stay at the organization from their own free will (Mayer & Allen, 1991).

However, as Mayer and Allen's (1991) framework present, organizational commitment can also be based on a feeling of "have to stay"; either continuance or normative, when employees' commitment is not associated with their desire to stay with the company. Bonus system is foremost seen as a positive thing, but due to findings, can create a pressure to stay with the company for much longer that they would desire, not to lose the bonuses they have worked for. This creates a continuance commitment; a feeling of "have to stay". Also associated with a continuance commitment is a situation where employees have a predetermined career path and grade promotions, the system creates a sense of commitment among employees. When the system requires employees to perform well at work to be promoted to the next grade according to plan, the employees feel that they are required and expected to perform accordingly not to fall behind. Thus, even though the system might create pressure on employees', it is also a great motivator to do one's best and remain as a valuable employee and gives a proper meaning to perform well and productively, even if the work wasn't that pleasurable. In conclusion, compensation systems, such as bonuses, can create both positive attitudes by increasing motivation to yield to better results, but also negative by adding pressure and creating fear of falling behind peers.

Same as with environmental aspect, employee well-being is a concept that is expected from the employer, rather than considered as a positive addition. In many interviews, the participants emphasized that well-being at work is the most important factor and believe that social sustainability practices are a crucial way to advance it. Even though employee well-being was also described as the "deal breaker", there are differences in which practices work best for each employee, as some find it to be achieved from higher salary while some believe it's a result of a decent work-life balance. Hence, even though there is no one correct answer to how to increase the employees' well-being, it is certain that a variety of social sustainability practices are a way to advance it, and employee well-being has a positive impact on job satisfaction and engagement. Several participants said that they feel more valuable as employees if an organization puts effort into their well-being. Even on large corporations that are often

considered “soulless”, and the common part of a brand image is that “everybody’s dispensable”, emphasizing employee well-being creates a feeling that the employees do matter, strengthening the emotional bond between the employee and the organization. Eisenberg et al (1986) also highlight that organizations’ level of care for their employees and respect towards them increases the perceived organizational support. Based on the theoretical framework and interview findings, sustainability practices that advance employee well-being have a positive influence on employee engagement, job satisfaction and perceived organizational commitment. Furthermore, high perceived organizational support is claimed to increase job satisfaction (Aban et al., 2019). Although as expected, job satisfaction is a relatively stable attitude (Staw & Cohen-Sharash, 2005) and therefore the impact of sustainability practices on it did not seem outstanding.

Consideration of other key stakeholders was the theme that had the biggest influence on how proud the employees feel about their job and the organizations they work for, both positively and negatively. The participants that found the organization’s action remarkable and their charity efforts significant were distinctly proud of their companies and expressed it to have an impact also on their contribution. These participants also experience engaged to the companies as their values align so strongly. Several theories support this finding, stating that when the alignment of the employee’s and organization’s values increase employee engagement, fosters work motivation and a sense of pride (Dixit & Naredran, 2019; Kaur et al., 2023; Rupp et al., 2006). Furthermore, the other of these outstandingly proud employees also revealed that she tends to have a very critical attitude towards big corporations as she automatically expects that they are greenwashing with their pretty promises, but her organization’s concrete actions have proved that that’s not always the case. Surprisingly, a sustainability practice can be so powerful that an employee’s negative attitude towards work can be turned into positive, a sense of pride and affective commitment. Hence, consideration of other key stakeholders has a positive impact on feeling moral pride towards work and a contrary impact on critical advocacy. However, there came up a situation in an interview where an organization doesn’t take some other key stakeholders into consideration and treats them unequally. Even though this specific employee is satisfied with other aspects of work and feels to be treated equally herself, the absence of equal treatment among other stakeholders takes away the moral pride about her work and creates strong dissatisfaction. It was surprising to find out that lack of a social sustainability practice can have such strong impact on an employee’s attitude towards work, raising negative attitudes despite there are several functioning practices in place. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that we should not concentrate only on how sustainable business practices influence attitudes towards work but also consider what kind of influence their absence has. This approach will be discussed further in the chapter Recommendations for future research.

Governance aspect to sustainable business practices was the most difficult of these aspects to consider, as the practices are rarely tangible or experiences in everyday life, but rather broader strategies and perception of the organizations' values and brand image. Nothing significant came up from the interviews regarding the governance aspect. The respondents see their organizations' sustainability values correlate with their actions and didn't express to be worried about the trustworthiness of their promises, as there is transparent information and communication regarding the topic. A sustainable and positive brand image was mentioned to help guide in daily work, so that the quality of one's work and companies' values support one another, providing a framework for all operations and activities.

In the interview, many participants admitted that even though they are aware of the sustainable business practices they are discussing about and consider them to influence their attitudes towards work, it is often unconscious. However, by actively thinking and talking about the practices that their organizations offer in the interview, the participants felt strengthening of those positive feelings that are the practices bring on a daily basis. Hence, it is important for organizations to efficiently and explicitly communicate about the sustainable business practices that they have in place, so that the employees will feel positive emotions and attitudes towards their work. Also, Baltzley (2016) highlights the importance of organizational communication and demonstration of their goals and purpose, as it fosters a sense of belonging within the workforce. Without proper communication, not all employees may be aware of the sustainability practices they have been provided by organizations.

Based on the interview findings and theoretical framework, organizations can influence positively on employees' attitudes towards work through social sustainability practices. Only one participant out of ten expressed that sustainability practices don't have any influence on their attitude, and it is a conscious choice for her not to let them. It comes up as quite rare to take a conscious stance to not let either positive practices influence one's attitudes, as of being afraid to create positive outcomes, such as employee engagement or organizational commitment. Also, a lack of social sustainability practices, unequal treatment and wages in this case, were proven to have a negative impact on an employee's attitude. Social sustainable business practices can even change a negative attitude to a positive, when implemented and communicated properly.

5.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this study offer important information for organizations that seek to enhance their employees' positive attitudes towards work. As sustainability has become a more crucial factor of business than ever, the requirements and expectations from all key stakeholders are also rising. Based on the findings of this study, the influence of different sustainability

practices varies greatly. In order to maximize the benefits of implementing such practices, organizations should be aware of what is the connection between sustainability practices and attitudes. By recognizing what types of attitudes can be positively influenced by what types of sustainability practices, the resources can be distributed efficiently.

It is also advisable for employees to be aware of how organizations can enhance sustainability through sustainable business practices. With a comprehensive understanding of various possibilities to act more sustainably, employees can demand their organizations to pay more attention to crucial actions. Furthermore, by being aware of the types of sustainability actions that could be, it will help them in the future to gravitate to organizations and jobs that value sustainability highly and establish it in their sustainable business practices.

5.3 Limitations

One main limitation of the study was to research only knowledge work employees. This decision was made so drawing conclusions will be possible, as knowledge work employees might have very different working environment and daily tasks than, for example, employees whose work consists of lots of physical labor. Also, the aspect of sustainable business practices most likely varies a lot between these sectors. Another limitation that was made regarding the sample was the size of the organizations; only employees of large size organizations were included. The point of this limitation was to focus on organizations that have the capacity and resources to implement sustainable business practices if they wish to do so. For example, some start-ups or small businesses might not have sustainability practices due to the lack of resources.

Regarding the research method, choosing to collect data through interviews meant that the sample size will be limited as conducting interviews is very time consuming. However, as the aim was to gather rich data and deep insights from the participants, interview was chosen to be the most suitable method to serve this purpose. By choosing to use some quantitative method, such as an online survey, the sample size would have been significantly larger, but the data collected would not have been as profound.

Even though the participants for the sample were chosen to represent a wide variety of employees, of different age groups, job descriptions and organizations, due to the limited number of interviews conducted, the sample of ten participants is still a relatively narrow group of individuals. If the sample was larger, also a wider variety of knowledge work employees would have been represented, and probably more different attitudes would have come up and how they're influenced by sustainable business practices.

Moreover, even though the definition of “sustainable business practice” was explained to the participants at the beginning of the interview, there might still be slight differences in how they interpret the term. Even though in the interview situation it appeared to the author that all respondents had a good understanding of the term, there is still a risk that the new term caused confusion to some participants and therefore didn’t recall sharing all the insights and information they had around the topic. The risk was mitigated by explaining the term for them and providing examples of all; Environmental, Social and Governance aspects. Also, the participants heard the term already when they were invited to the interview and had the possibility to familiarize themselves with the term in advance if they wished to do so.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

As the findings indicate that sustainable business practices can influence knowledge work employees’ attitudes towards work, it would be interesting to investigate more closely the influence of single practices, not the phenomenon as a whole. For example, bonus systems came up in many interviews to be a crucial sustainability practice in the social aspect for the employees. Conducting research that aims to find out how this particular sustainability practice influences knowledge work employees’ attitudes towards work would provide valuable information to organizations how effective the practices are in promoting positive attitudes towards work.

This research was focused on how sustainable business practices influence attitudes towards work. In interviews, several participants discussed also about their feelings and attitudes towards the organizations they work at and how they are influenced by such practices. In the future it would be an interesting topic to focus the research on the impact of sustainability practices on the organization and how they affect the brand image the employees have of their organizations.

Luckily, on this research no employees expressed concerns about suspecting their sustainable business practices to be greenwashing. All the practices mentioned had a positive impact on employees’ attitudes towards work. Hence, in this study no active negative sustainability practices, i.e. greenwashing, came up. Conducting research on how organizations’ so-called sustainable business practices, that are actually groundless and a form of greenwashing influence employees’ attitudes towards work would be an interesting topic. However, finding a sample for this might be difficult as proving greenwashing may not be a straight-forward process, and not all employees relate critically to what their organizations communicate, but rather accept all claims. In interviews, only one participant reported the absence of consideration of other stakeholders having a negative impact on how they feel about their job. In addition to greenwashing, investigating how the absence of crucial sustainability practices

influences the employees' attitudes towards work. This research had a more positive approach as it focused solely on the influence of existing sustainable business practices, and not the influence of those that have not been implemented. Thus, the participants were asked in the interview if there are any sustainability practices they wish that they had at their organizations, but none came up.

The approach of this research starts from sustainable business practices. Another way to investigate this topic but from a different perspective would be to start from a different end, and choose a desired attitude, such as job satisfaction, and investigate which practices can have a positive effect on increasing it. Companies might have different attitudes they wish to see from their employees, and this would be a more targeted approach to gain an understanding of a specific attitude and what impacts it.

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Appendix 1 Interview guide in English

Introducing the consent form

Requesting a permission for recording

Introducing the topic and explaining the term “sustainable business practices” and providing examples to support the understanding

Interview questions:

1. What kind of sustainable business practices does your organization have?
2. Do these practices affect how you feel about your job?
3. Are there some practices you think the organization should implement? How would that make you feel?
4. What does sustainability mean to you, how important is it as a value?

Appendix 2 Interview guide in original language Finnish

Suostumuslomakkeen esittely

Pyyntö nauhoitusta varten

Termin “kestävyyskäytäntö” selitys sekä esimerkkien tarjoaminen ymmärryksen tueksi

Haastattelu kysymykset:

1. Millaisia kestävyyskäytäntöjä yritykselläsi on käytössä?
2. Miten nämä vaikuttavat kuinka tunnet työtäsi kohtaan?
3. Onko jotain kestävyyskäytäntöjä joita toivot että yrityksesi ottaisi käyttöön?
4. Mitä kestävyys merkitsee sinulle, kuinka tärkeä se on arvona?

Appendix 3 Citations in original language Finnish

Participant	Original comment in Finnish	Translated to English
6	“... Mä kierrätän kotonaki ja aina sammutan elektroniikat ku en haluu tuhjata. Ni must ois outoa jos toimistolla ei kierrätettäis tai laitteet jätettäis päälle.”	“... I recycle also at home and always switch off electricity at home as I don't want to squander. Thus, I would find it odd if we didn't recycle at the office or electricity wasn't switched off.”
4	“Toimistol on mahdollisuus kierrättää oikeestaa kaikki, mut en tiää, tuntuu vähän merkityksettömältä et mihin roskikseen laitan mun jugurttikupin verrattuna siihen et miten isoi vaikutuksii luontoon jollain isoi johdon päätöksil on, esim hyväntekeväisyytee liittyen. Toisaalta kierrätysmahis toimistolla on ikäänku “bare minimum” mitä voidaan tehdä ympäristön eteen. Näist ympäristöö liittyyvis kestävyyskäytännöist tulee toki nyt vähä käytännönläheisimpiä ku uus toimisto rakennetaan ja siitä pitäis tulla aika ympäristöystävällinen suunnittelun ynnä muun suhteen.”	“At the office there are recycling possibilities basically to everything, but I don't know, seems sort of insignificant to which recycle bin I put my yoghurt cup compared to how big environmental impact some organizational decisions have, for example do they do charity. On the other hand, I guess recycling opportunities are sort of “bare minimum” that offices can do for sustainability. Although environmental practices become more practical now that the new office building is being built and I think it will be quite environmentally friendly with design and stuff.”
7	“Eipä oo tullu hirveesti pohdittuu omaa kierrätystä ku asuu yksin eikä hirveesti tuota roskaa. Tietty kiva et toimistol on toi mahis jo olemas valmiina ni siel kyl kierrätän ja ihan hyvä muistutus et pitäis kotonaki.”	“As I live alone and don't produce litter by myself that much, I haven't paid attention to my recycling habits. However, as there are nice recycling possibilities at the office I do recycle there and it's kind of a good reminder that maybe I should do it at home also.”
9	“Meil on toimistol kierrätysmahis ja kyl me yritetään kierrättää, ja meidän siivooja toivois et kierrätetään mut ei se aina ihan mee niin. Ei mee ihan niinku Strömssös haha. Meidän roskikset on liian pieniä ja ne on täynnä ni ihmiset sit aina vaan laittaa sinne mitkä on vähä tyhjempii mut siin se koko kierrätyksen idea sit meneeki.”	“We have the recycling opportunity at the office, and we try to maintain it, and we do have a cleaner that wishes that we would recycle but that's not always the case. Doesn't go as in Strömsö haha. Our garbage bins are too small and they're always full, so people just toss the garbage where are little emptier, but then the whole purpose of recycling sort of fails”
6	“Meil todellaki on ympäristöystävällisyys isos roolis meidän yrityksessä, esim kierrätysastetta seurataan tosi tiiviisti ja siit infotaa henksua paljon ja muutenki panostetaan tohon. Suurin osa laitteista ja ravintoloista pyrkii käyttää uusiutuvaa energiaa. Sit kans jatkuvast mietitää miten saatais vähennetty jätettä tai miten sitä sais hyödynnetty. Meil henksul on mahis ostaa edellisen päivän ylijäämä ruokaa 80% alennuksel. Tällasii hyvii ja	“We absolutely have environmental-friendly playing a big part in the company, for example recycling level is followed very closely and staff is well informed of that and lots of effort is put into that. Most of our machines and restaurants aim to be run by renewable energy. Also waste reduction procedures are constantly being considered and how waste could be utilized. We have as the staff the possibility to buy the previous day's leftovers with an 80% discount. These kinds of good and concrete actions are constantly being considered.”

	konkreettisii keinoi mietitää kyl koko ajan.”	
4	“Meil on hyväntekeväisyyskampanja joka kevät mikä perustuu siihen et kuin monta kilsaa kävelee työkaverinkaa. Mä nään et tää on keino saada ihmiset innostuu kävelystä ja miettii kävely kulkutapana esim et aina ei tarvi ottaa bussii, mut tietty myös sosiaalinen juttu ku ne kilsat pitää saada yhes työkaverinkaa.”	“... we have the charity campaign every spring that collects donations based on how many kilometers we employees walk with colleagues. I see it as a way to make people get excited about walking and start considering walking as a transportation option, but obviously it is also a social practice as only those kilometers count that are done with colleagues.”
4	Must on upeeta et on selkee urapolku mitä seurata, et jos teet työt hyvin ja pystyt osottaa et oot kunnianhimonen ja motivoitunu ni seuraava grade oottaa sua. Se kyl oikeest motivoi tekee työt hyvin ku tietää et firma oikeest sit palkitsee.”	“I think it’s great that there is a clear career path to follow, that if you do your work well and show that you’re ambitious and motivated, you will be rewarded by bonuses and there is a next grade waiting for you. It really motivates me to complete my tasks well to know that there are good compensations in the company.”
8	“En mä oo niin innoissaa täst alasta et antaisin näin paljo energiaa ja panosta mun työhön ellei ois tota mejän palkitsemisjärjestelmää. Pakko sanoo et hyvä tapa pitää työntekijät sitoutuneena, tai toimii ainaki muhun.”	“I’m not that interested in this industry that I would give that much energy and effort to my job if there wasn’t this compensation program that we have. Gotta say it’s a good way to keep employees engaged, works at least for me.”
9	“Meijän työnantaja tarjoa meille LinkedIn sertifikaatit et voidaa tehdä siel niit e-learnei jos halutaa. Must se on kiva et tarjotaa noita et vaikkei oo mitään alaan liittyvii spesifejä vaa enemmäki tollasii yleispäteviä niinku johtamisee liittyviä.”	“Our employer provides LinkedIn certificates for us so that we can conduct e-learnings there if we want to. I think it’s really nice that we are provided with the opportunity to learn new skills even though they are not industry specific, but rather overall skills such as management.”
10	”Lähtökohtasesti bonussysteemi on mun mielestä hyvä juttu. Mutta ne kun maksetaan aina syyskuussa, ni ei oo mitään järkee irtisanoutuu ku just sen jälkee. Rankin jakso töissä on kiirekausi tammikuusta noin huhtikuuhun, joillaa toki menee kesäkuuhun asti. Ni miks irtisanoutuis ennenku saa bonuksen siitä rankasta työstä jonka on jo tehny? Siinä jää iaka pieni ikkuna irtisanoutumiselle, jos silloin ees on mitää kiinnostavii paikkoi avoinna. Välil tunuu ku ois ansassa ton takia.”	“In general, I see the bonus system as a good thing. But as they are paid in September, there is no sense to resign any other time than right after that. The hardest time at work is always the busy season from January to April, to some it lasts even to June. So why resign before getting the bonus for the hard work you’re done? That leaves a rather small window for resignation, in case there even are any interesting positions available that time. Sometimes it feels like you’re in a trap.”
7	“Se että tuetaa uralla etenemistä, hyvä ilmapiiri töissä, palkitseminen ja tasavertainen kohtelu on mulle tärkeimmät sustiskäytännöt.”	“Supporting career development, good atmosphere at work, rewarding and equal treatment are the most important sustainability practices”
2	Se et miten paljo nää kestävyyskäytännöt vaikuttaa mun sitoutumiseen yritykseen niin vaihtelee.	“How these sustainability actions influence my engagement with the organization varies. For

	<p>Esimerkiksi en mä irtisanoutuis tai jättäis hakematta jotaa työtä jos siel ei enää kierrätettäis tai lopetettais hyväntekeväisyys. Mut jos yritys poistais palkkamallin tai ylenemismahollisuudet ois huonommat tai työntekijöiden hyvinvointi ei ois prioriteetti tai kohdeltais tasavertasest ni sit uskon et vaikuttais aika paljo mun päätökseen irtisanoutuu.”</p>	<p>example, I wouldn't resign or not apply to a company if recycling or charity campaigns stopped. But then if the organization removed the salary model or promotion opportunities were worse or employees' well-being wasn't priority or were treated unequally, I believe that would influence a lot my decision to resign.”</p>
5	<p>”En mä haluu antaa minkää ulkopuolisen tekijän vaikuttaa mun suoriutumiseen töissä.”</p>	<p>“I don't want to let anything external have an influence on my performance at work.”</p>
4	<p>“Tässähän säästää ihan rutosti rahaa ku hyödyntää firman tarjoomat liikuntaedut, niinku Edenredin, hobby clubit ja toimiston kellarisalin. Ja kyl mä tunnen eron, et on paljo energisempi ja tuottosampi olo ku pitää huolta itestää ja arvostan kyl et firma tulee siinä. Plus noi edut on ihanku ilmasta rahaa.”</p>	<p>“I save tons of money by utilizing the sport benefits that our company offers, like Edenred, hobby clubs and the free gym at the office basement. And I really feel different, more energetic and productive when I take care of myself and I appreciate that the company supports that. Plus, it feels like free money.”</p>
3	<p>“Kyl se ois mulle deal-breaker jos firma ei panostais työntekijöiden hyvinvointii, en mä vois olla ilonen siellä.”</p>	<p>“It would be a deal breaker if my company didn't put effort into employee well-being, I wouldn't be happy to work here.”</p>
1	<p>“Vaik aika automaattisesti vihaanki isoi korporaatioi ja must tuntuu et ne aina vaan viherpesee, ni oon kyl tosi ylpee omast työnantajasta ja tuntuu et ois “hyvien puolella” ja pystyy pitää heikommas asemas olevien puolia... Haluun olla osa tiimii tällases yritykses... Tykkään niin paljo ku on konkreettisi tuloksii ja numeroit noist hyväntekeväisyyksistä... Jos tiiän et jollain on vähän vaikeeta henkilökohtases elämässä ni haluun yrityksen arvojen tavoin pitää huolta muista ja keskitty et miten voisin tehdä niiden tilanteista vähä helpompia.”</p>	<p>“Even though I quite automatically hate big corporations as I feel like they're just greenwashing, I'm really proud of my employer and I feel like I'm on the “good side” and can stand for those in weaker positions... I want to be a part of this team in this type of company... I like that there are concrete results and numbers of the charity accomplishments... If I know that someone is struggling in their personal life, I want to keep sharing the company value of taking care of others and pay attention to how I can make their situation easier.”</p>
6	<p>“Hyväntekeväisyys on kyl isos roolissa ku tehää lahjotuksii joka vuosen mukaa miten paljo tulosta on tehty... Kun tekee työnsä hyvin ni firma pärjää paremmin ja se sit suuraa vaikuttaa et voidaa tehdä isompia lahjotuksii. Ja sit kans tavarantoimittajat on meil tosi tarkkaa valittuja, esim just purettiin yhteistyö X:n kaa ton Ukrainan sotatilanteen takii. Sekä nykyisten että uusien toimittajien vastuullisuutta arvioidaa jatkuvasti. En vois kyl ees</p>	<p>“... charity plays a big role as we make donations every year based on how much profit is made... When you do your job well, your company is doing better and so it's directly affecting, that we can make bigger donations. Also, suppliers are very carefully selected, for example we canceled the X collaboration because of Ukraine was situation. The responsibility of new and current suppliers is constantly being examined. I couldn't imagine working for a company that didn't find these</p>

	kuvitella olevani töissä jossaa missä nää kestävyysasiat ei ois tärkeitä tai niitä ei kehitettäis aktiivisesti.”	sustainability issues important or actively improved them.”
6	“Esim lahjotus mikä vast tehti lapsille tuntu niin merkitykselliselt ja tärkeeltä et ei ees kiinnosta ettei mul oo niin hyvä palkka. On varmast paljo firmoi jotka maksais mulle enemmän täst mitä teen nyt mut tää mitä me tehdään tuntuu niin tärkeeltä.”	“For example, the donation we recently did for the children feels so meaningful and important to me that I don’t care that I don’t have that good salary. There are certainly many organizations that would pay me more for what I do but what we do here feels so important.”
9	“Ehdottomast kyllä. Valitettavast mul ei oo mahista vaikuttaa tai kehittää noit asioita mut kyl ne aina kummittelee takaraivos.”	“Absolutely yes. Unfortunately, I have no chance to make a change or improvement on those things, but they are always haunting at the back of my head.”
2	“Must ainaki vaikuttaa et johto oikeest korostaa sitä et kestävyys on se pää-arvo ja se on kyl linjas viime aikaisten tekojen ja päätöstenkaa. Ja ku viesti ylemmält johdolta on selkee et kestävyys on se juttu ni kyl se on helppo tehdä töitäki sit sen mukaa.”	“It seems at least to me that the board really wants to emphasize sustainability to be the leading value and I think it’s in line with recent actions and decision. And when the message from upper management is clear that sustainability is the thing, it’s easier to execute it also in own daily work.”
10	“Kyl oma panos kestävyiden puolesta tuntuis et ois yhtä tyhjänkaa jos yritys ei ite pitäis sitä arvona kaiken keskiössä. Mä tykkään työskennellä tuolla ku tiiän että pelataa samas joukkuees ja vieläpä samaan maaliin firmankaa.”	“I would find my effort to act sustainably next to nothing if the company didn’t integrate it to the core of our values. I’m happy to work there as I know that I’m playing in the same team and to the same goal with the company.”